

CHAPTER IV

SECTION I

SOCIAL CONDITION

The division of the people into four Varṇas or Social Groups viz. Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Sūdra was merely a theory, except perhaps in the ancient period of Indian history. In later times, the connotation of the term Varṇa expanded so as to signify the four conventional grades of the Indian Society in which Aryan and Non-aryan elements were gradually being mixed up.¹ The limits comprising the social grades called Varṇa came to be known as jāti; but in later literature, this word is often used in the sense of varṇa itself. The primary significance of the term jāti is birth; but the early catuṣ varṇa division of the Indo-Aryan Society was not really dependent on birth. The incorporation of the tribal groups in the Brahmanical social system seems to have popularised the word jāti in the sense of a caste and later also of a varṇa. By the time Bengal adopted the Aryan culture, numerous castes and sub-castes had been evolved, mainly by the development of different arts, crafts and professions, but partly also for other reasons, and tribal, racial and religious factors were at work in gradually adding to their number.²

The author of the Dharma-sūtras and smṛtis attempted

to bring the actual state of society of their days within the framework of the four Varṇas. This led them to propound the theory that the numerous castes (and even tribes and races), actually existing in the country, arose from the unions of males and females belonging to varṇas other than their own.³ This theory originally applied to the males and females of the four primitive Varṇas, had to be extended to those of the subsidiary or mixed castes, arising out of their union. Even then the Smṛtikāras could not follow this process logically ad infinitum. The characteristic features of society in medieval Bengal have been faithfully reflected in the Bṛhad-dharma and the Bṛhad-Vaiyartā purāṇas which were composed not later than the 13th-14th century A.D. The texts point out the breakdown of the traditional four-fold caste system and the emergence of a large number of non-Brahmana mixed castes (the conventional number being 35) which are classified as uttama, madhyama and adhama sūtikaras, all having the status of sūdra on the basis of different vocations.⁴

The process of State formation within a tribe could have started only when it had to a considerable extent moved from shifting to permanent cultivation, as a quantum of surplus was necessary to maintain the rudimentary state apparatus. Accordingly in the early 16th century we notice two medieval tribal state formations one under the Ahoms who initially settled in the upper Brahmaputra valley from the neighbouring Shan State (Burma) and other the Kāmata-Koch Kingdom stretching

from the Karatoya to the Bagmati. The adoption of Sanskrit culture by the first important ruler of the Kāmatā-Koch Kingdom Visvasinha gave a great deal of impetus towards the formation of castes in the tribal group to which he belonged. We have already noticed that the traditional four-fold caste system had been submerged and numerous castes and sub-castes were developed in the medieval Bengal and it is not unlikely that this trend might have influenced social formation in the Kāmatā-Koch territory. As a result of the influx of a large numbers of the Brāhmana population from the adjoining territories into the kingdom of Kāmatā since the earlier times, attempts were made to organise the society on the basis of the traditional catur-varna system in the reign of Naranārāyana.⁵ The Kāmatā of Siddhāntavāgīśa was composed at the court of Naranārāyana aimed at this traditional divisions of the society. But it appears that the four-fold division of the society remain more or less superficial, the real basis of the divisions of the society, as we notice in the other parts of Bengal, was determined on the development of the arts, crafts and professions, and the castes were accordingly classified as uttara, madhya and hina jātis.⁶

Visvasinha, as noticed earlier, brought Brāhmana from Kanauj. They replaced the kalitās and became the Gurus of the Koch people.⁷ He inducted some men of piety (Vaidika) from Srikhatta, and gave them the title of Kāmarūpa Brāhmanas.^{7a}

authority was established in the whole of the Kāmatā-Koch kingdom. Again, with the ascendancy of the Brāhmanas the ancient custom of worshipping the respective tribal deities by the people was abolished. In Siddhānta Vāgīśa's Smṛiti Kaumudī Brāhmanas alone have been allowed the right of worshipping Śakti. By an injunction the Koch kings, the Śūdras, women in general, especially young ladies, and even the Brāhmana widows were prohibited from looking at the goddess Kāmākhyā.¹² In the Darrang Rājā Vāgīśāli, it has been mentioned that in all temples lying to the north of Gohāin Kamal's Āli (Road) which was the line of demarcation between southern and northern Kāmarūpa, the Koches and the Meches would continue to perform the worship, while in the south the Brāhmanas would officiate.¹³ This law was to hold good in all places.

It may thus be inferred that the supremacy of the Brāhmanas was established in the Kāmatā-Koch kingdom including the districts of Goālpāra, Kāmarūpa, Nongāon and Darrang. Kāmarūpa was then known far and wide as the greatest centre of the Śāktas. The Bṛihat Rājavaiśāvalī, a work compiled under Raja Harendranarayana of Koch Bihar¹⁴ supplies us with some information about the simplification of the duties of the Brāhmanas who inspite of their knowledge of the yasas, had resorted to taking fish and meat and also cultivation. They did not feel the necessity of upholding the ideals of Brāhmacarya (life-long celibacy) and of fasting on the Ekādāśī day (other than on the day of Śuklāṣṭmī).

Kāyastha

With the rise of the Bhuyāns at the patronage of the king Naranārāyana and Gilā Rāj, the social status of the Kāyastha Bhuyāns increased gradually. These Bhuyāns were defeated at the hands of Visvasiṅha who founded the Koch kingdoms on the ruins of the Kāmatā kingdom.¹⁵ The Bhuyāns fled to the upper Assam but again their fate did not favour them. These Bhuyāns somehow incurred displeasure of the king Sukhāpā (1552-1603 A.D.) who ultimately ousted them from the Ahom kingdom.¹⁶ The fourteen Bhuyāns then appeared before King Naranārāyana at his court. They appealed to the king for their shelter. Hence, through the efforts of Gilā Rāj, king Naranārāyana had established fourteen Bhuyāns in his kingdom making land grants to them.¹⁷ It is recorded in Rājā Narendra-nārāyana's Bṛhat Rāja Vaiśewālī, that the king Naranārāyana had married Bhānumatī, the daughter of the Bhuyān Pratāpa Ray and that his brother Gilā Rāj had married Candrapālā, the daughter of Pratap's youngest brother. The learned lady Bhānumatī became the principal queen of Naranārāyana.¹⁸

From the Gurita Pāṭhī we learn that the ruler of Kāmatā (probably Visvasiṅha) brought Brāhmanas and Kāyasthas from the king of Gauda.¹⁹ It is noticed earlier that Naranārāyana encouraged the settlement of the Kāyastha Bhuyāns on the bank of the river Brāhmaputra. The Kāyasthas were established in the society. They were Sanskrit Scholars of

repute. Their ladies were also highly educated.²⁰ The Kathā-guru-carita refers to the Kāyasthas who were employed in ploughing or carrying of loads on their shoulders in the eastern part of the country.²¹

Vaidyas

The Vaidyas are mentioned in the Darrang Rāja Vaisāvali as the Physicians.^{22*} It is, however, difficult to say when this professional group was developed into a caste. The South Indian Inscriptions (8th century A.D.) contain the earliest reference to the Vaidyas.²³ There is no definite reference to the Vaidyas as a caste in Bengal before the 12th century A.D. when they gave the status of Uttama Śākhara (Śūdra).²⁴

The Vaidyas represent a small professional caste of Physicians whose crystallisation as a social group seems to have begun in the age of the later Pālas i.e. about the 11th century A.D.^{24a} This caste is identified with the ancient Ambastha-jāti in the Candraprabhā (composed in 1675 A.D.) by Bharata Mallika, the famous Vaidya Scholar of Bengal. That the Vaidyas were regarded as Ambasthas as early as 16th century A.D. is indicated by the Suriana Carita which describes its Vaidya another Candra Śekhara as a Gauda Ambastha.^{24b} Outside Bengal in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, the barbaras who are surgeons are called both Vaidya and Ambastha (Ambattan). According to Sircar some Ambastha-Vaidyas of South India migrated to

Bengal in the early medieval period and merged themselves in the local physician classes so as to develop ultimately into the Bengal Vaidya Community (Sircar, op.cit., p. 118). They were held in high esteem in the society. ✓

Kaivarttas

Daityari Thakura refers to the Kaivarttas with whom Śaṅkaradeva dined.²⁵ The Kaivarttas stands for Mārgava or Dāsa in the Āryāvartta, who is born of a Niṣāda father and an Ayogava mother.^{25a} The Jātakas refer to the fishermen as Kevattas.²⁶ The Brahma-Vaivartta Purāna mention, the Kaivarttas as born of Kṣatriya and Vaiśya mother, but the Kaivarttas were degraded in the Kālī-yuga by his association with Ṭivara and adoption of the vocation of fisherman (Dhivara).²⁷ Bhaṭṭ Bhaṇḍarāyaṇa, however, refers to them as one of the antajas (low castes). According to a tradition Vallabhasena improved the status of the Kaivarttas and made them a clean caste.²⁸ They are said to have owned land and lived on agriculture.²⁹ This attests the present divisions of the Kaivartta caste viz., Hālovā (one who works with the hāla or the plough) and Jālovā (one who works with the Jāla or the throw-net).^{29a} ✓

Kaivajñas

The Kaivajñas or the astrologers were specially associated with the propitiating of the Grahas or planets and considered to be the important members of the society.³⁰ It may be mentioned here that during the early medieval period the Devala Brāhmaṇas were degraded for cultivating the study

of 'astrology'. In the 19th century A.D. the Ganaka Brāhmanas of Bengal whose profession seems to have also been connected with astrology and were considered as degraded Brāhmana.^{30a} The functions of the Daivajñas are given in the Darrang Rāja-Vaiśāvalī and the Gosānīmāṅgalā.³¹ Śhīvara Daivajña who flourished in the court of Visvasinha used to give counselling to the king so that no untoward thing could occur. It may be noted that Sūrya Khari Daivajña alias Baladeva who composed Darrang RājaVaiśāvalī under order of Rājā Saundranārēyaṇa at about 1791 A.D. was himself a member of Daivajña caste. These Daivajña people received royal patronage.^{31a}

From the Darrang RājaVaiśāvalī and the Bhōhōdānta,³² we gather the names of a large number of other castes who were associated with different types of vocations. They are as follows :

Sonāri (Goldsmith), Kumar (Potter), Tāntī (Weaver), Māli (Gardeners), Gāvān (Singer), Bāvān (Drummer), Toli (oil-pressurers), Kānār (Blacksmith), Kāhār (Palanquin bearers), Sūtradhār (Carpenters), Rajak (Washermen), Modak (confectionaries), Chānār (shoe-maker), Jalā (fisherman), Goālā (producer of milk-products) etc.

The above account gives us a fair idea of the pattern of social life in the Kānatā-koch kingdom. It appears that 'caste system was less vigorous, less elaborate and less inhibiting in this region than elsewhere'.³³ Even the

Brāhmana women were allowed to plough the lands or to engage in weaving. It has rightly been suggested that "the steady process of detribalization over the centuries also meant, inter alia, the proselytes' adoption of mud-plinth dwelling houses in place of pile-houses, of the caste society's dominant language in place of a tribal dialect and of the plough in place of the hoe or the digging stick".³⁴

It is interesting to note that in the wake of class distinctions, Śaṅkaradeva and ~~and~~ Dāmodaradeva acted as social reformers in order to bring all sections of people on one platform. All the people of the kingdom on account of the popularity of the Śākta Cult, male and female, young and old alike used to eat the flesh of animals in addition to fish. The people of this country were greatly influenced by this custom which had obviously a chastening effect on the society.³⁵ It may be mentioned that at the instance of Śaṅkaradeva, the people irrespective of castes or creed used to dine together.³⁶

Before king Naranārāyaṇa, Śaṅkaradeva upheld that according to Śāstra the Brāhmanas would attain salvation by reading the Bhāgavata, the Kshatriya would get the kingdom, the Vaiśyas, the wealth and the Sūdras would become pure.³⁷ Śaṅkaradeva again postulated that a Vaiṣṇava should equally treat a Brāhmana or Candāla without judging the caste to which he belonged.³⁸

Women :

In Kāmarūpa the woman was the recipient of special honour as the representative of the Goddess Kāmākhya.³⁹ The Koches like the Ahoms and the Shāns held their women folk in high esteem. Even in the present Koch Society the supremacy of mother is recognised on all hands. The whole community looks upon the female sex as the very back-bone of the social fabric. This resulted in a deep devotion to the women, symbolised by the generative organ which distinguishes her.⁴⁰

The queens of the Kāmata-Koch Bihar kingdom (viz. Bhānumatī, Br̄ndesvarī, Kāmesvarīdevī, Nirūpamādevī) took immense interest in the development of language and literature and uplift of the social status of the women in general. At the request of Bhānumatī Vidyāvāgīśā composed the Grammar Ratnamālā.⁴¹ It may be inferred that in those days the ladies of the royal harem were well-versed in Sanskrit. They showed great interest in the publication of religious books. Just as Malladeva came to be known as Naranarāyana at the time of his coronation, so Bhānumatī too got the name of Ratnamālā when she became the chief queen. In Behārdanta the queen Br̄ndesvarī Devī has drawn a picture of the social relationship among the women of various classes in the society. We learn regarding the dress, ornaments which the women generally used to wear while they had been coming out to see the king or to attend any social gathering.⁴² The queen herself came from a

common family. She was the daughter of Rājendranārāyaṇa, who was a zamindar of a place within the Goālpārā area. However, she became the queen by virtue of her qualities and erudition. She took immense interest in the study of various things such as Literature, nunthis, religion, Purāṇa etc. Language and literature flourished to a great extent in Koch Bihar during her period. The modern Jenkins School in Koch Bihar still stands today as a glaring example of the twin efforts of Kṛṣṇasvarī Devi and Bṛndasvarī Devi of Koch Bihar.⁴³ The women even among the lower class were conscious about their chastity. One fisherwoman is found to take the name after Sītā.⁴⁴ The women of upper class got their beloved after their choices and even the married women of chastity and devotion surrendered them to the worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa.⁴⁵

The women in general of Koch Bihar used to perform different Vrata Ceremonies for the welfare of the members of their families.⁴⁶ A good number of Vratas were in vogue viz. Kātyāyṇī Vrata, Sātpujā Vrata, Niskalanika Vrata, Subacānī Vrata, Manvantara Vrata etc. and these were observed for their well-being. Actually, these Vrata ceremonies were used to be performed since early days. Interestingly enough, the Vratas were performed without the Sāstric rituals.⁴⁷ In spirit and content the Vratas were magico-religious rites performed mainly by women folk for invoking the blessing of various deities to secure domestic happiness and welfare of dear ones. But with the advent of the

Brahmanas during the period of Narayana and Cilāraī Sāstric rules and regulations were incorporated into the Vrata ceremonies. It is interesting to note in this connection that king Narayana himself observed Nirāhari Vrata, apparently under the sāstric injunction, to propitiate the Goddess Durga.^{47a}

The character of the progressive minded heroine, as depicted in the Vratas like Ukhāi Gorāi and Ghot Pātālī Bhāsā was a source of inspiration among the women in general.⁴⁸

From the Sāstric Vrata,⁴⁹ it appears that the people of base origin were also admitted in the society. The women even of the lower classes had been enjoying the right to perform such ceremonial festivals. Campbell observes that generally the women were more intelligent and helpful than the male members in the family. In order to take care for the guests or to entertain anything, the women had to shoulder all responsibilities. They are said to have enjoyed full freedom. Even if they used to go without veil the society did not treat them improperly. They had to manage everything in the domestic affairs.⁵⁰

Marriage

The most important sacrament in a Hindu's life is the marriage ceremony. The Smritis generally record the

prevalence of the eight forms of marriage in the society, although they do not recommend all types of marriage. Among these Brāhma, Daiva, Prājanatya and Ārsha types of marriage are praised by all^{50a} although the Manusmṛiti observes that only two forms Asura and Paissāca are not to be practised.^{50b} With the spread of Sanskrit Culture in the Kānata-Kośh kingdom and the advent of the Brāhmanas, the eight forms of marriage seem to have been prevalent in the society.^{50c} It appears, however, that the following three types of marriages were popular among the people of the kingdom.

(1) Gandharva marriage :

The Gāndharva form wherein the mutual love and consent of the bride and bridegroom is the only condition required to bring about the union (icchayānyonyasaṁ-yogaḥ). Neither the father nor the kinsmen need have a hand in bringing about the marriage. In the Kānata-Kośh kingdom this marriage celebrated with some trivial formalities. 'The girl is placed by young married women before a Ghalun hati (a sieve of bamboo containing among other thing five lights, a bunch of plaintain fruits, some grains of paddy, and a few ends of the durha grass), and is presented with a new cloth and sankha or shell bracelets. Garlands of flowers are also exchanged between the bride and the bridegroom'.⁵¹ No religious ceremony was performed, and the services of the priest were not required. This form of marriage was usually

in vogue in the royal family and among the higher order of the people, and was very seldom, if ever, resorted to by the lower classes.

Brāhma marriage

According to usual custom the Brāhma form, consisting of the gift (dānam) of a daughter by the father, after decking her with ornaments to a man, learned in the Vedas and of a good character (Śrūtiśāilavān) whom the bride's father himself invites. This is the form of marriage that prevails among the people in general.⁵² The fundamental portion of the ceremony is the same as is commonly observed in Bengal and consists in the giving away of the bride by the father or any other relative, and acceptance of her by the bride-groom. The prevalence of dowries from bride's father was in practice. At the same time some people were also kept in father-in-law's house for their not being able to pay for a girl, and were thus called Ghar-jāva or Ghar-Jāmātā. H.N. Chowdhury records the superstitious habits of the Koch people. It is said that in spite of marriage the sight of any inauspicious omen on their way viz., a deadbody, a funeral, a ditch recently cut, a leech, a snake, led them come back home and the marriage was no more thought of. On the other hand, seeing on the way, flowers^{or} fish, it increased the happiness of the couple. The cutting of betel nuts, which was called daraganā presents

consisting of curd, ^{cheena} ~~sesame~~, fish, new cloth, shell bracelets, vermilion, betel-nuts and betel leaves were sent to the bride's home. The services of the Brahmana priest were necessary at the marriage'.^{52a}

Widow marriage

The Agni-purāna⁵³ repeats the remarkable texts of Nārada and Parāśara permitting a woman to take a second husband on the five occasions, viz., when the husband is lost, or is dead, or has adopted the life of a recluse or is impotent, or has become an outcaste. Likewise, Viśvarūpa⁵⁴ seems to sanction remarriage of women, for he quotes an authority permitting a father to give away his daughter, though no longer a virgin. On the other hand, it is forbidden by Brahma-purāna⁵⁵ and Medātithi.⁵⁶

In accordance with the earlier traditions the people of the kingdom would accept widows. As per local terms the male member was called Ṣaṅgana and the female was termed Ṣaṅgani. The cooked food by those widows were not taken by any other people. The union between a widow and a man among the native Hindus in this state was no marriage at all, and no ceremony was performed on the occasion.⁵⁷ This form of connection was looked down upon even by the people themselves. Young widows sometimes appeared to have given to the suitors by their relatives on the receipt of a sum of money and ornaments were also sometimes presented to the woman to

induce her to become pābhūnā (coming after). A social stigma generally attaches to the Pābhūnā connection even according to the public opinion of the caste itself. ✓

Though Dalton⁵⁸ refers to the tradition of monogamy among the people, it appears that the system of polygamy was not unknown, particularly among the rulers of the country. While the earlier authorities like the Smṛti-sādhikā refers to the practice of polygamy among the people, Vaijayanti supplies us with a two-fold classifications of the king's wives (like Mahisī, Devī, Paṭivrkti, Bābatā etc.) The Darrang-Rāja Vaiśāli⁵⁹ mentions as many as eighteen queens of Viśvasiṃha, the first important ruler of the Kāsatā-Koch kingdom and these wives, however, did not enjoy the equal status like those of the kings of early medieval period. Similarly, when Naranārāyaṇa came to suppress the revolt of Raghudeva, his nephew, it is said that Raghudeva instead of fighting fairly, dressed his one hundred and twenty wives as soldiers and sent them to oppose his uncle.⁶⁰

The position of the widows in the society was not enviable. They were often looked upon as inauspicious and were not generally allowed to take part in different rites and ceremonies. They seem to have been encouraged by the people to immolate themselves in the funeral pyres of their husbands. The practice of asti, seems to have been in vogue in India from an early times. Dāmodaragupta's Kuttanīmatan,

refers that a ^{concubine} concubine of Bhāskaravarmana became Satī after the death of the king.⁶¹ The Bṛhaddehmapurāṇa (II.8.3-10) in most eloquent terms praises the exploits of Satī : "...there is no greater exploit for women, because (by performing Satī) she enjoys in heaven the company of her husband for a manvāntara...." ✓

Thus the custom of burning of Satī came into practice in Bengal from an early period. The Yoginī Tantra⁶² which was composed in the late medieval age during the reigns of the rulers of the Kānatā-Koch Kingdom, also stresses merits of self-immolation in Nuktī-tīrtha by the widows of Brahmanas. Śūdra and Vaiśya widows moved by deep sense of love were also enjoined to burn themselves. This practice of Satī however definitely prohibited to unchaste women and women having many children.⁶³ ✓

On the basis of a tradition recorded in the Darrang Vaiśāvalī Amanatulla refers to the queen Sudānī of Mahārāja Viśvasiṅha mounting the funeral pyre.⁶⁴ According to the Vaiśāvalī of Gandharvanārāyaṇa, on hearing the news of the death of Viśvasiṅha, his old father Hariśāsa Mondala died of grief and his mother Hira Devi mounted the funeral pyre with her husband's body. The funeral ceremonies of the father and the son were performed at the same time.⁶⁵ Again, after a reign of 49 years the king Upendranārāyaṇa died at Dhaliyabāri in 1763 A.D. The senior queen placed Devendranārāyaṇa son of the

second queen, on the throne, and ascended the funeral pyre of her husband.⁶⁶

The Sati or the custom of Sahmarana⁶⁷ was prohibited in Koch Bihar in 1849 A.D.

Slavery

Slavery was not unknown in north eastern India including the Kamata-Koch territory. The nobles and persons of respectable position also owned slaves for performing household work and labour of the fields.^{67a}

In the 16th century, a number of slaves were found in the household of Sankaradeva, the Vaishnava reformer.⁶⁸ Stephen Casella who came to Koch Bihar during Lakshminarayana's time remarked about the export of male and female slaves to Bhutan.⁶⁹

Robinson made us believe that 'the slaves were persons taken in war, or brought of the hill tribes, or the descendants of slave'.⁷⁰ Martin supplies with an interesting information about the prevalence of slave trade in the Koch Kingdom. It is said that children were dressed up and sold in the hats or basars.⁷¹ Again, we learn that the people of the neighbouring Bhot or Garo tribe often abducted men and women from Mughal or Koch Bihar territory and make them slaves.⁷² Sometimes slaves were sent to Bengal, Bhutan and upper Burma and they were also made as marriage dowry of rich men's

daughters.⁷³ Peasants were often selling themselves or their wives and children. It appeared that distinction between serfdom and slavery was less accountable, in the absence of the classical form of a dehumanized slavery.⁷⁴ It has been noticed by F. Hamilton that 'about a hundred of pure caste were annually sold to Bengal. They were mostly children; the girls were chiefly bought by prostitutes, and cost from twelve to fifteen rupees. A Koch boy cost twentyfive rupees, a Kolita boy fifty; slaves of impure tribes were sold to the Garos, and many were said to be sent to Naga, from whence they were probably exported to Ava'.⁷⁵ W. Hamilton, however, observes that 'the people of Assam sell many slaves, and those of Cooch Behar are not unwilling to carry on the same trade'.⁷⁶ Ibn Batutāh on his visit to Bengal came to Sodkaman and from there he started for Kāmarūpa which was a month's journey on foot and observed that the people dwelling in the mountains were very hardy servants and slaves.⁷⁷

From the story of 'Sātpusa Vrata' we learn that during that period in the society slaves were bought and sold in the open market. It further informs us that the slaves unlike the other countries were treated as the members of the families and were not surely tortured.⁷⁸

Food

The Gurullā tells us that during the time of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa the people ate fowls, ducks and pigs.⁷⁹ People

of high and low status lived in the Kingdom. Brāhmin-Pandits, officers with the titles Barua, Karmi (Kārji), castes like potters, barbers, washermen, goldsmith and singers, players of musical instruments, actors etc. formed the mixed population of the Capital. The Yoginī Tantra (Uttarakhandā, Patala IX Verse 16) refers to the diet of the people in Kāmarūpa, the flesh of Ducks, Pigeons, tortoise and bears, and warns those who give up eating these animals, that they will come to grief. Again, from the accounts of the Gurulīlā and the Gobānīśāgala, we know that the people ate among others, curd, molasses, sugar, betel-leaf and betel-nut, milk, honey, fish etc.⁸⁰

H.N. Chowdhury writing about the food habit of the people of Koch Kingdom states, "generally two meals are taken : one at about mid-day, and the other shortly after nightfall. In the morning Chira or goora is generally eaten."^{80a} Food was taken twice a day - rice, vegetables, fish, salt, oil and chillies - and worth a penny.⁸¹ At harvest time, there was plenty of food stuff and there was no end of meals. In times of famine and scarcity the case was altogether different.

Sweet milk was a favourite drink for the children. The adults preferred sour or curded milk called dahi. Dahi and chiras with a little salt and couple of green chillis was a favourable food. The people often preferred it to rice.⁸² Campbell says that rice is the staple food of the Rājāsās.

They also eat pigeon, goats, ducks and wild rabbits. They used spices like onion, garlic, green chillies.⁸³ Tobacco is in wide use. Opium and hemp are also taken by the people. The betel-leaf (pān) and betel-nut (tāmbul) have been in extensive and intensive use through the ages.⁸⁴ Some scholar while commenting on the food habit of the people of this ~~xxxx~~ region, remarked that the per capita intake of rice, fish, meat and leafy vegetables as was higher in the 16th and 17th centuries than in the British period. Salt being expensive, poor people used more of alkāli (jāhāg) as its substitutes.⁸⁵

The people of the Baikantapurā region, as noted by Śrī Jagadindradeva Rāikat, used to take rice and other vegetables.⁸⁶

Dress ✓

The women, as narrated in Gurullā, wore various dresses of white, blue and yellow colour.⁸⁷ Again the women, according to Campbell, used to wear magnificent dresses of red and yellow colour.⁸⁸ It is interesting to note here that the Kālikā-purāṇa forbids the use of garments of blue and red for religious purpose.⁸⁹ The male normally used to wear dhoti, chāddar and the women wore only dhoti. The women used to wear a piece of cloth on the breast. The use of langoti was also in vogue. It had origin in the wants of the people, but the

people accustomed to it like exposure so much that they actually felt uncomfortable in a bigger or fuller raiment.⁹⁰

Both at home and abroad the women liked to be better dressed. When at home, and for ordinary wear, they used to wear a piece of cotton cloth called pāṭāni about 5 feet length, which was wrapped round the body and backed up above the breast so as to reach the knee. When going out the pieces of cloth as large as pāṭāni were worn, one round the waist and the other round the breast. This was called agraṇ.⁹¹

Ornaments ✓

The Gosānīmaṅgala and the Beharādīpta, though not composed in the same period, give us an account of different types of ornaments.⁹² The married women used vermilion above the forehead at the parting of the hair. They also used shell bracelets called śankha generally on the left wrist.

Those who could afford had also silver bangles. Muthā, a kind of silver bracelet, was of common use. Other popular ornaments were silver, gold mālā, necklace, and śukṭi or gold ear ring, nat or nose ring of gold and silver, nakṭal for the nose, śankhāru for the ankle-joint.⁹³

Games ✓

Among the indoor games we have the information of

the following : Chau-roti, Shatchares-rotte, Khalchak, Mogal-pathān or sola-patā, shaker-chal, Bāch-hāchini and Te-parte. The nature of these games are not, however, always clear.⁹⁴

It is interesting to note that king Prānanārāyaṇa used to entertain during the spring season with the beautiful ladies every year. During these two months he did not look after the administration of the Kingdom. He had deep passion for music. He is said to have composed a treatise on music.^{94a}

Music was an essential thing for public entertainment. The musical instruments of the people as narrated in the Rāgrang RāisVānsavali, are Gonch, Bell, Kartāle, Dundubhi, Dhak, Dhol, Dakka, Nāṅkā, Rābhens, Kabilāsa, Kheniarika, Mohori, Dotkā, Rokkā, Sāvindā, Bāsi, Zhili, Zhinirikā, Budraka, Tokāri, Tudi, Mrdanga, Mandira, Kholā, Dhamsai, Gosona, Moxuri, Upanga, Barkāṅkha, Mambai, Joykālī, Vaxi, Rānsingā, Rāntāle, Zhoniorā, Gomkha, Birkālī, SingheVān, Tobala, Docari, Dholaka, Mādala, Tāl etc.⁹⁵

Notes and References

- 1 D.C.Sircar, Problems of Early Indian Social History, Calcutta, 1933, p.39.
- 2 Risley, The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Vol.I, XVff.
- 3 R.C.Majumdar (ed.), History of Bengal, Vol.I, p.566.

It may be mentioned that the formation of castes from tribal groups is a characteristics of the Social life in all periods of Indian history (D.C.Sircar, Studies in the Society and Administration of Ancient Medieval India, Vol.I, Delhi, 1957, p.105) Manusmṛiti and other works on law are eager to include all Aryans, Non-aryans and foreign tribes and communities into the theoretical schens of the Catur-varṇa. The attempt was mainly to represent these tribal or foreign communities as a Vratya (or degraded) class of Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya or Vaiśya or as ṣ originated from an admixture of blood of two or more of the four conventional varṇas.

See D.C.Sircar, Problems of Early Indian Social History, p.40. According to the evidence of the Yoginītantra, a product of the late medieval period the plca or the Bhūtās, the Samar or the Assamese, the Kuvāsa or the Koch who govern Vihar and the yavay or the Barbarians of the west are descendants of Haihoyo and Talojonggho, the degraded Kṣatriyas (Buchanan, J.A.S.B. No.73, 1838, p.11).

- 4 Cf. The Brhad-dharma purāna, (ed. in Bibliotheca Indica Series, Pts. I & II); R.C.Majumdar ed., op.cit., pp.567 ff.

5 Cf. Brāhmaṇa Kṣatriya Vaiśya Sūdra Cārijatī |

Pari pari praname bhakati bhāve āti || -V 637

K.C.Pathak (ed.), Gurullā, p.105.

Also the people of these four Varnas (Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Sūdra) are said to have acknowledged Viśvasimha's accession to the throne. See Ghosal, op.cit., p.111.

6 Cf. Bipra Kṣatrigon Vaiśya Sūdra jan āno nana jāticay |

Kariā bivad dilā pariched bhāge bhāge āticay || -791

Samsta jātik bhinna karilek uttan madhya kari

Kato sakalek hīn karilek sāstra bhāva anusāri || V-792

Rājā Harendranārāyaṇa, Bṛhat Rājasmāsāvalī, quoted in

N.N.Vasu's Social History of Kamarupa, p.58, Vol.II,

New Delhi, Reprint.

7 F.Hamilton, An Account of Assam, edited by S.K.Bhuyan,

Ganhati, 1940; p.52.

S.N.Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.22.

7a Hunter, A Statistical Account of Assam, Vol.I, First published

1879, Reprinted, Delhi, 1975, pp.29-35.

8 M.Neog, Sankaradeva and His times, p.76.

Regarding Kalitās following observations have been made by the different scholars :

(1) Mārkandeya Purāṇa refers to Kulta along with Darada, Gana etc. (Chap.55)

(ii) Dalton (Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, pp.321-322)

Considers Kalitās to be the Aryans of Pure descent, who came to the Province before the formation of existing

professional castes

- (iii) Baden Powel, however, ranked them (the Kalitās) in class who were formerly Buddhists but they had to seek refuge in the hills from the mid-India following the subsequent Brahmanic revival. He remarks that 'there are scattered remnants of these once ruling houses still existing under the name Kulta or Kalita Caste', - The Indian Village Community, London, 1906, pp. 135 ff.
- (iv) Martin, on the other hand, refers to their unorthodox character, and says that they are independent of the Brāhmaṇa priests. (Eastern India, Vol. III, p. 545).
- (v) Gait mentions Kalitās as kāyasthas and as a predominating caste who were enlightened and advanced. (A History of Assam, p. 258).
- (vi) Hunter observed that the Kalitās were the agriculturists. They were the priests of the Koch rulers before the advent of the Brāhmaṇas. And they appeared to have been a superior race. Hunter, op. cit., p. 32.

9 N.N. Vasu, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 58.

10 Loc. cit.

11 Rājā Harendranārāyaṇa, op. cit., padas (1793-1794)

(Vide Assam Govt. Collection, Darrang, No. 2, 1st part).

12 N.N. Vasu, op. cit., p. 60.

13 H.C. Sharma (ed.), op. cit., p. 68.

14 Cf. Kāmrūpa dviḥjagan paramasōvan | Vedācar kari gr̥he gr̥he thāke

raṅgman ||

Binā tīrthasūnāe sūddha kari saṅkār | deśa desantare vrami

rukare bicār ||

Pūṅka Van ādi karma Ved byabehār | Karanta Brāhmaṅgane

ācar bicār

Kṛsikama karāl Bipragan pravartay | matsya māṅksa tāmbulak

bhojan karay ||

Rājā Harendranārāyaṇa, op.cit., padas - 130-132.

15 'Cf Bāro Bhuyān āche laṅḍādev mukhya kari |

Viśvasiṅha nāme pāche bhalla nareśvar ||

Sirirān Khāko chalsūddhe zinilek |

Āno bhuyān samostaka basya karilek ||

S.C.Goswami, (ed.), op.cit., (Intro.p.26.)

It is said that Kusumavara, a Bhuyān Chief who was the father of the Vaiṣṇava reformer Śaṅkaradeva was defeated by Viśvasiṅha.

16 Ibid., (Intro: p.26)

17 N.H.Vasu, op.cit., Vol.II, pp.64ff.

18 Ibid., pp.71-72.

19 S.C.Goswami (ed.), op.cit., p.46; H.N.Dutta Barua (ed.)

Guruarita, pp.15-16 & p.547.

20 Ibid., p.72.

21 M.Neog, op.cit., p.75.

22 N.C.Sharma (ed.), op.cit., p.37.

This Group of people, as mentioned in the above book,

had been engaged in the treatment of various diseases. They were acquainted with the uses of various drugs prepared from plants. They were also adept in charms and incantations. They knew the ideas as referred to in the Vedas and could also prescribe good diet.

- 23 Epigraphia Indica, Vol.XVII, pp.291-309; Indian Antiquary, Bombay, 1893, pp.57 ff.
- 24 R.C.Majumder, History of Bengal, Vol.I, p.590.
Cf. Brahma-Vaivarta Purana's story regarding Vaidya in Visvakosa S.V. Vaidyajāti.
- 24a D.C.Sircar, Studies in Society and Administration of Ancient and Medieval India, Vol.I, pp.21ff.
- 24b D.C.Sircar, op.cit., p.113.
- 25 Daityāri Thākura, Mahāpurāṇa Śrī Śaṅkaradeva aru Mādhavadeva Carita, ed. by H.N.Dutta Barua, p.168.
- 25a Manu, X, 34.
- 26 Fick, Soziale Entwicklung, 302.
- 27 R.C.Majumder, History of Bengal, Vol.I, p.591.
- 28 Cf. The story of Vallāla Carita mentioned in the History of Bengal, Vol.I, p.240.
- 29 B.K.Barua, A Cultural History of Assam, op.cit., p.128.
- 29a Robinson, A Descriptive Account of Assam, 1841, Delhi, Reprint 1975, p.263.
- 30 B.K.Barua, op.cit., p.127.

30a Cf. the Bṛhad-Dharma Purāṇa II-XIV, 75;

Also see R.C. Majumder (ed.), History of Bengal, Vol. I, p. 573.

31 Cf. Graha nakṣatrasa gati rāsi yorā Grantha |

Bhūṣ Bhaviṣyat varttanānak jānanta || V. 177.

31 N.C. Sharma (ed.), op. cit., pp. 36-37; N.N. Paul (ed.),

Gosāṁsāgala, p. 37.

31a Cf. Brāhmaṇa Daivajña Santa Mahanta jatek |

Gāye gāye saṁhāko tusilā pratyek ||

See N.C. Sharma (ed.), op. cit., p. 64.

32 N.C. Sharma, op. cit., Intro., pp. 17-18;

Bṛhensvārī Devī, Behāradanta, Cooch Behar, 1330 B.S.,
ed. by Nirūpsmā Devā, pp. 53-54.

N. Paul (ed.), Gosāṁsāgala, p. 25.

33 A. Guha, Mughal North East India : Polity, Society and
Economy 1200-1750 A.D., ^{Occasional Paper No. 19} Calcutta, 1978, p. 14.

34 Loc. cit.

35 N.N. Vasu, op. cit., p. 81.

36 Cf. Kaivartta kalitā koch Brāhmaṇa sanasta |

Ekiage khāl dūdh cirā kalājata ||

H.N. Dutta Barua (ed.), Mahāpurusa śrī Saṅkaradeva śru

Śrīnāthadeva Carita, p. 168.

37 H.N. Dutta Barua (ed.), op. cit., p. 181.

38 S.N. Sharma, A Contemporary of Guru Nanak. Shankaradeva,

Published in the Journal of Sikh Studies, Amritsar,

1978, p. 133.

- 39 N.N.Vasu, op.cit., Vol.I, p.74.
- 40 Ibid., p.78.
- 41 Ibid., p.64.
- 42 Br̄ndes̄varī Devī, Beh̄radants, pp.54-56.
Also see K.C.Pathak (ed.), op.cit., pp.104-105.
- 43 Monika Roychoudhury, Koch Biharē Rāja Amale Nārī Pragatir Rūpa Rekha (an article in Bengali)
Published in Koch Bihar Sāhitya Sabha Patrika (Bengali),
1380 (Bengali San), pp.25-26.
- 44 Cf. sei gr̄me Madhujālī dehidre dh̄m̄ |
Tār nārī mah̄satī dh̄re Sītā nām̄ ||
N.N.Paul (ed.), Gosānī Mangala, p.37.
- 45 Cf. Punnyabatī ei Satī, Kṛṣṇa padē sadā matī,
Kṛṣṇa padē bād̄hā sarbakṣen
Ibid., p.43.
- 46 H.S.Bhattacharyya & S.S.Bhattacharyya,
Koch Biharer Pr̄cin Vrat̄akathā, Burdwan University,
1983, Intro: p.10.
- 47 Ibid., Intro: p.15.
- 47a N.C.Sharma (ed.), op.cit., p.70.
- 48 H.S.Bhattacharyya & S.S.Bhattacharyya, op.cit., Intro: p.17.
- 49 Loc.cit.
- 50 A.C.Campbell, A Comprehensive Archaeological, Biographical and Pictorial History of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa,
Vol.I, Chapter - 'Glimpses of Bengal' tr. of the portion on
Cooch Behar by N.N.Paul in Bengali, Calcutta, 1979, p.3; Also

see H.N.Chowdhury, The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement, 1903, p. 132.

50a Cf. Asvalayana Grhyasūtra, 1, 6, 1-8;

Also see B Śadhāyana, 1, no. 1-2, Gautama, IV, 6-15.

50b Manu, 111, 24-251.

50c N.C.Chowdhury (ed.), Rāikat Vaisā O Tāhāder Rājyer Samskṛta Vivarana (in Bengali), Jalpaiguri, 3rd ed. 1983, pp. 6-7.

51 H.N.Chowdhury, op. cit., p. 144;

Cf. Gāndharva bivāhe bihā karilā saksāt |

Nṛtya gīt bādya bhāndya bajāl asankhyat ||

Brāhman Daivajña santa mahanta jatek |

Dāne Māne Samastake Tusilā Pratyek || - V. 236.

The Darrang Rāia Vaisāvalī (pp. 46-47) records the Gāndharva marriages of mahārājā Viśvasimha. The marriages of eighteen queens were said to have performed in one day.

S.C.Ghosal informs us of a case which was lodged against Makaranda deva, of the Rāikat family of Baikantapurā, who took possession of the zamindary by one Rājendranārāyaṇa alleging that Makarandadeva was born of a woman of Gopa (milkman) caste, but in the judgement of the Sudder Dewani Ādalat this mixed marriage was held to be valid (8th February 1853 A.D.) and Makarandadeva became the fifteenth Rāikat.

See A History of Cooch Behar, p. 236.

- 52 Cf. Sambandha Viveka, fol. 2b.
- 52a H.N. Chowdhury, op.cit., pp. 144-45.
- 53 C LIW. 5.
- 54 Yājñya Valkya Smṛti with a commentary of Viśvarūpa, I. 63.
- 55 Brahmapurāna, quoted by Aparārka on yaj. I. 68.69.
- 56 Medhatithi on Manu, VIII, 225.
- 57 H.N. Chowdhury (op.cit., p. 146) provides us with the information that the issue of the Union, under a recent ruling of the State Council, has not the status of a legitimate child, and does not succeed to the man's property.
- 58 Col. Dalton, Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, pp. 91-92.
- 59 N.C. Sharma (ed.), pp. 46-47.
- 60 S.C. Ghosal, op.cit., p. 152.
- 61 B.K. Barua, op.cit., p. 134.
- 62 Yoginī Tantra, II, Verses 302-303.
- 63 Loc. cit.
- 64 S.C. Ghosal, op.cit., p. 124.
- 65 Loc. cit.
- 66 H.N. Chowdhury, op.cit., p. 243.
- 67 Ibid., p. 283.
- 67a Gait, op.cit., p. 255.

'David Scott is said to have released 14,000 slaves in Kamarupa alone'. A. Guha says that Chāsua pāiks were also said to have managed to carry on cultivation with one, two or more slaves and bondsmen.
See the occasional paper 19, p. 54.

68 U.C.Lekharu⁽²⁾, Katha-Gura-Grits, p.619.

69 S.C.Ghosal, op.cit., p.188.

70 Robinson, A Descriptive Account of Assam, p.204.

First Pub. 1841, Delhi, 1978.

71 Martin, Eastern India, Vol.III, p.681.

Also see S.Turner, An Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama in Tibet ed. by H.K.Kuloy, Manjusri Publishing House, New Delhi, 1971 (Reprint), p 11

72 S.C.Ghosal, op.cit., p.279.

73 A.Guha, op.cit., p.37.

74 Ibid., p.38.

In the Ahom territory, as Guha says, "slaves, serfs and bondsmen, together constituted 5 to 9 per cent of the population". While describing social conditions under the Ahoms, Gait has also observed that the slaves who lost their liberty by mortgaging their persons for a loan, were brought and sold in open market. The price was ranging from about twenty rupees for an adult male of good taste to three rupees for a low caste girl".

Also see A History of Assam, p.255, 3rd ed. Reprint 1967;

Also see M'cosh Topography of Assam, pp.26ff, Calcutta, 1887.

75 F.Hamilton, An Account of Assam, edited by S.K.Bhuyan, Gauhati, 1940, p.74.

76 W.Hamilton, A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of Hindoostan, Vol.I, p.207.

- 77 Ibn Batutah's Account of Bengal, Eng. Tr. by H.N. Dey,
Calcutta, 1978, p. 9.
- 78 H. Bhattacharyya & S. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., p. 7.
- 79 K.C. Pathak (ed.), Gurulila, p. 98.
- 80 Ibid., p. 104; N.N. Paul (ed.),
Gosānīmangala, p. 32.
- 80a H.N. Chowdhury, op. cit., p. 137.
- 81 S.C. Ghosal, op. cit., p. 279.
- 82 H.N. Chowdhury, loc. cit.
- 83 Campbell, op. cit., p. 4. Tr. by N.N. Paul (in Bengali)
- 84 H.N. Chowdhury, loc. cit.
- 85 A. Guha, op. cit., p. 39.
- 86 N.C. Chowdhury, (ed.), op. cit., p. 6.
- 87 K.C. Pathak (ed.), op. cit., pp. 104-05.
- 88 Campbell, tr. by N.N. Paul, op. cit., p. 5.
- 89 B.K. Barua, op. cit., pp. 145-46.
- 90 H.N. Chowdhury, op. cit., p. 135.
- 91 Ibid., pp. 134-35.
- 92 N.N. Paul (ed.) Gosānī Mangala, p. 9.
Cf. Hastete balay dilā padete nūpur |
Katite kinkini dilā gale matihār ||
- 93 Campbell, op. cit., tr. by N.N. Paul, p. 4,
& also H.N. Chowdhury, op. cit., p. 135.

94 Ibid., p. 138.

94a Biswanath Das (ed.), Rājopākhyāna, p. 31.

95 N.C. Sharma, op.cit., Intro : 19.

SECTION II

EDUCATION AND GROWTH OF LITERATURE

The ancient Brahmanical sacred law laid down a comprehensive scheme of Vedic education for students belonging to the first three classes of Hindu social system.¹ But the Smṛti authorities unlike those of the Gupta and the earlier periods, seldom refer to technical education. The Bhavisavattakha, a tenth century Jaina text, however, gives an interesting account of the training of a young merchant.²

The education that was imparted to the pupils through the agency of one of our traditional institutions, namely the public recitations of the Epics, the Purāṇas and other religious works were at a later period accessible even to the lowest strata of the society. The inscriptions of early medieval India refer from time to time to endowments made by pious donors with this object.

The Koch Kings during the period under review also brought the Brāhmanas from different places as mentioned earlier and gave encouragement for the dissemination of Sanskrit learning and education. Sanskrit talas (Schools) were said to have existed from the 16th century onwards at Koch Bihar. The subjects taught were "the four Vedas, the fourteen Sāstras,

the eighteen Purānas, the Mahābhārata, the sixteen Vyākaraṇas, the eighteen Kāvyas, the eighteen Kośas, and Arthasastra,^{2a} besides yoga-sāstra and texts on Kāithālī or Mathematics (the learning followed by Kāyasthas or clerks and Accountants).^{2a} For advanced study the people would go to places like Mithilā (Darbhanga), Śāntipura and Navadvīpa in Bengal, and to Varāṇasī. We learn that Malladeva (Naranārāyaṇa) and Sukladhvaja, sons of Viśvasimha were sent to Varāṇasī where they acquired education in the hermitage of a saint named Brahmananda Svāmī. They became adept in grammar, literature, astronomy, the Vedas, the Smṛtis, Nyaya, Mīmāṃsā and Purānas. Goṣāṇīśāgala (composed in 1825 A.D.)^{2b} describes how the pupils were taught at the residences of Brāhmaṇa Gurus (teachers). The students had to stay at such venerable institutions of the Brāhmaṇa Gurus and they acquired learning in Bengali, Sanskrit, Vyākaraṇas, Kāvyas, Sāstras, Tantras and Mantras etc.

The Rājanākhyaṇa,³ also mentions about the establishment of educational institutions throughout the Kingdom during the reign period of Virṅarāyaṇa and Prāṇanārāyaṇa. Virṅarāyaṇa is said to have had strict watch on the progress of education. The children of the Brāhmaṇas, kings, ministers, officers, gatekeepers etc. were sent to those institutions for study.

Regarding women education, mention has already been made that the Queens of the Kāṇatā-Kośh kingdom, like

Bhānumatī, Brādesvarī Devī, Kāmesvarī Devī and Nirūpanā Devī played an important part in the growth of language and literature and in the spread of education among the women. It may be noted here that the rulers of the Kāmatā-Koch Bihar, apart from their encouragement to religious compositions, also patronised the secular writing in the kingdom.

As regards the growth of literature in the Kāmatā-Koch Kingdom, an attempt may be made to discuss it from two angles : (i) literary compositions by the Mahārājās themselves and the Court poets; (ii) literary contributions from the Neo-vaishnava preachers like Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva.

The Kāmarūpī language was cultivated in the royal court of Durlabhanārāyaṇa, who possibly flourished in the second quarter of the fourteenth century A.D. He patronised three poets viz., Hema Sarasvatī, Harihara Vipra and Kaviratna Sarasvatī.⁴ Hema Sarasvatī was a follower of devotee of Hara-Gaurī and Hari. His predilection to Bhakti cult has been mentioned in Hiranyakesinīśabdha chapter of work on Praband-Cerita.⁵ He wrote two other books viz. Narasimha Purana and Hara-Gaurī Saṁvāda. Harihara Vipra translated the Asvamedha Parva of the Mahābhārata, while Kaviratna Sarasvatī translated the Drupadaparva of the same epic.

The Poet Pitānvara who was the contemporary of

Viśvasiṃha, wrote the Nala Damayanti episode of the Mahābhārata. He is said to have composed the book at the request of Samar Śiṃha (Sukladhvaja) son of Viśvasiṃha at 1466 Śaka corresponding to A.D. 1544.⁶ He also translated into Bengali verse the stories contained in the Mārkandeya Purāna.⁷ Another work accomplished by Pīṭambhara at the instance of Sukladhvaja, was the translation of the 10th Canto of the Bhāgavata Purāna between 1514-33 A.D.⁸ Mānkara and Durgāvara were the Court poets of Viśvasiṃha. Mānkara in his Manasā-maṅgala uses the name Mārāiyā for Manasā (Mārāiyā-māḍali jagok jāteka barati'.... i.e., let all the devotees be ready in the pavillion of the Goddess). Mārāi means a scourge of death or epidemic. It has been mentioned in Chapter III that the worship of Bisahari (Manasā) was greatly popularised. The Goddess is still being propitiated to get rid of epidemics and natural calamities.⁹

Mahārājā Naranārāyaṇa's period witnessed a spectacular development in the field of language and literature. It was during his reign the Sanskrit learning was immensely improved. Sanskrit became the chief vehicle of expression. The conversation was conducted in the royal court in Sanskrit. Even the people used to speak in Sanskrit.¹⁰ His court was always adorned with pundits, and in his time Sanskrit learning was greatly popularised. Bhūṣeṇa, a Brāhmaṇa was the court poet. Gunabhiram Barua informs us that before Śaṅkaradeva and Nāḍhadeva's advent in Assam with their literary treasure, Sanskrit

was taught in the toles established in different places of the country.¹¹ With the Vaisnava revival under Śaṅkaraḍeva, Mādhavaḍeva and Dāmodaraḍeva, there was an impetus to the use of the popular regional language as the medium of expressions. The books composed by these religious reformers were introduced in the various Sātras for learning. King Naraṅarāyaṅa issued an injunction asking the Scholars to translate the noted Sanskrit classics, which he thought, would be useful "for the edification and study of women and sūdra, at the present time, and of the Brahmanas at a later stage".¹² Kavi Rāmasarṣvatī, the court poet of Naraṅarāyaṅa gave an idea about the royal patronage in one of his 'Bhaṅgitaṅ'. He wrote : "My sovereign commanded me to translate the Mahābhārata into verse ; He offered to place before me all the commentaries available at the royal court. He sent cart-loads of texts to my residence and encouraged me in my work with adequate money, clothing, apparel and servants".¹³ Thus the poet translated into Sanskrit the whole of the Mahābhārata. The work consists Yogaṅkya, Bhishmaṅkya, Virāṅkya, Udyogaṅkya, Aśvamedhaṅkya, etc. Ananta Kaṅḍali, another poet wrote a Kāvya, Sāvitrī upāśhyāna of the Mahābhārata. We come across a manuscript on Rājasāya of the Mahābhārata composed by him at that period.¹⁴ He also wrote ŚrīRāma Kīrtana.

In 1555 A.D. Naraṅarāyaṅa sent a Letter to the Ahom King Sukhaṅphā, Khora Rāja through his envoys requesting the

letter to establish friendship between the two kings. This letter considered to be first letter written in Bengali Drama style.^{14a}

At the request of Bhānumatī, the Chief queen of Naranārāyaṇa, Purusottama Vidyāvāgīśa composed the celebrated Sanskrit grammar, Prayoga Ratnamālā (in Śaka 1499 i.e. 1568 A.D.) which was taught in many toles in Koch Bihar and Ahom kingdom extensively.¹⁵ Raghudeva was taught with the help of this Grammar.¹⁶ The queen Bhānumatī was said to have well-versed in Pāṇinī and Kalāpa-avyākaraṇas.¹⁷ Naranārāyaṇa also encouraged the writing of secular literature. Under his instructions Bakul Kāyastha composed 'Bhūmi Parimāna' and translated Līlāvati. He is said to have compiled on a poetical treatise Kitāba Maṣīri on Arithmetic, land-surveying and Book-keeping.^{17a} The royal astrologer wrote a book named 'Jyotiṣa'. Siddhānta Vāgīśa, who was celebrated under the Cognomen 'Jagatguru', wrote many treatise on Smṛti entitled 'Kaṇḍī' and translated Sanskrit works into Bengali.

We learn that Naranārāyaṇa composed a dictionary entitled Malladevī Abhidhāna, which, however, could not be discovered as yet. The poet Kānsari who flourished at his court translated some portions of Virāṭaparva and Kirāṭaparva of the Mahābhārata.¹⁸

It is said that Naranārāyaṇa took a keen interest in extending education to the common people. A few persons

belonging to Kāyastha and Kalitā castes were engaged in writing books on Arithmetic etc.¹⁹

Naranārāyaṇa was not merely a great patron of learning and education, but was himself well versed in different Sāstras. He was described as the Vikramāditya of Kāmarūpa.²⁰

Vipraprasāda flourished at the court of Mahārāja Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa and wrote the following books : Vikāṅkavya, Jananavya and Kaṣṭha Parva. Govinda Misra another court poet of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa translated the eighteen parvas of the Bhāgavata Gītā. This translated work of Gītā was considered to be the only work at that period in Eastern India.²¹

Sri Kavisekhara was the court poet of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa. He rendered into translation the Kirātaparva of the Mahābhārata, the manuscript of which is still preserved in the State library in Koch Bihar.²²

During Prānanārāyaṇa's time the state of language and education reached to a great height. All officers and courtiers of the king used to speak in Sanskrit and the king established a Pundit Sabha known as the Pañcārṣṭha (five jewels i. e. five learned men).²³ Kaviratna, being patronised by the King wrote history of the royal dynasty in Sanskrit entitled Rājakhanda. Śrīnātha Brāhmana, the court poet also translated Ādiparva, Bṛhaspatisya Smṛtya,²⁴ Virātaparva of the

Bhishmaparva of the Mahābhārata was translated by Dvija Rāma. The poet described Mahāndranārāyana as the lord of Kānata, 31

Nārāyana Dvija, the court poet of Upendranārāyana, at the instance of Kumār Khagendranārāyana, the brother of the king translated the Nāradiya Purāna into verse which is preserved in the Cooch Behar State library.

Vaishnava Literature

Śaṅkaradeva, the Vaishnava reformer was not only successful in the propagation of religious teachings, but he was also equally famous as a great scholar and a poet as well. He drew inspiration chiefly from the Bhāgavata, being the quintessence of the Vedānta philosophy and made it into translation. His outstanding literary contribution was the Kīrttana Ghosa which contains several Kīrttana songs. 32 He has rendered translation of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa for which he was accused before the Koch King Naranārāyana by the Brāhmanas. Śaṅkaradeva said the king that Bhāgavata reading was equally essential for the Brāhmanas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Sūdras. This could easily be made accessible even to the Sūdras. 33 His longer narrative episodes comprised Harishchandra-upākhyāna, Rukminīharanākāya, Aimilopākhyāna, Amartasanthana Kāvya, Kuruksetra Kāvya etc. 34

He translated the last Canto of the Rāmāyana.

His next works may be discussed under theological and cosmological categories. He wrote (i) Bhakti Pradīna which denounces the worship of other deities in preference to Kṛṣṇa-bhakti, (ii) Nīlī-Navaśiḍḍha-śaivāda, (iii) Bhaktiratnākara (Sanskrit). He also composed verses in Sanskrit. He used mainly the language of the region as the medium of writing, but in rhyme and rhythm he followed the Brajaboli, in which style the Poet Jayadeva composed Gīta-Govinda.³⁶

He also wrote a devotional work Guṇamālā which highlighted mental speed and brevity.³⁶

Śaṅkaradeva composed a good number of dramas viz. Sītā-Svayamvara, Kṛṣṇa Guṇamālā, Pānīprasāda, Kāliyā-damaṇa, Keligopala, Pāṅgātaharṣa, Rukminīharṣa, Rāma-vijaya Kāvya etc.³⁷ The dramas were written to spearhead the cause of Vaiṣṇavism and to create devotional sentiments in the audience. His plays expressed love, devotion and heroism.

Śaṅkaradeva introduced the Baṅ-gīt or (Vara-gīta) devotional poems which dealt with religious experiences, philosophic reflections on the world and mortality, and poignant introspection of the self. The Baṅgīta already attained popularity and were also composed by later poets amongst whom many were women.³⁸

Among the ancient manuscripts collected recently

by the Government of Assam, many of them were written under the encouragement of the king Naranārāyaṇa. The patronage of the Mahārājā Naranārāyaṇa is acknowledged in the Colophons of many of the works of Śaṅkaradeva.³⁹ The outstanding product of Mādhavadeva, the disciple of Śaṅkaradeva, was Nāna Ghoṣā. He wrote Nāna-mālikā at the request of Virupākṣa Kārṣi, the minister of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa.⁴⁰ He followed the Brajbolī style in writing Bargits and dramas.⁴¹ Mādhavadeva also wrote a commentary on Śaṅkaradeva's Bhakti-Ratnākara. His one act plays also received a great appreciation by the people of Kāṣṭā Koṣh Bihar.

The literature that grew during the period of our study under the orders or encouragements of the kings or individual initiation of the poets, had a tremendous reflection on the religion of the contemporary period and the Epics. The religious movement that spread over the State of Koṣh Bihār under Śaṅkaradeva and his followers, was made possible for its acceptance to the people because of these literary works. Śaṅkaradeva brought Bhakti in the literature of the Kāṣṭā-Koṣh-Raj-Darbar. It can be estimated that stories covering the aspects of religion had become the chief constituent in writing the various books. The writers of the Kāṣṭā Koṣh Court used prose in literature. They were the harbinger in this field. This style was, however, followed by the writers of Bengal at a later period.

Notes and References

- 1 R.C.Majumdar, The Age of Imperial Kanauj, 2nd ed. Bombay, 1964. p. 388.
- 2 Bhavisayattakshā, ed. by Jacobi, Introduction, 3f
- 2a S.K.Chatterjee, The place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India, p.74.
- 2b N.N.Paul (ed.), Gosāinśāhā, p.8.
- 3 Biswanath Das (ed.), Rājopākhyāna, p.31. The Rājopākhyāna of Jaygnath Munshi was composed in 1823 A.D.
- 4 N.N.Acharyya, The History of the Medieval Assam, p. 161.
- 5 A.K.Chakravartti, Literature in Kānatā Koch Bihar Rāj-Darbhāṅg, Dhubri (Assam), 1964, p. 29.
- 6 Durgadas Majumdar, West Bengal District Gazetteers - Koch Bihar, Calcutta, 1977, p. 172.
- 7 Shashi Bhushan Das Gupta (ed.), A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts Preserved in the State Library of Cooch Behar, The Cooch Behar State, 1948, Manuscript No. 8, p. 7.
- 8 Ibid., Manuscript No. 58, p. 62.
It may be mentioned here that the complete version of the Bhāgavata (Rājā Khanda) is only available at the Akshaya Kumar Naitreya Museum, North Bengal University (Darjeeling). The book has recently been edited by Dr. Bimalendu Dasg.
- 9 Durgadas Majumdar, op.cit., p. 172.

10 Cf. Sabe loke smiskṛta bacana bolaya | V.822

H.N.Dutta Barua (ed.), Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Śaṅkaradeva

Śrī Śrī Mādhavadeva Garita, Nalbari Assam, 1945, pp.180-181.

11 Gunabhiram Barua, Assam Burañi, Gauhati, Reprint, 1972, p, 183.

12 S.K.Bhuyan, Studies in the Literature of Assam,
Gauhati, 1956, p.123.

Cf. Saupratike Strive sūdre nariba istane

Kichu Sego bhalle naribek biprasna V.606

N.C.Sharma (ed.) Darrang Rājanisāvalī, p.124.

13 B.K.Barua, Assamese Language and Early Assamese

Literature, Aspects of the Heritage of Assam,

Edited by K.N.Dutta, Gauhati, 1959, p.63.

King Naranārāyana also ordered Rāma Sarasvatī to
translate the whole of the Rāmāyana and the eighteen
Purāṇas :

Cf. Āru āche sapṭakaṇḍa Rāmāyana jata |

Slokek bhāṅgiā kariyo sauprata ||

Aṣṭādasa Purāṇara kariyok Pada | V.607

N.C.Sharma, (ed.), op. cit., p.124.

14 S.B.Das Gupta, op.cit., p.121 Manuscript, No.102.

14a Cf. The letter of Naranārāyana ^{Sent} to the Ahom King

Cf. Prācīn Bāñcī Patra Śaṅkalan by S.N.Sen, Calcutta
University, 1942.

15 Cf. Ratna mālā guru Grantha karikā |
Āmār nāmak sehi Granthe lekhiok ||

.....

.....

Smṛanta ādeś tahi bolā na Marilā |
Ānandate Ratnamālā sāstrak niruilā ||

Verses 1825-27.

Rājā Harendranārāyaṇa, Bṛhat Rājavamsāvalī

16 S.C.Ghosal, A History of Gooch Behar, p.184.

17 H.N.Yasa, The Social History of Kamarupa, Vol.II, p.72.

17a H.C.Goswami (ed.), Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts, Calcutta University, 1930, pp.93-94.

The date of composition of the said work by
 Bakul Kāyastha shown in this book is 1434 A.D., which
 however, seems to be wrong.

18 A.K.Chakravartty, op.cit., p.69.

19 G.Barua, op.cit., p.183.

20 Āssam Sāhitva Sabhā Adhibeśanar
Sabhāntir abhibhāṣaṇa, p.40, quoted by S.C.Ghosal,
op.cit., p.165fn.

21 A.K.Chakravartty, op.cit., p.86.

22 S.B.Dasgupta, op.cit., p.105, Manuscript, No.90.

23 Bisvenath Das, op.cit., p.33.

24 S.B.Dasgupta, op.cit., pp.87-91, Manuscript Nos.77 & 78.

25 Ibid., p.3.

Manuscript No.3.

- 26 S.C.Ghosal, op.cit., p.203.
- 27 Biswanath Das, op.cit., p.33.
- 28 S.C.Ghosal, op.cit., p.204.
- 29x From the Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts,
it is observed that the name of the commentary on
Pragoga Ratnamālā as composed in Sanskrit by
Jayakṛṣṇa Deva was Padmañīgi. See H.C.Goswami (ed.),
op.cit., pp.227-28.
- 29 A.K.Chakravartty, op.cit., p.73.
- 30 S.B.Dasgupta, op.cit., p.98, Manuscript No.85.
- 31 Cf. Kāmatār pati Mahīndra Nṛpati
Tar ājñā paramāṇe |
Ibid., Manuscript 94, p.111.
- 32 M.Neog, Śaṅkaradeva, New Delhi, 1967, p.48.
- 33 H.N.Datta Barua, op.cit., p.181.
- 34 S.N.Sharma, A Contemporary of Guru Nanaka-Śaṅkara Deva,
published in the Journal of Sikh Studies, Vol.V,
No.1, Amritsar, 1978, p.141.
- 35 A.K.Chakravartty, op.cit., p.40.
- 36 M.Neog, op.cit., p.48.
- 37 S.N.Sharma, op.cit., p.142.
- 38 M.Neog, Assiyā Sāhityar Bāna-Rekhā,
Gauhati, 1962, pp.84-101.
- 39 Ghosal, op.cit., p.165.
- 40 Ibid., p.180.
- 41 Harachand Das (ed.), Nānā Ghosa, Gauhati, 1957,
Intro: p.11.