CHAPTER- III

MĀDHAVADEVA AND SOUTH KAMRUP

1. Preface :

Mādhavadeva was the chief disciple of Śaṅkaradeva. Among the makers of Neo-Vaiṣṇavite religion in modern Assam the name of Mādhavadeva comes next to that of Śaṅkaradeva. Mādhavadeva succeeded him as the religious head of Vaiṣṇavite community. Like his Guru, Mādhavadeva was also occupies a remarkable position in the religious and literary history of Assam. By virtue of his genuine versatile genius, he was an outstanding religious organiser, an erudite scholar, a poet and a musician of a very high order. He holds a unique position in the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite religion. The influence of Mādhavadeva in the field of spiritual, literary, cultural and social life was so noble and great and abiding that he came to be known as Mahāpuruṣa.¹

1. Early life of Mādhavadeva : His Initiation to Ekośarana-Dharma:

Mādhavadeva was born in the month of Jaiśtha (May-June), 1411 Šaka ² (1489 A.D.) at Letekupukhuri, a village near

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¹ Mahanta, Dr. P. J. (ed): Glimpses of the Vaiṣṇavite Heritage of Assam, p. 8 (Article written by Dr. B. P. Chaliha, Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva, Saint Poet of Assam)
² Guru Carit Kathā, p. 43.
Narayanpur in the present district of Lakshimpur. His father’s name was Gobindagiri. He belonged to a Kayastha family. Gobindagiri’s original home land was at Bandukā to the west of Koch-behar. After the death of his first wife he migrated to eastern Assam where he married a girl named Manoramā. Manoramā belonged to Bhuyan family of Bardowā in the present district of Nowgaon. Madhavadeva was born by Manoramā.

Gobindagiri with his wife and son Mādhava, had wandered from place to place due to devastating famine during the period of Ahom rule in the early part of 15th century. Madhavadeva’s early life was in great hardship. Somehow he managed to get good education. He was able to get admission into the Tol of Rājendra Adhyāpaka at Bandukā and he had his education in Sanskrit grammar, Purāṇas, Bhāgavata and other religious scriptures. When he was in Tol his father was died and he was bound to back to his relative Gayāpāni alias Rāmdās, who was his brother-in-law.

On his way to Rāmdās, Mādhava had the news of his mother’s illness. Mādhava, therefore, resolved to sacrifice a pair of white goats to goddess Durgā for his mother’s early recovery. In

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time Mādhaṇa engaged Rāmdās to procure a pair of he-goats for the aforesaid purpose. Rāmdās being a disciple of Śaṅkaradeva, did not do so, rather politely told Mādhaṇa about the new Vaiṣṇava faith of Śaṅkaradeva, which was dead against all sorts of violence to animal and worship of gods and goddesses than Viṣṇu. Mādhaṇa on the other hand, being a staunch Śākti did not listen to Rāmdās and set out with his brother-in-law to have a dispute with Śaṅkaradeva over the matter of sacrifice of animal. In that religious dispute they plunged into a serious debate on the comparative motives of the Śākti and the Bhakti cults. Mādhaṇadeva cited many verses from various scriptures to defend his Śakti cult, while the veteran Vaiṣṇava scholar wanted to establish the supremacy of the Viṣṇu cult. Śaṅkara had to argue for hours to convince the youth that if supreme Viṣṇu is propitiated, one need not go to worship for other gods and goddesses. At last he cited Śloka from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa which means -

As the branches, leaves, and foliage of a tree are nourished by the pouring of water at the root of the tree, as the limbs of the body are nourised by putting food only in the stomach, so all gods and goddesses are propitiated by the worship of Achyuta alone.
The Śloka as a great miracle changed the mind of Mādhavadeva. He gradually bowed down to the Bhakti cult and at once he fell at the feet of Śaṅkaradeva and accepted him as his Guru (master). He realised that Bhakti cult was the supreme one. He accepted the Bhakti cult with devotion and honoured Śaṅkaradeva as his Guru. He dedicated his whole life with the mission of his Guru and with great respect he spread all over Assam the new cult propagated by Śaṅkaradeva known as Ėksaraṇa-Nāma-Dharma. In his zeal to serve the cause of his master, Mādhavadeva remained as a bachelor for whole life. Since then, Mādhava who moved with Śaṅkara like his shadow in weal and woe was similar to that of Uddhava with Kṛṣṇa, as ascribed by the biographers of the saints. Mādhava had been devoting himself whole-heartedly to the cause of his Guru till the last moment of his life. The unique between Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva never to be separated throughout the course of Bhakti movement.

Mādhavadeva’s religious propagation was started after being an apostolic head of the new cult. He outlived Śaṅkaradeva by 28 years. During that period he also carried on the cultural tradition initiated by his Guru.

2. Madhavadeva in South Kamrup:

The role of Madhavadeva in the growth of Satras had a great significance. Madhavadeva was the chief apostle of Śaṅkaradeva. In fact, Madhavadeva was regarded as the real founder of the Satra institution in South Kamrup. He organised it on a firm footing of Śaṅkaradeva and introduced a very staunch and disciplined monastic code of religion. He selected some of his ardent followers and invested them with proper authority to admit disciples to the new faith in the name of the Great Guru.6 These selfless devotees had carried the banner of Nāma-Dharma to different parts of the land and established the network of the Satras and the Nāmghars. Later on, they became important centers of Vaiṣṇavite religion and culture. Madhavadeva appointed very prominent disciples out of the twelve apostles in the different places of Assam. Out of such twelve apostles, the contributions of Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā and Padhiyā Mādhav Āto in respect of creating Vaiṣṇavite atmosphere in South Kamrup appeared to be noteworthy.

A. Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā and Mahāpuruṣa Madhavadeva:

Śrī-Śrī Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā was a special Ātā amongst the Nine Ātās of Assam.7 Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā, the founder and the first

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6. Chaliha, Dr. B. P., Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva, Saint poet of Assam (Article), published in the souvenir, entitled Glimpses of the Vaiṣṇavite Heritage of Assam, p. 9.

7. Ďas, Dr. Nārāyaṇ and Adhikary, N. K. (ed.) : Dakṣiṇ-kāliyā Śrī-Śrī Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā Carit, p. 19
Satrādhikāra of the Chamarīya Satra was born in a Kāyastra family at Bikrampur in the present Koch-Beher district. His early name was Kāṁśāri. The identity of predecessors of Bar-Viṣṇu Āṭā were: Soureśvara - Sourabara - Gourāṅga Maṇḍala-Hiromala - Biromala - Kāṁadeva - Kāṁśāri. Kāṁśāri alias Bar-Viṣṇu belonged to the seventh generation from the ancestry of Soureśvara. His father’s name was Kāṁadeva. Predecessors of Kāṁśāri were very rich. Eventually they became victim of the king’s unnatural and brutal behaviour. They made up their mind to shift to another new place, and carried all their valuable articles loaded in boat and one night crossed the Hahakā river with all the members of his family. It was unfortunate that in an accident the boat was sunk and everything was lost. Kāṁśāri was the lone surviver; he was a good swimmer, and was able to cross the river. Kāṁśāri then reached Mālanchā (Mālacā) village of Assam in the state of intense grief. Then he went to a merchant,

   But according to the Kathā Guru Carit, edited by Upendra Chandra Lekharu, Kāṁśāri was born in Kamatāpur at Barkaraibāri and his father’s name was Nirmala. Predecessors were: Gourāṅga-Gourīcandra-Sourībardha - Hirmla - Ahīrmala - Birmala - Nirmal - Kāṁśāri.
named Chandra Bhuyan of Mālanchā village, and took shelter under him. Kamsāri had to earn his livelihood by cultivating the land. Gradually their relationship grew in such a way that he entered on matrimonial bond with Candrāvatī, the daughter of Chandra Bhuyan. Usually, Kamsāri was cultivating the lands with his two hands using one spade. But it is said that when he was alone he was transformed himself to a different shape and cultivated the lands using four hands and two spades. In course of time Candrāvatī and Kamsāri were blessed with a son, named Gopāla. Candrāvatī was deeply wounded when Chandra Bhuyan, her father, did not make any present to his grandson in the occasion of his Annaprāsana (the day of a child’s first taking of rice). They thought that it was better to leave the father’s house. So they left the house of Chandra Bhuyan and made a hut at the back of his (Chandra Bhuyan) house and started living there happily. But according to Śrī-Śrī Thākur Ātār Carit, edited by Garga Nārāyaṇ Choudhury, Kamsāri went to the house of Candrāvatī’s maternal uncle with his family. Kamsāri began to cultivate Āhudhān (one kind of paddy) along with his friends

11. According to Kathā Guru Carit, his name was Sodar Māzi.
13. ibid, p. 4.
named Lāukalamiya (also known as Lapaniya), Bāngan and Ādhaliyā. Like a miracle, one night Kaṁsārī in a dream found the holy scripture Bhakti-Pradīpa. Kaṁsārī with great pleasure kept on reciting this scripture with his friends regularly.\textsuperscript{15} Once the cultivation of Āhu-paddy (crops) was badly affected by flood water. He was worried and proceeded to the northern part of the Brahmputra in search of new paddy seeds. At that time Chinese paddy was popular in Assam and he was in search of new China paddy to cultivate in his own land. During his journey by boat he was tired and anchored his boat on the bank of the river Joniyā. Then he decided to spend the night there. Incidentally, Sakhī (friend) of Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva, who was the Viśṇavite apostle Śrī Śrī Nārāyaṇ Dās Thākur Ātā was living at the same village. While Kaṁsārī was busy in reciting the Bhakti-Pradīpa at night, Thākur Ātā, hearing the recitation became curious to know the person and wanted to meet him. Thākur Ātā came to him and introduced himself to Kaṁsārī. He asked Kaṁsārī about his purpose of coming to this village. Then he collected all the information from Kaṁsārī and prepared to help him (Kaṁsārī) by giving the seeds of Cīnā-dhān. Thākur Ātā enquired about the book which he was reading, and asked

him to tell the name of the composer of the book, *Bhakti-Pradīpa*. Kamsāri expressed his ignorance about the name of the composer. Thākur Ātā knew about the book *Bhakti-Pradīpa* and he was confirmed that the composer of the holy scripture was Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva. Thākur Ātā told him that Mādhavadeva, the great disciple of Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva resided at Sundaridiyā (situated near Barpeta). Kamsāri was deeply influenced by *Mahāpuruṣīyā Dharma* when he learnt about Mādhavadeva and *Eksaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. He decided to take initiation (*śaraṇa*) from Mādhavadeva. He sought advice from Thākur Ātā about the way how to approaching Mādhavadeva. Then Thākur Ātā advised Kamsāri to come back to him within eight days after the completion of the work of his cultivation.17 Kamsāri completed the cultivation in eight days and came back to Thākur Ātā. Thākur Ātā advised him to observe fast for the night. Kamsāri did the same and spent the night with Thākur Ātā. The following day, both Thākur Ātā and Kamsāri advanced to Sundaridiyā. On the eve of their journey, Thākur Ātā asked him to take bath and directed him to turn his face towards the east. Then Thākur Ātā asked him to

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17. *ibid*, p. 199.
make obeisance to God by prostrating flatly on the ground and repeat the process seven times. After that both Thākur Ātā and Kaṁśāri reached Sundarīdiyā and paid their obeisance to Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva. The moment Mādhavadeva noticed Kaṁśāri, he pronounced the name Viṣṇu. From that time Kaṁśāri was known as Viṣṇu Ātā. After seeing Kaṁśāri, Mādhavadeva was curious to know about Kaṁśāri. He came to know the antecedents of the new comer from Thākur Ātā, and he found him to be a true devotee. From that day Kaṁśāri was initiated as a disciple of Mādhavadeva. Mādhavadeva was pleased with Kaṁśāri and Ekaśaraṇa-Nāma-Dharma. Having been initiated, Kaṁśāri requested Mādhavadeva to dedicate him in the sacred service of his Guru in Sundarīdiyā. Kaṁśāri learned and felt that the family life was full of illusions and worries. He expressed his desire to renounce family life. But Mādhavadeva was totally against his desire and asked him to continue the family life with devotion, and said so:

bole jowā tomāt hante anek jīva dhariba tariba /

mor guru dharmao tomār parā bārhi pantha mukali h'ba //

That means Mādhavadeva directed Kaṁsāri to go back home and spread the message of the faith among the people for the sake of their salvation and expand my Guru’s preachings to open the vistas for this faith.

Kaṁsāri, now known as Viṣṇu Ātā readily agreed to carry on the advice of his Guru. The Guru arranged food for both the Ātās at night. He provided a mat for the two on a cot to sleep. When the two Ātās were in their deep sleep at night Mādhavadeva came and slept in between the two Ātās. Due to the small cot three persons could not sleep together. That was why when space for three people was so narrow both the Ātās fell down from the cot. After finding out the reason why they have fell down on the ground, they found the Guru on the mat, and they surprised to see Guru and started to get up from the ground, but the Guru pressed on them such a way that they could not get up and felt as if the pressure of the whole universe fell on them. Both the Ātās cried and chanted:

_We are going to die; we are dead._

Then Guru interrupted and asked:

_Why did you utter the word ‘dead’? Who are you? Who am I? Try to examine and find out the reason._

After doing so Mādhavadeva convinced them that they both were the same as the Guru, and that they were the same in devotion. In the morning both the Ātās with deep devotion bowed their heads on the feet of the Guru and paid their salute with regard. After that they proceeded to Manthoi (i.e. Joniyā, the residence of Thākur Ātā). From Manthoi Viṣṇu Ātā parted from Thākur Ātā and came to his own place Mālanchā. After arriving at Mālanchā, Viṣṇu Ātā at first initiated his wife Candrāvatī to Eksarāṇa Dharma. Then Viṣṇu Ātā initiated his friends Kalomiyā, Bāngan and Ādholiyā in the order of Eksarāṇa Bhāgavatī Dharma.

In this way Viṣṇu Ātā spent his days with his devotees in Mālanchā preaching the Nāma-Kirtana. He used to visit Mādhavadeva in an interval of eight days. It is worthmentioning here that Mādhavadeva assigned Viṣṇu Ātā as Guru in the task of initiating the people of southern part (Dakṣin Kūl). Gradually people of different groups of southern part expressed their willingness to take initiation from Viṣṇu Ātā. As such, there was a great crowd for the initiation which was uncontrollable. To overcome the situation Viṣṇu Ātā contacted Mādhavadeva to ask a solution to get rid from such a holly crowed.

Madhavadeva carefully watched the frequent visit of Viṣṇu Ātā to him. Then Madhavadeva advised Viṣṇu Ātā not to visit him so frequently with so much pain. Thereafter, Madhavadeva advised Thākur Ātā to go to Mālancā and build a Kīrtanghar to find a solution to manage such a big crowd. Responding the advice of the Guru Thākur Ātā came to Mālanchā and made arrangement for constructing a Kīrtanghar with the combined efforts of Viṣṇu Ātā and the other devotees. In compliance with the request of Viṣṇu Ātā, Madhavadeva came to Mālanchā in due course and camped there for six months.* Madhavadeva himself set the first roof of the Kīrtanghar and built the same by engaging his devotees and disciples to extend their service. Further Madhavadeva enacted a Bhaona (one act play) named Nara Siṁha Yātrā. He himself played the leading part of the play wearing the guise of Nara Siṁha. This way he entertained the devotees. Then he placed Śrī Śrī Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā in the highest position of Strādhikāra (the head of the Satra) by offering him garland and sandal paste in 1580 A.D. Thereafter, Madhavadeva


*But according to the Paḍhiyā Madhav Ātār Carit, edited by Dr. M. Neog, Madhavadeva stayed for six months at Herāmda Satra (Thān) of the village Ātibāmā in Dakṣin Rānī Mouza. Perhaps Madhavadeva stayed as a whole six (6) months in South Kamrup.
set out for Sundaridiyā. At the time of his return from Mālanchā to Sundaridiyā the Guru set his foot on different parts of South Kamrup. The vivid description of his journey has been narrated in the Kathā Guru Carit. After a couple of days during his visit to Dakṣīṇ Kūl with his friend Nārāyaṇ Dās Thākur Ātā and the cousin Rām Caran Thākur, Mādhavadeva halted on the bank of a Bil (a small lake type). Just that time Mādhavadeva came across an old man coming to take bath. Mādhavadeva requested the old man to fetch banana for them. Then the old man went back home to fetch the bananas. After some time the old man returned and informed them that there was no ripe banana. But Mādhavadeva told the old man with a sense of confidence to back home and get the banana which were lying on the top of the roof of the Barghar (the main house) of the old man. The old man again came back home. To utter surprise he got the ripe banana. He brought the ripe banana and offered Mādhavadeva with great enthusiastic manner and paid him his salutation. Mādhavadeva blessed the old man and accepted the bananas. After this episode the Bil was known as the Kal Khowā Bil (Bil of Banana eating) where the old man came to bath. After that they sailed the boat and anchored it near a place called Gobindapur. Gobindapur was the early name of village
Chamarīyā where the Chamarīyā Satra was established (The history of establishment of Chamarīyā Satra have discussed in detail in the Chapter-IV).

From Gobindapur Mādhavadeva proceeded to Mālanchā and informed about the new place to Viṣṇu Ātā and Mādhavadeva advised him to build the Satra at Chamarīyā. Then he stayed at Kāthami (near Chamarīyā) and returned to Sundarīdiyā.

It is noteworthy to mention that in view of severe river erosion the Mālanchā Satra was shifted to a place named Kāthami. So according to the Carit of Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā Mādhavadeva informed Viṣṇu Ātā about Chamarīyā at Kāthami. Whatever it might be copious evidences are available in support of the shifting of Mālanchā Satra to Kāthami.

On his way to Sundarīdiyā the attention of Mādhavadeva was drawn to different places. Later on Satras were set up in these places in due course (description of these Satras have given in the identity of the respective Satras).

When the Satra of Viṣṇu Ātā was there in Mālanchā, then a Dharmapuruṣa (a pious man) named Śibānanda took initiation

under Mahāpuruṣa Mādhava-deva in Sundarī-diyā. His home was in Barnagar. His father was Viṣṇupati. Śibānanda belonged to a Kāyastha family. He studied all the holy scriptures. After taking initiation under Mādhava-deva he dedicated himself to the service of the Guru in Sundarī-diyā.

Once Viṣṇu Ātā approached to Guru with a view to serving him at his place. Mādhava-deva apprehended interruption in Nāma Prasārīga in case of the visit of Viṣṇu Ātā to him within an interval of eight days. Mādhava-deva deputed Śibānanda Ātā to carry on the Nāma Prasārīga in the absence of Viṣṇu Ātā and also to assist him at Mālanchā. Viṣṇu Ātā gathered detailed information about Śibānanda Ātā from Mādhava-deva and learnt that he (Śibānanda Ātā) was one of his forefathers. So, Viṣṇu Ātā decided to accompany him to Mālanchā. Śibānanda Ātā stayed with Viṣṇu Ātā from that time. Another disciple of Mādhava-deva, Kamal Nayan joined them. Mādhava-deva advised Viṣṇu Ātā that Śibānanda Ātā should inherit the responsibility of Dharmabhār (Religious Head) after him.

30. ibid, p. 49.
Viṣṇu Ātā had three sons named Gopāl, Jadumoṇi and Haricaraṇ. Gopāl with another man called the Choudhury (the village collector) resolved disputes in the village. Both of them by taking bribe were in the habit of distorting the truth of the judgement of the village community. This matter seriously injured the mind of Viṣṇu Ātā. Gopāl did not yeild to any kind of pressure and carry on his activities paying no need to any good counsel. Finding no alternative Viṣṇu Ātā sought the intervention of the Guru (Mādhavadeva) to set up the matter in the right way. The Guru then advised Viṣṇu Ātā to perform Ajāmil-Upākhyān Bhāonā * and asked Thākur Ātā to accompany Viṣṇu Ātā. After all the necessary arrangements were made Guru (Mādhavadeva) consented to go to Mālanchā. When things were made Mādhavadeva arrived on the spot and presented the Bhāonā.32 Gopāl was assigned with the role of Jama-dūta (the messenger of death), the role of Viṣṇu-dūta (the messenger of Lord Viṣṇu) was played by Viṣṇu Ātā and some one was to play the role to keep Gopāl steady by arresting him. In performing his role Viṣṇu Ātā started beating Gopāl by the club. Gopāl began to cry and utter the word—Father I am going to die.33

After having a good lesson from the Bhāonā being refrained

* According to Bar-Viṣṇu Ātār Carīt, the name of the drama was Yamasiddha.
himself from attending the meeting and to resolve the disputes of different parties in his village, Viṣṇu Ātā brought his son to the right path and reformed him by way of attributing corporal punishment.

One day Viṣṇu Ātā was going to Guru to extend his service. In the dusk his foot slipped and the top of his toe was badly injured. That time Mādhavadeva was busy in the religious discourses with his devotees. Suddenly Mādhavadeva exclaimed with a sound Oh! The devotees became curious to know as to what happened to the Guru. Mādhavadeva told them that Viṣṇu Ātā was coming. If Viṣṇu Ātā is hurt, I feel pain, said Mādhavadeva. Then Mādhavadeva deputed two of his devotees to go and accompany Viṣṇu Ātā.34

Once during the religious discourse Mādhavadeva in order to test the minds of his devotees questioned which mode of worship would satisfy the God. Viṣṇu Ātā promptly replied that worshipping with flower would please God. After the collection of the flowers, the Guru started worshipping with these. But surprisingly these flowers fell upon the body of Viṣṇu Ātā. It gave an uncomfortable feeling to Viṣṇu Ātā. The devotees were taken aback at this very sight. From that day the Guru

entitled Viṣṇu Ātā as *Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā*.  

Haricaraṇ, the first son of Viṣṇu Ātā was very innocent, quiet and spiritual by nature. Once a farmer informed Viṣṇu Ātā that a lady was seen coming out from the other end of the forest where Haricaraṇ had gone to attend the call of nature. But Haricaraṇ was quite in dark about the presence of the lady. Ātā was hurt at what was told by the farmer about his son. Out of rage, he exiled Haricaraṇ to the northern part of Kamrup by a boat. Haricaraṇ was mentally shocked and came to the place of Rāmcaraṇ Thākur Ātā at Guwāgāchā. Mādhavadeva was ignorant about the incident. At the same time Mādhavadeva was searching for a man to copy his play *Balichalan* in distinct and good handwriting. Rāmcaraṇ Thākur then suggested the name of Haricaraṇ to the Guru. Then Mādhavadeva engaged Payonidhi Ātā to fetch Haricaraṇ from Guwāgāchā to Sundaridiyā. Guru had a glimps of the most beautiful handwriting of Haricaraṇ and came to know everything in details about him (Haricaraṇ) as the son of Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā. The Guru understood the innocence of Haricaraṇ and presented two *Ghoṣā* to Viṣṇu Ātā through Jaikrṣṇa Ātā and Hari Ātā and then sent back Haricaraṇ to Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā.

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33. *ibid*, p. 85.  
Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā made his second son Jadumoni (the Satrādhikāra of Chamarīyā Satra after Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā) to stay with Mādhavadeva to serve the Guru at Sundarīdiyā. At the time of Jadumoni’s parting from Mādhavadeva, the Guru sent a Guru Āsana made by himself (Mādhavadeva) through the hand of Jadumoni.

When Mādhavadeva was staying at Bhellā, Padma Ātā (Badulā Ātā) of Upper Assam took initiation from Mādhavadeva. Mādhavadeva instructed Padma Ātā to meet Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā at Mālanchā at the time of his return journey. Mādhavadeva sent through Padma Ātā the manuscript of the Nāma-Mālikā to Viṣṇu Ātā with the instruction to make a copy of it and preserve the copy in the Satra. When Padma Ātā reached Mālanchā, Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā accorded him a grand welcome. Viṣṇu Ātā made him stay for a week. He preserved the copy of the Nāma-Mālikā in the Satra.37

Meanwhile as directed by the Guru, Viṣṇu Ātā had shifted the Satra from Mālanchā to Kathami. The great devotee Śibānanda Ātoī breathed his last at this place. Later on, confronted by various inconveniences Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā, in accordance with the suggestion of the Guru (Mādhavaṇḍa) shifted the Satra from

Kathami to Chamariya in 1588 A.D. in consultation with the other devotees.

The Chamariya Satra later became the prime centre of Eksaraṇa Bhāgavatī Dharma of Dakṣin Kūl (i.e. South Kamrup). The pioneer and the chief disciple of Mādhavadeva, Dakṣin-kuliya Śrī-Śrī Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā made his journey to the heavenly abode from this holy Satra.

B. Paḍhiyā Mādhav Ātoi and Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva:

Paḍhiyā Mādhav Ātoi was one of the chief propagators of Eksaraṇa Dharma. But Paḍhiyā Mādhav Ātoi’s life and career is not much known. From his successors it is learnt that Paḍhiyā Mādhav Ātoi was born in 1529 A.D. in the month of Āhina (Āśvina, i.e. Sept. - Oct.) on the third day of the dark-half (krṣṇā-tṛtiyā tithi) and passed away in 1632 A.D. There is a controversy about his birth place. In one page of Paḍhiyā Mādhav Ātār Carit edited by Dr. M. Neog, it has been stated that he was born at the village Bondāgrām near Beltolā Mouzā in Kamrup district. In another page of the same book it is stressed that his birth place was at the village Bondāgrām in Beltolā state.38 Beltolā was a part of the (Koch) kingdom of Koch-Bihar. Later on, it was transformed to a Mouzā. It is worthmentioning that according

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to *Katha Guru Carit*, Padhīyā Ātā was an inhabitant of Urput village. Bondāgrām was situated to the east of present Guwahati, three furlong from Narengi. According to the *Padhīyā Mādhav Ātār Carit*, the word Padhīyā means reader, one who reads. Again Padhīyā means - Pursuer, one who pursus.\(^{39}\)

Puruṣottam Bhuyan was the ancestor of Padhīyā Ātoi. He had two sons, one was Gopal and the other was Mādhav Bhuyan who later came to be known as Padhīyā Mādhav Ātoi. Unfortunately almost all the members of the family perished of Pox, except his elder brother, and Anusuyā Āi, the sister-in-law of Mādhav Bhuyan. Mādhav Bhuyan was so much disillusioned at the tragic event befalling on his family that he left home with Jagannāth Sainyāsi, a saint, and travelled for long twelve years in several holy places in the western part of India.\(^{40}\) After his long journey he came to the Jamadanda mountain in depressive mind, which was situated in the west of Nepal, with the intention of committing suicide. Fortunately, he met a great saint there who told him that death from that region does not mean salvation. Then he advised him to move towards east where he would meet superior *Guru*.\(^{41}\) Then Padhīyā Ātoi returned home with

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great consolation. His companion Jagannāth Sainyāśī followed Ātoi. At home getting strange behaviour from his elder brother and sister-in-law, Ātoi left home and crossed the Brahmaputra and arrived at Sundarīdiyā with Jagannāth Sainyāśī. Jagannath Sainyāśī went to Jayamurti Bāsudeva and Ātoi came to the gate of Mādhavadeva’s premises. There he met Thākur Ātā who was just returning from Manthoi. Paḍhiyā Ātoi expressed his keen desire to meet Mādhavadeva to Thākur Ātā. Thākur Ātā made clean Paḍhiyā Ātoi and presented before the Guru Mādhavadeva. Paḍhiyā Ātoi disclosed his identity before Guru. Guru Mādhavadeva recited a Ghoṣā. Hearing the Ghoṣā the heart and mind of Ātoi were thrilled and attached to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Then he was initiated by the Guru Mādhavadeva. After initiation Ātoi was conferred with a new name Mādhava by his Guru. As his name was same as his Guru he was called Mitā (friend) by the Guru. After that he remained with Guru for long six months.

One day Mādhavadeva told Ātoi that he placed his leg on a mango tree by seeing three symbols of three ages. Because Lord Kṛṣṇa also did the same on Kadamba and Āhat (Peepal) tree for their salvation. Guru said that, once an old man was making bambo split near to Guru when he was in a place of

41. ibid, p. 260.
42. Guru Carit Kathā, p. 261.
Dakṣīṇa Kūl. The Guru asked the man for what purpose he was doing so. The man replied that it was for a Gosāi Ghar (worshipping place of deity). Madhavadeva repeated his question thrice by keeping his back towards the man. But all the three times he got same reply. After sometime when the old man turned towards Madhavadeva the latter was found vanished. The old man then covered the foot print of Madhavadeva with a small hut and went out in search of him. Ultimately, he arrived at Sundarīdiyā where he met Madhavadeva and got initiation.44 After this he returned to his home Herāmda. But he continued his visit at Sundarīdiyā to listen the Nām-Prasāṇga and Kṛṣṇa kathā. One day while coming to Sundarīdiyā he faced a lot of problems as their boat submerged in the river Brahmaputra. He told Guru that he needed a company of a Mahanta’s child. So Madhavadeva asked Rāmcaraṇ to be the companion with the old man, but he refused to do so. He then asked his Sakhī (friend) Thākur Ātā, but he too refused. At last Paḍhīyā Ātoi was asked by the Guru to be the companion with the old man at Herāmda. Again the Guru told Paḍhīyā Ātoi that through him (Ātoi) several lives would get salvation from this world. When Paḍhīyā Ātoi told Guru that he himself was alone, Guru

advised him to get married. But Ātoi refused to marry. Then the Guru made a prophecy that Ātoi would have to marry twice and his dynasty would increase like Kayā ban (one kind of grass) and would get salvation up to seven generation.45 After this Guru sent Paḍhiyā Ātoi with the old man, who was also called Gosāi Gharīyā Burhā to Herāmda in South Kamrup. When Gosāi Gharīyā Burhā narrated everything to the other people of Herāmda like Jugdum, Megha, Jahā Cāuliya etc., they all built a small hut for Paḍhiyā Ātoi. They all honoured Ātoi as god. Very soon a Kīrtanghar was built at Herāmda. They all decided that the Guru Mādhavadeva should be invited to inaugurate the Kīrtanghar with earthen lamp. Accordingly they arrived at Sundaridiyā. At the request of Paḍhiyā Ātoi, the Guru with other disciples like Rāmcaraṇ Thākur, Thākur Ātā, Śrīrām Ātā, Hariballav Ātoi reached on the bank of Kāśīgaṅgā. When the villagers were informed about the visit of Mādhavadeva, with his disciples, all the villagers came to the bank of the river with Gāyana, Bāyana, Dhuliya and Tāmol-Pān to welcome the Guru. They took him to the Lāikhuta (main post) of Nāmghar. When the ceremony was over, the Guru asked Paḍhiyā Ātoi to arrange Māh-Prasād. Next day with Nām-Kīrtana lightening the earthen lamp.

44. Neog, Dr. M. (ed.): Paḍhiyā Mādhav Ātār Carīt, pp. 7-8.
lamp the Guru inaugurated the Herāmda Satra. Madhavadeva stayed there for a long time and arranged Doul Yatra. People were very much facinated by the activities of the Guru.

At Herāmda Paḍhīyā Ātoi stayed at Kṛṣṇa Ātoi’s house. When Madhavadeva came to Kṛṣṇa Ātoi’s house the latter built a Harigrha. Later on this Harigrha was used by Paḍhīyā Ātoi for Nām-Prasānga. There is a good description in the Guru Carit Kathā about the punishment of Paḍhīyā Ātoi given by the Guru. Shortly, once Paḍhīyā Ātoi came into contact with a Śākta Paṇḍit in his ignorance. When Guru learnt about this, he dismissed Paḍhīyā Ātoi including Kṛṣṇa Ātoi and Hari Ātoi from the unit of devotees. The moment Paḍhīyā Ātoi came to know about their dismissal, he hurriedly came to Sundarīdiyā to meet the Guru. When other disciples saw Ātoi, they informed the Guru. The Guru ordered that Paḍhīyā Ātoi should stay where he was. Abiding the order of Guru Paḍhīyā Ātoi took shelter in a small hut of a cultivating field. He remained there and starving for long six months. One day while Thākur Ātā was passing through that field he saw the pathetic condition of Paḍhīyā Ātoi. He immediately came to Guru and informed him

45. ibid, p. 8.
46. Neog, Dr. M. (ed.): Paḍhīyā Mādhav Ātār Carit, p. 11.
about the sickly condition of Paḍḥiyā Ātoi. The Guru then allowed Paḍḥiyā Ātoi to be brought to him. Paḍḥiyā Ātoi was then in a miserable condition. In such a deteriorating condition it was difficult to recognise him. Seeing the miserable state of Paḍḥiyā Ātoi, the Guru felt pity and apologised all the offences. After this he was given shave and bath. After long three months of immense attention Ātoi regained his original health and strength. After he was fully recovered from bad state of health he was sent to Herāmda. 49

Soon after that, the Gosāi Gharilā arranged Paḍḥiyā Ātoi’s marriage with the elder daughter of Kṛṣṇa Ātoi, Indumātī by name. Very soon he married the second daughter of Kṛṣṇa Ātoi also. 50 He was blessed with four sons - Gopāl, Bholā, Niranjan and Murāri respectively. 51

Paḍḥiyā Ātoi met Guru Mādhavadeva for the last time when the latter was going to Koch-Behar and had halted at Manḍiyā Ghāţ. Ātoi expressed his keen desire to accompany the Guru to Koch-Behar. But he refused. Rather he was advised by the Guru to continue Nām-Prasaṅga. 52 Later on, following the advice of the Guru, Kṛṣṇa Ātoi, Paḍḥiyā Ātoi and Hari Ātoi supplied

49. Guru Carit Kathā, p. 262.
51. Guru Carit Kathā, p. 262.
Raṅgpāṭā, Bālicandā and Kharmāti for the decoration of the Raṅgiyāl Ghar (Theatre Hall) of Barpetā Satra.\textsuperscript{53}

C. Mādhavadeva in other places of South Kamrup:

It is said that Mādhavadeva stayed for six months in the southern part of the district of Kamrup. After the establishment of the Mālanchā Satra, on his return journey to Sundarīdiya Mādhavadeva had travelled South Kamrup. There is a vivid description in the Guru Carit Kathā about this travelling. Mādhavadeva with Ātoi's were staying at Mālanchā for ten days and then they had gone by the river Kāśi-Gaṅgā towards stream to Heremeswar’s kingdom and they stayed at Harāmda. The king of Heremeswar sent people to Guru to take permission to get initiation at the feet of the Guru and his Dharma. Guru told to Rāmcaraṇ (his companion) that his Guru Śaṅkaradeva got salvation and went to heaven because king Naranārāyaṇa came to him to take initiation and accept his Dharma. So it is better also to them to leave this place. By saying this they started boating downwards.\textsuperscript{54} During the course of his boating Mādhavadeva watched the beautiful land around him. Where his eyes felt the Satras were established in course of time. The

\textsuperscript{52} Neog, Dr. M. (ed.) : Paḍhīyā Mādhav Ātār Carit, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{53} Choudhury, G. N. (ed.) : Śrī Śrī Thākur Ātār Carit Kathā, p. 108.
name of the Satras are Phulguri, Šikārhaṭi, Dhopguri, Napārā, Nahāṭi, Nabori, Marhāṭa, Jaṭiyā, Jaji, Guwālbori, Guwālhāṭa, Dighalkuchi, Urput, Kānḍupur etc.⁵⁵

In his travelling, at one place a fisherman was netting for fish. Guru enquired about the fishes. He replied that he got seventeen Šol fishes. From that time the name of the Bil (small lake) known as Sataršol Bil (the lake of seventeen Šol fishes). After proceeding towards he found a man who was netting for fishes. Guru asked him how many fishes he had found. He replied that six buskets of Nāra fishes he got. From that time the name of the place is known as Chaburiyā.⁵⁶

After this proceeding down towards the river Kalahi Madhavadeva arrived again at Mālanchā. In his travelling to Mālanchā his eyes fell in various places like Malibārī, Kātaribārī, Kaimārī, Dalgomā, Dāmālcoca, Burukā, Haripur, Kāripārā, Kātālāmārī, Kecāidubi, Dhekelaḇārī, and Nālangā. In course of time Satras grew up at most of the places with great enthusiastic way. Having backed from Mālanchā Madhavadeva stopped at Kāthami and then went to Sundarīdiyā.⁵⁷

Though we have the names of the above mentioned Satras

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55. ibid, p. 206.
in the *Guru Carit Kathā* yet in course of time some of the mentioned Satras disappeared due to various reasons. Again some Satras have changed their places and lot of new Satras grew up. The relations of Mādhavadeva with the respective Satras are being discussed in the next Chapter.

3. Contribution of Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva:

Mādhavadeva was the worthy successor of Śaṅkaradeva and contributed not less than his *Guru* to Assam and the Assamese particularly in literature, socio-religious and cultural field. He did not hesitate to leave out his betrothed girl and to risk anything in the cause of his faith.

Mādhavadeva added the ideal *Guru* to the originally established three folded faith of Śaṅkaradeva to make it four folded (*Cāri-*vastu) one, namely *Guru* (preceptor), *Deva* (God), *Nama* (prayer), and *Bhakata* (devotees). He introduced daily prayer services systematically by making firm in the number and order of their performance. The custom of conducting 14 *prasaṅga* in Satras have been systematized since the time of Mādhavadeva.

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57. *ibid*, p. 207.
60. *Guru Carit Kathā*, p. 58.
61. Sarma, Dr. S. N.: *The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Movement and the Satra Institution*
Satras in Assam. Barpeta Satra is not only a centre of great religious activities, but also served as a model institution to the Vaiṣṇavites.

Mādhavadeva’s contribution to Assamese literature is significant. Like his Guru, he, too, was a profound writer. He wrote a number of books in different literary forms and completed the religious exigences of the Bhakti cult. His first work Janmaraḥasya (Mystery of Birth) is a work of 300 verses which relates to the story of creation and destruction of the world and thus establishes the omnipotence of God. He translated the Bhakti-Ratnāvalī, compiled by Viṣṇupurī Sainnyāsī. It is considered as one of the most sacred books of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. Mādhavadeva translated the Nāma-Mālikā from Śanskrit which was written by Puruṣottam Gajapati in the same name. Mādhavadeva also successfully translated the Ādikāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki. His Rājśūya Kāvyā based on the episode of the Sabhāparva of Mahābhārata, is dignified in style with intensity of devotion. Mādhavadeva composed the Nām-Ghoṣa which may be called the supreme achievement of Assamese literature. The Nām-Ghoṣā (chanting of the name Divine), also

of Assam, p. 21.
62. Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva : Saint poet of Assam (Article) by Dr. B.P. Chaliha, Souvenir, The glimpses of the Vaiṣṇava heritage of Assam
called the Hajari Ghoṣā as it contains one thousand (1000) verses, occupies a unique place in the philosophical literature of Assam. The Nām-Ghoṣā achieved a unique position in the whole world literature. In the words of Acharya Vinoba Bhava, the Nām-Ghoṣā of Mādhavadeva is one of the greatest religious books in the whole world.63

Mādhavadeva composed several Aṅkīyā Nāṭ (one act play) relating to Kṛṣṇa's childhood days. Some remarkable Aṅkīyā Nāṭa of Mādhavadeva are Cordharā, Pimparā Gucowā, Dadhimathan, Bhūmi leṭowā, Bhajan Bihār etc. He composed one hundred and ninety one (191) Bargīta64 which are highly poetical tuned with classical rāgas. Most of these songs depict incidents of the early life of Kṛṣṇa. He composed these Bargītas according to the direction of his Guru Śaṅkaradeva. Mādhavadeva collected the portions of Kīrtan-Ghoṣā into a complete position with the help of Rāmcaraṇ Thākur which were being scattered in different Satras.

Mādhavadeva had the opportunity to see Vaiṣṇavism in his life which secured a good ground in the Brahmaputra Valley.
4. Gāro Gobinda Ātā and his contribution to Neo-Vaiṣṇavism:

Gāro Gobinda Ātā was one of the great disciples amongst others that initiated by Mahā puruṣa Śaṅkaradeva. As a disciple the devotion of Gāro Gobinda Ātā to Guru was profound. The easy-going simple person Gāro Gobinda Ātā, being taken the advice of his Guru, took an important role in preaching the faith of Eksaraṇa Bhāgavatī Dharma in Assam particularly in Dakṣīṇ Kūl (South Kamrup). Chamariyā Satra was the main centre of his worship as well as service. Having been an assistant of Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā, the founder of Chamariyā Satra, he offered himself in the preaching of Vaiṣṇava religion. There is no detailed description of the life history of this great Ātā. It is tried to make a focus on the life history of this great soul with the help of Carit Puthis, field studies and some other sources.

Gāro Gobinda Ātā was an utmost disciple of Mahā puruṣa Śaṅkaradeva. Having taken initiation from Mahā puruṣa Śaṅkaradeva Gāro Govinda spent his life with the Vaiṣṇavite ideology. On the other hand Gāro Gobinda Ātā was the favourite disciple of Mahā puruṣa Śaṅkaradeva. Hence Śaṅkaradeva named him Gobinda 65 by giving initiation to his favourite disciple. After taking initiation he obtained the title Ātā. Thus his name

64. Guru Carit Kathā, p. 178.
became Gobinda Ātā. Since he was from Gāro community, he is called Gāro Gobinda Ātā. Hence forward, he became popular as Gāro Gobinda Ātā. Though the editor of the Carit Puthi mentioned here and there as Garor Gobinda Ātoi but the biographer of the Carit Puthi mentioned as Gāro Gobinda Ātoi for many times. Before taking the initiation from Śaṅkaradeva, the real name of Gāro Gobinda Ātā was Ronda J. Sangma. The full meaning of 'J' is Jongske. It means that the matriarchal dynasty was Jongske. The name of the wife of Gāro Gobinda Ātā was Wanay K. Marak. It may be mentioned that the real name of Gāro Gobinda and his wife become known from popular belief and his hereditary tradition.

It has been known from Carit Puthi and other sources about the meeting of Gāro Gobinda Ātā with Śaṅkaradeva and acceptance of Mahāpuruṣiyā Dharma. It was a great contribution of Nārāyaṇ Dās Thākur Ātā in bringing Gobinda Ātā to Eksaraṇa Bhāgavatī Dharma. It is mentioned in the Carit Puthi that Nārāyaṇ Dās Thākur Ātā always visits from his own residence Manthoi

66. ibid, p. 94.
67. ibid, p. 345.
to the residence of Madhavadeva of Ganakkuchi and thereupon along with his Sakhī (friend) Madhavadeva, both went for devotional salutation to their Guru and for religious discourses near to Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva at Pāṭbāusi. In this way once it so happened that they had seen a ploughman who was ploughing sounding *hey hey* to his bullock nearby a paddy field on their way from Gaṅak kuchi to Pāṭbāusi. So seeing this scene Thākur Ātā says the ploughman that it should be sounded as Rām Rām instead of *hey hey*. Then Mādhavadeva says his Sakhī Thākur Ātā that he must has to come uttering the sound Rām-Rām through the ploughman. Having said this Mādhavadeva went to Pāṭbāusi. Thākur Ātā moves after the ploughman to make the sound of Rām-Rām. But the ploughman does not do. At length, the ploughman sounds as Rām without having any alternative.

It is in the *Guru Carit* as-

\[ pāce thākur ātā pāche pāche phuriche bole rām bol : \\
si nobole : ātā bole ekekhaři rām bol : upāhe / tehe ekorūpe \\
erābo napāri bole bulilo rām ki haiche etiyā : bole eko \\
nahay thāk pā // \]

After having finished, Thākur Ātā went to Pāṭbāusi. After being arrived at Pāṭbāusi Mādhavadeva asked his Sakhī Thākur

70. ibid.
71. Smartlin J. Sangma : family member.
Āta whether the ploughman had said Rām or not. Thākur Āṭā replied in the affirmative that he was made to do that somehow. Then Mādhavadeva said that why he had said so. What it would have been if he had not said so.\textsuperscript{74}

This ploughman was from the Garo community. There is a popular belief that this Garo ploughman was ploughing on the west bank of the river Nakhandā near Barpeta.\textsuperscript{75} Gāro Gobinda Āṭā was met for the first time by Nārāyaṇ Dās Thākur Āṭā and Mādhavadeva at the time of ploughing on the bank of this Nakhandā river.

After the incident of the Rām-Nām caused by, at the dying moment of the said ploughman, the blackish messenger of the regent of death (Jamdūti) adopting terrible ugly shape came to bring the ploughman with the chain of iron. The ploughman shouted as Rām in the fear of the regent of death. On hearing the sound Rām the regent of death escaped with great fright. After being recovered from illness he was asked to carry him near to Thākur Āṭā. The ploughman has been brought near to Thākur Āṭā.\textsuperscript{76} Having met Thākur Āṭā, the ploughman said with devotional salutation:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Neog. M. (ed.): Guru Carit Kathā, Second edition, 1999, p. 93.
\item \textsuperscript{73} ibid, p. 93.
\item \textsuperscript{74} ibid, p. 93.
\item \textsuperscript{75} ibid, p. 93.
\item \textsuperscript{76} ibid, p. 93.
\end{itemize}
“bāp” I have been saved only for you; do not leave me alone; keep me with you as a dās” (religious servant).

On hearing that Thākur Ātā said: ‘O.K. come’, and saying this the ploughman has been brought near to Mādhavadeva and the preceding incident was reminded to him by Thākur Ātā. Then Mādhavadeva recited a Ghoṣā as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mrtyura mukhata pari} & \quad \text{āche jīto siṭojana} \\
\text{hariguna kīrtana nakare} & \\
\text{mrtyu taribāra jānā} & \quad \text{nāhike upāya āna} \\
\text{harināma kittanata pare} &
\end{align*}
\]

That means although a person do not intend to chant the glory of Hari on the threshold of death yet it is true that there is no other remedy to conquer death without uttering the name of Hari-nāma-kīrtana.

Having read the Ghoṣā, Mādhavadeva said to Thākur Ātā: sakhi (friend) look (Bole Sakhī dekhīchā). Hereafter, both Mādhavadeva and Thākur Ātā brought the ploughman near to their Guru Śaṅkaradeva. Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva himself gave initiation to the Garo ploughman and the Garo was named

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75. Sil, Sri Ram Kumar: Advocate, Gauhati D.C. Court.
77. A term used towards a Vaiṣṇava religious preceptor.
Gobinda. It is mentioned in the Carit Puthi: Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva Gobinda nām diche purbar Gāror parā ahā ātoi sijanmaro kāraṇ (The name Gobinda has been given by Śrī Śaṅkaradeva as the Ātoi who descended from Garo tribe and it was the cause for his noble deeds of his previous birth).

This is the man whom we called Gāro Gobinda Ātā, after being initiated by Śaṅkaradeva, from whom several people of Garo tribe and the people of other tribal communities accepted the initiation of Eksaraṇa Bhāgavatī Dharma.

The residence of Gāro Gobinda Ātā was at the village Lārubāmā of Bangaon Mouzā under present Chhaygaon circle. Its revenue village is Sākomurī No. 1. The village Lārubāmā is situated 13 km. away from Boko town in the south-east corner. Lārubāmā village was formerly known as Ālukhundā. Gāro Gobinda Ātā was living on a hillock of a hill erecting a house with a raised platform (Camghar) at the old plinth of Ālukhundā village. At present the descendents of Gāro Gobinda Ātā have transferred their residence to a nearby hillock. They transferred their residence in the year 1996-97. As has been informed by their family members it came into ashes due to set burnt twice in the house of old plinth of Gāro Gobinda Ātā where they

79. ibid, p. 94.
settled in the new homestead. All the remaining memorial articles of Gāro Gobinda Ātā have been burnt into ashes.82

It was unable to take the fixed decision regarding the birth place of Gāro Gobinda Ātā. According to their descendants Gāro Gobinda Ātā was born at village Nokmānok situated almost 1 (one) km. south from the present village Lārubāmā. The present Mouzā of the village Nokmānok is Bangaon. But there are no inhabitants there. The people went away from that very village to other places because the forest department took it under their own control according to the Govt. law. Under that circumstances Gāro Gobinda Ātā began to live at Ālukhundā.83 On the other hand somebody want to say that Gāro Gobinda Ātā was born at the village Gāmerimurā, at present situated 20 km. away from Boko in the south-west direction and according to the matriarchal system after marriage he began to live at Ālukhundā. But it has been proved from our field study that Gāmerimurā was not the birth place of Gāro Gobinda Ātā.84 It was not found even in popular belief also.

It is known from another popular belief that there is a place

80.  ibid, p. 94.
82. Smartlin J. Sangma : family member of Gāror Gobinda Ātā.
83. ibid.
84. Informer - Sri Siva Ram Das - 80 years, Sri Ramesh Das - 70 years, Sri
named *Gomuri*, near Barpeta at present. Gāro Gobinda Ātā was born in that said Gomuri. Later on according to matriarchal system he stayed to live at Ālukhundā. Their logic is that Mādhavadeva and Nārāyaṇ Dās Thākur Ātā met Gāro Gobinda Ātā at the time of ploughing on the bank of the river Nakhandā near Barpeta. Therefore they believe that Gāro Gobinda Ātā was born at Gomuri or nearby places of that area.

A probable assumption can be obtained about the life time of Gāro Gobinda Ātā from various sources. It is known from the sources that Gāro Gobinda Ātā was born in between 1510 A.D. - 1530 A.D. approximately. In accordance with the popular belief prevailing between the descendants of Gobinda Ātā and the villagers of Lārubāmā, Gāro Gobinda Ātā was born in between 2nd and 3rd decades of the 16th century A.D. (i.e. 1510-1530 A.D.). Again it is also proved that Gāro Gobinda Ātā was younger than Mādhavadeva. When Gobinda Ātā goes to say *Tumi* (you), instead of *Tai* (act of addressing one as junior to one’s) then seeing Gobinda Ātā Mādhavadeva says, Gobinda O, you have come! (*Gobinda, dekho āhichā!). It is learnt from the calling by name as *Gobinda* by Mādhavadeva that Gāro Gobinda Ātā was too younger than Mādhavadeva. On the other hand, Bar-Bhupen Das - 45 years, Sri Siva Rabha - 48 years, (all are residents of Gāmerimurā) (Date 28, 31st October, 04)
Visnu Ata, the founder of Chamariyā Satra and the disciple of Mādhavadeva, was younger than Mādhavadeva. Gāro Gobinda Ata was younger than Bar-Viṣṇu Ata also. In addition to call Gobinda by name, Gāro Gobinda Ata was the Āldharā (an attendant) of Bar-Viṣṇu Ata. Generally the young one of one's own and the person skilful in work is appointed as Āldharā. On observing the generation it can also be assumed that he was born in between 2nd and 3rd decade of the 16th century A.D.

Gāro Gobinda Ata died within the first score of 17th century, that means during 1600-1620 A.D. He was born during 1510-1530 A.D. So his life period can be assumed as 90 years (1600-1510 = 90 or 1620-1530 = 90).

Gāro Gobinda Ata was initiated by Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva when Śaṅkaradeva stayed at Pāṭbāṣī. Śaṅkaradeva began to stay at Pāṭbāṣī from 1546 A.D. During 1546-1567 A.D. Śaṅkaradeva stayed at Pāṭbāṣī for 15 years excluding pilgrimage, in the Koch-court and coming and going to other places of 6/7 years in the middle. Within this period Gāro

87. ibid, p. 321.
88. "Gāro-Assamese relations with occasional reference to rivers"- a Research Article by Dr. Jiten Das, Published in 2004 by IGRMS, Bhopal and printed by NEHU Publication, p. 46.
Gobinda Ātā took initiation under Śaṅkaradeva. It may be assumed that Gāro Gobinda was not initiated by Śaṅkaradeva within the first four years (1546-1550). It is confirmed that Gāro Gobinda did not take initiation within the next 6/7 years (1550-1556 A.D.). Because within this period Śaṅkaradeva made his second pilgrimage. So it is clear that the first ten (10) years (4+6 = 10) of Śaṅkaradeva that stayed at Pāṭbāusi Gāro Gobinda did not take initiation. Therefore it can be assumed that Gāro Gobinda took initiation from Śaṅkaradeva within next 10-11 years. That means he took initiation within 1556-1567 A.D. Śaṅkaradeva was 107-118 years of old within the period from 1556 to 1567 A.D. So it is seen that Gāro Gobinda took initiation at the ending years of life of his Guru Śaṅkaradeva. At that time Gāro Gobinda Ātā was approximately 37-46 years of old (1556-1510 = 46, or 1567-1530 = 37). It has been assumed through this estimation that Gāror Gobinda Ātā was alive from 44 to 53 years after taking initiation (1600-1556 = 44 or 1620-1567 = 53). From the aforesaid discussion it is estimated that the life span of Gāror Gobinda Ātā was 90 years (1600-1510 = 90 or 1620-1530 = 90, or 46+44 = 90 or 37+53 = 90).

Gāro Gobinda Ātā was an inhabitant of then Bagāi or Bage Rājya. His residence was at the village Lārubāmā of Bagāi Rājya.
The village Lārubāmā was a hilly village situated in the south corner of Bagāi Rājya. The Bagāi Rājya was established within the period from the beginning of the decline of Kāmarūpa-Kamatā to the flourishing of Koch kingdom. That means the Bagāi Rājya was established within the period of the last decade of the 15th century. During that period the neighboring states (Rājyas) of Bagāi Rājya were Pāntān Rājya in the east, Augurī Rājya in the South-East, Luki Rājya in north-west and Boko Rājya in the west. The other two neighboring states were Dimariyā Rājya and Rāṇī Rājya in the north-west. At that time the powerful Ahom dynasty ruled over the eastern part of Assam and the western part of Assam was ruled over by the heroic Koch dynasty. The Bagāi Rājya was under the Koches as feudal state from the reign of Bīṣva Singha, the Koch king to the reign of Parikshit Nārāyaṇa, the king of Koch-Hazo. In lump, it goes to mean that the Bagāi Rājya was under the Koches from 1500 A.D. to 1613 A.D. for 113 years. The existence and presentation about Bagāi Rājya can be known to the last part of the 19th century. Under the Koch king Mahārāj Naraṇārāyaṇa

92. ibid, p. 36.
93. ibid, p. 36.
(1540-1584) and according to his order a man named Gobinda Laskar began to rule over a part of Bagāi Rājya when Bagāi Rājya was under Koch Rājya. As a result of this another new state (Rājya) flourished inside the Bagāi Rājya. Later on this new state came to known as Bangaon Rājya. In this way the Bagāi Rājya has been divided into two parts. One of these was Bagāi Rājya and another was Bangaon Rājya. In course of time this Bangaon Rājya converted into Bangaon Mouzā. Gāro Gobinda Ātā was the inhabitant of this Bangaon Mouzā.

Probably Bangaon Rājya was not created to the time of the arrival of Gāro Gobinda Ātā to Ālukhundā, that means Lārubāmā after being initiated to Eksaraṇa Bhāgavatī Dharma. Probably Bangaon Rājya has been created in the last part of the reign of Mahārāj Naranārāyaṇa i.e. after the eight decade of the sixteenth century A.D. (1570-1584 A.D.). Because the only popular belief is that after initiation Gāro Gobinda came to Bagāi Rājya and not to Bangaon Rājya. During that time the king (Rājā) of Bagāi Rājya was either Bagā Singh (1540-1560) or San Singh (1560-1600).95 Gāro Gobinda was initiated during 1556-1567 A.D. approximately.

94. ibid, p. 37.
95. ibid, p. 39.
Whatever that may be, after being initiated by Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva, Gāro Gobinda came to his own village Lārubāmā. There is a popular saying that after being arrived at his own village Ātā entered in the discussion about Puruṣottam Śrīkṛṣṇa, the fact of Eksaraṇa Nāma Dharma, and Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva in the Māhāri Mel * of the village and being enamoured with the discussion, the people of Māhāri made humble salutation kneeling down before Ātā thinking he (Ātā) possesses some unforeseen power.

During that time, according to the prevailing rule of the Bagāi or Bage Rājya the people could kneel down before the Rājā (king) only. The act of kneeling down before the general people except the Rājā (king) was considered as a crime. In this connection when it was complained, Ātā was adjudicated by the Bagāi Rājā in the court. It the trial Ātā was asked to give explanation why he accepted the humble salutation publicly. Gobinda Ātā said in replying that people kneel down when Bagāi Rājā riding on elephant. He asked whether this kind of kneeling down was before the elephant or the king. It must be before the king. Just like that Gobinda Ātā was like an elephant,

* 'Māhāri Mel' is a unit of husbands or males of the women (mother’s dynasty) of the tribal matrimonial society. Mā + Hari = Māhāri, Mā = Mother, Hari = Dynasty (specially male of mother dynasty).
people knelt down before God who is above all (him). Being dissatisfied with the reply of Ātā, he was asked to take oath before the Kecāikhāti Gosānī taking a little sault on the pointed edge of a sword that he would not do such deed in future according to the prevailing customs of the Bagāi Rājya. But when Gobinda Ātā refused to take oath he was ordered to beat (whip) up and boycott (excommunicate) from the Garo society.\textsuperscript{96} It is known from a popular belief that in course of the beating when he was beaten on his leg, Ātā made a soliloquy that it was a punishment because he did not kneel down before God, when he was beaten on hand he spoke about the service to his Guru and when he was slapped on his cheek he made soliloquy as a punishment that he did not utter the glory of Hari-nāma.\textsuperscript{97} It is proved from the punishment and the boycott of Gāro Gobinda Ātā that each great soul who tried to establish a new religion or to reform a society covered with prejudice of medieval period had to confront public punishment or royal house. As for example at that period the torture of a royal house as well as a class of society that made to both Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva and Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva can be mentioned. It showed that

\textsuperscript{96} Informer - Sil, Sri Ram Kumar : Advocate, Gauhati High Court.
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{ibid},
Gāro Gobinda Ātā also could not keep away himself from the torture of royal house as well as public punishment.

Gāro Gobinda Ātā was a man of very simple and easy-going nature. His devotion to Guru was too deep. After the departure to heaven of Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva, the responsibilities of spiritual instructor of the Vaiṣṇava cult went to Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva. Therefore Gāro Gobinda Ātā showed his great respect and compliment to Mādhavadeva. There was an intimate friendship and brotherhood relationship between Mādhavadeva and Gāro Gobinda Ātā. Generally on conversation Gāro Gobinda Ātā addressed Mādhavadeva as ‘tai’ (you, act of addressing one as junior to one’s or a close relationship). Once, after being saluted devotionally to their Guru (Mādhavadeva), the devotees on the way to their home said to Gāro Gobinda Ātā why was calling the Guru ‘tai’; Gobinda Ātā asked, that what is to be addressed: The Bhakats said, “that, address as ‘tumi/tomra’” *(98)* (address to show some respect to others). On hearing this, next day Gobinda Ātā came near to Mādhavadeva with four Bhārs (a Bhār consists of a load carried on a pole placed on the shoulders). Having seen Gāro Gobinda Mādhavadeva asked, “that, Gobinda you have come again.”

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Ātā said, "that Bāp, (an address to Vaiṣṇavite religious person) come to call you ‘tumi’ (you) instead of ‘tai’. On hearing this Mādhavadeva laughed and narrated a story about the śālagrāma (a special stone representing Viṣṇu) to Gāro Gobinda. Mādhavadeva said: ‘...Gobinda, I get much pleasure when you address me as ‘tai’ whatever is not derived from the words ‘tumi’ by others.’ After hearing this Gobinda Ātā saluted Mādhavadeva and went away to his own home satisfied. It may be easily assumed from the above mentioned incident that Mādhavadeva loved Gāro Gobinda as his own close relative or as his own brother for which Gāro Gobinda Ātā was permitted by Mādhavadeva to call him as ‘tai’. There was no any single instance that Mādhavadeva permitted other Bhakats or disciples to call him as tai except Gāro Gobinda.

The contribution of Gāro Gobinda Ātā was noteworthy in the field of preaching of Vaiṣṇava religion in Daksin Kūl. So many instances were found that Gāro Gobinda Ātā had played an important role in preaching and enrichment of Eksaraṇa Bhāgavatī Dharma far from Mālacā to Herām. At first Chamarlyā Satra was established at Mālacā in 1580 A.D. Śrī Śrī Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā, the favourite disciple of Mahāpuruṣa

99. ibid, p. 346.
Mādhavadeva and the exceptional one of the twelve apostles appointed by Mādhavadeva established the Chamariyā Satra. By the order of Mādhavadeva the preparation for the establishment for the Satra at Mālacā has been made by Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā in collaboration with Nārāyaṇ Dās Thākur Ātā, the Sakhī (friend) of Mādhavadeva. After a few days Mādhavadeva came to Mālacā from Sundarīdiyā and enchored the boat at Mālacā. On getting the information of Mādhavadeva who reached on the bank of the river Mālacā innumerable people gathered to listen his sermons and to meet him at Mālacā. Amongst these people the people of the Garo tribe was large in number. Having enchored the boat on the bank of the river and seeing a large crowd of people, Mādhavadeva was confused. The Guru said to Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā and Nārāyaṇ Dās Thākur Ātā that he would not go to Mālacā house (place of Satra), because those people who were not initiated (abhakatas) and they would touch him in their humble salutation. Hence Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā and Nārāyaṇ Dās Thākur Ātā were asked by Mādhavadeva, to erect a fence around. Following the advice both the Ātās erected a fence. But the fence was broken down by the crowd when scrambling by all the people made their humble salutation by

touching the *Pāda-Padma* (Lotus-like feet of Mādhavadeva). Then Mādhavadeva told Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā that the practice of paying salutation to their *Guru* by touching his feet would a custom in Dakṣīṇ Kūl from that time.¹⁰¹ The custom of paying obeisance by touching the feet of the *Satrādhikāras* has been become a tradition in the Mahāpuruṣīyā Satras of Dakṣīṇ Kūl, including Chamarīyā Satra, since then. Be that as it may, with the help of the *Bhakats* and other local people Mādhavadeva laid the foundation of the Satra by fastening the *Māralī* (a pole of bamboo placed horizontally under the roof to support it) as well as installed the sacred altar (*Guru-Āsana*) inside the *Kīrtanghar*. Thus, the Satra at Mālacā came to be established.¹⁰²

When Mādhavadeva came to Mālacā the people of Garo community was large in number. It has been assumed that as a result of the efforts and influence of Gāror-Gobinda Ātā the Garo people scrambled to visit Mādhavadeva and anxious to pay their humble salutation. Besides this, the *Avaiṣṇava* or those who were not initiated (most of the Garos) being paid their humble salutation by touching the feet of Mādhavadeva, another tradition has been established in Dakṣīṇ Kūl which is not seen.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, p. 37.
¹⁰² *ibid*, p. 36-37.
in the other Satras of Assam. It is the tradition in which the feet of Guru is touched by the devotees (Bhakats) at the time of paying their obeisance. If the people of the Garo tribe came as a result of the influence of Gāro Gobinda Ātā, then credit should go to him for the spreading of Vaiṣṇava Bhakti faith as well as the newly born tradition in Dakṣin Kūl, indirectly though. Therefore, it is said that Gāro Gobinda Ātā was the real bridge builder of unity between the the Garos and the Assamese.

Another-example has been found that Gāro Gobinda Ātā made a remarkable contribution in the preaching of Vaiṣṇava Dharma. It was mentioned in the Guru-Carit that once Gāro Gobinda Ātā was beaten by a Cobra at midnight. Without searching any Bez (a physician or medicine) Ātoi removed the pain of snake by uttering Nāma or Hari-nāma (worshipping God). Ātā came round.103 A few days after this incident, Ātā went to Herāmda. At that time Herāmda was a border state. Herāmda is situated 10 km. south-west away from Mirza town of present Dakhin Kamrup. At that time nothing was known about the influence of Vaiṣṇava Dharma in Herāmda. Later on, Paḍhīyā Mādhav Ātoi established the Herāmda Satra.104 After

the arrival of Gāro Gobinda Ātā in this Herāmda Rājya, the people of Herāmda told Heremeswar or the Rājā of Herāmda that he (Ātā) was once beaten by snake; but removed the pain by reciting nāma. Hearing this, the Rājā (king) said: “that the poison of snake and Barbih (poison that succumbed to death) is equal: let him to consume a little poison and let us see how he remove the pain.” 105 Ātā was fed a cup of poison as has been ordered by the king. The colour of the body of Ātā became black. Ātā tten began reciting Hari-nāma. Once his physique became black; but now it became bright. The intoxication of the venom removed after being repeatedly uttering Hari-nāma. Seeing this, the king was surprised, and admiring Gobinda Ātā, the king bade him with royal honour. It is in the Guru-Carit: “Rajāi praśaṁśā koi bole: nāmo staya guru satya bhakato satya: ei buli sanmāṅkoī pathāle.” 106 It has been proved that the king of Herāmda was also influenced by Gobinda Ātā showing the power of Nāma-Dharma. Later, on the coming of Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva to Herāmda and the desire of the king of Herāmda seeking initiation in the Vaiṣṇava Bhakti faith might be the earlier influence of Gāro Gobinda Ātā on the king.

106. ibid, p. 352.
of Herāmda; this cannot be denied. On the other hand, there is a popular belief that Gobinda Ātā had some supernatural power and, therefore, he could remove the intoxication of the venomous snake by uttering *Hari-nāma*.

Whatever may that be, after a few days the snake-bite as well as the incident of feeding venom by the Herāmda king, Gobinda Ātā went to Mādhavadeva then residing at Barpeta. Hearing the removal of the venom of snake by uttering *Hari-nāma*, Mādhavadeva angrily advised Gāro Gobinda Ātā that in case of any future snake-bite, he should get it treated by the physician (*Bez*) without having done it removed by *Nama*. “If the king had killed you by feeding *Barbīh*, what it would have been then. As a *prapanna* (a Vaiṣṇava devoted to God) you have been saved. The other irreligious person will not be saved by by resorting to practice when fed.”¹⁰⁷ It may be understood from the words of Mādhavadeva that Gobinda Ātā came round by chanting *Hari-nāma* without having a *Bez* because he was a very virtuous Vaiṣṇava. It is impossible for general people. It is learnt that the personality of Gāro Gobinda Ātā was far superior to the general people. But Gobinda Ātā carried out the advice of Mādhavadeva very sincerely. In the last part of his life, Gāro

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Gobinda Ātā was suffering from a boil on his thigh. It was supposed that Mādhavadeva became angry because he (Gāro Gobinda) did not take any physician (Bez) at the time of snake-bitting, and therefore due to his (Mādhavadeva) disregarding the boil has been broken out now. So, this time Ātā put medicine on his boil and recovered.\(^{108}\)

How far Gāro Gobinda Ātā was able to read or write is unknown. But, it is beyond doubt that Gāro Gobinda Ātā contributed in the creation of Assamese literature is proved. Gāro Gobinda collected \textit{Mahi} (specially made ink) from Dakṣin Kūl supplied to Mādhavadeva who stayed at Barpeta.\(^{109}\) From that \textit{Mahi} Mādhavadeva enriched the store of Assamese literature by creating \textit{Ghoṣā-pada-nāṭaka-gītā}. It is learnt from \textit{Guru-Carit} that once when Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā came to visit Mādhavadeva from Dakṣin Kūl he was advised to bring \textit{Mahi} by Mādhavadeva. Accordingly, on his next visit Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā along with Gāro Gobinda Ātā carried \textit{Mahi} to Mādhavadeva. On being asked by Mādhavadeva whether \textit{Mahi} was brought or not, Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā replied in the affirmative, and said to Gobinda Ātā, “\textit{Gobinda bring it.}”\(^{110}\) But the \textit{Mahi} on being not seen that was carrying

\(^{108}\) \textit{ibid}, p. 353.
\(^{110}\) \textit{ibid}, p. 503.
on the *Bhār* on that particular spot, when informed to Mādhavadeva that it was dropped somewhere, Mādhavadeva said that *Mahī* was not dropped. The bamboo tube of *Mahī* was standing on the side of the *Birinā* (a kind of long grass) nearby. Accordingly, Gobinda Ātā collecting the bamboo tube of *Mahī* gave Mādhavadeva.\textsuperscript{111}

From the time of establishment of Satra at Mālaca and after the transformation to Chamarīyā Gāro Gobinda Ātā stayed at Chamarīyā Satra till his death. On being stayed at Chamarīyā Satra, in addition to rendering his service to the Satra, he rendered his service whole-heartedly to the *Eksaraṇa-Vaiṣṇava-Dharma* as a staunch devotee. Following the way showed by Gobinda Ātā his descendants maintained relationship with Chamarīyā Satra near about 400 years. Till the time of Rangsang Marak, the descendants of Gobinda Ātā following all the customs and rites visited Chamarīyā Satra yearly at the time of the *tithi* of Bar- Viṣṇu Ātā with some *Bhakats* by *Karbhār*.\textsuperscript{112} Rangsang Marak was born in 1852 and died in 1938. After the death of Rangsang Marak his descendants discontinued this practice. That means up till nearby 65 years back from to-day the relationship with Chamarīyā Satra as well as supplying of *Karbhār* had been

\textsuperscript{111} ibid, p. 503.

\textsuperscript{112} Informer - Smartlin J. Sangma : family member of Gāro Gobinda Ātā.
maintained.\textsuperscript{113} On the other hand nearly 5/6 years back from Chamariyā Satra also the Balan (invite) had been offering in the family of the descendants of Gaṅgo Gobinda Ātā accordingly Satra custom at the time of Sabhā (festive gathering) as well as the death anniversary of Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā held yearly.\textsuperscript{114} Of late, the reason of not maintaining relation with Chamariyā Satra by the members of the family of Gaṅgo Gobinda Ātā is that they accepted Christianity. They think that their society would not take it easily if they keep the relation with Chamariyā Satra.\textsuperscript{115}

Residing at the Hāti of Chamariyā Satra Gaṅgo Gobinda Ātā rendered his service as Āldharā (an attendant) of Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā.\textsuperscript{116} An Āldharā is a person who renders his services as an attendant or a manual servitor of a virtuous person or a saint. It is in the Guru-Carit that Gaṅgo Gobinda Ātā was an Āldharā of Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā. When Bar-Viṣṇu Ātā carried the Mahi to Mādhavadeva then the Mahi was kept on the Bhār of Āldharā Gobinda Ātoi. Thus, it is said: \textit{āhote āldharā Gobinda Ātoir bhārat mahi diā nichā}.\textsuperscript{117} From the time of the establishment of Chamariyā Satra to the last breath of his life, Gaṅgo Gobinda Ātā

\textsuperscript{113. ibid.}
\textsuperscript{114. ibid.}
\textsuperscript{115. ibid.}
\textsuperscript{117. ibid, p. 503.}
rendered his services ceaselessly for near about 30-40 years at Chamarīyā Satra. His contribution towards the development of Chamarīyā Satra was remarkable. So, even today the Chamarīyā Satra is called as Gāro Gobinda Ātār Thān (Thān of Gāro Gobinda Ātā).

In this way Gāro Gobinda Ātā played an important role in the preaching and spreading of Mahāpuruṣīyā Dharma propagated by Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva, more particularly in Dakṣīṇ Kūl by involving himself deeply. Gāro Gobinda Ātā was the symbol of unity. Gathering the people from diverse castes and creeds, languages and places that Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva built the bridge of unity of Assamese nation wherein Gāro Gobinda Ātā remained as a real representative.