

MEDIEVAL ASSAMESE SOCIETY

1228—1826

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# MEDIEVAL ASSAMESE SOCIETY

( As gleaned from Contemporary  
Biographical and Historical Literature )

**1228—1826**

Thesis approved for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in the University of Gauhati

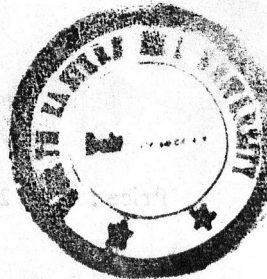
*Foreword*

**Late Dr. Niharranjan Ray**

Professor Emeritus, Calcutta University

**Sarbeswar Rajguru, M. A , D. PHIL.,**

NAGAON : ASAM



ASAMI

Milanpur

P. O. : Haibargaon—782002

NAGAON : ASAM

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Medieval Assamese Society, a socio-cultural history of Assam from the beginning of the thirteenth Century A. D. to the beginning of the nineteenth Century A. D., written by Dr. Sarbeswar Rajguru and published by Sri Pankaj Kumar Rajguru, on behalf of Asami, Milanpur, P. O. Haibargaon-782002, Nagaon : Asam.

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Dedicated  
To  
*The Sacred Memory*  
*of my father*  
*Lilambar Deva-Sarma Rajguru.*



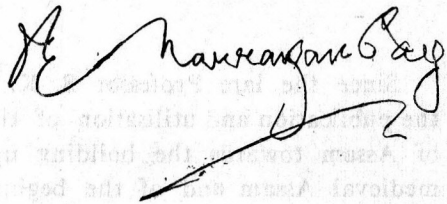
## Foreword

Since the late Professor S. K. Bhuyan had pioneered the publication and utilisation of the rich *buranji* literature of Assam towards the building up of the history of late medieval Assam and of the beginning of British rule there not much sustained and systematic attempt was made to exploit this rich material for the purpose of working out a comprehensive socio-religious and cultural history of this region. Yet it had been recognised from the very beginning that, first, here was just the kind of source material which was needed for cultural and Socio-religious history, and that, secondly, these *buranjis* when supplemented by the almost equally rich *Charita* or biographical chronicles, constituted the most comprehensive and dependable source of historical facts and situations for a continuous period of six hundred years, from about the middle of the thirteenth to about the middle of the nineteenth century.

To my knowledge Dr. Sarbeswar Rajguru's is perhaps the first attempt to exploit exactly these two sources towards the reconstruction of a fairly comprehensive account of medieval Assamese Society, and therefore, I welcome this publication. More attempts will be made in future, I am sure, towards a better organisation of the entire material, a more incisive and rigorous analysis of the facts and situations and a more integrated approach to the theme it-self. But any such attempt must take an appreciative

note of Dr. Rajguru's first straight forward assemblage of the basic material classified under different broad subject-heads. Even a cursory look at Dr. Rajguru's table of contents would show what this material is like, its range, nature and character. A good amount of time and patient and sustained labour must have gone into the making of this book, for which I for our feel very thankful indeed.

Foreword



Calcutta,  
10th March/1979

(Sd/- Niharranjan Ray)

## Preface

*Medieval Assamese Society, 1228-1826*, for which I was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the Gauhati University in the year 1967, was the outcome of my persistent and laborious investigation in different aspects of the social life of the Assamese people of the medieval period, for some years together. The medieval period beginning from the thirteenth century A. D. to the beginning of the nineteenth century A. D., is indeed a very significant period in the history of Assam, during which the Assamese Society not only attained a complete shape of its own but also made remarkable progress and development in different spheres of its national life. The following pages are an humble and sincere attempt of this writer to unveil the true and accurate picture of that society with all its perspectives and specilities tapping almost all the sources,—original and secondary, available, as far as possible.

For a systematic investigation in the subject-matter, the whole work was divided into four parts, such as, Introduction, Social Aspects, Economic Aspects and Cultural Aspects, in its original form and there were altogether 24 Chapters. But in order to make the work more compact and compressed, I have now reduced it to three parts only by incorporating the part *Economic Aspects* in the part *Cultural Aspects* as its first chapter with the title *Economic Condition*. I have also reorganised the chapters and reduced them from 24 in number to 10 only by incorporating some small chapters of the original work as sections in some chapters with new titles of wider denotation. Some extracts quoted verbatim in the original work have also been omitted by giving reference to them or by giving the gist only. But, all the while, I have kept myself alert so that the coherence and the integrity of the work, as a whole, remain undisturbed.

In the third part of the work, I have made limited discussions on two very important cultural topics, viz. literature and religion, as they have already been thoroughly discussed by other eminent scholars. Barring these two topics, I have tried my best to present true and complete picture of every aspect of the medieval Assamese Society by critically examining, besides my main sources Biographical and Historical literature, all other sources at my disposal as far as possible.

I have a pleasant duty to express my heart-felt gratitude to Dr. S. N. Sarma, former Secretary, University Clases and Rabindranath Tagore Professor, Gauhati University, under whose kind supervision I had the privilege to carry on my research work, for the encouragement and valuable suggestions given to me in writting out this work and who has also now written the Introduction to it, inspite of his multifarious works and busy time. It must be acknowledged that Late Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, the noted Historian and Educationist of the state, rendered monumental services to the cause of Historical and Antiquarian studies in Assam. It is for his untiring labour that we have got today enough sources for any sort of historical investigation relating to medieval Assam and Particularly to Ahom rule. I take this opportunity here to record my irdebtness and gratitude to Late Dr. Bhuyan. Besides my sources I was also much helped in my research work by the works of the early period of my predecessors. I consider it my pious duty to mention a few important of them, such as *Early History of Kāmarūpa* by Late K. L. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam* (Early Period) by Late Dr B.K. Barua and *The History of Civilization of the people of Assam* by Dr. P. C. Chowdhury. I take this opportunity to record and express my thanks and gratitude to them.

Besides my supervisor, Dr. S. N. Sarma of the Gauhati University, the two other lumineries in the Board of Examiners of my thesis were Late Dr. Niharanjan Ray, then Director, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla and Professor Emeritus, Calcutta University and Late

renowned Indologist Prof. A. L. Basham of the Department of History of South Asia, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London. I had the privilege of having personal contacts with both of these internationally reputed scholars. To speak the truth, it was Professor Ray's encouragement and appreciation of my thesis which inspired me to venture the publication of this expensive work. Professor Ray had laid me under special obligation by readily agreeing to write the Foreword of it. But these two learned professors are no more amongst us; their noble souls had left their mortal coils for the above world. I take this opportunity to record their names with great veneration and most humbly express my thanks and gratitude to them. During the period between 1963 and 1967 the Governing Body, Nagaon College, graciously helped me in every possible way in carrying on my research work. I take this opportunity to express and record my thanks and gratitude to the honourable members of the then Governing Body, Nagaon College.

I acknowledge with thanks the valuable suggestions and other helps which Late Benudhar Sarma, the noted historian of the State, Late Monoranjan Sastri, former Principal, Sanskrit College, Nalbari, Sri J. C. Sarma, former Principal, Nagaon College, Prof. L. Saikia, Head of the Department of History, Nagaon College and Prof. Md. Saleh, Head of the Department of English, Nagaon College, were kind enough to offer me while I was carrying on my research. My thanks are also due to Sri Benu Misra and Sri Dhruba Deka of the Artists' Guild, Gauhati for the sketches, Sri Sambhuran Saikia of Kujarbari Village, Nagaon for the coloured drawings and Sri Trailokya Dutta, Gauhati, for the Cover-design.

I express my heart-felt gratitude to Mr. S. C. Sutton, then Librarian, India Office Library, Commonwealth Relations Office, who laid me under special obligation by lending at the time of research, some very rare and valuable publications to the Nagaon College Library, for my use.

I am grateful indeed to Sri Reba Bara, B. A., B. Lib. Sc. Librarian, Nagaon College Library, who helped me immensely in my work by lending readily and ungrudgingly every available reference book at his disposal, at whatever time I approached him.

As a matter of fact if Sri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Honourable Chief Minister of Assam would not have come forward at a most critical time with a considerable amount of financial help, perhaps the present work would not have seen the light of the day. Sri Bhubaneswar Goswami, former Registrar, Gauhati High Court has also offered financial assistance towards the publication of this work. I take this opportunity to acknowledge with thanks and gratitude the benevolent assistance offered by Sri Mahanta, Honourable Chief Minister, Assam and Sri Goswami.

My thanks are due to Prof. K. C. Goswami, former Head of the Department of Geography, Nagaon College and Prof. H. Barua, for the Ground Plans, and Prof. M. R. Medhi, now in the Department of Geography, Mangaldai College for the Map of Assam, included in the work. My thanks are also due to Prof. H. Rahman, former Head of the Department of English, Nagaon College, Sri Bangsidhar Sarma, Amolapatty, Nagaon, Late Prof. S. C. Bhuyan, Department of Commerce, Nagaon College, Prof. K. P. Chowdhury, Department of English, Nagaon College, Sri Dilip Kumar Rajkhowa, Haibargaon, Sri Gopal Goswami of Village Chataibari, Nagaon and Sri Gobinda Chatterjee, Nagaon who helped me in bringing out this work to the light, by different ways.

The printing of such a thick thesis requires efficient compositors, huge amount of accent and italic types and a great deal of labour and patience and the presses in Assam generally do not like to undertake such printing work. But the Proprietor of Purbadesh Mudran, Gauhati, Sri Prasanta Sarma and his workers in the Press, facing many such difficulties and odds have completed the printing of the work with much pain and patience.

I express my heart-felt gratitude to them and acknowledge their help and services with thanks.

Last but not the least, I crave the indulgence to record the name of my wife Srimati Charuprabha Rajgru, without whose help in the way of inspiring me and relieving me of the household affairs, the present work, perhaps, would not have been possible for me to complete and to bring it out to the light.

At the end I owe an apology to the readers for errors that have crept into the work inspite of my best efforts. A list of *Erreta and corrigenda* of a few errors is attached at the end for the convenience of the readers. I hope any other such errors found in the work, may kindly be brought to the notice of the author for future modification and incorporation.

Balagopal

Milanpur

P.O. Haibargaon—782002

Nagaon : Asam

November/1988

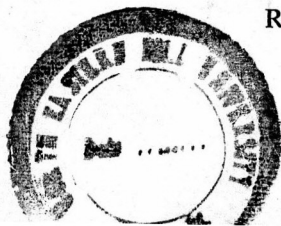
**Sarbeswar Rajguru**

## INTRODUCTION

*Medieval Assamese Society* by Dr. Sarbeswar Rajguru, unfolds the social and cultural panorama of Assam from the thirteenth century of the Christian era to the advent of the British in the early part of the nineteenth century. In fact, it is a pioneering work in the subject. Stray articles on different aspects of social life were attempted in a slipshod manner by a few writers, but no systematic and connected account covering almost all aspects of social and cultural life of medieval Assam was undertaken by any scholar before Dr. Rajguru. The political and cultural history of Assam entered into a new phase with the fall of the Pala power in the first half of the thirteenth century. This marks the beginning of the medieval period in Assam's history and continued nearly for six hundred years till arrival of the British. Dr. Rajguru has tapped almost all the sources to give a complete picture of Assamese society during the long span of six hundred years. The work consisting of ten chapters under three parts discusses in detail the land, its physical features, the people, social divisions, professions and castes, Social units, food and drink, ornaments and dress, customs and manners, impact of political system on social life, economic condition, cultural life, literature and education, religious beliefs and practices, amusements and sports and allied subjects. In short the work is capable of giving a fair idea of medieval Assam to any inquisitive reader. The work is well-documented and the findings are substantiated by reasonable and authenticated proofs. Publication of this valuable work will certainly remove a great desideratum in our historical literature.

Sd/ Dr. Satyendranath Sarma

M. A., D. Phil,  
Rabindranath Tagore Professor,  
Gauhati University,  
Gauhati—14  
9.6.79.



**Thesis Examiners :**

1. Late Dr. Niharranjan Ray, former Director, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla and Professor Emeritus, Calcutta University.
2. Late Professor A. L. Basham, B. A., Ph.D., F. S. A., Department of History of South Asia, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London.
3. Dr. S. N. Sarma, M. A., D. Phil., Former Secretary, University Classes and Rabindranath Tagore Professor, Gauhati University, Gauhati.

**Extracts from Thesis Report :**

“It forms a comprehensive study of the subject bringing together evidence from a very wide range of sources, and as such it is a definite contribution to historical knowledge.”

“The manner in which the author has arranged and organised his chapters and materials show his knowledge and experience of systematic, logical and coherent thinking, and of his grasp of his materials he was concerning himself with.”

“.....It must be said to the credit of the candidate that he has been able to present an exhaustive picture of Medieval Assamese Society with wealth of details collected or gleaned from original or secondary sources.”

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## SIGNS

1. To represent long vowels such as आ (आ), ई (ई) and ऊ (ऊ) vowel types having - sign above is used. For example ā for आ, ī for ई and ū for ऊ.
2. To represent palatal sibilant, viz. श (श), sibilant having ' sign above is used. For example ś for श (श)
3. To represent cerebrals, a dot ( . ) is used below letters like t, n, s, etc. For example ṅ for ण (ण), ṭ for ट (ट), ṣ for ष (ष) etc.
4. To represent nasalised sounds, due to shortage of types with the particular sign ~ above, in the press, I have used types having ~ and ^ both these signs above. For example ã and â both these types are used to represent nasalised a (अँ) and so on.
5. Assamese letters, such as ঞ (ञ), চ (च), ছ (छ), and ক্ষ (क्ष) are respectively transliterated as ṅ, cha, chha, and Kṣa in English in the book.

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## PART—I

### Introduction

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## CHAPTER I

### THE SUBJECT MATTER AND ITS SOURCES

#### 1. The subject and its importance :

Different aspects of society, such as social, historical and cultural of the early period of Assam, then known by the designations of Prāggyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa, have already been exhaustively dealt with by authorities of the State and outside. But the Assamese Society of the medieval period, the subject matter of our investigation, has almost been left untouched by them. In spite of the best efforts made by the scholars, owing to paucity of materials, a complete picture of the Assamese Society of the ancient period with its different aspects, still remains incomplete and hazy to us. The different heterogeneous racial elements in this period could not combine themselves to stand united in order to form a greater society or a nation amongst themselves. The political and the cultural activities of the period also could not infuse a spirit of national unity amongst them. The importance of the study of the subject "Medieval Assamese Society", therefore, lies in the fact that this is the period in which not only the Assamese Society had got its firm footing on a strong ground, but the entire people stood united as a nation and made an allround development in different spheres of their national life, making a superb history of their own. Our aim is to see and examine here, how the Assamese Society shaped itself into a complete form in this period and how it marched ahead with different activities of the social life. In the present context of the subject we will mainly confine ourselves to the discussion of the social, economic and cultural

conditions of the period and will try to discuss them in detail as far as possible.

## 2. Scope of the subject :

Now, as to the subject itself, "Medieval Assamese Society", what is its scope and its meaning? Let us try to explain the jurisdictions of the medieval period and the Assamese Society.

### (a) The Medieval period :

The whole range of the process of formation and development of Assamese Society and its culture can be divided into three periods, viz., the ancient, the medieval and the modern. The ancient period covers the period from the earliest time to the 12th century A.D. and the medieval period begins from the beginning of the 13th century A.D., i.e. from the advent of the Āhoms, a *Thai-Chinese* people, to the beginning of the 19th century A.D., i.e. to the advent of the Britishers, to Assam. Accordingly, our predecessors, in their works of the ancient period, covers the range of the time from the earliest time, i.e. from the pre-historic time, to the end of the twelfth century A.D., with the exception of K. L. Barua, who, in his work *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, covers the period from the earliest time to the 16th century A.D.<sup>1</sup> We cannot agree with K. L. Barua in regard to this; because, Assam practically entered a new era and new phase of her political and cultural life from the beginning of the 13th century A.D. alongwith the entry of the Āhoms and the ancient designations of the land *Prāgjyotiṣa* and *Kāmarūpa* were replaced by new nomenclature *Āsām* (Assam). The term *Āsām* gave birth to other terms like *Ācām*, *Āsam*, *Āhom*, *Asam* etc. Thenceforward the land came to be known as *Asam* and its people as *Āsamīā*.

---

1. *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, K. L. Barua, 1933.

Towards the end of the ancient period, i.e. in the 10th and the 11th centuries A.D., the political power of the Kāmarūpa-kings began to dwindle away and it was almost on the verge of extinction when Jayapāla of the Pāla dynasty ascended the throne of Kāmarūpa, whose date of accession was placed at about 1120.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to trace out a distinct and systematic history of this period. However, it seems, after Jayapāla of the Pāla dynasty, there was no strong monarch to maintain the solidarity and the political unity of the kingdom. But this state of things could not continue for long. The Āhoms, a new power came into political lime-light in the eastern region of Assam and succeeded to a great extent in recovering the lost political unity of the kingdom after a series of contests with their adversaries.<sup>3</sup> The Āhoms entered Assam in the year 1228 A.D. and ruled over this land for a period of about six hundred years up to the Christian era 1826 A.D., in which year, according to the treaty of Yāṇḍābu, the land passed into the hands of the Britishers. During the first part of the Medieval period, the Āhoms restored the lost political unity of Kāmarūpa to a great extent. The new political patrons like the Koches and the Āhoms and the great socio-religious cum cultural movement, called Vaisnavite movement, working in their own ways, have greatly enhanced the progress of the Assamese people in different spheres of its national life. A synthesis among the diverse ethnic and cultural elements of the state also took place in this period owing to the activities of many factors. All these factors working together helped the emergence of a powerful Assamese nation in this medieval period. Alongwith the Britishers new thoughts and ideas poured into Assam from the western world. Hence, the period from the advent of the

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2. *The History of Civilisation of the people of Assam*, Dr. P. C. Choudhury, 1959, p. 267.

3. *The History of Civilisation of the people of Assam*, Dr. P. C. Choudhury, 1959, p. 277.

Āhoms to the advent of the Britishers, i.e. from the beginning of the 13th century A.D., to the beginning of the 19th century A.D., forms a distinct phase of our cultural history usually designated as the medieval period of Assam's history.

### (b) The Assamese Society :

To have a precise idea of the jurisdiction of the medieval Assamese Society, it will require a little more explanation. The idea of the medieval Assamese Society consists of two main things, i.e. its area and the people living inside it. Elsewhere we are discussing the different kingdoms that were within the boundary of medieval Assam, which will enable us to know about the area inhabited by the Assamese people. According to John Pater Wade, once the kingdoms of Bhūtān and Nepāl were included within Assam; the kingdoms of Tripurā, Kochbehār and the kingdoms that were on the west of the Karatoyā were within the boundary of Assam. The kingdoms of Mañipur, Jayantiā, Khāsīā and the hilly regions like Nagā, Singpho, Gāro, Bhot, Ākā, Daffā etc., were within the political boundary of Assam.<sup>4</sup> But the range of the Assamese Society does not conform to the then geo-political map of Assam. The whole Brahmaputra valley and the kingdoms of Kamatā or Koch should come within the range of the Assamese Society. Besides the Brahmaputra valley of modern Assam, the districts of Kochbehār and Jalpāiguri, now in West Bengal, would come within the periphery of the medieval Assamese Society. K. L. Barua and Dr. B. Kakati go to the extent of saying that Rungpore, Dinājpur and portions of Maimansingh, now included in West Bengal and East Pakistan (now Bānglā Desh), should come within the boundary of Assam.<sup>5</sup>

4. *An Account of Assam*, John Pater Wade (1800 A.D.), Edited by B. Sarma, 1972, p. IV.

5. *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, K. L. Barua, 1933, pp. 242, 302.  
*Assamese, Its Formation and Development*, Dr. B. Kakati, 1941, p. 4.

Assam is the home-land of different heterogeneous racial elements ; but these heterogeneous racial elements were forced to combine together to form a strong homogeneous Assamese Society by the political and cultural activities of the period, for which, this period would remain markably significant in the history of Assam. The Assamee Society of the medieval period, therefore, includes people of various ethnic groups living in Assam. In the formation and development of the Assamese Society, the contributions made by these peoples can in no way be neglected. There existed a cordial relationship between the people of the plains and the people of the hilly regions in those days. Some of the letters that were exchanged between the Āhom kings and the kings of the hilly regions best reveal the spirit of that cordial relationship. For example, one of the Jayantiā kings wrote to the Āhom king Chakradhvaj Singha : “I donot consider Gargāon and Jayantiā to be two different capitals. I consider them to be one. One who attempts to bring disunity between the two, must fall from the truth.”<sup>6</sup> However, it is not possible to bring under the purview of the medieval Assamese Society all the hilly regions and kingdoms and the people living there. We are making stray references of these people, specially of the people living on the fringes of the hills on all sides of the Brahmaputra valley, in course of our discussions. So, in the context of the medieval Assamese Society, we include the people living in the Brahamaputra valley including the hill peoples living on the fringes of the hills encircling the valley and those of the modern districts of Kochbehār and Jalpāiguri, now included in West Bengal, which were integral parts of the kingdoms of Kamatā and Kochbehār in the medieval period. We will also make stray references to the hill people in general, in our discussions now and then.

### 3. Sources :

For the study of the medieval Assamese Society we depend

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6. *Jayantiā Buranjī*, Edited by Dr. S.K. Bhuyan, 1937, p. 31.

mainly upon the contemporary historical and biographical literatures.

Besides historical and biographical works, which are the primary sources for our investigation, we will supplement our findings from literary works composed during the period under investigation and oral traditions transmitted from generation to generation. Moreover, now and then, we will take help of some *Accounts* collected and published during the subsequent centuries by some learned and inquisitive local and foreign scholars, which contain many firsthand valuable informations of the period. Now we will refer to the primary sources : (a) historical and (b) biographical literatures of the period.

#### (a) Historical literature :

The Indian term that is generally used as the equivalent of history, is *Itihāsa*. Both *Purāṇa* and *Itihāsa* are almost identical. But these terms *Itihāsa* and *Purāṇa* with their extensive range of denotations cannot be accepted as equivalent of the more restricted modern term *History*. *Itihāsa* or *Purāṇa* includes many things to be learnt for the attainment of allround development by a man living in a society.<sup>7\*</sup> If there were any historical literature composed during the reign of the Kings of ancient Kāmarūpa, they were all desultory and on the line of *Itihāsa* lacking in proper historical perspective of the modern sense. Even quasi-historical works like *Yoginī Tantra*, *Kālikā Purāṇa* and *Dipikā Chhanda*, which are supposed to have been composed during the period of our discussion, are not free from

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7. Introduction to the *Puraṇi Asam Buranjī*, Edited by H. C. Goswami, 1st Edition.

\*Rgyajuh Sāmatha vākhyāh Veda-chatvāra uddhṛtāh /  
Itihāsa Purāṇanācha Panchamo Veda uchyate //

Dharmārtha Kāmamokṣāṇāmupadeśa Samanvitam /  
Purvavṛta kathāyuktamitihāsam Praschakṣate //

such defects and are all based on sectarian belief. But the historical literatures, the foremost source of our study, are above all such defects and their authenticity or historicity can be relied upon for any historical investigation.

The histories or the *Buranjīs*, as they are called in Assamese, are the most valuable contribution to Assamese literature made by the Shān descendants, popularly known as Āhoms, who migrated to Assam early in the 13th century A.D. With this new branch of historiography, Assamese literature occupied an unique position amongst the Indian literatures which no other Indian literature can claim. Sir G. A. Grierson, in his work *Linguistic Survey of India*, remarks : "The Assamese are justly proud of their national literature. In no department have they been more successful than in a branch of study, in which India as a rule is curiously deficient. The historical works or *Buranjīs*, as they are styled by the Assamese, are numerous and voluminous". During their rule of about six hundred years, a large number of chronicles were written, both in the Āhom and the Assamese language, of which surely a negligible number have come down to our hands. We are discussing elsewhere about the enemies of manuscripts in Assam ; they are the damp climate of Assam, the ant, the natural calamities, such as earthquake, flood, storm, fire etc. The great civil war known as *Mowāmarīā Bidroh* and the three successive Burmese attacks, towards the last part of the Āhom rule, might have destroyed and carried away a large number of manuscripts. Kīrtichandra Barbarua, the Chief Executive Officer of the Āhom King Rājeśwar Singha (A.D. 1751-1769), caused a large number of chronicles, which were suspected by him as having references to his ignominious descent to be burnt into ashes. <sup>8</sup> On the other hand, a sufficient number of manuscripts of the traditional family archives are still lying unexplored as their conservative owners donot want to part with them.

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8. *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*,

Edited by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, 1947, p. 28.

For a distinct idea of the range of our sources, i.e. the chronicles of medieval Assam, an attempt has been made to give below a classification of them, in our own way, differing a little from late A. R. Dhekiāl Phookan and late Dr. S. K. Bhuyan. We may divide the chronicles of our period into the following classes :

(1) Chronicles of the Āhom kings of Assam : These chronicles were composed during the period from 1228 A.D., from the advent of Āhoms to Assam, to the termination of their rule in 1826 A.D., or continued upto some decades more of the British occupation.

(2) Chronicles of countries other than Assam : This class of chronicles included the chronicles of Burdwan, Kāsmīr, chronicles dealing with the affairs of Mogul-India and a chronicle of Tripurā, written in 1724 A.D. We have, however, some reliable testimony of the chronicles of Kāsmīr and Burdwan which are unfortunately lost. An Assamese manuscript-chronicle of Burdwan was exhibited in the Bengal Literary Conferance, held at Burdwan, by late Pt. Hemchandra Goswami, where it was unfortunately lost. The Assam Government published a chronicle of Tripurā, written in 1724 A.D., in the year 1938, obtaining a manuscript from the British Museum, London.

(3) Chronicles of the diplomatic embassies or the Katakī, Buranjī : From these chronicles we can acquire knowledge of the external relations of Assam. Besides many diplomatic letters, these chronicles contain accounts of receptions accorded to the Assamese Ambassadors.

(4) Fragmentary Chronicles : (This class of chronicles deals with particular episodes, events, tribes) such as the Kachhāries, the Chutiās and the Jayantiās and they are like monographs. In this class we can include the metrical chronicles of the Rajās of Darrang and also a manuscript containing an account of the tribute paid to Mirjumla. (All these manuscripts are in Assamese “and are generally tagged

on to chronicles of the first two classes".<sup>9</sup> The metrical chronicles of the Rajās of Darrang are generally known as *Darrang Rājvamśāvalī* and contain considerable amount of informations for us. Amongst these chronicles, the '*Darrang Rājvamśāvalī*' composed by Suryyakhari Daivajna under the patronage of Samudranārāyaṇa (A.D. 1798) and the *Rājvamśāvalī* composed by Ratikanta Dvija under the patronage of Khadganārāyaṇa, are important ones. These historical epics contain historical accounts of the kingdom of Kochbehār and its branch kingdoms, viz. Bijnī, Darrang and Beltolā. They have got some points of distinct difference with the chronicles of Assam in their treatment.

(Almost all the chronicles of the Āhom kingdom are written in prose and full justice has been done to preserve the dignity of truth, making no room for imagination at all. While, the *Rājvamśāvalīs* are written in verse, in the style of an epic, eulogizing the royal patron of the author with a degree of free imagination. Still, historical facts are there which give us the chance to look into the manifold social activities of the State.<sup>10</sup>

(5) Chronicles of the religious monasteries or the *Satrīā Buranjīs*.

(6) The family chronicles or the *Vamśāvalīs*: Some of the influential families of Assam have their *Vamśāvalīs* or the family chronicles. These family chronicles give us historical accounts of the origin of different families, their geneologies and the important role played by the members of these families in the affairs of the State. So, these family chronicles throw ample light on the contemporary social history of Assam.)

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9. *Report on the progress of Historical Research in Assam*, Sir Edward Gait, 1897, p. 17.

*Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*,

Edited by Dr. S.K. Bhuyan, 1947, p. 29.

10. *Asamīyā Sāhityar Itibṛtta*, Dr. S. N. Sarma, 1959, p. 159.

(7) Chronicles written during the early part of the British rule: Some reputed Assamese gentlemen coming into contact with the western civilisation, during the early part of the British rule, began to rewrite the history of Assam on western models. The most noteworthy amongst them are Manirām Dewān, Halirām Dhekiāl Phukan, Rādhānāth Barbarua, Kāśināth Tāmūli Phukan, Harakānta Śarmā (sadarāmin) and Rāi Guṇābhirām Barua Bāhādur.<sup>11</sup>

The historiography is a great contribution made by the Āhoms to the Assamese culture. Enriched by this culture, Assamese literature proved to be an exception to the complaint made by the western scholars, regarding the paucity of historical literature of Hindu-India. The Āhoms, who are a branch of the great Thai-Chinese people, accounts their origin from A.D. 568, when the fore-fathers of the Āhom kings are said to have descended from heaven. Some of the chronicles of the Āhom kings go back to that year. The Burmese and the Siamese, who also belong to the same branch, have chronicles of their own countries, in their own language, known as *AZAWINS* and *P'ONGSA WADANS*, respectively.<sup>12</sup> But the first Āhom king Sukāphā entered Assam in A.D. 1228. As soon as he entered Assam, he ordered his attendant-scholars to note down whatever new thing they had to come across and whatever had happened to them in this new land.<sup>13</sup> This is the beginning of the chronicles in Assam and since then the system of writing chronicles began to develop in this land.

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11. *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, Etd. by Dr. S.K. Bhuyan, 1947, pp. 29-30.

*Studies in the literature of Assam*, Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, 1956, p. 26.

12. *A History of Assam*, Sir Edward Gait, 1926, p. XI.

*Studies in the literature of Assam*, Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, 1956, p. 3.

13. *Sātsarī Asam Buranjī*, Edt. by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan,

1960, p. 3.

*Buranjī* the Assamese equivalent of 'History', is a word of Āhom origin. In the Āhom language, the word Bu means ignorant, Ran means useful knowledge and Jī means the store-house; hence the meaning of the whole word *Buranjī* is a store-house of useful knowledge for the ignorant.<sup>14</sup> The very meaning of the word itself indicates what amount of respect and regard the Āhoms maintained for their *Buranjis*. According to the tradition of the Āhoms, the knowledge of the *Buranjis* was an indispensable accomplishment of a gentleman.<sup>15</sup> For the administration of the country, the Āhoms had no written constitution; they conducted the administrative affairs of the state by looking into the parallel precedents recorded in their chronicles when they thought it necessary. The children of the princes and nobles were imparted education from the chapters of their chronicles. The Āhoms had the custom of (even now it is in vogue) reciting chapters from the *Buranjis* whenever a marriage took place in their families. Every family of some status in the state had at least a manuscript copy of chronicles in their possession. Besides the royal court, individually, the Āhom priests, known as *Deodhāi*, and the nobles preserved chronicles containing reliable continuous narrative account of the rule of the Āhom kings written from time to time.<sup>16</sup> On the whole, the Āhoms had deep respect for the chronicles; they kept their possession secret and did not disclose about it to persons who were not proved worthy of confidence. In

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14. Introduction to the *Puraṇi Asam Buranjī*,

Edt. by H. C. Goswami, 1st Edition.

15. *Linguistic Survey of India*, G. A. Grierson, Vol. & Part I, Introduction, p. 156.

*Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, Dr. S. K. Bhuyan,

1947, p. 28.

16. *Studies in the literature of Assam*, Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, 1956, p. 34.

*Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, 1947, p. 28.

the preamble of the chronicle of the *Tungkhungīā* dynasty, written at the instance of Śrīnāth Duarā Barbarua, the following words of apology were thus made :

“Salutation to *Śrīkṛṣṇa* ! Salutation to *Ganeśa*. Salutation to Goddess *Pārvatī*. This is the *Buranjī* caused to be written in Śaka 1725 by the Duarā Barbarua ; keep it secretly. Donot give it even to your son, if you have no confidence in him. Show it to one who is unhostile and well-disposed towards you. *Pandits* have prohibited the betrayal of princes ; and if trust is violated it amounts to an insult shown to one’s mother. So keep it in confidence, more specially it is an unfathomable *Śāstra*, who even finds its bottom. Even great sages become victims of confession in such matters, which I have handed with whatever judgment I can command. So *Pandits* should not at random find fault with this book. If one is bent upon detecting blemishes, he will find many. This is the *Vamśāvalī* or history of the *Swargodeos* or kings of *Tungkhungīā* dynasty. This history is caused to be written on thursday, the twenty second of *Phālguna* on the *Panchamī Tithi*.”<sup>17</sup>

At the capital of the Āhom kings there was a department attached to the Secretariate for the writing of the chronicles where a large number of scribes served under the supervision of an officer, known as *Likhakar Barua*. About the materials and procedure of writing manuscripts, a discussion will be undertaken in a relevant chapter below. In the compilation work “the chronicles were given free access to all the necessary State papers, including dispatches from local administrators and Commanders, diplomatic corres-

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17. *Tungkhungīā Buranjī*, Edt. by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, 1932, Introduction, XXIV-XXV, & p. 1.

pondence, court minutes recorded from day to day, as well as proceedings from important judicial trials.”<sup>18</sup> Individually the chronicles were compiled by nobles either under their immediate supervision or by themselves. Sometimes the eager persons also managed to get a copy of the chronicles to be preserved in their family archives. The chronicles under the Govt. management were kept in a store-house called *Gandhiā Bhāḍāl* with all other Govt. papers, in the capital.

There are chronicles written both in Āhom and Assamese languages. Edward Gait infers that the chronicles written in the earlier part of the Āhom administration are of Āhom Language; later on when they accepted the Assamese language as the major vehicle of expression in the country, it came to be used in the writing of their chronicles.<sup>19</sup> So, the chronicles written during the Āhom rule can be divided into two from the view point of their medium, viz. (i) chronicles written in Āhom language and (ii) chronicles written in Assamese language.<sup>20</sup> Some of the chronicles written in the Āhom language were translated by Late Rāi Shāheb Golāp Chandra Barua and they were all published in a volume with the title *Āhom Buranjī* by the Assam Government, in the year 1930. Almost all the chronicles written in Assamese are in prose. Historical literature written in Assamese prose began to play an important role in the history of Assamese prose literature towards the later part of the 17th century. Most of the important chronicles, written in Assamese (and now in our possession) were written in the later part of the 17th and in the 18th centuries, and in fact, this is the period in which Assamese historical literature fully developed under the patronage of the Āhom kings.<sup>21</sup> Chronicles written in Assamese verse,

18. *Studies in the literature of Assam*, Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, 1956, p. 33.

19. *A History of Assam*, E. Gait, 1926, p. Introduction-X.

20. *A History of Assam*, E. Gait, 1926, p. Introduction-XI.

21. *Asamīyā Sāhityar Itibṛitta*, Dr. S. N. Sarma, 1959, p. 151.

are very few ; we have two such chronicles, viz. the '*Kalibhārat Buranjī*' and the *Belimārar Buranjī*, composed by Dutirām Hāzarikā and Viśveśvar Baidyādhipa, respectively. These chronicles edited by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, have been published by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian studies, Assam, in 1932. The first one gives an account of Assam of the period from 1679 A.D. to 1858 A.D. and the second deals with the events of the period during which the Āhom kings Gaurniāth Singha and Chandra Kānta Singha were on the throne of Assam, i.e. the period in which the Āhom power dwindled into a state of collapse as a result of the great civil war known as *Moāmariā Bidroh* and the three successive ghastly invasions made by the Burmese. Dr. S.K. Bhuyan places the date of the second one in between 1833 and 1846 A.D. In the history of the evolution and development of Assamese prose literature, historical literature has a significant position of its own.

The chronicles were written down from time to time ; so, there are very few chronicles wherein we may expect to get a full picture of the whole Āhom period. In some chronicles, it so happens, that some portions of the period are found very inadequately dealt with. This was not with a view to neglecting the reign of the King or Kings of that particular period but due to the fact that the neglected portion has already been thoroughly dealt with in some other works. Sometimes, owing to the change of hands of persons in charge of writing chronicles, the portion of the chronicles under writing during the change-over, is seen not properly dealt with. Although it is not possible to get a complete picture of the whole Āhom rule in one chronicle at a time, yet there is every possibility of getting the same by arraying the chronicles one after another composed from time to time and by incorporating the well-treated portion of one chronicle with the neglected corresponding portion of the other. As for instance, let us take the example of the complete and valuable chronicle written in Āhom language, from the earliest time to the end

of the Āhom rule, referred to by Edward Gait.<sup>22</sup> This is most probably the chronicle which was translated from Āhom language by Rāi Shāheb Golāp Chandra Barua. It would be worth-quoting here what the Rāi Shāheb speaks about this chronicle. He states :

“The *Buranjī* deals with events concernring the Āhoms only, from the earliest times to the end of their rule. This *Buranjī* is almost complete, but it gives a very meagre account of the reign of the great Āhom king Rudra Simha—only the dates of his enthronement and death being given. This was perhaps due to the charge of writing *Buranjī* changed hands. There is another *Buranjī* in Āhom from the death of Gadādhara Simha to the reign of Lakṣmī Simha, wherein a full account of the reign of Rudra Simha is given. If the portion containing Rudra Simha's reign should have been incorporated in this *Buranjī*, the record of Āhom reign would have been very complete.”<sup>23</sup>

So, the reason, why the reign of the great Āhom king Rudra Singha was not elaborately dealt with in this chronicle, can be easily understood from the above extract. If one period of the Āhom rule is not given its due importance in one chronicle, we may supplement that portion from another chronicle. In one of the chronicles the writer mentioning the great battle of Śarāighāṭ in a few lines, says : “There are elaborate description of this war in other chronicles ; therefore, I did not write about it here”<sup>24</sup> Instances of undue elaboration, exaggeration or omission of certain historical facts are not rare in our chronicles. Dr. S. K. Bhuyan

22. *A History of Assam*, E. Gait, 1926, p. Introduction-XI

23. *Āhom Buranjī*, G. C. Barua, 1930, preface.

24. *Sātsarī Asam Buranjī*, Edt. by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, 1960, pp. 33-34.

is of opinion that "Self importance, family animosity or tribal jealousy" are mainly responsible for these defects.<sup>25</sup> However, we can thrash out the truth by critically examining the various copies of the same chronicles received from different quarters. To make the chronicles upto-date, alongwith the advancement of time, the Government and the individual both always supplemented them with new materials at their disposal. As the *Buranjis* were always written and supplemented contemporaneously, they contain greater amount of truth and validity with facts and figures.

As to the validity of the Assamese Historical Literature, scholars like Edward Gait, antiquarian Pt. H. C. Goswami and Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, who rendered great services for the spade-work and historical research in Assam, have made valuable remarks. According to Gait,—

"They (the Āhoms) were endowed with the historical faculty in a very high degree. The historicity of these *Buranjis* is proved not only by the way in which they support each other, but also by the confirmation which is afforded by the narratives of Muhammedan writers, wherever these are available for comparison. Their chronology is further supported by the dates on various records which have been collected and collated for the purpose of checking it, including those on about 70 coins, 48 copper plates, nine rock and 28 temple inscriptions and six inscriptions on cannon."<sup>26</sup>

According to H. C. Goswami, it was the Āhoms who first introduced the system of writing chronicles in a scientific method in Assam. The facts of the chronicles are not twisted and the language is simple and straight. The chronicles were written in such simple and unequivocal language that

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25. *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, 1947, p. 30.

26. *A History of Assam*, E. Gait, 1926, p. Introduction-X, XII.

no different interpretation of the facts can be given. The descriptions are abridged, nevertheless they convey the ideas in full. Further, there is no attempt to conceal the truth ; even many things concerning the royal families or the nobles, the publication of which are considered objectionable, are freely discussed in them.<sup>27</sup> That was why once a large number of chronicles were burnt to ashes during the rule of King Rājeśvar Singha under the influence of Kīrtichandra Barbarua, when one Numali Bor Gohāin in his most venomous work *Chakarīpheṣi Buranjī* (Cobra-chronicle) raised a shocking question as to the purity of Barbarua's descent. Such instances of free discussions in the chronicles are not few and far between. The chronicles were written by persons who were contemporaneous of events and were fully equipped with knowledge of the internal and external affairs of the State. On many occasions the discussions that were held between the king and his ministers, either at the royal assembly or at the dinner table, were recorded in the chronicles.<sup>28</sup> Anything that was recorded, were very accurate and thorough. For example let us cite a typical extract :

“Then all the officials of the higher rank after due deliberation made Gadādhara Singha king at Kaliābar on the 18th *danda* of Thursday the 20th *Śrāvaṇa*, in the year 1603 Śaka. On the thursday the 27th, advancing upwards, they arrived at Gargāon towards the end of the night, before four *dandas* for the break of the day. Making camp on the bank of the lotus-tank within the walls of the royal rampart, the king sent the Chāmagurīā king to the hill and put him to

27. *Puraṇi Asam Buranjī*, Edt. by H. C. Goswami, 1st Edition, Introduction.

28. *Puraṇi Asam Buranjī*, Edt. by H. C. Goswami 1st Edition, Introduction.

death there. He (Chamāguriā) enjoyed the throne for one year four months and fifteen days. On Saturday the 21st of *Phālguna*, thunder fell upon the king's house on the hill. On Sunday the 22nd, the king ascended the *Śingarighar*. On Monday, when four *daṇḍas* were more for the end of the day, the king sat upon the *Śinghapīrā* (wooden seat supported by wooden lions). Just on the 10th *daṇḍa* of Tuesday the 24th, he (the king) ascended the royal throne and accepted the name Gadādhār Singha. The Majumdār, writing that name with a pen of gold, read it aloud for the hearing of the *Pātra-Mantri* (Cabinet).<sup>29</sup>

To sum up, when a war was declared and the army marched to the battle field, facts about the strength of army and who won the battle with what amount of loss or gain are found in the chronicles accurately described. Descriptions of natural calamities like earthquake, flood, storm, fire etc. are found recorded with their dates, the particular time of occurrence and the damage done. So also, details about a king's demise, accession and enthronement and coronation are faithfully described in the chronicles. Detailed description of the architectural composition, design and also quantities of materials used in the construction of temples, palaces, rampart, bridges etc. of the Āhom age, were given in the chronicles of *Chāngrung Phukan*, who was in charge of public works. Accounts of other departments are also found systematically recorded in their books.

Another notable aspect of the chronicles is that they are full of expressions of noble patriotic sentiments made by the political personalities of the State at different critical moments of the national life. Their importance

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29. *Sātsari Asam Buranjī*, Edt. by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, 1960, P. 110.

cannot be minimised even according to modern standpoint. There is a considerable number of stories and fables in the chronicles, the presence of which in such historical works seem unjustified at the first glance. Nevertheless, they have some value; these stories and allegories were used by the politicians to comment upon contemporary political events. In addition to this, they added literary flavour to the textual facts of the chronicles. In our present work, we are mainly concerned with social, economic and cultural conditions of the Medieval Assam. The chronicles are packed up with materials of these aspects and furnish us with facts concerning different aspects of the Medieval Assamese People, such as different races and castes, their admixture, different religions and their sects, conversion to Hinduism, manners and customs of the people, industries, material condition of the people, art and culture etc. In the chronicles one is sure to meet with descriptions of some unnatural or abnormal events, the reality of which no-body can conceive. For example, events like darkness prevailing at day time, raining red, yellow or black; sprouting of boiled paddy; bearing of rice (the grain without the husk) by paddy plant; dog giving birth to a hog; the story of a gigantic man under the earth; the story of a golden comb etc. are found vividly described in the chronicles.<sup>30</sup> It is not possible to find out any material truth behind these unnatural events recorded in the chronicles; however, the common belief of the common people is that when a bad event takes place in our national or individual life, it is always preceded by a bad omen. Just before the invasion of Mirjumla, who defeated the Assamese people miserably, for the first time during the Āhom rule, the then ruling king Jayadhvaja Singha, one day, suddenly saw his meal red, while he

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30. *Sātsarī Asam Buranjī*, Edt. by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, 1960 pp. 18, 19, 54.

was taking it from his royal dish.<sup>31</sup> This is nothing but an indication of the impending calamity that was awaiting king Jayadhvaja Singha as well as the nation. With the exception of these stories and fables, one can resort to the Medieval Assamese chronicles as the best reliable sources of information for any historical investigation of the period.

(b) **Biographical literature :**

The next important source for our study is the biographies of Medieval saints. The system of writing biographies of the saints, popularly known as *Charit-Puthis*, was introduced amongst the Vaisnavite people of Assam in the last part of the seventeenth century and it continued upto to the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup> In the biographies, the day-to-day experiences and incidents of the saints' lives were recorded. Written from purely devotional point of view, this is a kind of religious literature both in prose and verse and it includes the biographies of Śankardeva, Dāmodardeva, Mādhavdeva Hari Deva, Bamśī Gopāl, Gopāl Ātā, Badulā Ātā, Banamālīdeva and a host of others. The authors of the biographies were disciples of the respective saints of the sects, and they wrote these works either from their direct knowledge or from sacred tradition handed down to them from their predecessors. These biographies are, therefore, considered to be the most human and realistic documents of Assamese literature. They throw a flood of light upon the contemporary social life of the people, such as, the religious rites and ceremonies, manners and customs, the Vaisnavite movement and institutions, education and educational institutions etc. and as such, they possess immense historical value for our studies. The biographies were usually written by people associated

31. *Āhom Buranjī*, G. C. Barua, 1930, p. 148.

32. *Asamīā Sahityar Itibṛtta*, Dr. S. N. Sarma, 1959, p. 159.

with the *Satra* institutions, under the different Vaisnavite sects.

There was a custom, prevalent amongst the Vaisnavite devotees of Assam, to discuss or to read a few chapters from the biography of their religious preceptor, just after the recitation of the Holy names (*Nāma-Kīrtana*) according to their daily routine. This custom was traditionally handed down to them. But who introduced this custom and when and how? Śankardeva was the founder-preceptor of Vaisnavism in Assam; when he was living, there was no such system of discussing the biographies of saints. During the life time of Śankardeva only the incarnatory deeds of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the only supreme-head recognised by the Vaisnavites of Assam, narrated in the holy books, the *Kīrtana* and the *Nāmghoṣā* were often related after the recital of the Holy names. In one of the biographies it is said :

“From *Baṭadrawā* to *Pāṭbāusī* the procedure was this : After the recital of the Holy names, the devotees asked about the incarnatory deeds of Kṛṣṇa and Balobhadra. The saint Śankardeva discussed amongst them (disciples) about the ten and twenty-two incarnations of Kṛṣṇa with the activities of his brother Balobhadra and they listened to it in rapt attention and with great devotion. But, after Śankardeva, according to his direction, it is said in the biography, that Mādhavdeva began to narrate the biography of his preceptor Śankardeva, amongst the devotees, after their daily recitals.”\*\*

Thus, this system of discussing the daily activities of their preceptors' life became a regular feature of their daily recital and thenceforth the system came to be prevalent amongst all the Vaisnavite people of Assam.

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33. *Kathā-Guru-Charit*, Edt. by Prof. U. C. Lekharu 1952, P. 1.

In his life time, Mādhavdeva himself narrated the activities of Śankardeva's life from his personal experience with great devotion. Gradually the system began to spread amongst the Vaisnavite people all over Assam. In the different Village-chapels (*Nāmgahars*) and *Satras* institutions, the experienced and devoted disciples and the *Adhikāras* (head of the (*Satras*) respectively, were in-charge of narrating the biography of Śankaadeva. At the first state, only the biography of Śankardeva was discussed ; but during the later part of Mādhavdeva's life, schism took place amongst the Vaisnavite church and under the leadership of different preceptors different sects known as *Samhatīs* began to grow up. From this time onwards, instead of narrating the biography of Śankardeva alone, different sects might have included the discussions of their respective preceptors biography as a part of their daily recital. In course of time, the discussion of day-to-day activities of a religious saint or preceptor reached a greater phase and it came to be observed with great devotion as a ritual amongst the Vaishnavites of Assam. This tradition of reading the biographies of the saints had been observed regularly by the disciples on the occasions of the celebration of the birth and death ceremonies of the saints of their respective sects.

As stated above, the biographies were written by the disciple-authors, purely with a religious bent of mind and an attempt to deify or to raise their heroes from human level to that of the incarnation of God Himself is very prominently seen throughout these works. In order to justify their supernatural powers, innumerable miraculous actions were attributed to these saints. For example, in one of the biographies, it is said that the great saint Śankardeva in his pilgrimage, at the temple of Jagannath, met and discussed with the immortal Vaisnavas like Hanumana, Bibhīṣaṇa, Jāmbavanta etc. of previous ages, besides the contemporary Vaiṣṇava saints of other parts of India. Again, one day, the Koch King Naranārāyaṇa disclosed to the court-scholars

his desire of listening to the gist of the whole *Bhāgavata Purāna* in one sitting and accordingly asked to prepare an abridged edition of it, to enable him to listen to the same, the next day. All other scholars failed, only Śankardeva could succeed. For the whole night, with a super-human form of four hands he prepared and composed the work *Guṇmālā*, the abridged edition of *Bhāgavata Purāna* and read it out completely to the king in the sitting at the court, the next day.<sup>34</sup> Such examples are numerous in the biographies. All over the world the biographies of the medieval prophets are the same ; it is the common trait of the hagiography that the heroes are raised from the human level to the incarnation of God Himself and our biographies are not an exception to this. Late Lakṣmīnāth Bezbaruā (A. D. 1864—1938), the undisputed authority of the Vaisnavite literature of Assam, admits this in connection with our biographies also.<sup>35</sup> But in our discussions we will take into account only the probable portions of it, excluding the supernatural. Further, this also cannot be denied that some of the authors or scribes either with a sectarian bias or with a view to fulfilling their designed motive, manipulated things in the biographies of the saints, which were not true. In this respect the scribes and the editors are more responsible. Late Bezbaruā strongly warns the readers to be cautious about these facts while studying the biographies of the saints.<sup>36</sup> For example, one of the much spoken biography, known as *Kathā-Guru-Charit*, edited by Prof. U. C. Lekhāru and published by H. N. Dutta Barua, contains some discrepancies. Though it contains innumerable real facts of the Medieval Assamese Society yet the contradictory facts so often met with in this biography cannot be overlooked. The names of

34. *Kathā-Guru-Charit*, Edt. by Prof. U. C. Lekharu, 1952, PP 155, 201.

35. *Śrī Śankardeva Āru Śrī Mādhavdeva*, L. N. Bezbaruā, 1963, PP, 18, 21.

36. *Śrī Śankardeva Āru Śrī Mādhavdeva*, L. N. Bezbaruā, 1963, preface.

some of the authors of some biographies are suspected to be spurious. L. N. Bezbaruā mentions the author of such a biography, viz. the *Ādicharit*. This biography is known among the Vaisnavites to be written by Śankardeva's favourite disciple Mādhavdeva. Late Bezbaruā rejects its authorship of Mādhavdeva on the grounds that the description of Śankardeva's forefathers given in this biography differs absolutely from the description given in the biography written by Rāmcharaṇ Ṭhākur, nephew of Mādhavdeva, and Dvijabhūṣaṇ. Had this *Ādicharit* been actually written by Mādhavdeva, the difference as regards the forefathers of Śankardeva would never have occurred between the two. Because, Mādhavdeva was the maternal uncle of Rāmcharaṇ Ṭhākur and he (Rāmcharaṇ Ṭhākur) was brought up and educated by Mādhavdeva; naturally Rāmcharaṇ Ṭhākur wrote in the biography of Śankardeva what he learnt from Madhavdeva. On the other hand, the language and the style of *Ādicharit* failed to make us convinced that they are from the mighty pen of Mādhavdeva. Therefore, this Mādhavdeva was some other Mādhavdeva and we cannot recognise this biography to be a genuine one. Again, some of the Vaisnavites do not accept the biography written by Rāmcharaṇ Ṭhākur; they are of opinion that Rāmcharaṇ of this particular biography was another Rāmcharaṇ of Kantari. Had there been a biography written by Rāmcharaṇ Ṭhākur, then his son Daityārī Ṭhākur would have never written another biography of Śankardeva. Daityārī Ṭhākur says that he had written the biography from the knowledge directly acquired from his father. Besides, nowhere in his work, he has mentioned a biography written by his father, which led some Vaisnavites to believe that Rāmcharaṇ, the nephew of Mādhavdeva, had written no biography and they regard the biography written by Daityārī as authentic and not the one written by Rāmcharaṇ Ṭhākur.<sup>37</sup>

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37. *Śrī Śankardeva Āru Śrī Mādhavdeva*, L. N. Bezbaruā, 1963, footnote, P. 9.

*Śrī Śrī Sankardeva*, Dr. M. Neog, 1963, P. 3.

The biographies were written both in verse and prose. The number of biographies written in verse is large. So far, only one important work, containing the biographies of almost all the Vaisnavite saints, with the exception of Dāmodardeva and Harideva, written in prose, has come down to our hands, edited by Prof. U. C. Lekhāru. This voluminous work was published by Late H. N. Dutta Barua and now it is prescribed as a Text book of the Post-Graduate Assamese Class of the Gauhati University. We have said above that this biography contains many incongruities; but these incongruities cannot hinder our work. We will only pick up those social facts which are commonly found in other biographies also. Incongruities are found in facts concerning the date of birth or death of the saints and the philosophy of their faiths. We are not much concerned about these facts. But this is the most voluminous biography, dealing with almost all the Vaisnavite saints of Medieval Assam, beginning from Śankardeva, the founder-preceptor, to Śrī Rāma, the ninth preceptor of the Vaisnavites of Assam. Hence it is a store-house of materials for our studies. In the reference of the vaisnavite preceptors in the book, Śrī Rāma, the ninth preceptor, takes the last place; hence some scholars following the date of Śrī Rāma maintain the view that this work was composed just after 1638 Śaka year, i.e. A. D. 1716. This is a reasonable view no doubt. There are references of English people in the work, which also indicate that the work was written after the advent of the Britishers to India. So, this work covers a long period from the beginning of the 15th century to the 18th century. From a study of this book, besides the movement and progress of Vaisnavism in Assam, we can collect information about the awakening of learning during this period, such as the trend of the people towards education, its institutions, syllabus, the method of imparting education and the centres of learning. It gives us ample information regarding the social, economic, cultural and political condition of the period. "The book is a treasure-house of information on religious beliefs, customs

and superstitions of the Assamese people. It gives a vivid account of the ordeal system prevalent at that time.”<sup>38</sup> Moreover the work enlightens us about different industries, trade and commerce, routes of communications, slave system and many other such information of national interest.<sup>39</sup>

The other biographies, written in verse, supply us more or less the same materials. Amongst the biographies written in verse, the *Gurucharit* by Rāmcharaṇ Thākur, *Śrī Śrī Śankardeva Āru Śrī Śrī Mādhavdeva Charit* by Daityārī Thākur, *Śrī Gurucharit* by Ramānanda Dvija, *Dāmodardeva-Charitra* by Nilakaṇṭha Dās, *Śrī Śrī Bamśi Gopaldevar Charitra* by Ramānanda Dvija, *Śrī Śrī Banamālī Deva-Charit* by Ramākanta Dvija, *Gurulilā* by Rām Rāi, *Santa-nirṇaya* by Kṛṣṇa Bhāratī, *Santa Charit* by Kṛṣṇāchāryya, *Gobinda charit* by Bhabananda Divja, *Thākur Charit* by Bidyānanda Oja etc., are important ones.<sup>40</sup> All the biographies inform us about the procedure of the routine of the daily life by which the pontiffs and the nobles spent their days at that time. Thus in the study of the Medieval Assamese Society, the biographies of the Medieval saints of Assam render very valuable services to us.

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38. *Kathā-Guru-Charit*, Edt. by Prof. U. C. Lekhāru, 1952, preface & P. 40.

39. *Kathā-Guru-Charit*, Edt. by Prof. U. C. Lekhāru, 1952, preface.

40. *Asamīā Sāhityar Itibrtta*, Dr. Satyendra Nath Sarma, 1959, PP. 128—129.