

Religious upheaval:

The reign of king Naranarayan, not only witnessed the practices of heterogeneous religious sects which prevailed in the region from the earliest times, but also acceptance of the Hinduism and its diffusion and rise of Neo-Vaisnavism and its wide acceptance by royal families and that of the masses of the region. During his reign, on the one hand the non-Hindu tribal people worshiped their Gods and Goddesses and performed their religious rites according to their own ways without any interference from the state and on the other hand, Hinduism spreading its wings among the royal families under the influence of the Hindu Brahmin priests. With their state formation, Koch kings Biswa Singha and Naranarayan adopted the policy of Hinduisation of the royal family to gain the status of Kshatriyas of Brahmanical fold and took active part in its wide diffusion among the masses of the state. However, they were liberal and broad-minded in the matter of religion, for which they patronized both Brahmaical and tribal pattern of worships and rites. The advent of Neo-vaisnavite preacher Sankaradeva into the Koch kingdom in about 1546, during the reign of King Naranarayan marked a golden chapter in not only the religious history but also socio-cultural and literary activities of the region. For the better understanding of the religions, religious cults / sects and religious establishments during the reign of king Naranarayan, we can ~~precede~~^{proceed} under two main heads: **A)** existing form of religious practices of tribal and non-tribal people and **B)** role of Sankardeva and his Neo-Vaisnavite religious movements. Contemporary literary and archeological sources and writings of the modern scholars provide us information about them.

A) Existing form of religious practices of tribal and non-tribal people:

The existing form of religions or religious practices included the religions like *Saivism*, *Saktism*, *Vaisnavism*, worship of *Vasudeva* and others, which were in vogue in the region from earliest times and would be discussed one by one.

Saivism and Saiva cults:

The worship of Lord *Siva* or *Saiva* cults seems to have been in vogue in the region i.e. lower Brahmaputra valley including northeastern Bengal and lower Assam (ancient Kamarupa and mediaeval Kamata-Koch Behar) from the earliest times. In the *Mahabharata* Bhagadatta of Kamarupa has been called as "a friend of *Siva*"¹. The *Kalika purana* narrates the story as to how Naraka induced by *Visnu* to worship Goddess *Kamakhya* and was inter-dicted from the worship of any other deity of the region, which was formally reserved by *Sambhu* (one name of Lord *Siva*) for his own domain². In the copper plate inscriptions of the royal dynasties of Pusyavarman, *Salasthambha* and *Brahmapala* (4th-12th centuries AD.), Lord *Siva* emerges as the *istadeva* (the only god) to be worshiped by these kings, and other deities like *Bisnu* and the *Devi* (*Kamakhya*) are only cursorily noticed³. Chinese Pilgrim Hiuen-Tsiang (during the reign of Bhaskaravarman) found the "the deva temples were some hundreds in number, and that the various systems had some myriads of professional adherents"⁴, and some of these temples were probably dedicated to Lord *Siva*, and Saivism was the dominating religion of the time⁵. Moreover, the existence of some temples and some ruins of temples of pre-Koch periods in the region clearly indicate the existence of *Siva* worship from the earliest times⁶. Therefore, it is evident from the sources that worship of *Siva* or *Saivaite* cults were in vogue in the region from the earliest times and tribal people like Kiratas worshiped saivaite cults in some gross form with wine and flesh more or less accustomed with it.

Saivaism was a living and flourishing religion when Sankaradeva was born. Ramananda in his *Guru Charita*, while describing the religious atmosphere of the land before the rising of Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva, writes: "people did not worship Krisna or perform the deeds sacred to Hari. They, on the other hand, would fain worship Bhairava and consider it the greatest of religions. They made offerings of blood of tortoises and goats to that deity, and drank of it as a sacred drink"⁷. Sankaradeva's father Kusumbara Bhuyan, who was a worshiper of *Siva*, had no issue till an advanced

age and said to had worshiped Siva to have child and as result the God pleased and a son was born to him. The child was named as Sankara on the God's name⁸. Madhavadeva, one of the disciples of Sankaradeva went to his native home at Banduka on the bank of Dharla when he was asked by his elder brother on the *Siva-Chaturdasi* day to worship *Siva*^{8a}.

The Koch dynasty as originated from tribal background of the region so was the worshiper or devotee of the Siva or Saivaite cults traditionally and with the state formation, the early Koch kings not only continued this process but also took steps for its development, modification and diffusion under the influences of Aryan culture.

The *Yogini Tantra*⁹, the DRV¹⁰, the *Buranjis*¹¹ vividly illustrated mythological story that *Bisu* was not the son of *Hariya Mech (Mandal)* but the son of God *Siva*. All the sources almost in same way state that God *Siva*, in guise of *Hariya Mech (Mandal)* had sexual intercourse with *Hira*, and in due course, she gave birth to *Bisa*, and other wife of *Hariya Mech (Mandal)*, *Jira* gave birth to *Sisu*¹². The *Akbarnama* also mention *Biswa Singha* as a blessed child of *Mahadeva*¹³. *Bisu* after becoming king took the name *Biswa Singha*. of Hindu fold and he being born of Lord *Siva* as mentioned above, the Koch kings of the dynasty claimed themselves as '*Siva-Vansis*' belonging to *Khshatriya* of Aryan fold. During his coronation ceremony and other occasions, *Biswa Singha* repeatedly remembered lord *Siva* as his father. It is said that *Biswa Singha* worshiped lord *Siva* by making numerous offerings at the *Baneswar Siva*, which is situated at *Baneswar*, in present Koch Behar¹⁴, and the subjects too display implicit faith in their kings as the *Siva* incarnate¹⁵.

King *Naranarayan* was a great devotee of Lord *Siva*, who accepted lord *Siva* as guardian deity and protector of his kingdom and his people¹⁶. The coins of *Naranarayan* though are known as *Narayani Mudra (Tanka)*, exhibit deep respect of him towards Lord *Siva*, as most of the coins depict the king as "bee on the lotus like feet of *Siva*" (*Siva-charana-kamala-madhu-karasya*) and the coins also known as *Siva-tanka*¹⁷.

King *Naranarayan* worshiped Lord *Siva*, both according to Hindu *Sastras* (scriptures) as well as with traditional tribal rites and customs. In the DRV¹⁸, it is stated that on the eve of his expedition against the *Ahoms* in 1562, king *Naranarayan*

worshiped lord *Siva* according to the Hindu rites and customs but Lord *Siva* appeared in a dream and rebuked him severely for giving up his own traditional tribal rites. In this situation, King *Naranarayan* arranged for the performance of the worship according to tribal rites and customs by his *Kachari* soldiers on the bank of the river *Sankosh* and such worship done was by offerings of ducks, pigeons wine, cooked rice, and sacrifices of buffaloes, swine, cocks, and he-goats. All the rites and customs of the worship were done under the auspices of a *Deodhai* priest (tribal priest), and there was *Kachari* dancing party with beating drums (*madala*). King *Naranarayan* recognized and legalized these tribal customs of worship by issuing an edict regarding the administration of religions in his kingdom. Thus, it was decided that the *Koch*, *Mech* and *Kachari* tribal people on the northern bank of the *Brahmaputra / Gosain Kamal Ali*, could only carry on their worship according to tribal customs, while those in the south of the river/ road, the *Brahmin* priests could perform their usual Hindu rites and customs¹⁹. Moreover, king *Naranarayan*, *Chilarai* and their successors constructed many temples including *Siva* temples all over their kingdom²⁰.

Two-dimensional *Siva* worship was prevailing in the region. Among the different *Baro* tribes (including the *Koch*, *Mech* and *Kachari* tribes) *Siva* was worshiped in different names like *Batho*, *Bathau-Brai* or *Bathau-siva-rai*, *Burha* and others with much dancing, feasting and sacrifices following their tribal customs²¹. In his article "Religious ideas of some of the Animistic tribes of Bengal" E. Gait notices the particular mode of *Siva* worship among the *Mech* people: The religion of the *Mech*, like that of the *Dhimal*, is still in an early stage of transition from animism to Hinduism. They describe themselves as the *Saiva Sect* of Hinduism and worship *Siva* under the name of *Batho*, and his consort *Kali* as *Bali Khungri*. To the former the *Agnia-Mech* sacrifices buffaloes, goats, and pigeons; while his wife has to put up with the less respectable offerings of pigs, fowls and goats²². On the other hand, non-tribal Hindus and royal families of pre-*Koch* periods, worshiped *Siva* in various forms like those of *Bhairava*, *Pasupati*, *Nataraja*, *Maheswara*, *Sambhu*, *Gopeswara* *Kameswara*, *Adideva* and others²³ and these names continue even today. The *Yogini Tantra* contains references to the *Mahabhairava Siva* in which form he gave himself up to unrestrained use of wine, women and flesh and he could therefore, be adorned with extreme left-handed (*vamachara*) practices²⁴. The tribal concept that *Mahabhairava Siva* or *Bhairava Siva*

was the god of diseases and death as well, and had been accepted to Hinduism as *Mahakala Siva* and became very popular among the *Hinduised Koches* of north Bengal²⁵.

Lord *Siva* is not conceived in the abstract alone, he appears as a concrete divine figure with familiar myths and legends clustering round him. The most of the pre-Koch inscriptions and literary sources of the Koch period occasionally refer to the equipments and ornaments he adorned. He is described in the records 'as having his usual weapons *Katanga, parasu, pinaka* and *sula*, his vehicle is the bull, *Shasikala* shines on his forehead, and he has a girdle of the lord of snakes²⁶.

Siva was also worshipped in the *linga* form and which was very popular in the region. The *Yogini Tantra*, a 16th century work, states that the number of *lingas* in *Kamarupa* exceeds a million²⁷. In the form of *lingam*, an upright pillar or rod of stone erected on a pedestal called *Yoni*.

It is fact from the above discussion that during the reigns of early Koch kings *Saivism* in its various forms was the dominating religion of the region. Even when the all pervading influence of Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva aiming at the establishment of a classless and casteless monotheistic religion, and powerful kings like Naranarayan and his successors took refuge to the new religion, it could not percolate deep into the heart of the people at large. In spite of great reverence of the people towards their kings and Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva, the people of the region could not shake off their time-honoured devotion to Lord *Siva*, who stood for the fertility of soil and agriculture²⁸. King Naranarayan, his successors and some of their subjects although took refuge to Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva, but did not give up their time-honoured devotion to Lord *Siva*. It is proved by the fact that a large number of temples continued to be erected till the latter period by the kings. Thus, Lord *Siva* resurfaced and reasserted Himself as the sole protector of the Koch Kingdom and Kings of the dynasty were obliged to build new temples of Lord *Siva* and popularized the legends indicating their association with Lord *Siva* to honour the sentiments of the subjects²⁹. All these evidences conclusively prove that the *Siva* worship was quite popular among the masses of the region and under the patronage of the early Koch kings, it became protector deity of the region.

Saktism and Sakti cults:

The concept of *Shakti/ Sakti* cults or primordial energy symbolised in a woman is an amalgam of many elements drawn from various sources, pre-Aryan, non-Aryan, Aryan and aboriginal. The processes in fertility and motherhood and the active and energising forces involved therein apparently led to the emergence of the concept of a supreme Goddess who is considered to be the repository of all energy governing the universe. Eliot defines Saktism, as the worship of "a goddess of many names and forms, who is adored with sexual rites and the sacrifice of animals or, when the law permits of men"³⁰. He also said in another place "Saktism, in the sense of a definite sect with scriptures of its own, if not confined to the north-east corner, at least has headquarters there"³¹. The worship of *Sakti* or *Sakti* cults seems to have been migrated in this region with the migration of the Austric people. *Narakasur*, a mythological king founded a kingdom in the region, worshipped *Shakti* in the form of *Yoni* as well as *Kamakhya* for the first time, established himself as the custodian of this *Yoni*-goddess, and made her the presiding deity of the state and subsequently *Kamakhya* was assimilated with *Devi Durga*³². Therefore, what may be the birthplace of *Saktism* or *Sakti* cult, traditionally the *Sakta* cult is considered to have its centre in Kamarupa with its chief temple at *Kamakhya*, on the Nilachal hill in present Gauhati town. H. K. Barpujari accepted the view by saying, "Ancient Assam was a very important seat of *Shaktism*. Traditionally Kamrupa has been recognised as the principal centre of the *Shakti* cult with its chief temple at *Kamakhya*"³³.

However, it is a matter of very great interest that in the pre-Koch inscriptions of the region, there is no trace of *Sakti* worship except the veiled references in the inscriptions of *Vanamala* (9th century AD.) and *Indrapala* (c. 1040-1065 AD.) to the temples of *Kameswara Maha-Gauri* and *Maha-Gauri Kameswara*³⁴. It might be because of *Saktism* represents a particular phase of religion, which was in the main personal and esoteric and had no connection with any public religious establishment or state. First, elaborate descriptions on the *Sakti* worship are found in the *Kalika Purana* (11th century) and the *Yogini Tantra* (16th century). Both composed in the region on the most extensive treatise on the *Shakti* cult and *Tantricism* and considered as the special class of magical and sacramental literature³⁵. However, Eliot makes a distinction between *Saktism* and *Tantricism* and according to him " *Saktism* means worship of a Goddess, specially those who are regarded as forms of *Siva's*

consorts.....*Tantricism* is a system of magical or sacramental ritual, which professes to attain the highest aims of religion by such methods as spells, diagrams, gestures and other physical exercises³⁶.

From about 13th century until 16th century, worship of *Shakti* in the name *Kamakhya* became the most dominant religion of the region and other goddesses recognized as her varied manifestations. Non-tribal Hindu communities including the Bhuyans of the region patronized the *Sakti* worship in various names like *Chandi*, *Durga*, *Bhagawati*, *Kali*, *Chhinnamasta* and above all *Kamakhya*. We have many references of *Sakti* worships among the Bhuyans as well as among some disciples of Sankaradeva in their early life. Kusuma Bhuyan, the father of Sankaradeva worshipped a stone image of *Chandi* in his house³⁷. Mahendra Kandali sought to teach his student some mantras of *Chandi* or *Durga*³⁸. Madhav's elder brother once offered about ten he-goats as sacrifice to the Devi (*Kamakhya*) in the month of *Asvina*³⁹.

On the other hand, tribal people worshipped primordial female deities called *Burhi*, *Jakani Thakurani*, *Kuri*, *Mechini*, and *Bali-Khungri* etc and ultimately, they were accepted to Hinduism as *Durga*, *Parvati* or *kali*, the consort of lord *Siva* with the beginning of the Koch rule. It is believed that goddess *Kamakhya* was only a Sanskritised form of '*khami*' or '*Kham-mai-kha*', the primordial female deity of the *Bodo-Kacharies*⁴⁰. It is also believed that some Buddhist goddesses merged with Hindu *Tantras* and later taken as manifestation of *Durga* or *Kali*. *Tara* is the same as *kali* and so also is *Kamakhya*⁴¹. Thus, all local and independent deities of tribal and Buddhist folds such as *Burhi*, *Jakani Thakurani*, *Kuri*, *Mechini*, and *Bali-Khungri*, *Tara*, *Ugratara* and *Chamunda* etc came to be regarded as manifestations of *Kamakhya* or *Durga* in different circumstances⁴².

Early Koch Kings worshipped the mother goddess both in her tribal and Sanskritised Hindu forms. According to the DRV, Biswa Singha as the adventurous cowherd youth worshipped a clay image of *Durga* with sacrifices of grasshoppers and he met and received advices from the goddess *Durga* in a tribal *Mechini* form after his defeat at the hands of Karnapur Bhuyan⁴³. The same source again mentioned that he after becoming king set up capital of the newly founded kingdom at a site of *Kamatapur* and worshipped the Goddess in the form of *Gosani*, according to the Vedic rites at the *Kamateswari* temple⁴⁴. King Naranarayan inaugurated the new self-built temple of *Kamakhya* on the Nilachal hill with numerous sacrifices, which bear the characteristics of

both tribal and Brahmanic rites⁴⁵. He also made rich endowments for the worship of the Goddess. Through out the DRV, king Naranarayan and his brother Chilarai called the Devi in various names like *Kamateswari*, *Bhavani*, *Bhagawati*, *Devi (Kamakhya)* etc. *Baro Devi* is another special form of Goddess *Durga*, worship of which was initiated by king Naranarayan in Koch royal family and this tradition even continues till today. The image of *Baro Devi* is very different from the familiar *Durga* idols. Devi *Durga*'s four sons and daughters are absent here. *Jaya* and *Bijaya* are here to replace them. The cult-animals are jointly a tiger and a lion, instead of a single lion. According to the prevailing traditions, king Naranarayan saw the Devi in this form in his dream when he was on fasting for days to get blessings from the Goddess. Later, he introduced the puja/ worship of *Baro Devi* and the clay-image was made following his description. Until now, the image is identical to the previous ones to keep the tradition alive.

Actually, the early Koch kings adopted Hinduism, Hinduised themselves and accepted Hindu socio-cultural and religious pattern, in which *Saivism* and *Saktism* both were included. According to B. K. Barua, "Kamakhya was no longer the primordial Mother goddess but became the amorous wife *Parvati* living in inseparable companionship with her husband *Siva* Thus a new motif came into play and fresh conceptions have been ascribed to the Goddess"⁴⁶. As Lord *Siva* was the male protector deity of the dynasty and goddess *Durga* in her different names became the female protector deity of the same. Therefore, king Naranarayan patronized *Saivism* and *Saktism* and constructed many *Siva* temples as we mentioned earlier as well as the temples of goddess *Kamakhya* and others and established himself as the protector of the both. It is proved by the fact that when the *Sakta* leaders complained King Naranarayan against *Sankaradeva* saying that he was persuading men not to worship the goddess *Kamakhya*, the king as a devoted votary of Goddess *Kamakhya* became so angry that he at once sent his men to arrest *Sankaradeva*⁴⁷.

Thus, early Koch kings worshipped and patronized both *Siva* and *Durga* in their different manifestations simultaneously and this tradition is continuing even today. They grant lands to the temples⁴⁸ (all, *Saiva*, *Sakta* and others), priests and other servants of the temples. King Naranarayan and his successors brought Brahmin priests from outside and granted lands to them and at the same time, the Kamarupi Brahmins were also granted lands and employed in the services of temples⁴⁹. However, kings followed the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the temples. On the contrary, the

priests of Kamakhya and others temples had imposed certain restrictions to the state by creating fictitious myths, which restricted the royal family to visit these temples. According to the *Kamarupa Buranji*, 'Kendu Kalai, a Brahmin priest of the Kamakhya temple, used to perform the daily worship of Goddess Kamakhya. The deity being satisfied and influenced by the musical worships of the priest, used to dance in naked. King Naranarayan aspired to see it from a hidden place. However, on realizing this, the deity became very angry and cursed that if Naranarayan and his successors visit this temple again, the dynasty of the Koch kings and that of the Brahmin priest would be destroyed'⁵⁰. From then king Naranarayan, Chilarai and their successors had strictly followed these restrictions and even today, this tradition continues.

Besides, people of the kingdom during the period, were very much influenced and inspired by the royal patronage to the *Saivism* and *Saktism*. They, following royal policy, started worshipping both the cults (*Siva* and *Durga* in various forms) simultaneously and in this way, *Saivism* and *Saktism* became very popular among the masses of the region and this tradition continues till today. Dr. Kakati explained it in the following ways; ".....the land was infected with itinerant teacher with the *Vamachara Tantric* School with their insistence on the philosophy of sex and palate. Among religious rites, the most spectacular were bloody sacrifices to gods and goddesses amidst deafening noises of drums cymbals night vigils virgin worship and lewd dances of temple women"⁵¹. It is also proved by existence of large number of house -temples and community- temples in this region, where *Siva* and *Sakti* are being worshipped. Even after the acceptance of Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva, the masses continued the worshipping of the *Devi*. According to the *Thakura-Charita of Vidyananda*, "These people not conscious of the Great Way (Vaisnavism); and *Sakti* (*Saktism*) then reigned supreme. They sang songs of Hari; but then, when the autumn came, they installed a *ghata* (pitcher representing the goddess) each in every one's house"⁵².

Vaisnavism:

The worship of lord *Visnu* or Vaisnavism was prevalent in this region from the early times and we have epigraphic and literary references about it. This traditional *Vaisnavism* was quite different from the *Vaisnavism* propagated by Sankaradeva. Therefore, to avoid confusion, in the present context, the traditional *Vaisnavism* would be termed simply as '*Vaisnavism*' and the *Vaisnavism* propagated by Sankaradeva

would be termed as 'Neo-Vaisnavism'. Earliest literary reference in details of *Vaisnavism* occurs in the *Kalika Purana*⁵³, which traced the lineage of early kings of *Kamarupa* from Lord *Visnu* through *Naraka*. *Bana* in his *Harsacharita* (7th century AD) described *Bhaskaravarman* as a descendant of the *Vaisnava* family (*Vaisnavavamsah*)⁵⁴. The epigraphic references to the *Vaisnavism* or the worship of *Visnu* in the region occurs in the *Baraganga* inscription of *Mahabhutivarman* (c.553-54AD) and *Nidhanpur* grant of *Bhaskaravarman* (7th century AD.) which referred to the kings as '*Parama-daivata Parama-Bhagavata*'⁵⁵. The adoption of *Visnu*'s name as a personal name became so common in the records of the times of this region, which bears significant message. Thus the name of king *Vanamala*, an epithet of *Visnu*, indicates his devotion to that god. From the occurrences of such personal names as *Madhava*, *Govardhana*, *Gopala*, *Sudarsana*, *Narayana*, *Janarddana* and *Kesava*, etc. clearly indicates the existence of *Vaisnavism* in this region as all these names are of Lord *Visnu*⁵⁶. Moreover, of the thousand names of Lord *Visnu*, some like *Achyuta*, *Narayana*, *Purusottam Hari*, *Upendra*, *Vasudeva* and *Krisna* etc became very popular⁵⁷. The *Kalika Purana* (12th century AD) mentioned many manifestations of *Vasudeva* or *Visnu* with their '*pithas*' of which *Hayagriva Madhava* at '*Manikuta*' and '*Vasudeva*' in the '*DikkaraVasini*' are most prominent⁵⁸.

Therefore, it is clear from the above discussion that *Vaisnavism* or the worship of *Visnu* in its several manifestations like *Madhava*, *Vasudeva* and *Hayagriva* etc. was in vogue in the region before the rise of *Neo-Vaisnavism* under *Sankaradeva*, although it was in a subordinate position due to the dominant position of the *Saivite* and *Sakti* cults.

Although the early Koch kings of our period of study, were worshiper of *Saivite* and *Sakti* cults, at least up to 1546, (the year of *Sankaradeva*'s coming to the Koch kingdom on a permanent basis), but more or less they were greatly influenced by *Vaisnavism*. *Biswa Singha* is said to have patronized *Vaisnavism* with gifts to its votaries⁵⁹ and was not beyond the influence of it. He named his 1st and 2nd sons i.e. *Nara Singha* and *Naranarayan* following the 4th (14th)⁶⁰ and 5th incarnations (Avatars) of Lord *Visnu*⁶¹. From *Naranarayan*, all succeeding Koch kings assumed their dynastic title '*Narayana*' on the *Vaisnava* style had been taken from the name *Narayana*, an incarnation of the Lord. The Koch coins had been widely circulated as *Narayani Tanka (Mudra)* due to the influence of *Vaisnavism* although it bears the name of *Lord Siva* and some times called *Siva Tanka*⁶². King *Naranarayan* is said to have founded the old *Hayagriva-Madhava*

temple in an entirely deserted condition and almost lost in an impenetrable jungle and repaired it and also endowed it with land, priests, musicians and dancing girls in 1550AD⁶³. Later on, Raghudeva, the son of Chilarai and King Koch of Hajo, being a worshiper of Madhava (Visnu), had reconstructed the temple on a large scale leaving only the basement of old temple and granted lands, slaves and servants for its maintenance in 1583AD. The *Yogini Tantra*, a 16th century work gives an account of the origin of the stone image of *Hayagriva-Madhava* in the light of the story of the wooden images of *Krisna, Balabhadra* and *Subhadra* of the great *Jagannath* temple of *Puri*⁶⁴. However, *Hayagriva-Madhava* is not a sufficiently famous god in the Hindu pantheon to merit worship and even not included into the *Dasa Avatars* of *Visnu*. The *Neo-Vaisnava* saint Madhavadeva said to have visited Hajo and went to pay his obeisance to *Hayagriva-Madhava*, by reciting several *Sanskrita slokas* describing the deity⁶⁵. Besides, *Hayagriva-Madhava* of *Manikuta*, other images of *Visnu* were worshipped during the period of our study; for Sankaradeva had discovered a four-armed *Vasudeva (Visnu)* image of black stone at Bardowa⁶⁶. It also appears that the *Bhagavata* literature seems to have entered into this region and there were scholars studying *Bhagavatagita*. It is proved by fact that Sankaradeva said to have found a copy of manuscript of the whole of the *Bhagavatagita*, floating on the Brahmaputra while he was deserting his native place Bardowa⁶⁷.

However, *Vaisnavite* cult or *Visnu* worship in many manifestations, before the peak hours of *Neo-Vaisnavism* was a minor or subordinate cult, during the period of our study. It was due to the wide spread popularity of the *Saivite* and *Sakti* cults among the masses. According to S. N. Sarma, "... majority of the Hindus instead of delving deep into the mysteries of *Tantricism* of *Sakti* and *Saiva* cults, resorted to them and adopted the outward philosophy of sex and palate as the real criterion of their religion"⁶⁸.

Buddhism:

Although there is no direct literary reference or direct epigraphical hints about the advent of Buddhism into the northeastern region, but archaeological evidences and different indirect literary and epigraphic sources say that Buddhism in the forms of the *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* found its way into Assam during the 7th century AD. Since then Buddhism (*Tantric*) had been mixing with the *Tantric* form (*Saktism*) of Hinduism

and prevailing in the northeast India⁶⁹. Buddhist doctrine was widely spread, and the places of worship of *Mahakal* at the extremity of the town Koch Behar and in Bhutan hills, the *Yogi-gopa* and *Mangal Chandi* in Goalpara, and temples known as *Chandikabehar* and *Singiri* in Darrang and others are all relics of Buddhist influences. Again, Buddhist monasteries are known as Behar and there are many names of places with suffix 'Behar' like Koch Behar, the capital city of the Koches, *Chandikabehar* in the Darrang of Assam and *Haludbehara* in the *Rajsahi* district (Bangladesh), indicate the existence of Buddhist monasteries in this region⁷⁰. Rewound scholar P.C. Chaudhuri has noticed two images in *Kamakhya*, one in *Sthanaka* posture carved on a granite block and had identified as *Bodhisattva*. The other one is of the *asana* variety of a figure shown in *Bhumisparsa mudra*, was identified as *Buddha*⁷¹. These all indicated the prevalence of Buddhist cults in this region. However, as the Brahmanical religion in its different forms had already occupied the heart of the people, only a marginal influence may be traced.

The Lama Buddhists of Bhutan and Tibet considered the *Hayagriva Madhava* temple of Hajo to be the temple of *Mahamuni* (the Buddha) and they take the temple as a Buddhist Chaitya⁷². They even believed that Buddha fled from Bhutan, took his abode in this place and finally attained Nirvana there⁷³. The temple is so important to them that every year a large number of pilgrims visit the temple in the winter season. Although, the *Yogini Tantra* gives an account of the origin of the stone image of *Hayagriva Madhava* in the light of the story of the images of Krisna, Balabhadra and Subhadra of great Puri temple and most of the Hindus accepted it as has been already mentioned. However, Dr Kakati calls the account of the *Yogini Tantra* an attempt to *Vaisnavising* god *Hayagriva Madhava*, seems to be different origin. According to him, '*Hayagriva-Madhava* is not a sufficiently famous god in the Hindu pantheon to merit worship and a temple. But he occupies high reputation in the Buddhist *Tantras* and in Buddhist pantheon⁷⁴ and even not included into the *Dasa Avatars* of Visnu. There are three different forms of *Hayagriva Madhava*- one with the image of *Amitabha* on the crown, one bearing *Aksobhya* and the third, *Paramasva Hayagriva*, among these first two definitely belonged to Buddhism⁷⁵ but having no indication of parentage. Dr. Kakati, with information from the *Kalika Purana* mentioned that, the Goddess *Dikkarvasini*, the presiding deity of northeastern Assam has two forms –*Tiksna-Kanta* (dreadfully

attractive) and *Lalita-Kanta* (gracefully attractive). She in all her forms are to be worshipped in general like goddess *Kamakhya*, but her delectable worships consisted of strong spirituous liquor, human sacrifice, *modaka*, flesh, curry, coconuts and sugarcane⁷⁶. *Tiksna-Kanta* are called *Ugratara* and *Ekajata*, which seems due to its Buddhist influence and which ultimately mixed up with Hindu *Tantras* as *Durga* or *Kali* or *Kamakhya*⁷⁷.

Therefore, Buddhism especially *Vajrayana* Buddhism / *Tantric* Buddhism mixed up so closely with Tantric practices of Hinduism and other tribal religious forms of the region in such a way that it is very hard to differentiate from them and for this reason M. Neog named the Buddhism of the region as 'crypto-Buddhism'⁷⁸.

However, in the *Neo-Vaisnavite* and other literatures we have some occasional and indirect references to the *Vajrayana* Buddhism / *Tantric* Buddhism. The *Katha Guru Charita* records that Sankaradeva had an encounter with two Buddhist magicians (*Baudhamatiya tatakiya*), who practiced magic at *Belaguri*⁷⁹. In his *Kirtana-ghosh*, Sankaradeva writes that the God incarnated as the Buddha, only to destroy the way of the *Vedas* and confound people with the left-hand scriptures (*vamanaya sastra*). In addition, the god will descend on the earth in his *Kalki* incarnation toward the end of the Kali age to massacre the mlecchhas, destroy all the '*Buddhas*' that there be, and to establish the truth⁸⁰. It is probably a reference to the excesses committed by *Tantric* or *Vajrayana* Buddhists, mixed up with Tantric practices of Hinduism and other tribal religious forms, as Sankaradeva himself saw them. Sankaradeva, more or less had some influences of Buddhism on him. The '*Sarana*' in *Nama*, *deva* and *bhakta* of *Neo-Vaisnavite* doctrine might have some relation with *tri-sarana* i.e. '*Sarana* in the *Buddha*, *dharma* and *sangha*' of Buddhism. Moreover, the use of the term '*dharani*' in *dharani mantras* of snakebites, the pattern of mathas (monasteries) in *Satras* and relic-worship might have some relation with Buddhism. The *Satras* are devoid of any images. Some disciples of Sankaradeva practiced celibacy. These might indicate some remnants of Buddhist monastic rites.

With reference from *Vyasasrama* of Rama Saraswati, M. Neog mentioned that "how Brahmins of the kali age would take to the left-handed rites and scriptures (*vamanaya vidhi sastra*) and turn '*Baudha*'. They would profess the '*Baudha*' Sastras and give up the usual duties of Brahmins. They would earn their livelihood by performing magical rites and feasts with funny idols made of copper, bell-metal, wood

and earth"⁸¹. However, we have no direct reference of Koch royal patronage of Buddhism during our period of study.

Tantricism:

The '*Tantricism*' is a philosophy according to which *Shakti* is usually the main deity worshipped, and a quest for spiritual perfection and magical power, to achieve complete control of oneself, for the achievement of spiritual and magical power and of all the forces of nature, in order to attain union with the cosmos and with the divine⁸². Although, in its essence, the '*Tantricism*' implied mystic worship of *Sakti* or female energy in general, but due the admixture with spiritual practices, ritual forms of worship, *Mudras* or gestures, *mandalas* and *yantras*, which are symbolic diagrams of the forces at work in the universe, of other extremist off-shot sections of the other religions, it became independent way of worship⁸³. D. Nath defines *Tantricism* in the following ways, "The association of *Saktism* with later form of Buddhism, i.e. *Vajrayana*, a queer mixture of monistic philosophy, magic and erotics, with a small admixture of Buddhist ideas and the absorption into it of various rites and rituals gave rise to a cult which came to be known as *Tantricism*"⁸⁴. Eliot makes a distinction between *Saktism* and *Tantricism* and according to him "Saktism means worship of a Goddess, specially those who are regarded as forms of Siva's consorts.....*Tantricism* is a system of magical or sacramental ritual, which professes to attain the highest aims of religion by such methods as spells, diagrams, gestures and other physical exercises. One of its bases is the assumption that man and the universe correspond as microcosm and macrocosm and that both are subject to the mysterious power of words and letters"⁸⁵. The central doctrine of the philosophy of *Tantra* is that the phenomenal world or *Maya* would not to be rejected outright but must be embraced. And the tacit acceptance of this ideal gave rise to the popular concept that "all beings are members of a single family, proceeding from *AUM*, the only divine substance, and that God-realization can take place by a bold affirmation of all that may ever come to be, the gods beings address as dwelling within microcosm"⁸⁶. However, *Tantricism* and *Shaktism* are so closely related that it is very hard to differentiate between the two and for this reason some scholars considered the both as the same except ritualistic⁸⁷. Both, the *Tantrics* (worshippers) and the *Sakta* worshippers worshipped the goddess some times in same form or some times in different forms, but always followed different rituals and practices of worship with

objectives. There are two classes of Saktas; 1) *Kaulika* and 2) *Samayin*. The former worship the gross material object, by offering the deity wine, flesh, fish, and such other things in dreadful way and might be considered as *Tantrics* followers, while the latter have a recourse to imagery and abstained from such practices and might be considered as real Saktas.

The *Tantricism* or *Trantric* rituals, at least in its debased form widely prevailed and practiced in the region from the 12th century, when its chief scripture, the *Kalika Purana* was written and some scholars even think that '*Tantrikism* originated in *Kamarupa* itself⁸⁸. Prior to the arrival of the *Neo-Vaisnavite* preacher Sankaradeva, the Koch kingdom was the main strongholds of the *Tantricism* or *Trantric* rituals, where it was practiced in various forms. *Vamachara*, or left-handed attainment practices, which are closely associated with *Tantrikism* and belief in magic and incarnation, gave religion a perverted form⁸⁹. The *Yogini Tantra* and the *Kalika Purana* both belong to the *Vamachara*, or left-hand school of *Tantricism* / *Saktism* enjoin blood sacrifices and various esoteric rites. The *Kalika Purana* makes provision for the offering of the votary's (*Tantric* / *Sakta* worshipers) own blood and flesh in small quantities⁹⁰ and some times the rituals consisted of even human sacrifices⁹¹. The votaries were ready to sacrifice everything in the name of the goddess. The *Katha Guru Charita* narrates how *Gobinda*, a petty Koch official, worshipped the *Devi* at the cost of all his belongings and then cut out his blood with a nail-clipper, from his body to offer it to the deity because of which he grew as white as cotton⁹². According to Gait, there was a class of votaries called '*Bhogis*' who dwelt in caves, and when they came out of the caves were allowed to do whatever they like even including sexes and finally they volunteered to be sacrificed before the goddess⁹³. He also mentioned that as late as 1615 *Karmachand*, son of *Satrajila* and a commander of an invading Muslim army was sacrificed to the goddess *Kamakhya*⁹⁴. In the *Trantric* mode of worship, five special elements required, which are known as '*PanchaTattva*' well known as five M's (*Panch makars*), because they begins with that letter, namely *Madya* (wine), *Mamsa* (meat), *Matsya* (fish), *Mudra* (parched grain) and *Maithuna* (sexual union)⁹⁵. The rituals are usually performed in the dead of night and the votaries were come to be known as *Aritiya* or *ratikhowa*⁹⁶. The *Kumari Pooja*, or virgin worship is another ritual performed by *Tantrics*, in which a *Kumari* or *Virgin* is considered as the deity and in selection of *Kumari* or *Virgin* no caste distinction was observed⁹⁷. About the *Trantric* mode of worship, Bhandarkar says, "The ambition of

every pious follower of this system, is to become identical with *Tripura Sundari* and one of his religious exercises is to habituate himself to think that he is a woman and it ought to be the aim of all to become a woman"⁹⁸. In the Neo-Vaisnavite and other literatures, there are some occasional and indirect references to the Tantricism. The *Katha Guru Charita* records that Sankaradeva had an encounter with two Buddhist magicians (*Baudhamatiya tatakiya*), who practiced magic at *Belaguri*, which we have mentioned earlier⁹⁹. *Kahata Samnyasi*, alleged to be a Buddhist magician, performed certain magic rites over a straw effigy of *chilarai*, whereupon this valiant fighter felt a helpless victim to slow death¹⁰⁰. Therefore, it is fact that the practice of the *Trantric* worship in various forms was prevalent in the Koch kingdom and parts of Assam as well, during our period of study and even the *Yogini Tantra*, the main book on the subject was composed in the region.

Nathism or Nath / Yogi Cult:

Nathism, a sub sect of *Saivism*, founded or reformed by Guru Gorakhsnath, has been prevalent in the region from ancient period¹⁰¹. The Nathas, the followers of *Nathism* are also known as *Yogis*, as various forms of *Yoga* practices once cultured among them and also as *Katanis* on account of their caste profession of rearing of silk cocoons and spinning of silk yarn¹⁰². Although, *Nathism* a sub-sect of *Saivism* yet "derived its inspirations from the *Vajrayana* or in other words, the progenitors of *Natha* school Hinduised the teaching of the Buddhist *Tantras*"¹⁰³. *Nathism* had gained its popularity by challenging the caste system and the Brahmin superiority of Hinduism and in the same way, it also wanted to reform *Trantricism* by repudiating *Mantras*, putting emphasis on *Yogic* practices and cultivation of mental powers and placing different interpretations on such fundamental *Trantric* concepts as those of *Vajra*, *Mudra* etc¹⁰⁴. M. Neog opines that, "The nine original Nathas are among the eighty-four *Siddhapurusas* of the Buddhist *Tantras*"¹⁰⁵.

Contemporary literary and archeological sources proved the existence of this sect under the early Koch kings. In the Assamese version of the *Ramayana* (*Ayodhyakanda*, vv.6-8), Madhava Kandali, narrates a pen-picture of the *Yogi*, with his ragged wallet, *dowadas Kathi* (platter, sometimes in the form of a trident), idols of worship, and the repeated utterance of the name of *Siva*¹⁰⁶. Madhavadeva, a disciple of

Sankaradeva, once visited the house of silk-rearing Yogi on the bank of Kachikata (in modern North Lakhimpur)¹⁰⁷. In the lower Assam, men of *Yogi* caste calling themselves *Nath* are numerous and throughout the northern Bengal and western Assam evidence reminiscent of *Guru Goraksnath* remains, in the temple *Goraksnath* in Bogra; *Goraksamandapa* in Rangpur; *Yogi-gopa* in Goalpara, and the temple of *Goraksnath* near Ranisankal in Dinajpur (now in Bangladesh)etc¹⁰⁸. In some local folk songs current in northern Bengal, the birthplace of *Goraksnatha* is reputed to be near Jalpesh and Mech-para (in the district of Goalpara)¹⁰⁹.

The worship of *Guru Gorakhsnath* of *Nath* cult is still prevalent among the followers of *Nath* sect of the region, which they perform in the months of *Bhadra* (July-august) and *Falguna* (February-March)¹¹⁰. However, the cult losing separate identity due to its close affinity with Hinduism and now a days it is only traceable in some local folk-songs, Socio-religious rites and *Nath* and *Debnath* titles of the people of the region¹¹¹.

Other minor cults and semi-religious practices:

Besides, above-mentioned religious practices, some other minor cults and semi-religious practices have been prevalent in the society of the region before the rise of the Koches. However, most of these cults and semi-religious practices were sub sects within the Hinduism or Hiduised form of tribalism simultaneously worshipped with main deities of Hinduism.

In the *Katha-Guru-Charita*, it is stated that Ananta Kandali, the great *Bhakta* poet was originally a great worshiper of *Dharma* before his conversion to the *Vaisnava* faith¹¹². It clearly indicates that the worship of *Dharma* was prevalent in the region before the time of Sankaradeva and on the eve of the rise of the Koches. However, during the time of the early Koch kings, the *Dharma* cult seemed to have been long dead, and the deity was worshipped along with the worship of the snake goddess *Manasa* or *Marai* with certain¹¹³.

Manasa or *Marai*, the snake goddess was another minor cult of the region, which had been prevalent in the region before the rise of the Koches. Among the tribal of the

region, she was worshipped as '*Bisahari*' or remover of the poisons¹¹⁴. We have literary evidences about the existence of the snake goddess. Makar appears to be the earliest *Manasa* poets of the region, who composed verses from the '*Padma Purana*, mainly, on the theme of *Behula-Lakhinder* during the time of king *Jalpeshwar* of Kamata¹¹⁵. However, most popular poet singer of the period was Durgavar, composed '*Behula Upakhyan*'. In the colophon, "*Kamata Iswar Vando Biswa Singha nripabar*" he pays homage to Biswa Singha styling him as a king of Kamata and in other place, he introduced himself as a *Kayastha* by caste and a resident of Nilachal hill near Gauhati and a devotee of the goddess Kamakhya and Manasa¹¹⁶. Biswa Singha is said to have discovered Kamakhya Pitha in a deserted condition; he built a temple there to worship goddess *Kamakhya* along with *Manasa*, for, Durgavar's *Manasa* songs are sung here by Oja-pali during the worship of *Kamakhya*¹¹⁷. Bahubal a naval officer of king Naranarayan during his Ahom expedition was a devotee of *Padma* (*Manasa*)¹¹⁸. According to the DRV, Chilarai by reciting '*Sandahua mantra*' revived the mother of the *Padsha* of Bengal from snakebite¹¹⁹. There is a large mass of mantras or spells called '*sape khowa mantra*' (spells of snakebite) or '*saper dharanidhara mantra*' or simply '*dharani mantra*' to save people from snake-bite¹²⁰. The word *dharani* is probably derived from *Dharini* texts of the Buddhists.

The worship of *Manasa* is accompanied with the worship of Dharma and offerings included ducks, pigeons, he-goat, rice and fruits etc¹²¹. It is very common tradition of the region that in the worship of *Siva*, *Kali* and *Durga*, a snake always accompanied. Therefore, it is believed that the cult of the goddess *Manasa* developed out of both Aryan and non-Aryan beliefs on snake worship¹²².

Another minor goddess of reverence of the region was small - pox goddess generally known as *Ai*, 'the mother'. The disease itself is reverentially called *Ai* or *Aisakal*, 'the mother' and its attack is called '*Ai olowa*' or *aisakal olowa*', the appearance of the mother or mothers¹²³. There is a large number of special type songs in praise of the goddess called '*Ai-nam*', 'the songs of the mother', which are still sung by the womenfolk of the region to get someone recovered from smallpox or measles¹²⁴. In such songs, seven types of the disease are mentioned as the seven *Ai-sisters*, and *Sitala* is one of the sisters, who control smallpox or pustule diseases¹²⁵. The worship of

'*Ai In*' the form *Sitala* widely prevalent in the region during our period of study with ritual prescribed in the *Skanda Purana*, which proves the fact that '*Vyasakalai*, a follower of Sankaradeva made arrangements for the worship of the small-pox deity *Sitala*, when his only surviving son was taken ill with small-pox,¹²⁶.

The sculpture images on the walls of the Kamakhya temple shows the images of *Ganesh* and *Biswakarma*, which indirectly indicate the *Ganesh* and *Biswakarma* were worshiped in the region.

The various types of *Yoga* exercises and the exhibitions of *Yogic* feats seem to have been practiced in the region. The Vaisnava reformer Sankaradeva came across *Yoga-Sastras* in his early life and became the master of this branch of practical learning and he "exhibited *Yogic* feats much to the amazement of the people"¹²⁷. It is said that he could hold his breath continuously for three or four days and could remain under water for long time¹²⁸. According to the *Katha Guru Charita*, one Ratikanta Dalai said to have practiced *Yoga*¹²⁹. It also refers to a *Yogi*, who made his abode in the house of Naranarayan¹³⁰. The exhibitions of *Yogic* feats and *Yoga* exercises attracted people so much that some itinerant *Yogis* went about exhibiting people different types of *Yogic* feats and exercises¹³¹.

Due to admixture of the Hindu, Trantric Buddhist, tribal and other religious beliefs, a mysterious atmosphere had been prevailing in the region during our period of study, which included belief and practice of magic, supernatural powers and Incantations or charms. The DRV records that, Chilarai, who was imprisoned in Gauda, conjured up a snake inside a knot of cloth (*gathi*) with spells (*sadahuya mantra*), according to the advice of the goddess Durga. The snake bit the mother of the Padsha of Gauda to apparent death, from which she was recovered by Chilarai himself¹³². With the references from the *Katha Guru Charita*, we mentioned earlier that how one *Kahata Sannyasi* or mendicant, alleged to be a Buddhist magician had performed certain magic rites over a straw of effigy of Chilarai, whereupon this valiant fighter felt a helpless victim to slow death. Narayanadasa and Gokulchandra, two disciples of Sankaradeva, were sold away to Bhutiyas by the men of king Naranarayan, were let off by the latter due to the suspicion that they were 'god-men'¹³³. There were various types of magical rites, animistic and superstitious beliefs, and usages current among the common

masses of the region to prevent every evil and disease or premature death from the numerous evil spirits. M. Neog records that there is a huge *mantra* literature in the region, considered as efficacious in warding off the super-natural agencies called "*bhut, daini =dakini, dat =daitya, danaha = danaba, camon* which makes people mute, *gulai* connected with Will o' the wisp, *jakh=Yaksa, jigini=yogini, kandh, kheta, mor* connected with choleric diseases, *prêt, pisach*, and numerous others"¹³⁴. The Persian chroniclers observed, "Whoever happens to step into the land becomes enchanted and cannot find his way to out of it. The idol of the temple of Kayamkhya, Lunachumari and Ismail Jogi are notorious for magic and sorcery"¹³⁵. The *Baharistan -i-Ghaybi* gives an interesting account of magic and sorcery of the Khuntaghat Pargana, a great centre of witchcraft of the region in the following ways: "This place is notorious for magic and sorcery. thus if a man takes by force a fowl from a Ryot, comes to the judge for redress, and if that person is refused justice, then the complainant, by means of his magic and sorcery could make the accused produce the voice of a fowl from inside his stomach and thus prove the falsity of the protestations of the accused. If a Bailiff of the judge stay at village in connection with the work of *Dihidar* or the *Pattadar* (the tenure holder of the village), and if in a state of drunkenness he would demand fish with violence in the evening or at mid-night when no fresh fish was available, and persisted in his demand by torturing the Riots, then they would bring some mango leaves (or leaves of another tree whose name reads like *Lahsura*) and breathe on the leaves some words of magic and sorcery. These leaves would forthwith turn into a kind of small fish. When these fish(es) were cooked by him in a state of drunkenness, they turn into blood . As soon as they were eaten by Bailiff, he died"¹³⁶.

Moreover, the semi-superstitious customs of the offering of worship to the natural things and others were also prevailing in the region. M. Neog with references from *Atair Charita* describes, that 'the offering of worship to the clouds and rivers, of making obeisance to cowsheds and barns or haylofts, of setting adrift down the course of a river a raft with standing sticks and cotton and yarn tied to the sticks, and of the tying of amulets with tiger claws to the neck of a child'¹³⁷ were prevalent in the society.

Besides these, tribal people (Hinduised or not) of the region worshipped a large number traditional tribal male and female deities, which continues among the tribal and

Hinduised tribal people of the region. The Hinduised tribal people of the present north Bengal, and adjoining territories of present Bangladesh and Assam worshipped female deities like *Bhandani*, *Pethani*, *Tista Buri*, *Jog* and male deities like *Hutumdeo*, *Rishi* (*Mahakal*), *Kistho*, *Grami* or *Gram Thakur*, *Dharma Thakur*, *Mashan* etc¹³⁸. The Kachari people of the region still worship their primordial male female deities like *Burah Thakur*-*Burhi Thakur*, *Bullibriu* (river Bharali), *Mouthansri* (*Lakshmi*) etc¹³⁹. The Meches worshipped *Bathou* (tribal form of Lord Siva). Tribal priest called *Deoshi* / *Deodhai* / *Huzi* performs the ritual of the chief deities¹⁴⁰.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the religions and religious beliefs of the region on the eve of the rise of the Neo-Vaisnavism bear some characteristics. A) A large number of religions or religious beliefs, both Hindu and tribal were prevailing in the region. B) The period witnessed the religious assimilation of the Hinduism and other tribal forms of worship under the guidance of the Brahmins royal family following the theory "assimilation from Above". C) Most of the religions were based on rituals and worldly pleasure, which included sacrifice, sex, mysterious practices and superstitious activities etc. D) The period distinguished itself for notorious practices of Tantricism, which combined many elements of ancient, savage, superstitious as well as ingenious but fanciful speculation.

However, it appears that both tribal and non-tribal (Brahmanical) religious beliefs existed in the region. With state formation under the early Koch kings and its political stability, existing religions could not come out of its dark sides and could not satisfy the demands of the people. As a result, a new religion came into existence under the leadership of Sankaradeva and came to be known as Neo-Vaisnavism that will be discussed in the following pages.

b). Role of Sankaradeva and Neo-Vaisnavism:

The North-East India from the fifteenth century presented a motley picture of diverse shades and grades of Socio-religious culture. The majority of the people belonged to non-Aryan tribes having distinct manners, customs and religious beliefs as we have mentioned earlier. Those who professed Hinduism loosely adhered to

Vaisnavism or *Saivism*. *Sāktism* bordering on extreme *Tāntricism* was also widely prevalent. The religious spectrum was the bulk of the indigenous tribal population who followed their indigenous tribal faiths. All these cults were more or less indulging in evil practices like animal and sometimes even human sacrifices, magical rites, spells and the like and were based on the philosophy of palate and sensual pleasures¹⁴¹. The economically backward classes and the socially downtrodden became the victims of such ghastly practices. Bringing all these diverse communities and warring factions under a systematized religious code and conduct to provide the masses with a mode of worship, which would be simple and at the same time accessible to all was what constituted the pressing need of the time. In these situations, Neo-Vaisnaite preacher Sankaradeva was born in the month *Ahin* (September-October) in 1371 Saka (1449 AD) at Tembuani (Bordowā), in the present-day Nowgāon district of Assām¹⁴². A multi-faceted genius, Sankaradeva was at once a spiritual leader, a social reformer, a prolific writer, a master playwright and composer and over all the prime mover of all aspects of the period of the region. He credited with providing the bedrock of Assamese culture, and creating a religion that gave shape to a set of new values and social synthesis.

Short Biographical sketch of Sankaradeva:

Biographical sketch of Sankaradeva's life can be discussed under three subheads considering his dwelling places in the following ways:

I). ***Early period: in the Bara Bhuyan territories at Bordowa / Ali-Pukhuri (1449-1506AD):***

II). ***Middle period: in the Ahom kingdom (c.1506-1546AD):***

III). ***Final period: in the Koch kingdom (c. 1546-1569AD.):***

I) Early period: At Bordowa / Ali-Pukhuri (1449-1506AD):

Sankaradeva was born into the Shiromani (chief) Bara Bhuyan family, near Bordowa in *Nowgaon* in a village called Ali-Pukhuri in c1449AD, when *Niladhvaja* (c.1440-1460 AD), and *Suhenpha* (1439-1488) were ruling over the thrones of the *Kamatapur*¹⁴³ and the Ahom respectively¹⁴⁴. His father *Kusumvara* was the chief of

Shiromani Bara Bhuyan and his mother was Satyasandhya Devi. Sankaradeva lost parents at a very tender age and was raised by his grandmother Khersuti, the wife of Suryavara¹⁴⁵. He began attending the tol or chatrasaal (school) of the renowned scholar Mahendra Kandali at the age of 12¹⁴⁶. In the school, he was a devoted student and completed his course of studies in all branches of Indian learning like the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas, the Samhitas, the Tantras, grammar, lexicon and kavyas within less time than was required ordinarily¹⁴⁷. A miracle said to have happened in his school days, by which he acquired the epithet 'deva' with Sankara. Mahendra Kandali one day found Sankara sleeping in the schoolhouse alone and a serpent with its extensive hood protected him from the burning rays of the sun. On seeing Kandali, the serpent crawled down out of sight. The Pandit recognized Sankara as divine personality, and next day, he narrated this unique experience to all the pupils, and asked them to address him as 'Sankaradeva' and not simply 'Sankara'¹⁴⁸.

In course of his studies, Sankaradeva learned Yoga and became a master of that art. By this art, he became both physically and mentally very able, which is proved by many legends, some of which we have mentioned earlier.

After completing his study, he came out a finished scholar at the age 20(1469AD) and in spite of interest in studious career, he was forced by his elders to be the Siromani Bhuyan¹⁴⁹. At the age of 23, he married his first wife Suryavati, daughter of Havaragiri Kayastha and four years after the marriage he lost his wife, who died giving birth to a girl who was named as Manu or Haripriya. It is possible that the death of his wife increased his spiritual inclination as his mind began to focus, more than ever before, on the transcendental and determined to go on a pilgrimage to Puri and other places. However, he could not do that immediately due to his affection to motherless child and administrative responsibility as *Siromani Bhuyan*. After six or seven years later, when his daughter turned nine, he married her off to a *Kayastha* youth *Hari* with household responsibility, handed over the Shiromaniship to his grand uncles and left for a pilgrimage at the age of 32(c1481)¹⁵⁰.

Seventeen persons are said to have accompanied him to the pilgrimage and visited places like Navadvipa, Puri, Mathura, Dwaraka, Vrindavan, Gaya, Rameswaram, Ayodhya, Sitakunda and almost all the other major seats of the

Vaisnavite religion in India. Interacted with Vaisnava Pandits of various schools and acquired first hand knowledge of Vaisnava theology, text, mode of worship and management of institutions¹⁵¹. He returned his native home to Ali-Pukhuri after 12 years in about 1493AD at the age of 44¹⁵². During his pilgrimage, Sankaradeva witnessed the Bhakti movement that was in full bloom in India at that time and he was greatly influenced by it, which consequently must have prompted him to inaugurate the Neo-Vaisnavite movement in the region.

After his return, Sankaradeva with widened outlook and experience of religious life wanted to take the mission of spiritual and devotional life. However, on his grandmother's insistence, he forced to marry (second marriage) Kalindi, daughter of kalika Bhuyan but inspite of repeated insists, he refused to take back the Shiromani Bhuyanship¹⁵³. At Bordowa, he constructed his first Naamghar (prayer hall) to discuss religious matters, hold prayers and began preaching his idea of Bhakti. However, he was yet to receive the message of the Bhagavata Purana in its fullest significance, for which he waited to get a complete copy of the *Bhagavata Purana* from Jagadisa Misra of Tirhut which had in it commentaries from Sridhara Swami of Puri, an Advaita scholar. Jagadish Misra before handing over the *Bhagavata Purana* to Sankaradeva, he recited and explained the whole work in Sankaradeva's presence. This made him realize that this work had no peer and that its purpose was to fix Krisna as the sole God and that the celebrating of his acts in the company of holy men and the taking of sole refuge in him was the greatest religion of men¹⁵⁴. Thus, Sankaradeva went into the deep of the *Bhagavata Purana* and took the task of propounding and propagating the cult of Bhakti among the masses by translating it in vernacular and composing the Kirtana-ghosha on the Bhagavata subject¹⁵⁵. The 13 years at Ali-pukhuri after his first pilgrimage (upto1506AD), was the period during which he reflected deeply on Vaisnavism and on the form that would best suit the spiritual and ethical needs of the people.

II). Middle period: in the Ahom kingdom (c.1506-1546AD.):

Sankaradeva could not however live long in his native place at *Bordowa / Ali-Pukhuri*, due to the political instability¹⁵⁶, which compelled him to shift his residence towards east through the northern bank of the Brahmaputra with temporary stays at

places like *Singari, Rauta, Ghiladhari and Bhalukaguri* and finally settled at *Gangmau* for five years¹⁵⁷. At *Gangmau*, his son *Ramananda* was born. Here too, due to the repeated raids of *Biswa Singha*, father of *Naranarayan*, against the *Bhuyans*, who were gradually getting weak, *Sankaradeva* left this place and moved further east to *Dhuwahat*, present day *Majuli*, now an island on the *Brahmaputra*. At this place, he stayed for about 18 years¹⁵⁸, spending most of his time in study and discussions of religious nature.

At *Dhuwahat*, *Sankaradeva* met his great disciple and spiritual successor *Madhavadeva* in 1522¹⁵⁹. *Madhavdeva*, a *Sakta*, got into a religious altercation with his brother-in-law *Ramadasa* who had recently converted to *Vaisnavism*. *Ramadasa* took him to *Sankaradeva*, who, after a long debate, could finally convince him of the power and the efficacy of *Naam Dharma* and as a result, *Madhavdeva* became his disciple. At *Dhuwahat*, he also initiated *Ratnakara Kandali* and *Vyasakalai*, both Brahmins, who used to read and explain the *Bhagavatagita* in the religious gatherings and many others into his religion continued composing the *Kirtana ghosha*.

The conversion is rightly regarded as the 'redoubtable exponent' of the Neo-Vaisnava sect, for it had far-reaching and enormous effect in the furtherance of Neo-Vaisnava in this region¹⁶⁰. The defeat / conversion of *Madhavadeva*, a *Sakta* by faith, meant the defeat of the *Sakti* cult a prominent religion of the land. Moreover, *Sankaradeva* raised the question about the authority of the priests, who were regarded as the indispensable mediators of Salvation and who had the theologian's art of translating the manifestly irrational into the seemingly rational. Because of it, the Brahmanic hostility towards the *Sankaradeva* and Neo-Vaisnava sect became inevitable and they took up the open challenge and started abusing *Sankaradeva* and his sect. This marked two-dimensional remarkable impacts on the society:

- A) The Neo-Vaisnava movement made rapid progress among the masses due to its democratic outlook and equality and within a short time, it could impress upon the imagination of the multitudes and the fame of *Sankaradeva* spread to distant places and,

B) The *Saktas* felt rudely shaken and threatened by the emergence of a new religion propagated by a Non-Brahmin and tried their best to nip the Neo-Vaisnava movement in the bud.

However, Sankaradeva tried to appease the Brahmans by gentle persuasion and debate, for which he arranged a religious debate with the leading and scholarly Brahmans of the locality in the house of Budha Khan. But, the effort went in vain and hostility on the side of *Sakta* Brahmans continued. Some Brahmans with epithets like *Acharya, Kandali, Bharati* and *Upadhyaya*¹⁶¹, submitted a complaint to the Ahom king *Suhungmung* (1497-1539) with the allegation that Sankaradeva had tampered the popular faith of the land. Influenced by the allegation of the priests, the king summoned Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva to court for trial but being satisfied by replies of them, they were freed temporarily. However, hostilities continued, but not owing to the religious ground, for the Ahom kings bore no personal hatred towards Sankaradeva and they did not interfere with the Neo-Vaisnavism in the pursuit of their religion¹⁶². The relationship with the Ahom royalty deteriorated due to the negligence of duty by Sankaradeva and his disciples in *khedda* or elephant-catching operation¹⁶³. Meanwhile, Naranarayan ascended the throne of Koch Behar with his brother Chilarai as chief general of his army at the death of their father Biswa Singha and they were preparing to invade the Ahom kingdom. Naranarayan also took moderate policy towards the Bhuyans discarding his father's policies of oppression, which made them feel happier and contented. For instance, Prataparaya and Gabharu Khan who were forced to flee in Gauda during the reign of Biswa Singha now came back to the Koch kingdom, made an alliance with king Naranarayan, and they agreed to serve the Koch army. Probably they helped Sankaradeva to come back to Koch kingdom¹⁶⁴. Moreover, Sankaradeva and his followers intended to migrate in to the territory of Naranarayan on hearing of his 'poetic qualities', scholarly activities and democratic out look towards all caste and creeds, religions and customs¹⁶⁵

Therefore, when Sankaradeva and his followers were preparing to migrate into Koch kingdom considering changing political situation and other circumstances, the news of the tragic incident of his son-in-law Hari's execution and the confinement of

Madhava in the Ahom prison, hastened their migration to the Koch kingdom in about 1546¹⁶⁶.

III. Final period: in the Koch kingdom (c. 1546-1569AD.):

From the territory of the Ahoms, Sankaradeva and his followers travelled hurriedly following the river route via the river *Kalakata* or *Kalakati*, *sadhana-ghat*, *khagarikata*, *Kaliyabar*, *Singari-Bardowa*, *Darrang*, *Kuwar-gao*, *Banbhag* and *Barbhag*¹⁶⁷, to Koch kingdom. In the Koch kingdom, they temporarily stationed at different places like *Kapalabari* (*Ksetri-pargana* in Kamarupa district), *Baradi* (northeast of the present Barpeta town), *Palengdi* (now a part of the Barpeta town, on the Barpeta-bil), *Ganakpara*, *Kamarkuchi* and finally settled at *Patbausi* near Barpeta. Here he spent the remaining years of his life comparatively in peace and tranquility, which gave him the opportunity to fulfill the mission of his life¹⁶⁸. At Barpeta, he laid the foundation of a *Satra*, erected a *Namghar* and continued the propagation of his doctrine and within few days, his name and fame reached every nook and corner of the kingdom.

Meanwhile, at *Sunpora* (*Palengdi*), Sankaradeva initiated Bhavananda, a rich trader who had extensive business interest in the Garo and Bhutan hills besides Kamarupa and renamed him as *Narayan Thakur* or *Narayan Ata*. He settled at *Janiya* near Barpeta, took to agriculture and became a devoted friend of Madhavadeva. A man of the world otherwise, he soon flourished and became a provider to Sankaradeva and his devotees and took great initiative in procuring a large number of new converts like Madhava of *Jayanti* village; *Gobinda Garamali*, a police officer and worshipper of the Devi; *Budha Gopal*; *Budha Sri-Rama Ata*; *Balarama*, a *Oja pali* singer and others¹⁶⁹.

At *Patbausi* Sankaradeva, converted two Brahmins; *Damodaradeva* (of *Nalacha* village near Barpeta) and *Harideva* (of *Maniyari* village near Barpeta) to his faith and both of them were very close disciples of him. However, after the death of Sankaradeva they founded two different sub-sects called *Damodariya* and *Harideviya* sects respectively¹⁷⁰. He also initiated some of the people here like *Chakrapani Dwija*¹⁷¹ and *Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya*¹⁷², two Brahmins; *Ketai Khan*, a *Kayastha*; *Govinda*, a Garo; *Jayarama*, a *Bhutia*; *Murari*, a Koch and *Chandsai* a Muslim. He also befriended

Ananta Kandali, a profound scholar of Sanskrit, who translated parts of the *Bhagavata Purana* and others as we have already mentioned.

At Barpeta, he spent most of his times in preaching and converting a considerable number of people, some of them already mentioned earlier. Besides, he continued composing and rendering a large number of literary works. He continued composing the *Kirtana Ghosha*, further translated the first book of the *Ramayana* (*uttarakanda*) and instructed Madhavadeva to translate the last book (*adikanda*), portions that were left undone by the 14th century poet *Madhava Kandali*. He wrote four dramas: *Rukmini harana*, *Parijata harana*, *Keligopala* and *kalidamana*. Another drama written at Patbausi, *Kansa Vadha*, is lost. At Patbausi, he had lent his Bargeets numbering around 240 to Kamala Gayana (singer). However, unfortunately, his house was gutted and most of the *Bargeets* were lost. Since that incident, Sankaradeva stopped composing *Bargeets*. Of the 240, 34 remain today¹⁷³.

In about 1550¹⁷⁴, at the ripe age of 101 years, Sankaradeva once again went out for his 2nd pilgrimage with a large party of 117 disciples that included Madhavadeva, *Ramarama*, *Thakur Ata* and others to *Puri* via *Gaya*¹⁷⁵. According to some biographers, Sankaradeva on his way to *Puri* via *Gaya* said to have visited *Kavir's* than or math, where he met *Kabir's* daughter *Kamali*¹⁷⁶. One biographer¹⁷⁷ even wrongly hold that *Kabir* was alive when Sankaradeva visited his place, although it is not possible as he died long before of the 2nd pilgrimage¹⁷⁸.

The Katha Guru Charita and other biographies of Sankaradeva record another incident, which happened during his second pilgrimage. The different *Charitas* claim that Sankaradeva met *Chaitanyadeva* (1483-1533) of Bengal during his 2nd pilgrimage either at *Nadia* or at *Puri*¹⁷⁹. However, this meeting does not seem to be possible because *Chaitanyadeva* had already died in 1533. But on the other hand, inspite of controversies, some modern scholars hold the view that there is ground to believe that this meeting might have happened in his 1st pilgrimage¹⁸⁰. Anyhow, *Madhavadeva*, on the request of Sankaradeva's wife *Kalindi* urged Sankaradeva to return from *Puri* and not proceed to *Vrindavana* and as a result, he returned to *Patbausi* within six months¹⁸¹.

On his return from the 2nd pilgrimage, Sankaradeva again engaged himself in preaching of the Neo-Vaisnavism, composing and translating of literary works mainly in vernacular, giving instruction to the people for their betterment and was able to establish himself as a popular religious man. The people attracted by his simple composition and translations, their sweet melody and easily understandable intelligible philosophic ideas and joined his sect in large numbers. With the increasing popularity of the new faith, the hostility of the Brahmins increased considerably and they were not ready to tolerate Sankaradeva's new faith. Therefore, they lodged a protest against Sankaradeva to king Naranarayan alleging his anti-traditional traits of Neo-Vaisnavism, which bringing utter disaster to the country by persuading the people not to perform the age-old Vedic sacrifices, as they would not bring any merit to the doer¹⁸². King Naranarayan, being a staunch Sakta and a devoted votary of the goddess and highly incensed by such exaggerated allegations of the Brahmins, he immediately sent some police men to arrest Sankaradeva. Sankaradeva managed to go into hiding through the good offices of Chilarai, but his two followers; Narayan Das (Thakur) and Gokulchand were captured, taken to Kochbehar and subjected to inhuman torture. But inspite of severest torture, they were adamant not to give up their faith and did not divulge the whereabouts of their Guru, for which they were sold to the Bhutiyas, who were impressed by their godliness and sent back to the Koch king by two constables¹⁸³. The constables too, were impressed by them and became converts to the faith of Sankaradeva and ultimately they were released by royal orders¹⁸⁴.

In the meantime, Chilarai, the general of the Koch army and brother of Naranarayana, who had married *Kamalapriya*, the daughter of Sankaradeva's cousin *Ramaraya*, and was so influenced by the faith of Sankaradeva that he converted to the faith. He took his master Sankaradeva away to his abode in *Phulbari* to safeguard him¹⁸⁵. On hearing this, king Naranarayan asked Chilarai to present Sankaradeva to his court, assuring his younger brother that no harm would be done to him, who was also decided to surrender himself to the king. Accordingly, Sankaradeva presented himself at the court and as he moved up the steps to the throne, singing his following Sanskrit *totaka* hymn (composed extempore) to God:

Madhu daanava daaran deva varam |
vara vaarija locana cakra dharam ||
dharani dhara dhaarana dheya param |
paramaarth avidyaashubha naasha karam ||
Kara churnita chedipa bhuri bhagam |
bhaga bhushana korchhita paada yugam ||
yuga naayaka naagara vesha ruchim |
*ruchiraangshupidhaana sharira suchim ||*¹⁸⁶.

After this hymn, he sat down; he recited the following *bargeet*:

Jaya jaya malla nripati rasavana,
Yakeri gunagana sama nahi ana.
Nijakula kumuda prakasita indu,
*Gahina gambhira dhira pekhite sindhu*¹⁸⁷.

On hearing these, Naranarayana became very pleased and offered him great seat of honour. The king then asked Brahmins to prove their allegations against Sankaradeva and as result, a great debate followed between the Brahmins and Sankaradeva, in which Sankaradeva utterly defeated the Brahmin scholars. King Naranarayan appreciated the powerful arguments and steady and serious voice of Sankaradeva and honoured him with rich presents and appointd him as 'Gamtha' or Viceroy of the Patbausi and its neighbouring places¹⁸⁸. Sankaradeva became friend of the king and lived there for about 30 months visiting the royal court daily and giving discourse on the neo-Vaisnava faith. It was at his court, where Sankaradeva established his reputation as a great religious preacher and erudite scholar and defeated the Brahmins on many occasions and as a result, many Brahmins became his disciples¹⁸⁹. Thus, his religion prospered well under the enlightened patronage of king Naranarayan and his brother Chilarai and he and his followers felt completely secure in their movements and the Neo-Vaisnava order thrived vigorously¹⁹⁰. On the request of Naranarayan and Chilarai, he supervised the creations of the 60mx30m woven *Vrindavani vastra* that depicted the playful activities of Krishna in Vrindavana, which was presented to the Koch king. He arranged a discussion with Madhavadeva and

Thakur Ata, and gave them various instructions at *Patbausi* and left the place for the last time and set up his home at *Bheladonga* in *Kochbehar*.

During his stay at *Kochbehar*, being impressed both by majestic personality of *Sankaradeva* and by the efficacy of the tenets of the Neo-Vaisnavism, *Naranarayan* expressed his willingness to become his disciple. However, *Sankaradeva* was reluctant to convert a king on the ground that he could not initiate the king into his religion, as he was obliged to be polytheist¹⁹¹. He also informed the king that those who did not believe in the unity of the godhead and worshipped a number of deities were not entitled to get '*Sarana mantra*'. In this connection, *B. Kakati* remarks; "By virtue of his position, a king would have to worship other gods and goddesses, and the fundamental principle of *Sankaradeva*'s creed was an undeviating love for one god. There was no provision for the worship of minor gods, because that would mark the purity of his creed"¹⁹². King *Naranarayan* however was not satisfied with the replies of *Sankaradeva* and he said that he would worship no other deities than *Hari* and intended to abdicate the throne to satisfy his religious hankering. On hearing this, *Sankaradeva* became very pleased, and agreed to initiate the king to his '*Sarana mantra*' and returned back to his home after advising him to observe requisite fasting to-morrow.

Last days of Sankaradeva:

The next day, which was the appointed day, the king made all kind of arrangements and sent his men to bring the saint to the royal court. However, when the royal messenger came to *Sankaradeva*, he found him suffering from boil in some part of his body and was not in a position to go to the royal court. However, there are two opinions about the causes of his death. According to most of the biographers, that a painful boil—a *visha phohara* – had appeared in some part of his body and this led to the passing away of the Saint¹⁹³. According to '*the Guru Charit Katha*', that adamancy of *Naranarayan*, that he be initiated into the new religion led the saint to surrender his life to the Lord by way of meditative communion¹⁹⁴. In the meanwhile, *Sankaradeva* realised that his last days were approaching. Therefore, he made all arrangements for the furtherance of his cult and for that purpose; he appointed his ardent disciple, *Madhavadeva* as his successor in the matters of religion and said to others "I give unto *Madhava* the whole energy of my soul. There is no distinction between myself and him.

You will get spiritual teaching from him"¹⁹⁵. Thus, on Thursday, 21st of *Bhadra* (September) in Saka 1490 /1569AD, after leading a most eventful life dedicated to enlightening humanity; Sankaradeva died – at the remarkable age of 120 years¹⁹⁶.

His Personality:

The biographers of Sankaradeva uniformly speak of the resplendency, transcendent glory and charming beauty and above all the great physical strength, of the saint¹⁹⁷ for which he lived up to the unusual age of nearly 120 years. Madhavadeva in a song in which he paid his obeisance to his guru describes the saint's physical charm in the following way:

“He is handsome to look. His fair body shines like the refulgent sun. His very sight, pleasing to the assembly of people, can remove and destroy sin. He is naturally handsome without the aid of ornaments and decorations. He is dignified, majestic in appearance and wise. His lotus-like eyes are wide and bright and his completion is pleasant like the rays of the moon. His gait is dignified like that of an elephant and his voice is deep like rumbling of a cloud"¹⁹⁸. Physically he was so strong that he in his childhood is said to have swam across the Brahmaputra during the rainy season and could tame a ferocious semi-wild bull by holding it by its horns. Ramananda Thakur records an incident that with books in his hands, Sankaradeva threw off two Kachari soldiers and ran away before a closely chasing band of such men¹⁹⁹. His spell bound speaking ability, attractive pronunciation during religious recitation and singing; dramatic performance of *Ankiya nat*, etc. clearly identified his great personality. Due to his attractive and radiating personality, *Sakta Madhava*, who was determined not to surrender before the saint at the eve of his meeting, felt overpowered at the very sight of him and immediately prostrated before the saint. Same was the case with king Naranarayan, who insisted by Sakta Brahmins, sent his men to arrest Sankaradeva and his followers, but at his first meeting with the saint, he had been so impressed by his personality of him that he provided him valuable gifts, *Gomaṣṭhaship* and decided to be a disciple of him²⁰⁰.

Besides physical strength beauty and others, he had intellectual stamina and excellence, for which he combined in himself many qualities and capabilities. He was a

scholar without arrogance, a steadfast pursuer of ideals, persuasive in arguments, humanistic in outlook, a householder without worldly attachment, a good administrator (as Siromany Bhuyan and Gomastha). He was a staunch believer in monotheism, an astute organizer of social reform, a versatile artist and poet, a successful religious discourses who could enliven his talk with appropriate logics, stories, parables and humour, a man of deep feeling and foresight. For all these things, his biographers and followers appropriately consider him as an incarnation of the god^{200A}. In this connection, the opinion of Dr. B. Kakati may be noted: "Sankaradeva has given Assam a new life, letters and a state. Rulers have come and gone and their kingdoms perished in the dust, but Sankaradeva's state endures and broad in the general heart of men his power survives"^{200B}.

Sankaradeva and Neo-Vaisnavism:

Sankaradeva preached the 'Neo-Vaisnavism', a religion of supreme surrender to a single God, Vasudeva Krishna and his various incarnations like Visnu, Narayan, Rama and Hari and therefore, it is officially known as *Eka-Saraniya-Nām-Dharma*²⁰¹. His faith also known as the '*Bhagavata Dharma*' as it is based on the concept of the *Bhagavata Purana* and later on it got popularised as '*Mahapurushiya Dharma*', for both he and his chief disciple Madhavadeva obtained the status of *Mahapurushas* or Saints among their followers as Chaitanyadeva of Bengal obtained the status of '*Mahaprabhu*' (supreme Lord) among his followers.

He upholds the concept of oneness in all through the uttering of simple *Nama-kirtana* or divine services in the form of community prayer. His faith was based on one qualified monism as propounded by Ramanuja and Ramananda in south India and in Northern India respectively, which also hold the views that God is the central reality of soul and matter and neither can exist without Him. Although, Sankaradeva mentioned nine modes, for showing devotion to God²⁰², he emphasised only two: the *sravana* (listening to the name of god), the *Nam-kirtana* (chanting the name of God) modes to be sufficient for common devotees to show *Bhakti* (devotion) to God. He also mentioned another mode, i.e. the *Dasya* (servitude to God) attitude of *Bhakti*, (devotion) in which the '*bhakta*' (votary) considered himself as the servant of God. To his followers, *Bhakti* (devotion) is the main essence and appeared to be of vital importance and metaphysical questions were of little significance. The faith was accessible to the

highest and lowest, men and women alike, irrespective of birth, religions, caste or status and no rigid theocratic laws were to be followed by the votary. He strictly prohibited Idols worship of other gods and goddess, which was an open revolt against the intellectualism of Brahmanic philosophy as well as against the misguided Tantricians and others²⁰³. He holds a non-dualistic standpoint of God and ignored dual-Gods concept like Radha-Krishna of *Chaitanyadeva*, Gopi-Krishna of Vallacharyya, Rukmini-Krishna of Namadeva and Sita-Rama of Ramananda of Vaisnavism of other parts of India²⁰⁴. His faith did not acknowledge neither female counterparts of the God or any *Sakti*, the energy represented in a female form of Lord *Visnu*.

if we elaborately go through the writings and activities of Sankaradeva, it becomes quite clear that he was not a speculative thinker and propagator of *Vaisnavism* supported by discursive reasoning and abstract thinking, but a realistic thinker and reformer of classical *Vaisnavism*, in a simplified form, based on devotion and faith of classical *Vaisnavism* of the *Bhagavata Purana*. He drew much of his inspiration and devotional theologism from the *Bhagavata Purana* and his two pilgrimages to the religious places of *Vaisnavism* in other parts of India, which we have mentioned earlier. According to Bhushan and the *Katha-Guru-charita*, after his first pilgrimage, Sankaradeva had built a temple on the original site of his father's residence to share his experience during the pilgrimage, to discuss religious matters and to hold prayers²⁰⁵. However, to obtain full teaching of *Vaisnavism* of the *Bhagavata Purana*, M. Neog with the authority of Daityari writes, "... he had still to wait, it appears, the arrival of a complete copy of the *Bhagavata Purana*, furnished with Sridhara Svami's commentary, from Puri through one Jagadish Misra of Tirhut. ... Much stress is laid by the biographers on this matter, which has been considered as being of great moment. It is added that Jagadish recited and explained the whole work in Sankara's presence, soon after which he died.

When Sankara had listened to Jagadish's discourses on the *Bhagavata Purana* he convinced that this work had no peer and that its purpose was to fix krsna as the sole worshipful, and that the celebrating of his acts in the company of holy men and the taking of sole refuge in him was the greatest religion of men"²⁰⁶.

Thus, Sankaradeva was greatly influenced by the *Bhagavata Purana* and derived devotional theologism from it. Daityari states that Sankaradeva now went into the *Purana* and set himself to the task of propounding and propagating the faith²⁰⁷. B. K.

Kakati rightly observes, "the *Bhagavata Purana* removed the last vestige of doubt still linger in his mind. Its appreciation marked the last stage in the process of spiritual evolution and reinforced with the voice of an ancient prophecy, the principle of devotion to One in which he had fixed his mind. ...as the condition of hope and final liberation, seemed to promise the only remedial social ideal, and Sankaradeva set at once to work it out"²⁰⁸.

However, inspite of the derivation of devotional theologism and inspiration from the *Bhagavata Purana* and other scriptures, he did not utilize it as mere the replica of the Vaisnavite movement of the other parts of India. Considering the prevailing situation, that is ignorance, superstitions, notorious practices of Tantricism, fanciful speculation, baneful effects of the caste system, expensive ritualistic worldly religious rites and above all the heterogeneous tribes and communities of the region, he tried to utilize his gained ideas in a new form of religion through which he created conditions for their harmonious living. In this connection, S. N. Sharma, opines, Sankaradeva "could clearly and rightly perceive that the society was more in need of reformation than a system of philosophy. That is why he divert his attention solely towards the propagation of the new faith without caring whether the religion propagated by him was based on a systematic philosophy or not"²⁰⁹. Therefore, his faith is generally called the 'Neo-Vaisnavism', 'the *Bhagavata Dharma*', or 'the *Mahapurushiya Dharma*', as we mentioned earlier, but not only 'Vaisnavism'.

However, it may be noted here that Sankaradeva was not a philosopher nor did he endeavour to evolve a philosophy. S. N. Sharma, opines, "He was a reformer and a poet, but not a philosopher"²¹⁰. Nevertheless, his works like the *Bhaktiratnakara*, the *Bhaktipradip* and many others, are pointers to the fact that he was steeped in the lore of Hindu philosophy and not any independent philosophy and his faith emphasised on practicalities of socio-religious aspects, not on theoretical and philosophical aspects. Even, neither Sankaradeva nor his immediate followers have tried to give much-needed philosophical basis to their faith.

Nevertheless, from the writings, translations and activities of Sankaradeva and his followers, a rough idea of their philosophical views can be had and those clearly revealed the fact that there is clear influence of the *Bhagavata Purana*, writings like the *Bhaktiratnakara*, the *Bhaktipradip* etc., in forming the theological and philosophical background of Neo-Vaisnavism of the region. All these books were very popular among

the Neo-Vaisnavas of the region and greatly respected them as religious scriptures, even as the God Almighty²¹¹.

Elements of the Neo-Vaisnavism:

The detail study of the literatures, writings, and religious activities of Sankaradeva and his followers, revealed the following fundamental elements of the Neo-Vaisnavism:

- A) God:** The only supreme Being, generally called Narayan, and *Krishna, Vasudeva, Visnu, Madhava, Janarddana, Gobinda*, etc. are some of the names that are used as synonyms of Narayana. "He (God) is the only reality and everything else that appears is illusory. There is no reality save and except Him"²¹². He pure bliss, self differentiated and the ground of all life, infinite in nature and attributes, omniscient, omnipotent, creator, destroyer, sustainer of all and the only Lord of the universe.
- B) Guru (spiritual guide):** It is the second fundamental element of the *Neo-Vaisnavism* of Sankaradeva. He is the initiator of the *Bhaktas* (devotees) to the faith, will guide them for all religious activities, and thus will act as bridge between God and *Bhaktas*. In the Neo-Vaisnavism, initiation of a *Bhaktas* through a Guru to the faith is a pre-condition to be a follower of the faith.
- C) Sarana:** This is another element of the *Neo-Vaisnavism* of Sankaradeva. The Sarana ceremony is the formal spiritual initiation of the proselyte, who totally surrendered to the God through the guru, the spiritual guide and a tax (*Guru-kar*) is paid. The mantra that is given during the Sarana ceremony to the Convert is "শরণং মে জগন্নাথ ত্রীকূঞ্চ পুরুষোত্তম", i.e. Lord Krishna, the best of all *purusha* and lord of the world, is my 'shelter'²¹³.
- D) The Bhakti (Devotion) and fraternity of Bhaktas (devotees):** The *Bhakti* (Devotion) or *Bhaktimarga* (Devotional way) is the one and only way to realise God and in this, *Bhakta* sees the Lord in everything in the world and finds him revealing himself in the form of love²¹⁴. A *Bhakta* must possess the qualities of sympathy, beneficence, forgiveness, softness of heart and complete mastery over his passions. Besides these, Sankaradeva prescribed *Dāsya* (servitude to God) as an important and only way to serve God and also the only way to be a *Bhakta* (devotee). The relations among the *Bhaktas* themselves are based on universal fraternity.

E) Nām: Chanting of the God's name and glories is another element of the Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva. Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva composed a large numbers of *Kirtana-ghosha* and *Nam-ghosh* respectively to praise the God and his glories and are being chanted almost on all occasions.

Sankaradeva and propagation of the Neo-Vaisnavism:

With above-mentioned elements as his basic principles, Sankaradeva launched his *Neo-Vaisnava* movement in the first decade 16th century in general and in Koch Kingdom in about 1546, i.e. from the year of his settlement in Koch Kingdom during the reign of king Naranarayan. Simplistic principles of his faith and its wide democratic and humanistic outlook had a universal appeal to the heterogeneous people of the region and as result all communities including the Koch, the Mech, *Kalita*, *Kayastha*, *Chandal*, *Garo*, Ahom, Bhutiya, Miri, the Brahmin and even Muslims embraced Sankaradeva's faith. For example, Gobinda, a Garo tribe; Paramananda, a Miri (Mishing) tribe; Narahari, an Ahom man; Jayarama, a Bhutiya man; Narottam, a Naga tribe; Chandsai, a Muslim – all were the disciples of Sankaradeva²¹⁵. Among his other disciples from lower castes of Hindu Pantheon, mention may be made of the Madhava, Hira by caste of Jayanti Village and Srirama and Bhabora Das, who were of Kaibarta and Baniya castes respectively²¹⁶. All these heterogeneous and peripheral or so called untouchables, backward classes and tribes, who were during Sankaradeva's time either outside of Hindu fold or lower castes of Hindu fold taken into the faith of Sankaradeva²¹⁷. Besides these, many people from upper stratum of the Hinduism or converted to the Hinduism, including members of royal families, Kayasthas, Brahmins, merchants etc. accepted the new faith of Sankaradeva. Thus for example, Chilarai²¹⁸, the brother and general of king Naranarayan, Kamalapriya, the wife of Chilarai²¹⁹, Bhavananda²²⁰, a big merchants (renamed as Narayana Thakur by Sankaradeva), most of the Kayasthas (including Bhuyans) and the Brahmins including Damodaradeva and Harideva –all were disciples of Sankaradeva and references of which had already made in various places. In spite of the challenge from the orthodox Brahmins and in their provocation, from royal courts of both the Koches and the Ahoms in early stages, Sankaradeva finally was able to subdue all challenges and able to reach to

the heart of the all communities of the region and made his faith a popular religion of the region²²¹.

King Naranarayan, Sankaradeva and Neo-Vaisnavism:

Sankaradeva migrated to the Koch kingdom from the Ahom kingdom in about 1546 due to Brahmanical opposition and to avoid the persecution of the Ahom royal court, he spent the rest of his life within the Koch Kingdom under King Naranarayan. Here, in the early stage, he started preaching his faith comparatively in peace and made his 2nd pilgrimage in about 1550. However, within few years, here too, he had to face the challenges from the orthodox Brahmins and their provocation, from king Naranarayan. King Naranarayan, being a staunch Sakta and a devoted votary of the goddess and highly incensed by the Brahmins, immediately sent some police men to arrest Sankaradeva. However, Chilarai, the general of the Koch army and brother of Naranarayana, who in the meanwhile, had converted to the Neo-Vaisnavism, interfered into the matter. Sankaradeva ultimately was able to win the heart of King Naranarayan. Highly impressed and pleased by the saint's deep knowledge, appearance and saintly character, the king offered him great seat of honour. He appointed him as the 'Gamatha' or Viceroy of the Patbausi and its neighbouring places²²², where the saint, lived for about 30 months, visiting the royal court daily and giving discourse on the Neo-Vaisnava faith. King Naranarayan became a friend of the saint, granted lands to establish a Satra at Bheladanga, (later known as Madhupur Satra) near the Koch capital²²³, issued a royal order permitting the free propagation of his faith among the subjects of the kingdom²²⁴ and thus established him as a great religious preacher and erudite scholar in the court. Besides these, King Naranarayan and Chilarai themselves encouraged construction of large number of Satras (monastery) and Namgharas (prayer halls) in various places within the Kingdom²²⁵. Even, during his stay at Kochbehar, being impressed both by majestic personality of Sankaradeva and by the efficacy of the tenets of the Neo-Vaisnavism, Naranarayan wanted to accept initiation from Sankaradeva, which the latter declined on the ground that he could not initiate the king into his religion, as the king was obliged to be polytheist²²⁶.

Thus, the religion of Sankaradeva prospered well under the enlightened patronage of king Naranarayan and his brother Chilarai, and his followers felt completely secure in their movements and the Neo-Vaisnava order thrived vigorously²²⁷. In such a situation, people from all castes and communities became converts to the new faith and within a short time; Neo-Vaisnavism became the religion of the people of in the Koch kingdom²²⁸. Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva did not remain only a religious movement in region; it marked a revolutionary impact on the society, culture and all spheres of life and brought about a change in the very outlook about life and the world. Dr. B. Kakati rightly observed, "A new gospel requires a new bible. And Sankara Deva gave his gospel in songs, dramas, stories and devotional exhortations. He inspired his followers and associates to popularise the literature of devotion. He led the way in acting in dramatic performances and singing in devotional congregations. He was in the full blaze of the day in all his activities, the mystic haze belonging only to the life of his spirit"^{228A}.

Direct Disciples of Sankaradeva and Neo-Vaisnavite Movements:

Sankaradeva, in his lifetime had initiated large number men to his faith from different castes and creeds and among them; some were so devoted to the faith that they greatly helped the spreading of the faith during the lifetime of Sankaradeva as associates. They took the full responsibility after the death of their Master in 1568. After the death of Sankaradeva, dissention arose among his disciples and as a result, different sub-sects arose which is discussed later. Before that, short biographical sketches of some important disciple-cum-preachers, who marked their achievements during our period of study, need to be highlighted:

Madhavadeva (1489-1596), was the most illustrious disciple of Sankaradeva and saint of the period, who was born in 1489 at a village near Narayanpur, in an orthodox Sakta Bhuyan family. It is stated that influenced by of his brother-in-law Gayapani who had already converted to the Neo-Vaisnavite faith, Madhavadeva intended to meet Sankaradeva to discuss religious matters. After a great conversation (arguments and counter arguments) between the two scholars after which, Madhavadeva realised the purity and sublimity of the faith of Sankaradeva and requested Sankaradeva to accept him as disciple and to show him the path of

supreme realization²²⁹. Soon he became a great disciple of the Master in about 1522AD²³⁰, and a strongest adherent of the faith. He started staying in the house of Ramadasa, near Sankaradeva's Satras and attended daily ceremonials of the Satras²³¹ and from then he became Master's shadow, his most accomplished and faithful follower. He first made his house at Baradi, and then moved Ganak-kuchi near Patbausi, the main Satra of Sankaradeva²³².

The conversion of Madhavadeva was a great impetus to the spreading of the Neo-Vaisnavite movement in the region for in him were the force of intellect and the strength of character imperative for a great social reformer and bulwark of religion. With his initiation, Madhavadeva too changed abode with his Master from various places, which we have already mentioned earlier. At the time of the death of Sankaradeva in 1568, he selected Madhavadeva as his successor and directed his sons and others that his spiritual power and energy would develop in Madhavadeva²³³. Madhavadeva, according to the tradition, outlived his master by 28 years till about 1596 AD. During these 28 years, he, as the head of the neo-Vaisnavism mostly stayed at Ganak-kuchi and Sunaridiya Satras close to principal Satra, Patbausi (Barpeta), and carried on the proselytising activities as well as the cultural tradition initiated by his Master and literary activities. But in the very first year of pontifical period, a section of Neo-Vaisnavas, headed by Damodaradeva, a Brahmin disciple of Sankaradeva, declined Madhavadeva's leadership and seeded the schism of the faith which is discussed later. In the meanwhile, the Koch kingdom got divided and Raghudeva, the son of Chilarai became the king of the eastern Koch Kingdom (Koch Hajo), with whom Madhavadeva came into conflict on the ground that he was preaching against the worship of the goddess Kamakhya, the guardian deity of the Koch Kings²³⁴. As a result, he was arrested and brought to Bijoy nagara, the capital Raghudeva as captive but ultimately the allegation proved baseless and the Saint was released with due respect. But he was not allowed to live at Barpeta and was directed to live at Hajo, near the Haragriva Madhava Temple²³⁵. After staying few months at Hajo, he realised the uncongenial situation for him and decided to leave the place owing to the hostile attitude of the king as well as a section of the Brahmins and therefore migrated to Koch Behar, the capital of western Koch Kingdom, then ruled by Lakshminarayan, the son of Naranarayan.

King Lakshminarayan reverentially received him and some of his disciples and made arrangement of their settlement at Bheladuar, a place near the capital²³⁶. In due course of time, with the king's munificence, a Satra was established at Bheladuar and king's mother, nurses, wives, sons, daughters and others high officials embraced the Neo-Vaisnavism from Madhavadeva²³⁷. It is also recorded that king Lakshminarayan passed orders saying "Let all my subjects from this day, follow the path shown by Madhavadeva. I have come to know the purity of the faith of Madhavadeva, and therefore, let all my subjects cast off their existing faiths and beliefs so long prevalent in my kingdom"²³⁸. As a result, the Koches and Meches gave up their old rites and customs with the acquisition of the new faith²³⁹. Madhavadeva stayed at Bheladuar Satra (Madhupur satra) in Koch Behar and died here in the year 1596 AD.

Madhavadeva remained a celibate throughout his life and initiated a new order called Kewaliya (the life-celibates)²⁴⁰. He is considered as the real founder of the Satra institution of the faith; systematised it by introducing daily prayer and disciplined monastic code and popularised it among the common masses. Besides systemisation, he was largely responsible for its spread in all direction for which he sent his faithful followers with the mission of propagation to the different regions of the north-east India. His missionary zeal and organising capacity firmly planted the root of the new faith as a faith of common masses the region. Daityari rightly said that "Sankara only revealed (the secret of) Bhakti, the religion of love; it is Madhava, who made it public"²⁴¹.

Moreover, he marked his great achievements in the fields of literature, music and rendering of religious scriptures like his master. He composed several Ankiya Nats (one act plays) and Bargitas (noble songs), all depicting the childish pranks of Krishna. At the direction of Guru, he rendered into vernacular verse the Bv'hakti-Ratnavali of Vishnupuri Sanyasi²⁴². Nevertheless, most crowning literary work of Madhavadeva is 'Nama-ghosh', consists of one thousand devotional verses for which it is also called Hajari-ghosh²⁴³. It is considered as magnum opus of Neo-Vaisnavite hymnic rapture and occupies a unique place in neo-Vaisnava philosophy of North-East India²⁴⁴.

Damodaradeva (1488-1598) was born in Brahmin family, at a village named Nilachal, near Sankaradeva's native place, Bardowa, in present *Nowgong* district where he lived in close friendship with the family of Sankaradeva. Although Dr. S. N. Sharma²⁴⁵ with reference from *Vamsigopaladevar Charita* of Ramananda Dvija, opines that Damodaradeva initiated into the mystery of the Bhakti cult by one Vasudeva Vipra of Orissa and even supported by *Buranji-Vivekaratna*²⁴⁶ of Maniram Barbhandar Barua. However, this view is not confirmed by contemporary happenings and others sources. The biographies of Sankaradeva unanimously assert that Damodaradeva was the disciple of the former. According to Gobindadasa, Damodara calls Sankaradeva his direct preceptor²⁴⁷. According to Daityari, Ramarama, a Brahmin Bhakta of Sankaradeva²⁴⁸, initiated Damodaradeva to the faith. Ramananda Dvija more elaborately records that Damodaradeva got the formal initiation (*saraṇa*) from Ramarama, while Sankaradeva administered to him the formal sermon or instruction (*upadesha or guru-vakya*)²⁴⁹. Even biographies of Damodaradeva had indirectly acknowledged the indebtedness of Damodaradeva to Sankaradeva. *Damodara-Charita* of Nilakantha say's "Sankara, Madhava and Damodara are identical; there is no distinction between them"²⁵⁰. Damodaradeva turned a proselytiser at behest of Sankaradeva, which is proved by the following command of Sankaradeva: "You please start initiating Brahmins, nobles and kings without any discriminate". In reply, Damodaradeva says, "You are burdening me with a noble responsibility when your own self is present"²⁵¹. Damodaradeva expected to be the successor of Sankaradeva, which can only demand a direct disciple and he duly celebrated the death anniversary of Sankaradeva as his Guru. Ramaraya, another biographer of Damodaradeva narrates that Sankaradeva, on one occasion, took Madhavadeva and Damodaradeva to a secluded place where he revealed religious secrets to Madhava in the presence of Damodaradeva, which is generally considered as internal matter of the faith²⁵².

From the above facts, it can safely be concluded that Damodaradeva might not be the direct disciple (*Mantra Sishya*) of Sankaradeva. He however, no doubt, inspired and helped Damodaradeva to undertake the arduous life of a religious preacher and reformer like an active preceptor (*Karma-guru*) for which Damodaradeva marked his important contribution to the propagation and spread of Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva during the lifetime of Sankaradeva as well as after his death.

During the time of Naranarayan's first Ahom invasion and shifting of Sankaradeva from Dhuwahat to Barpeta in about 1546, Damodaradeva with some relatives, too, followed him and settled at Patbausi, near Sankaradeva's Satra at Barpeta, where he was attracted towards the faith of Sankaradeva for its musical charm²⁵³. From here he first received the great impetus from Sankaradeva for adopting the life of a proselytiser and within a short time he could attract a band of faithful followers, mainly from the Brahmins and began to take active part in propagation and spread of *Neo-Vaisnavism*. With the conversion of the learned Brahmins under the guidance of Damodaradeva, the *Neo-Vaisnavism* movement gained a status and superiority over other faiths and came to command the admiration and reverence of kings and nobles, which ultimately lead towards the growth and popularity of the faith among the masses.

Damodaradeva was not a poet and great scholar of writings like Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. However, as a religious organizer and propagator, he could be classed with them. After the death of Sankaradeva, dissension arose between Damodaradeva and Madhavadeva as a result of which he started a new sub-sect claiming complete independence of the sect founded by Sankaradeva and came to be known as after his own name *Damodariya* sect.

After the division of the Koch kingdom in about 1581, his Satra in Patbausi fell within the kingdom of Raghudeva, where he peacefully conduct religious activities. However, during the reign of his son and successor Parikhshitnarayan, the king for upholding a religion propounded by a Sudra saint persecuted Damodaradeva and for this reason, he had to leave his native place and had to shift to Koch Behar (the capital of the western Koch Kingdom) where he died in about 1598.

Harideva (1493-1568) was another Brahmin follower of Sankaradeva, who was born at Narayanpur, and attained a high spiritual eminence following puritanical proclivities of Sankaradeva. He is considered as one of the four *dharmacharyas* appointed by Sankaradeva and was a great follower of him²⁵⁴.

From his native place at Narayanpur, he migrated to Kamarupa, wandered places like Hajo, Malipara and Dantapur and finally settled at *Maneri* or *Maniyari* near Patbausi Satra of Sankaradeva. He used to visit the Satra daily. He died in the year 1568, the year in which Sankaradeva is also said to have died. After his death, his followers are said to have established independent '*Brahma Samhati*' sect accepting Brahmanical rituals along with the devotional practices of Neo-Vaisnavism, which had close affinity

with the fundamental teachings and practices of *Damodariya* sect. He, for the first time nominated his daughter Bhubaneswari for the headship of his Satra at *Maneri* or *Maniyari*, which is considered, as one of the extra ordinary and revolutionary event in the faith.

Narayana Dasa or Thakur Ata, another prominent disciple of Sankaradeva and a colleague of Madhavadeva was born in 1495 at a place called *Malau* or *Malowa*, on the northern bank of Brahmaputra in Kamarupa district, marked his contribution in propagation of the faith. His original name was *Bhavananda* and was a talented merchant, who joined Sankaradeva. Sankaradeva very impressed by his firmness of mind and talent, re-named him as Narayana Dasa or Thakur Ata. It is said that during a trade journey Narayan Thakur met Bhaskara Dvija, a disciple of Sankaradeva, who influenced him very much and as a result, he approached the master for initiation. Then he became very active in the faith and induced many men to come and accept the faith including Madhava of Jayanti village, Gobinda Garamali (a police officer and worshipper of Devi), Balarama (a Oja pali singer), and many others²⁵⁵. Narayan Thakur first settled at *Manthai*, a place near Patbausi Satra to enable him to attend daily ceremonials of the Satra and then he finally built his house at Janiya and tried his best to bring people from the surrounding villages to the faith. It is also said that he had extraordinary power, by which he and Gokulchandra were able to free themselves from the guards of king Naranarayan, which we have already mentioned. At the time of migration of Madhavadeva to Koch Behar, he wanted to accompany him there, but the former did not agree to take Narayana with him as the monks and lay disciples of Kamarupa would constantly be in need of a guide and support²⁵⁶. Therefore, he stayed at his home at Janiya and died at a very old age there leaving four sons- Paramananda, Jagadananda, Sivananda and Ramananda²⁵⁷.

Besides these fours, Sankaradeva had galaxy of eminent disciple, occasional references of which made at different places of the foregoing pages. He also produced in an unbroken stream a galaxy of eminent saints, poets, preachers, philosophers and leaders, who marked their significant achievements in the fields of religion, literature, religion and philosophy. They also brought into juxtaposition different races, castes tribes who were in various stages of cultures and thus infused newness and fullness to the life and thought of the people of the region. Thus, they will occupy an honoured position among the saints of India²⁵⁸.

Neo-Vaisnavism and Satra Institutions:

The most important institution, through which Sankaradeva and his followers propagated, stabilized, extended and above all institutionalised the Neo-Vaisnavism, is known as 'Satra'. The term 'Satra' in the Sanskrita texts has been used in two senses, firstly, in the sense of a sacrifice with recitation, listening and explanation of the entire the *Bhagavata Purana* and secondly, in the sense of an alms-house. In the *Satapatha Brahmana*, Purusha Narayana is said to have performed a *Pancharatna Satra* as a means of obtaining superiority over all beings and becoming all beings²⁵⁹. In the same way, in the beginning of the *Bhagavata Purana*, the term *Satra* has been used in the sense of an assembly of sages gathered together in the forest of *Nimasha* for the sacrificial purpose and *Suta-Ugrasvara* is said to have recited and explained the entire the *Bhagavata Purana* to the assembled sages²⁶⁰. On the other hand, later Sanskrita texts and inscriptions used the term in the sense of alms-house, or a hall of charity²⁶¹. However, it is most probable that Sankaradeva has utilized the part of reciting and listening of the story of *Suta-Ugrasvara* of the *Bhagavata Purana*, in his Neo-Vaisnava movement, who did the same thing to his followers, who clustered around him to listen to his religious discourses. He reminds the listeners of the part played by *Suta-Ugrasvara* in the assembly of holy sages in the forest of *Nimasha* and that easily led the people to believe that a *Satra* and a holy association where the *Bhagavata* used to be discussed were identical. Under this impression, the followers of *Neo-Vaisnavite* faith began to term as assembly where the *Bhagavata Purana* used to be recited and explained as a *Satra*²⁶². Etymologically *Satra* means 'an association or a sitting (V sad+tra) or an instrument which helps to liberate the noble (sat +v trai) which must have supplied additional weight to form the whole notion of *Sattra*', which changed to *Satra* in *Neo-Vaisnavism* of the whole northeast India²⁶³. However, the definition of *Satra* as given by Bhattadeva, a prominent religious teacher of 16th century, in his '*Sarana Mallika*', may be cited in this connection :

***"Yatracaranti saddharman kevala Bhagavata-priyah I
Navadha bhagavadbhakti pratyaham yatra vartate II
Tat-sattram uttamam khetram vaisnava-sura-vanditam I***

***Tatrstha vaisnavah sarve Harinama parayanah*²⁶⁴. II**

(That supreme place adored by gods and Vaisnavas, where ardent devotees perform place adored by gods and Vaisnavas, where ardent devotees perform duties pleasing to God and where nine fold Bhakti daily prevails, is called *Satra*: Vaisnavas residing there are naturally prone to Harinama)

Satra as an institution resembles a certain context, i.e., the Buddhist Matha or Monastery of early and medieval period. However, M. Neog²⁶⁵ opines that the influence of two other religious institutions more than Buddhist matha, seem to have gone deep into the origin of *Neo-Vaisnavite Satras*. These are the Jagannath temple at Puri being the chief among them and the residential institutions of various monastic faiths of India, chiefly those of the schools of Sankaracharya and Ramananda. Nevertheless, it is fact that the *Satra* institution played a vital role in the propagation and institutionalisation of *Neo-Vaisnavite* movement and became an integrated part of it.

Constituent parts of a Satra:

Sankaradeva himself first introduced the structure of the *Satra* institution, at least in the primary stage. According to the biographies of Sankaradeva, the reformer finding his home insufficient for the propagation of the faith, shifted a few hundred yards from his ancestral village to an open field, where his father used to cultivate mustered seeds. Here he constructed a *Satra-griha* including *Namghar*, a *Manikuta* and *Chai-hati*, which till to-day form the constituent elements of a *Satra*²⁶⁶. However, an ideal *Neo - Vaisnavite Satra* proper consists of a square enclosure wall, made of bamboo and wood, varying according to its strength and having main four parts. They are as follows²⁶⁷.

- 1) ***Karapat or Batchara:*** The entrances (generally four) or gateways leading to the interior of a *Satra* are usually marked by a small open house called *Karapat* or *Batchara*. It work as gatehouse, the visitors are first received here, and then they are escorted to the interior of the *Satra*.
- 2) ***Namghar or Kirtanghar:*** The central assembly hall of a *Satra* is called *Namghar* or *Kirtanghar* and is considered as the centre of the main activities of a *Satra*. It is a large open hall for holding prayers, religious meetings and social gatherings. The

existence of *Namghar* or *Kirtanghar* is not confined to the *Satras* alone, but it is a common feature of the all villages of the region.

3) *Manikut* or *Bhaj-ghar*: The central temple, the actual shrine in which is placed the *Sinhasana* or *Thapana*, which contain the main object of worship, generally a sacred scripture, called '*Manikut*' or '*Bhaj-ghar*'. It is a separate house usually a bit higher but smaller in dimension and attached to the *Namghar* or *Kirtanghar* adjoining the eastern end.

4) *Hati*: Centering round the '*Manikut*' or '*Bhaj-ghar*' and *Namghar* or *Kirtanghar*, the four rows of huts or long houses existed as the living place of the clerical devotees called *Hati*. Considering its numbers i.e. four, it is popularly known as *Chari-hati*. In general, it is the living area of the *Satra*. To each devotee, one hut consisting of one or more rooms is allotted according to his status and need. The head of the *Satra* i.e. *Adhikar* or *Satriya* and his assistants heads, *Deka-Adhikar*, generally live in the eastern *Hati* with the principal devotee. However, in non-monastic *Satra*, the *Chari-hati* system is rarely found, where only other three parts are found.

Development of the Satra institution:

However, in the initial stage of the *Neo-Vaisnavite* movement of Sankaradeva, the term *Satra* did not acquire a technical meaning to mean a particular systematized and well-organised religious institution. It simply meant an assembly of holy men where recitation of the *Bhagavata-Purana* was regularly held. According to Ananta Kandali, a contemporary of Sankaradeva, in course of his own introduction in his translation of the *Bhagavata* (*X Skanda*) speaks of his father founding a *Satra* at Hajo, where he constantly recited the *Bhagavata*, most probably a religious sitting, without proper setup of full-fledged *Satra* of succeeding period²⁶⁸. Sankaradeva is said to have established his first *Satra* or *Satra-griha* at Bardowa, his birthplace, which ultimately became a holy place (*Than*) for the *Vaisnavite* faith. According to Bhushan Dvija, Sankaradeva used the term '*Satre-griha*' in the sense of a house, where religious functions and discussions took place and which was established immediately after his return from 1st pilgrimage²⁶⁹. Thus, it is fact that that the *Satra* institution, in a well-organised form with four parts of a *Vaisnavite* monastery on permanent nature with different paraphernalia of elaborate religious institution developed after Sankaradeva. This is proved by the facts that Madhavadeva, who succeeded Sankaradeva as the head of the sect did not

become the head of any *Satra* left by Sankaradeva and had there been any such a system, Madhavadeva would not have resided with his brother-in-law, Ramadasa who lived at a distance of few miles from Sankaradeva's residence²⁷⁰. Thus, it is possible that insecurity and temporary nature of his stay at different places prevented Sankaradeva from organizing the infant institution on a permanent and systematic basis. However, later on *Satras* grew up at almost all places where Sankaradeva stayed during his movements from one place to another throughout his life.

Madhavadeva is regarded as the real founder of the *Satra* institutions, for he systematized and organised it on firmer footing and introduced a very rigorous and disciplined monastic codes including '*Chaidya-prasanga*' (fourteen services) and daily prayer services. He organised and reconstructed the *Barpeta Satra*, which henceforth became not only a centre of the neo-Vaisnavite activities, but also served as a model institution of that.

Damodaradeva as a head of the Brahmanical sub-sect after the death of Sankaradeva also made great contribution to the growth of the *Satra* institution and seems to be more striking. Probably it was he, who for the first time introduced the system of paying religious tithe (*dharmar kar*) by disciples to their respective *Satras*²⁷¹. It helped to improve the financial condition of the *Satras*. From the account given by Ramaraya, one of the biographers of Damodaradeva, of the *Satra* of Damodaradeva at Koch Behar, it is evident that it practically resembles a monastic *Satra* of the present day. From this, it can be inferred that he had hands in giving a definite shape to the structural pattern of the *Satra* institution²⁷². Ramacharana Thakura also indirectly admitted the role of Damodaradeva in the structural growth of the *Satra* institution. He stated that Narayan Thakur once advised Madhavadeva to establish a *Satra* on the lines of Damodaradeva's *Satra* at Patbausi, and accordingly he reorganized and reconstructed the *Satra* of Barpeta, the reference of which we have already made²⁷³.

Thus, both Madhavadeva and Damodaradeva gave a definite shape and systematized pattern to the *Satra* institution and as a result, a large number of *Satras* established in different parts of the country and their number gradually increased. S. N. Sharma elaborately made an approximate list of the *Satras* of the northeast India, mentioning names of *Satras*, founders, the times of foundation and location the *Satras*²⁷⁴. From this vast list, we rearranged the following list, which included in our period of Study:

S/L No.	Names Satras	Founders	Approx Dates	Location
1.	Bahari.	Harideva	1560-1580	Kamarupa
2.	Maneri.	Harideva	1560-1580	Kamarupa
3.	Parena	Jagannathadeva	1580-1600	Kamarupa
4.	Srijangram	Raghunath	1575-1600	Goalpara
5.	Baradi	Narayana Thakur	1580-1600	Kamarupa
6.	Ganak-Kuchi	Madhavadeva	1550-1575	Kamarupa
7.	Satrasal	Ramaraya	1550-1575	Goalpara
8.	Sundariya	Ramacharana-Thakur	1575-1600	Kamarupa
9.	Barpeta	Madhavadeva	1570-1590	Kamarupa
10.	Barbari	Narayana Thakur	1580-1600	Darrang & Lakhimpur

However, it seems to us that it is an incomplete list. The *Bhitauadhap Satra*, which later on came to be known as *Vaikunthapura Satra*, *Madhupur Satra* of Sankaradeva, *Kakatkuta* and *Vela Satras* of Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva, *Fulbari Satra* of Madhavdeva and some others are not listed²⁷⁵. Moreover, the direct encouragement and patronage of king Naranarayan, Chilarai, and Laxminarayan gave impetus to the

establishment of a large number of *Satras* within the Kingdom, references of which mentioned in many places earlier²⁷⁶.

Thus, *Satra* institution originated as a *Neo-Vaisnavite* religious establishment to educate the disciples in the religious doctrine, to create an atmosphere where single-minded devotion to God based on a fellowship of devotees under the guidance of a Guru could be achieved, to initiate aspirants to *Neo-Vaisnavism* and to look after the administration of the establishment and others. However, within a short period, it became the epicenter of the all types of socio-cultural activities, spiritual and other leanings, religious activities and dramatic performances and brought about significant changes in all spheres life. As institutions having an unmatched symbolic value and commanding deepest of reverence from all sections of the people of Assam, the role of *Satras* becomes immensely significant in terms of reaching out to the people. D. Nath opines, "The *Satras* were the centres of learning and education and guardians of religion and morality. Regular Nama-Kirtana, recitation from religious texts, learned discussions, performance of drama on religious themes as well as of classical dance music and skill in some technical arts and crafts made the monastic life an ideal way of living"²⁷⁷.

One component of the *Satra* institution i.e. the *Kirtanghar* or the *Nāmghar*, needs to be emphasised in this regard which existed not only in all the *Satras* but also in every village of the region. It may be termed as intra-satra (situated in side of a satra campus) and extra-satra (situated in almost all villages out side of a satra campus). The *Kirtanghar* or the *Nāmghar* became an integral part of every Hindu village in lower Assam over time. The Village *Kirtanghar* or *Nāmghars* operate and are managed on democratic principles. The *Kirtanghar* or *Nāmghars* since the time of Sankaradeva have been so designed and constructed that people of all races and tribes living in this part of the country could easily enter them and take part in congregational prayers and the like. Thus, significantly, the *Kirtanghar* or *Nāmghar* is built without walls or if at all, only with half walls with two rows of pillars with a thatched or tin roof. This has a great deal of symbolic value in terms of promotion of the ideal of equality. An open wall-less *Nāmghar* underscores the point that its doors are open to everyone and that it is an

inclusive institution embracing all people without making any discrimination among them along such artificial lines as caste, creed, religion, tribe or language.

The establishment of the village *Kirtanghar* or *Nāmghar* came about with the idea of popularizing the Neo-Vaisnavite faith to the masses. As a result, every village came under the religious influence of one *Satra* or the other and its influence even penetrated gradually into the neighbouring tribal areas. It also gave the region a religious forum and rich literature; popularised art of classical music and dance and socio-cultural activities of the community feeling. Thus, D. Nath writes "The community prayer held in the *Nāmghars*, frequent recitations and interpretations of religious texts as well as performance of Bhawanas disseminated among the villagers spiritual and moral education. The *Nāmghar* therefore, was a very useful institution teaching the villagers good conduct, ethics, Morales, and even personal hygiene. Soon they became the village court trying all cases –civil and criminal"²⁷⁸.

Thus, *Neo-Vaisnavite* Satras of north-east India, as a whole, propagated, stabilized and systematized the faith and kept watchful eye upon the moral conduct and other socio-cultural-educational aspects. Like the Christian church of medieval Europe, Neo-Vaisnavite Satras of the region had been keeping the candle of learning and knowledge burning from the 16th century until the early part of the last century.

Schism of the faith at the death of Sankaradeva:

In the lifetime of Sankaradeva, there was no rift amongst his followers. However, immediately after his death dissension arose between his two principal followers and colleagues, Madhavadeva and Damodaradeva. About the main causes that led to the dissension, there are two versions of opinion. According to one version, before his death, Sankaradeva nominated Madhavadeva, as the head of his faith, which was not liked by his another disciple Damodaradeva²⁷⁹. Therefore, Damodaradeva, being one of the principal followers of the Brahmin caste, naturally expected to succeed Sankaradeva to the pontifical position but when his expectation was belied by the nomination of Madhavadeva, another principal Kayastha follower of Sankaradeva, he became angry and humiliated and found it difficult to accept Madhavadeva, a colleague, as his superior. As a result, Damodaradeva founded a separate sub-sect

with his Brahmins followers which came to be known after his own name as Damodariya sect at the early stage and finally came to be popularly known as the 'Brahma-Samhati' or 'Brahma Sampradaya'²⁸⁰.

According to another version, the dissension on succession ground seems to be very trifling and silly one. The main cause was on theological ground. According to S. N. Sharma, Damodaradeva did certain modification to accommodate *Smartta* rituals in the *Neo-Vaisnavism* of Sankaradeva and even accepted in his fold a few persons who were expelled from the faith by Madhavadeva, which led to the dissension²⁸¹. He did not attend the general congregation when the annual death rites of the master were to be solemnized²⁸². Under these situations, when Madhavadeva called for an explanation, Damodaradeva denied the authority of Sankaradeva and his '*Bhakti-ratnakara*', and declared the '*Bhagavata*' more authoritative than Sankaradeva and '*Bhakti-ratnakara*' and even refused himself as a member of the faith of Sankaradeva²⁸³. Upon this unpleasant reply, Madhavadeva severed connection with Damodaradeva and declared a division between himself and Damodaradeva²⁸⁴. Thus, thereafter the main branch under Madhavadeva came to known as '*Mahapurusiya*' sect and the other branch under Damodaradeva came to known as '*Damodariya* sect'.

From the above two versions of opinion, it seems to us that the division was a combined result of the both. The question of succession, personal egos, jealousies and theological differences etc. led to the schism of the *Neo-Vaisnavism*.

There are some differences and similarities between the two sects. In doctrinal matters, there seems to be not much difference between the two sects. Both the sects extolled the single-minded devotion to *Krishna* or His other forms. In social intercourse, there is no distinction between the two sects. They even join in all religious ceremonies connected with the *Satras* and *Kirtanaghars* or *Namghars* (both intra-*Satra* and extra-*Satra*). The only point where they differ in doctrinal matters is that the *Damodariya* sect, alongside the devotional process of worshipping the *Bhakti* cult, introduced idol worship of *Krishna* or others, worship of other gods and goddesses and observances of Vedic and Brahmanical rites²⁸⁵. On the other hand, the '*Mahapurusiya*' are only worshiper of the *Bhakti* cult in form of an object (generally a holy book of the *Bhakti* cult) and remained stern against idol worship of *Krishna* or others, worship of other gods

and goddesses and observances of Vedic and Brahmanical rites²⁸⁶. In spiritual matters, again, we find some differences. H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy has written these differences in the following way: "... in Damodariya sect, a Brahmin alone can become the head of the Satra, and he alone has the authority of conferring ordination on desiring entrants.againonly Brahmanas are entitled to recite the full mystic formula of Sankaradeva while the Sudras are allowed to recite it only in a curtailed form. But such a system does not exist in *Mahapurusiya* sect"²⁸⁷.

However, we have no information about any direct confrontation and face-to-face conflict between the '*Mahapurusiya*' and the *Damodariya* sects, at least during our period of study. There were no existence of rivalry between them and conversion between the two sects was from one sect to the other is not prohibited. Both of them even worked together. For example, Madhavadeva sent Gopaldeva or Vanshigopal, to Damodaradeva for ordination (*Sarana*) and after that he himself gave spiritual light (*tattva*) to him²⁸⁸. Both of them in conjunction deputed him (Gopaldeva or Vanshigopal) to upper Assam for spreading the message of *Bhakti*²⁸⁹.

Besides, the '*Mahapurusiya*' and the '*Damodariya*' sects, according to *Harideva-Charita* of Dhaneswar and Baneswar Dvija, Harideva, another Brahmin disciple of Sankaradeva, also said to have founded an independent sect of his own called '*Harideviya* sect'²⁹⁰. In doctrinal matters, it swings more towards Damodaradeva than Sankaradeva. Although, all '*Charita- puthis*' of Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and Damodaradeva are completely silent about the sect.

In succeeding period, schism in the Neo-Vaisnavism widened and consequently several sub-sects known as *Samhatis* or *Sampradayas* grew up²⁹¹.

In the light of the preceding discussions, it can be concluded that the *Neo-Vaisnavite* movement initiated by Sankaradeva and cultivated institutionalized by himself and his able successors through the Satra institution, marked a new era not only in the religious format with humanistic philosophy and democratic outlook, but also marked renaissance in the socio- cultural pattern of the region. It contributed immensely to the process of socialization and cultural homogenization, which led to the building of a vibrant civil society, based on peace, goodwill, mutual respect, social justice, self-help and equality. In this connection, the opinion of B. K. Barua is noteworthy. According to

him Sankaradeva through his faith, "tried to bring about a synthesis in his creed, by leaving undisturbed, and where possible, by incorporating, some social and cultural traits of the tribal people, such as, the community life, congregational gathering and eating of fish, flesh, art forms, music and dance, which were most suited to the genius of the of the Assamese people comprised of diverse racial elements"²⁹². It also gave a tremendous impetus to the development of languages, literature, in various forms, art, music and vernacular writings. In this connection, it should be mentioned here that all these activities mostly cultivated under the direct patronage of the early Koch kings. It should be specially mentioned here that Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and Damodaradeva – all of them in the later part of their lives peacefully lived within Koch kingdom and enjoyed the patronages of the early Koch kings. King Naranarayan issued a royal order permitting the free propagation of his faith among the subjects of the kingdom²⁹³. Early Koch kings with a few exceptions liberally helped in propagation of the faith and construction of many *Satras* at royal cost and gave asylum to the reformers of the faith expelled from eastern Assam. Thus, the *Neo-Vaisnavism*, under the royal patronages of the Koches emerged as the prime religion of the masses of the kingdom.

However, according to P. K. Bhattacharyya²⁹⁴, in spite of royal patronage and royal family taking refuge to *Neo-Vaisnavism*, which also aimed at the establishment of a classless and casteless society on democratic and humanistic ground, the *Neo-Vaisnavism* could not percolate deep into the heart of the people at large within the Kingdom. In spite of great reverence of the people towards their kings and *Neo-Vaisnavism* of Sankaradeva, the people of the region could not shake off their time-honoured devotion to Lord Siva and Shakti. He tried to prove this fact by the existence of large number of temples, which continued to be erected until the later period by the kings and ultimately came to the conclusion that the *Neo-Vaisnavism* could not become the prime religion of the people of the region.

From the above discussions, it seems to us that, King Naranarayan was very liberal in religious believe and outlook, for which he patronize all (both tribal and Brahmanical) religions of the region. As a Staunch *Sakta*, king Naranarayan, constructed *Kamakhya* temple at Nilachal hill and others and introduced a combined ritual of tribal, Brahmanical and Tantric rituals to worship the deity. As a Staunch *Saiva*, he patronized to construct *Baneswar Siva temple* at Baneswar, near Koch Behar and

many others and introduced a combined ritual of tribal and Brahmanical rituals to worship the deity in various forms like *Siva*, *Siva Linga* and *Mahakal*. Due to his respect to *Neo-Vaisnavism* and Sankaradeva, he patronized the construction of large numbers *Satras* including *Madhupur Satra* (also know as *Bardowa Satra*), *Barpeta Satra* (*Barpeta*) and many more. It might be due two causes. A) By virtue of his position, a king would have to worship all gods and goddesses, both tribal and Brahmanical, to harmonize relations among the multi-ethnic and multicultural subjects to legitimize his position. On the other hand, B) Due to his tribal origin, he could not completely discard his tribal traditional believe and in the same way, due to Hinduisation, he adopted Brahmanical religious culture, so he assimilated the both from his core of heart. Both the causes synthesized his liberal outlook, following which his followers also became liberal to worship many deities of different faiths.

Notes and References:

1. *Savaparva*, Ch. XXV, v., 1005.
2. *The Kalika purana*, 39. 103-5.
3. M. Neog, '*Religions of the north-East India*', *Munshiram Manoharlal publishers Pvt. Ltd*, Delhi, 1984, p. 3. (Henceforth, M. Neog-RNEI.)
4. Hiuen Tsiang (Yuan Chwang)'s, '*Si-u-ki*', edited by David, Rhyas and Bhushel S. W., 2 vols. London, 1905, reprint, *Munshiram Manoharlal*, Delhi, 1961, pp.186-192 and Watters, *op. cit.*, II, p.186.
5. B. k. Barua, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-65.
6. The ruins of many *Siva* temples have been excavated all over the northeast India. Two ancient *Siva* temples near *Dhanukhana* hill on the north bank of the *Brahmaputra*, belonging to 9th century AD. The ruin of another *Siva* temple of 10th century was excavated in the heart of the town of *Tezpur*. The ruins of *Biswanath Siva* temple at *Biswanath Ghat*, *Tezpur* and that of a small hill called *Deoparvat* or *Deo-ghar-parvat* at *Numalighar* in the *Golaghat* sub-division belong to pre-Ahom period. The *Jalpeswar Siva* temple of *Jalpaiguri* existed as pre Koch *Siva* temple. (See B. K. Barua, *op. cit.* pp.161-65 and M. Neog: *Religions of the north-East India*, p. 3.)

7. The *Guru Charita* of Ramananda Dvija, v., 28, cited in M. Neog op. cit., p.81.
8. The *Katha Guru Charita*, p. 20; Daityari, 27-34. 8a. The *Guru Charita* of Ramananda 841-f.
9. The *Yogini Tantra*, Ch. Vv. 2-22.
10. The DRV, vv. 27-74.
11. The *Rajoupakhyan*, pp., 3-5; *Kamarupa Buranji*, op. cit., pp.10 -11.
12. The basic information of the all sources is almost same but there are differences in the process of description among the sources.
13. *Akbarnama*, op., cit. pp, 1066-68.
14. According to the Ms. *Rajopakhyana*, King Naranarayan rebuilt the Baneswara Siva temple which had a remote antiquity, and named the as 'Gard Sandara'. Prannarayan (1632-1665) had again rebuilt it in the present structure. '*Koch Behar Jelar Pura Kriti*', p.53; The DRV, vv. 219.
15. P. K. Bhattacharyya: *Siva as guardian deity – case studies of the kingdoms of Kamata Cooch Behar and Kamarupa*, in his self edited ' *The kingdom of Kamata Koch Behar in Historical perspective*, University of North Bengal,2000, pp. 82-88.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. The DRV, vv. 324-28.
19. Ibid, vv. 336-37.
20. King Naranarayan and Chilarai constructed the temples like *Bhairav* Nath temple (than) on the *Bhairav* hill in the present district of Goalpara of Assam, the *Baneswar Siva Temple* near Koch Behar, *Chhoto Mahadeva* at *Nakkati Gachh*, *Baro Mahadeva* at *Baro Kodali* (both at Tufanganj, in Koch Behar district) etc., and others all over their kingdom. (See R. K. Barman, op. cit. p.176.)
21. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 81; D. Nath, op. cit. p. 166.
22. The census of India, 1901, Vol. I, Part I, appendix to Ch. VIII, p. 414.
23. *Yogini Tantra*, III, Patal IV, vs., 3-22; B. K. Barua, op. cit., pp. 161-65; D. Nath, op. cit. p.166.
24. *Yogini Tantra*, III, Patal XIX; B. K. Kakati, op. cit., pp. 20-22.
25. M. Neog, (ed), *Studies in the History of Assam*, Jorhat, 1973, p.171; D. Nath, op. cit. p.166.
26. B. K. Barua, op. cit., p. 165.

27. *Yogini Tantra*, chap. XI, v. 36.
28. P. K. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., p. 84.
29. Ibid.
30. C. Eliot: *Hinduism and Buddhism, 'An Historical Sketch'*, reprint, Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003, Delhi. p. XXXVI.
31. Eliot: *Hinduism in Assam*, JRAS. 1920, p.1153.
32. B. K. Barua, op. cit., p. 167.
33. H. K. Barpujari, op. cit., 117 .
34. B. K. Barua, op. cit., p. 167.
35. Ibid.
36. C. Eliot, op. cit. vol. II, p .74.
37. *The Katha Guru Charita*, p. 20.
38. Ibid. p. 27.
39. *Guru-Charita* of Ramananda, 419-f, cited in M. Neog, op. cit., p. 85.
40. D. Nath, op. cit., p.167.
41. B. K. Barua, op. cit., p. 168.
42. Ibid.
43. The DRV, vv., 78, 79 and 97-105.
44. The DRV, vv., 217-18.
45. The DRV, v., 548.
46. B. K. Barua, op. cit., p. 168.
47. N. N. Vasu, op. cit., p103.
48. In the DRV, there are references of land grants to the temples, Brahmins and others but exact amount of grants are not known of the period of Naranarayan. However, in the year 1872 land revenue share of the granted lands was 15% of total revenue. H. N. Choudhury, op. cit., p.544; R. K. Barman, op. cit., p.179 mentioned that lands granted to the Kamakhya temple, Hayagriva Madhava temple and Jalpesh temple was very high roughly 23685 *bighas*, 54300 *bighas* and 44 *jotes* respectively.
49. The DRV, vv. 541&561.
50. *The Kamarupa Buranji*, p. 38.

51. B. K. Kakati, '*The mother Goddess Kamakhya*', Gauhati, 1948, cited in Nitul Kumar Gogoi; *Continuity and Change among the Ahom*, vol. 9 (castes and tribes of India), concept publishing company, Delhi, 2006, p. 2.
52. Cited in M. Neog, *op. cit.*, p.86.
53. *The Kalika Purana*, Chapter. 88.
54. Cited in B. K. Barua, *op. cit.*, p.169.
55. The *Baraganga* inscription (c.553-54AD), of *Mahabhutivarman* (lines 1-2); See M. M. Sharma, '*Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*', Gauhati University, 1978, p.6.
56. B. K. Barua, *op. cit.*, pp.169-70.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *The Kalika Purana*, Ch. 12; also see Nitul Kumar Gogoi; *Continuity and Change among the Ahom*, vol. 9 (castes and tribes of India), concept publishing company, Delhi, 2006, p.2;
59. *Gait*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
60. *Bhagavata Purana*- 1.3.18 "In the fourteenth incarnation, the Lord appeared as *Nrisinha* (Halfmen-Halflion) and bifurcated the strong body of the atheist Hiranyakasipu with His nails, just as a carpenter pierces cane." However, Within the *Dasavatara-stotra* of Jayadeva Goswami (which lists the major incarnations of Vishnu) *Narasinha* is listed as the 4th incarnation. See Steven J. Rosen, '*Narasinha Avatar, the Half-Man/Half-Lion Incarnation*', and visit *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia.
61. On the other hand, Nara-Narayana is the twin-brother 5th incarnation (*Avatar*) of the preserver-god *Visnu* on earth, working for the preservation of dharma or righteousness. In a previous life, the duo was born as the sages Nara and Narayana, and who performed great penances at the holy spot of Badrinath. In the concept of Nara-Narayana, the human soul Nara is the eternal companion of the Divine Narayana. In epic poetry, they are the sons of Dharma by *Murti* or *Ahimsa* and emanations of *Visnu*, *Arjuna* being identified with Nara, and Krishna with Narayana (Vijnanananda, p.250). For details, see Ramkrishna_Gopal Bhandarkar, '*Vaisnavism Saivism and Minor Religious Systems*', (1995), Asian Educational Services; Swami Vijnanananda, '*The Sri Mad Devi Bhagavatam*', *Books One Through Twelve Part 1*, (2004), Kessinger Publishing and visit; *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia.

62. P. K. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.82-88.
63. E.T. Dalton, '*Notes on Assam temples ruins*', JASB, 1855, p.10. But Dalton did not mentioned his source and so it might not be correct , for the place of the temple situated was not within the kingdom of Naranarayan in 1550AD.
64. *The Yogini Tantra*, II, *Patal IX*, vv. 219 and 245.
65. *The Guru Charita of Daityari*, (ed.), by Haribilas Gupta, 1900, vv.1896-98.
66. *The Guru Charita of Ramacharana Thakura*, 1515ff; the *Katha Guru Charita*, p. 34.
67. *The Guru Charita of Daityari*, op. cit., vv.184-85 ; *The Katha Guru Charita*, p. 55; *The Guru charita of Ramacharana Thakura*, 176ff.
68. S. N. Sarma, '*The Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and the Satra Institutions of Assam*', Gauhati University, 1966, p.6.
69. Dr N. P. Chaudhury, Secretary, *Kâmrupa Anusandhana Samiti*, Gauhati. (Personal interview).
70. Khan Chaudhuri A. Ahamed, '*Kochbeharer Itihas*', reprint, Calcutta, 1990, p.5.
71. P. C. Chaudhury, '*The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D*', Gauhati, 1966.
72. M. Neog, '*Buddhism in Kamarupa*', IHQ., XXVII, June 1951, pp.159f.
73. M. Neog - RNEI.
74. B. K. Kakati, op. cit., p.73.
75. B. Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, p. 52, cited in M. Neog RNEI.
76. B. K. Kakati, op. cit., pp.35-70.
77. B. K. Barua, op. cit., p. 168.
78. M. Neog, op. cit., p.88.
79. *The Katha Guru Charita*, 45.
80. *Kirtana-ghosh*, vv., 13 & 14.
81. M. Neog, op. cit., p.89.
82. David Gordon White, (ed.), '*Tantra in Practice*', Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 9.
83. Katherine Harper, and Anne Robert L. Brown, '*The Roots of Tantra*', (ed.), 2002, State University of New York Press, Introduction, p.1; M.A. winternitz, '*A History of Indian Culture*', Vol. II, Calcutta, 1933, p.388.

84. D. Nath, op. cit., p. 168. He quote from M.A. winternitz, op. cit., 388, that, "a queer mixture of monistic philosophy, magic and erotics, with a small admixture of Buddhist ideas".
85. Eliot, op., cit., p.74.
86. Mulka Raj Anand: '*Kamakala*' cited in H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, '*Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva and Ramanuja*', Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1973, p. 41.
87. B. K. Barua, op. cit., pp.166-68; describes the various forms of the worship of mothers goddess as the Saktism. On the other hand, H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., pp. 34 - 44, describes as *Tantricism*.
88. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 82 ; D. Nath, op. cit. p.168.
89. Vamachara is a Sanskrit term meaning "left-handed attainment" and is synonymous with "Left-Hand Path" or "Left-path Sanskrit: 'Vamamarga' It is used to describe a particular mode of worship or 'spiritual practice' that are not only 'heterodox' to standard Vedic injection, but extreme in comparison to the *status quo*. The converse term to Vamachara is '*Dakshinachara*' glossed 'Right-Hand Path', which is used to refer not only to 'orthodox' sects but to modes of spirituality that engage in spiritual practices that not only accord with Vedic injunction but are generally agreeable to the *status quo*.
90. *The Kalika Purana*, 71.155-162.
91. Eliot, op. cit., p.288; B. K. Barua, op. cit., p. 68; M. Neog, op. cit., p.84.
92. *The Katha-Guru- Charita*, pp. 117f; M. Neog, op. cit., p.84.
93. Gait, op. cit., p. 59.
94. Ibid.
95. *Yogini Tantra*, *patal VI*, v. 14.
96. D. Nath, op. cit., p.168.
97. *Yogini Tantra I*, *patal XI*, vv. 32-34.
98. H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 37.
99. *The Katha Guru Charita*, 45.
100. *The Katha Guru Charita*, 206 and 486.
101. According to A. Ahamed Khan Chaudhuri, the sect was founded or reformed by Guru Goraknath (op. cit p.58.) The existence of Nathism in the pre-Koch period in the region proved by the fact that an inscription dated *Saka 1154 (1232AD)*, discovered at Ambari near Gauhati refers to a settlement (*hati*) of the yogi gurus

during the reign of *Pala* king *Samudra Pala* (D. Nath op. Cit., notes, p.192.). "It received encouragement in Bengal from the Buddhist kings of Pala dynasty" R. C. Majumdar, (*History of Bengal*, vol. I, Ed.), p. 350.

102. M. Neog, op. cit., p.89.

103. B. Bhattacharyya, '*Tantrika culture among the Buddhists*', *the cultural heritage of India*, Vol. II, p. 218; cited in M. Neog, op. cit., p.89.

104. R. C. Majumdar, '*History of Bengal*', Vol. I, (Ed.), p. 339.

105. M. Neog, op. cit. 89.

106. '*Sankaradeva and his predecessors*', p.14, cited in M. Neog, op. cit. p.89.

107. Ibid.

108. Khan Chaudhuri A. Ahamed, op. cit p.58.

109. Ibid.

110. C. C. Sannyal. op. cit., pp.139 and 141.

111. M. Neog, op. cit., p.89; Khan Chaudhury A. Ahamed, op. cit pp.58

112. The *Katha Guru Charita*, 57. It also stated a mythological story about the conversion Ananta Kandali to Vainava faith. The story says, the deity was so pleased with the devotee that he manifested himself as a bull and accepted all offerings. Kandali's wife was, however, a devout Vaisnavite and adored the Vaisnava guru, Sankaradeva. Kandali could not tolerate this and one day had his wife-belabored. From that day on Dharma desisted from taking his offerings; nor did he appear before him as usual. The wife came to know of all this and said that Dharma had left for his own place, namely, where Sankaradeva, who was none else but *Hari* incarnate, lived at the place called Bardowa. Kandali went there all at once and saw Dharma sleeping near Sankaradeva in the form of a tawny-coloured bull. He however, could not remove the bull from there, and later decided to become a disciple of Sankaradeva.(see M. Neog edited *Katha Guru Charita*, 77).

113. M. Neog, op. cit., p.89.

114. D. Nath, op. cit., p.169.

115. Mankar in his benedictory verses he refers to king Jalpeswar and king of Kamata (*Kamatar raja vando raja Jalpeswar*), cited in D. Neog, '*New light on history of Asamiya Literature*, Dispur, 1962, p. 126 and also in M. Neog- RNEI. p.46.

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid.

118. . Neog- RNEI., p. 47.
119. The DRV, vv. 516-528. The DRV records that Chilarai, who was imprisoned in Gauda conjured up a snake inside a knot of cloth (*gathi*) with spells (*sadahuya mantra*) , according to the advice of the goddess Durga. The snake bit the mother of the *Padsha* of Gauda to apparent death, from which she was recovered by Chilarai himself.
120. M. Neog- RNEI., p. 42.
121. Ibid.
122. D. Nath, op. cit., p.169.
123. M. Neog- RNEI., 54.
124. M. Neog, '*Ai, the small pox Goddess of Assam*', *Man in India*, Vol. XXXI,1951, pp.72ff; M. Neog -RNEI, p. 54.
125. M. Neog -RNEI. p. 55.
126. *The Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti*, library has an MS. Of the Puran, which deals with the worship of *Sitala* (Hemchandra Goswami: '*Descriptive catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts*', Calcutta University on behalf of the Government of Assam, 1930, p.189.
127. The *Guru Charita* of Daityari Thakur, vv. 55-59; the *Guru Charita* of Bhusan, vv. 66-68.
128. N. N. Vasu, op. cit., 84.
129. The *Katha Guru Charita*, p.126.
130. Ibid. p. 205.
131. The *Guru Charita* of Daityari Thakur, vv. 1345-1347.
132. The DRV, vv. 516-528.
133. Bhusan, 826; N. N. Vasu, op. cit.,105; M. Neog, op. cit., p. 91.
134. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 91.
135. *Alamgir Namah*, p.699, cited in H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 39.
136. The '*Baharistan -i-Ghayb*', I, 273.
137. M. Neog, op. cit., p.92.
138. C. C. Sanyal, op. cit., p.142; D. Nath, op. cit., p.170.
139. D. Nath, op. cit., p. 170.
140. R. K. Barman, op. cit., p.190.
141. H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 44.

142. There is some controversy about the birth date of Sankaradeva. Without going into the debate, we mentioned traditionally held view i.e. 1449AD. For details, see M. Neog, op. cit., pp.98-99.
143. K.L. Barua, op. cit. pp .170 -78.
144. M. Neog, op. cit., p.59.
145. The *Guru Charita* of Daityari, 36; Ramananda, 119. However, the *Guru Charita* of Bhushan (114-20) and ascribe the death of his parents to the time of Sankaradeva's marriage. But it is fact that his mother *Satyasandhya Devi* burnt herself on his father's funeral pyre to be chaste wife.
146. The *Guru Charita* of Ramananda, 134.
147. M. Neog, op. cit., p.102.
148. Ibid.; H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 48.
149. M. Neog, op. cit., p.103.
150. Some modern scholars give 1481AD as the date of the first pilgrimage.
151. H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 52.
152. M. Neog, op. cit., p.106.
153. Ibid.
154. The *Guru Charita* of Daityari Thakur, v. 93.
155. Ibid. vv. 95-96.
156. The period from 1493-1506 is a period constant friction and conflict. The last *khen* king *Nilambar* was over thrown by Alauddin Hussain Shah (c1493-1519) of Bengal in about 1498AD. He also subdued the local chieftains, *Bhuyans* of the region and established military control over the region and then Hussein shah returned to Bengal leaving his son, *Danial* with a strong force as viceroy of the conquered country. However, Hussein shah's invasion ultimately proved to be a failure, for within few days the *Bhuyans* of the region combined against the common enemy and attacked *Danial's* garrison, defeated and killed him about 1503A.D. However, after that local *Bhuyans* started fighting among themselves for supremacy over the whole region and finally *Biswa Singha*, the father of Naranarayan subduing all these *Bhuyans* consolidate his political power in about 1515AD. This situation is not suitable for a peace loving man like Sankaradeva.
157. M. Neog, op. cit., p.109.
158. M. Neog, op. cit., p.100. See the chart.

159. M. Neog, op. cit., p.110.
160. H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 52.
161. The names of the priests, who made complaint against Sankaradeva are not known, M. Neog (op. cit., p.111) mentioned some epithets, which we mentioned therein. However, N. N. Vasu adds the epithet Kandali with Ratnakar, and according to him the leader of the team was Ratnakar Kandali (Vasu, op. cit., p.96)
162. N. N. Vasu, op. cit., p.103.
163. "Sankaradeva's group of Bara Bhuyans seems to have had some administrative relation with the Ahom capital" (M. Neog, op. cit., p. 112), according to which king Suklenmung ordered his people including Sankaradeva and his followers , to cooperate in *khedda* (elephant-catching) operation. They failed to perform the duty in this venture and therefore they fell into the disfavour of the king. (Ibid), also see H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 54.
164. The *Guru Charita* of Bhusan, vv. 374-6 ; Ramacharana, vv. 2337-38, 2532-35.
165. The *Guru Charita* of Daityari Thakur, vv., 438-40.
166. About the date of migration to Koch kingdom, there are mainly two dates: 1543 and 1546. M. Neog mentioned both the dates as the date of migration in the same work in different places. (See M. Neog, op. cit., pp.112 and 161. L. Bezborora, took the date 1546. ('Sankaradeva, 3rd. Ed, Jorhat, 1936.
167. Ramacharana, vv. 2343-67.
168. M. Neog, op. cit., pp.113-4.
169. M. Neog, op. cit., p.114.
170. The *Guru Charita* of Daityari Thakur, vv. 1324-31.
171. A Brahmin scholar of the small village named Chila or Chili near the native village of Narayan Thakur and priest ship was his chief means of livelihood. Under the influences of Narayan Thakur, he deserted his old profession and became a disciple of Sankaradeva (Bhushan, vv., 723-34).
172. He had his education at Varanasi and was a great scholar, who interacted with Sankaradeva in scholarly disputations and being defeated by Sankaradeva, became a disciple of him (The *Katha Guru Charita*, 576.)
173. M. Neog, op. cit., pp. 172-207. Also, see the chapter IV of the thesis.

174. The *Katha Guru Charita*, pp. 141-43. Although some scholars identified 1546 as the date of his 2nd pilgrimage.
175. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 115.
176. Daityari Thakur, vv. 606 -12; Ramananda, vv. 1035-40.
177. Bardowa Charita, Ch., 25, in cited M. Neog, op. cit., p. 116.
178. Kabir was born in 1440 and he died in 1518. (See <http://www.cs.colostate.edu/~malaiya/kabir.html>, <http://literaryindia.com/Biographies/Biographic-Note/kabir.html>, <http://www.sikhionz.com/bhagatkabir.htm>, <http://www.wisdomportal.com/Peace/Kabir-Peace.html>). Therefore, it is not possible to meet *Kabir* in his 2nd pilgrimage in 1550. However, there are possibilities of meeting them in the first pilgrimage in 1481-93). For he stayed long 12 years in that sojourn and visited many religious centers of Northern India, where Kabir was very popular and time period also permit the assumption. However, all sources are silent about it.
179. Daityari Thakur, 571-ff; Bhusan, 578; Ramananda, 242-ff; The *Katha Guru Charita*, 152-f.
180. M. Neog, ('*Sankaradeva*', National book trust, New Delhi, 1980, Reprint, pp.6 and 22); H. V. S. Murthy, in '*Did Chaitanya influence 'Sankaradeva'*', *IHQ*, Vol. 35, pp.171ff; and other hold the view that both the saints never met each other, as they believe that Chaitanya was born after Sankaradeva's first pilgrimage and died prior to his second one. On the other hand, S. C. Goswami, Ed. ('*Sree Sree Deva Damodara Charita*', p.34); Gait, (op. cit., p.59), R. M. Nath, ('*Cultural Heritage of India*', vol. IV, p.222.) and others hold the view that they met each other during the 1st pilgrimage of Sankaradeva but not during the 2nd pilgrimage. This group of scholars thinks that Sankaradeva was born in seventies or early eighties Fifteen century and not in 1449 AD. For instance, Gait (Ibid.) hold, that the date of birth of Sankaradeva 1449 as described by *Charit puthis* is thirty to forty years too early and actual date might be $1449+30=1479$ or $1449+40= 1489$. S. C. Goswami (Ibid.) Damodaradeva died in about 1626 at the age of 110 and so he was born in about $1626-110= 1516$. He was 39 years junior by Sankaradeva which leads us to the fact that Sankaradeva was born in $1516 -39 = 1477$. Sankaradeva started his 1st pilgrimage at the age of 32 i.e. $1477 + 32 = 1509$, and he stayed 12 years up

to 1521 (1509+12 =1521), when Chaitanyadeva was in Puri. If this view is accepted then there is possibility of meeting them. Moreover, it seems to me that the information of Charita puthis regarding the date of birth of Sankaradeva i.e. 1449 is doubtful on logical ground. Kusumvara father of Sankaradeva was a contemporary of Biswa Singha, who started his power consolidating after the decline of Kamata kingdom in the hand of Hussain shah of Bengal in 1498 and died in the mid thirties of the sixteen century. The encounter between Biswa Singha and Kusumvara took after 1498 and before 1533. It is also fact according the Caritas that Kusumvara died immediately after the birth of Sankaradeva in 1449 or after the marriage of Sankaradeva at the age 32 in 1481. If we accept the term 'immediately after', within five years then Kusumvara died within 1455 or 1486 and there is no possibilities of meeting them. On the other hand, if we accept the view (1477) of Gait and his group and the death of Kusumvara after the marriage of Sankaradeva in about 1509, there is strong ground meeting Kusumvara and Biswa Singh.

181. The *Katha Guru Charita*, 154a-169; M. Neog, op. cit., p. 116.

182. The *Guru Charita* of Bhusan, v., 742; Daityari Thakur, v. 714f.

183. N. N. Vasu, op. cit., p.105.

184. Daityari Thakur, v., 712-ff.

185. Daityari Thakur, v. 749-ff; the *Katha Guru Charita*, v.,108f. It records that Chilarai happened one day to overhear of his wife *Kamalapriya* singing Sankaradeva's lyric, '*pamara mana rama-charane chitta dehu*' on the instrument '*saringa*', and so impressed by it that he lost no time in resolving to secure initiation into *Bhakti*.

186. Cited in H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 56.

187. Ibid.

188. N. N. Vasu, op. cit., p.109.

189. For example, Kanthabhusan, who had gone to Benares to study the Bhagavata to defeating Sankaradeva in religious discourses, came to him and saluted him touching his feet. Ananta Kandali, who was so widely known for his erudition came to him and became disciple (Ibid.).

190. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 119.

191. N. N. Vasu, op. cit., p.112.

192. B. Kakati, (ed.), '*Sankaradeva*', cited in Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 56.

193. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 120.
194. Bhushan, 660-f ; Free Wikipedia, Sankaradeva.
195. N. N. Vasu, op. cit., p.113.
196. The *Katha Guru Charita*, v. 224.
197. Daityari Thakur, v. 598; KGC, 172 , and Ramananda, 111-f.
198. Madhavadeva, *Guru Bhatima*, pp. 1ff.
199. Ramananda, 173-f.
200. Daityari Thakur, v. 774-ff ; **200A**.Ibid. vv. 262-69, 315-27, 340-47; Ramananda, 459-ff, 586-ff. **200B** . Dr. B. Kakati, '*The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*', APB, third edition, Gauhati, 2004, p.82.
201. B. K. Barua, '*Sankaradeva Vaisnava Saint of Assam*', first edition, 1960, reprint edition, Bina Library, Gauhati, 2009, p.92. (hence forth BKB-SVSA).
202. In '*Kirtana-ghosha*', vv. 340 -1, following the *Bhagavata Purana*, he mentioned following nine modes of devotion to God : 1) the *sravana* (listening to the name of god), 2) the *Nam-kirtana* (chanting the name of God), 3) *Smarana* (recollection of the God's name), 4) *Archana* (worship of the God), 5) *Pada-sevana* (personal service to the feet of the god), 6) *Dasya* (servitude to the God), 7) *Sakhitta* (friendship with the God), 8) *Vandana* (obeisance to God) and 9) *Atmanivedana* (full-hearted submission of one's whole body). (H. N. Datta Barua, (ed.) '*Kirtana Aru Nam-Ghosha*', Nalbari, 1974.).
203. Hem Barua, '*Assamese Literature*', New Delhi, 1965, pp.50-55.
204. B. K. Barua, op. cit., p.88.
205. Bhushan, v., 156-ff; *Katha-Guru-Charita*, p.34.
206. M. Neog, op. cit., pp.107-108. He mentioned his authority to Daityari, vv. 82-95.
207. Daityari, v., 52.
208. Dr. B. Kakati, '*Chaitanya to vivekananda*', Natesan & Co., Madras, 1928. Cited in H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 61.
209. S. N. Sharma, op. cit., p. 34.
210. Ibid.
211. According to Ramananda Dvija, (305, 609 and 1119), Sankaradeva initiated his disciples into faith with the *Bhagavata-Purana* to represent the Lord, in whom the initiate's soul was to find refuge (sarana). Some times other Puthis like Sankaradeva's *Bhakti-pradipa*, Madhavadeva's *Bhaktiratnavali* were also be

substituted (M. Neog, op. cit., p.319). It is a tradition of the Neo-Vaisnavism to place a Bhagavata-Purana or other on the Ashana or *Sinhashana* of the Nam-ghar of Satra, in lieu of the image of the God. This tradition of showing of reverence to the religious scripture or holy book is common to all the great religions of the world. Christianity, Islam Sikhism, have their holy books *the Bible*, *the Koran* and *Granth sahib* respectively. In the '*Srimata-bhavata-mahatma*' section of the *Padmapurana, Uttar-khanda*, the Bhagavata-Purana considered as Lord.

212. *Bhakti-ratnakara* of Sankaradeva, V., 111, p.19.
213. N. N. Vasu, op. cit., p.115.
214. BKB-SVSA, op. cit. p. 96.
215. *The Katha-Guru-Charita*, pp.140 &255.
216. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 369.
217. Ibid.
218. Ibid.
219. M. Neog, op. cit., 288.
220. Ibid.
221. R. K. Barman, op. cit., p.173. Besides, all the Biographies of Sankaradeva and his other disciples have vividly depicted the popularity of the faith among the people of the region.
222. N. N. Vasu, op. cit., p.109.
223. *The Katha-Guru-Charita*, p. 252; Ramcharana Thakur, vv. 3606-3609.
224. Ramcharana Thakur, vv. 3507-3508; Bhushan Dvija, p.91.
225. R. K. Barman, op. cit., p.175. he made a list of 11 Satras, out of which following 7 were constructed under the direct encouragement of king Naranarayan and Chilarai : a) Madhupur Satra (also know as Bardowa Satra) at Madhupur, founder: Sankaradeva. b) RamraiKuthi or Satrasal, Satra at Dhubri, founder: Ram Ray. c) Kakatkuta and Vela Satras, (Koch Behar, now extinct), founders: Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva. d) Fulbari Satra (Tufanganj, Koch Behar), founder: Madhavdeva. e) Bhitrua Satra (Baikunthapur). f) Barpeta Satra (Barpeta). g) Raghunath Prabhu Satra, (Golokganj, (Dhubri). (However, most of the Satras extinct now and some existed in renovated forms, which done in later days.)
226. Ramcharana Thakur, v., 3755; *The Katha-Guru-Charita*, pp.280f; N. N. Vasu, op. cit., p.112. In this connection, B. Kakati remarks; "By virtue of his position, a king

would have to worship other gods and goddesses, and the fundamental principle of Sankaradeva's creed was an undeviating love for one god. There was no provision for the worship of minor gods, because that would mark the purity of his creed" (B. Kakati, ed., 'Sankaradeva', cited in Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 56.).

227. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 119.

228. D. Nath, op. cit., p.174. 228A . Dr. B. Kakati, 'The Mother Goddess Kamakhya', APB, third edition, Gauhati, 2004, p.81.

229. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 124.

230. Ramananda, 526-f.

231. Neog, op. cit., p. 110.

232. bid. p.124.

233: Ramcharana Thakur, p.199.

234. S. N. Sharma however mentioned another incident as the cause of the conflict without mentioning his source, in the following way: when "Madhavadeva undertook the task of reorganizing and reconstructing the Barpeta Satra on a grand style. On the completion of the construction, the opening ceremony was performed with dramatic performances and religious dances, where devotees donning female costumes acted and danced as *gopis*. Madhavadeva's opponents however, found it a convenient occasion to bring him under the frown of Raghudeva the then king of the eastern Koch kingdom. They alleged that Madhavadeva, with celibate disciples, had been dancing and singing with women". (S.N.Sharma, 'The Neo-Vaishnavite movement and the Satra Institution of Assam', Gauhati University, Gauhati, 1968. 2nd edition, lawyer Book stall, Gauhati, 1999, p.27.)

235. Daityari Thakur, p.285; Ramcharana Thakur, p.311ff.

236. M. N. Neog, op. cit., p.126, named the place as 'Bheldanga' (now Mādhpurdham.) a place situated at a distance 1.5 miles from the Koch Behar town. On the other hand, B. K. Barua, 'Sankaradeva Vaisnava Saint of Assam' (henceforth BKB-SVSA), reprint edition, 2009, Bina Library, Gauhati, p.118, and S. N. Sharma, op. cit. p. 28, named the place as 'Bheladuar' a place near Koch Behar town.

237. Daityari Thakur, vv. 1504-6.

238. Ibid.

239. M. Neog, op. cit., p.126.
240. BKB-SVSA, p.115.
241. Daityari Thakur, v. 1596.
242. BKB-SVSA, p.116 and S. N. Sharma, op. cit., p.30.
243. Ibid.
244. BKB-SVSA, p.117.
245. S. N. Sharma, op. cit., p.100.
246. *Vamsigopaladevar Charita*, vv. 151-153. Cited in S.N. Sharma, op. cit., p.100.
247. '*Santa-sampradaya-katha*', f. 6b., cited in M. Neog, op. cit., p.129fn..
248. Daityari, vv. 895-899.
249. Ramananda, vv., 833-436.
250. *Damodara-Charita* of Nilakantha, p.2.
251. Ibid., pp. 71 and 87.
252. '*Gurulila*', of Ramaraya, pp. 33-34 cited in S. N. Sharma, op. cit., pp.103.
253. M. Neog, op. cit., p.129.
254. *Damodara-Charita* of Nilakantha, v., 394, p.103.
255. M. Neog, op. cit., p.114.
256. *Katha Guru Charita*, 455. It should be mentioned here that he had very close affinity to Madhavadeva, whom he considered as his friend and Guru and he also belongs to Damodariya sub-sect after the death of Sankaradeva (M. Neog, op. cit., p.133.).
257. M. Neog, op. cit., pp.133-34.
258. BKB-SVSA, p.125.
259. The *Satapatha Brahmana*, (XIII, 6.I), Cited in '*A few aspects of Assamese literature and culture*', by Satyendranath Sharma, Assam Sahitya Sabha, Gauhati, 1991, p.38.
260. The *Bhagavata Purana* (I.I.3), Ibid.
261. *Epigraphic Indica*, Vol. I, pp. 79-83, Ibid.
262. S. N. Sharma, op. cit., p.143.
263. Ibid.
264. Quoted by Ramdev Goswami in his introduction to *Prasanga-mala* by Bhattadeva.
265. M. Neog, op. cit., p.310.

266. The *Katha-Guru Charita*, p. 34; Ramacharan Thakur, p.161.
267. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 309 ; D. Nath, op. cit., p.188 ;S. N. Sharma, op. cit., p.143.
268. Satyendranath Sharma, op. cit., p.39.
269. Bhushan, v.157.
270. S. N. Sharma, op. cit., p.146.
271. Ibid., pp.104-05.
272. Ramaraya, '*Guru-Lila*', p.157f.
273. Ramcharana Thakur, p. 310.
274. S. N. Sharma, op. cit., appendix, V, pp. 297-314.
275. R. K. Barman, op. cit., p.175.
276. Ibid.
277. D. Nath, op. cit., p.175.
278. Ibid.
279. Daityari Thakur, 1326; Nilkantha, 457-66.
280. Satyendranath Sharma, op. cit., p. 65.
281. S. N. Sharma, op. cit., p. 26.
282. Daityari Thakur, 1316-22.
283. S. N. Sharma, op. cit., p. 26. He writes with the authorities of Ramacharana (p.305f.), Daityari (p.299) and the *Katha-Guru-Charita* (p.229) in a replying style of the questions of Madhavadeva in this way : "Though I have deviated a little from Sankaradeva, I have not thereby deviated from the original preaching of the *Bhagavata*. I consider the *Bhagavata* to be more authoritative than Sankaradeva. Further, I do not owe any explanation to you (Madhavadeva) as I am not a member of your order". N. N. Vasu, op. cit., pp. 137-8, mentioned the version of Daityari.
284. Daityari, 1324-31.
285. For details, see Dr. B. Kakati, '*Chaitanya to vivekananda*', Natesan & Co., Madras, 1928, p. 61;BKB-SVSA, p.119; Satyendranath Sharma, op. cit., p.65; H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 208.
286. Ibid.
287. H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy, op. cit., p. 208.
288. M. Neog, op. cit., p.114.
289. Ibid.; BKB-SVSA, p.120.

290. Dhaneswar and Banerwar Dvija, '*Harideva-Charita*', edited and published by Karuna Kanta Barua, 1332 B. S., quoted in S. N. Sharma, op. cit., p. 92.
291. Most of the schisms occurred in the last decade of 16th century and in beginning of 17th century, at the end of our period of study. However, names and features of the four main sub-sects are mentioned here: **A)** *The Brahma Samhati or Sampradaya* includes the sub-sects of Damodaradeva and Harideva, there Brahmanic elements pre-dominated; **B)** *The Kala Samhati or Sampradaya*, owes for its origin to Gopala Ata or *Gopaladeva* of Bhawanipur. The followers of this branch claim that Madhavadeva nominated *Gopala Ata* or *Gopaladeva* as the supreme religious head after. He had his headquarter at *Kaljar*, from which the name Kala originated; **C)** *The Purusha- Samhati or Sampradaya*, called so because, the followers of this branch claim that they are the direct successors Sankaradeva's line or *Purusha*. Purusottam Thakur, grandson of Sankaradeva. Madhavadeva simply acted as an agent during the interim period; and **D)** *The Nika- Samhati or Sampradaya*, called so because this branch strictly followed the rules and regulations laid down by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva and considered their rules and regulations as '*Nika*' (pure, clean). Most probably, this sub-sect originated after the formation of other three sub-sects to organise a purer and cleaner sub-sect, when other sub-sects appeared to have gone astray from the original path chalked out by the first two gurus.
292. BKB-SVSA, p.112.
293. Ramcharana Thakur, vv. 3507-3508; Bhushan Dvija, p. 91.
294. P. K. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.84-85.

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