

CHAPTER-III

ŚAṆKARADEVA, HIS *BHAKTI* MOVEMENT AND CONTEMPORARY ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

3.0: Introduction

Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568 A.D.), was the founder of Assamese Vaishnavism. He contributed to the foundation of Assamese society in a number of ways. He was a multifaceted genius. He was an erudite scholar, a prolific writer, a versatile poet of unlimited merit, a lyricist of universal acceptance, a musician of high caliber, a pioneer in the field of Assamese prose, drama and dramatic performances, a painter and above all the greatest religious teacher-preacher-leader of the medieval Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam which is rightly known as Śaṅkaradeva Movement.¹

The *Bhakti* Movement or the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement refers to the powerful spiritual awakening emerged against degenerated medieval Hinduism in India. “This movement originated in South India during the seventh century A.D., spread northwards from Tamil Nadu through Karnataka and Maharashtra, and gained wide acceptance in fifteenth-century in Bengal and northern India”.² The *Bhakti* Movement threw a new light on the spiritual and cultural life of the people of India, and, at the same time, also revived and re-established the political and social

¹ Prasad, K. N. (1990). *Śaṅkaradeva: A Trend- Setter in Assam*. in B. P. Chaliha (ed.), Journal of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Research Institute, Volume I. p.83

² Schomer, K. & McLeod, W. H. (ed.). (1987). *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*. p.1

conditions of the country. Many Vaishnava leaders like Ramananda (1299-1410 A.D.) of North-India, Kabir (1398-1518 A.D.) of Benaras, Namdeva (1270- 1350 A.D.) and Tukarama (1608-1649 A.D.) of Maharashtra, Nanaka (1469-1539 A.D.) of Punjab, Vallabhacarya (1479-1531 A.D.) of Andhra, Vrajamandala, Tulsidasa (1523- 1623 A.D.) of North India, Chaitanydeva (1486-1533 A.D.) of Bengal and others put forward the movement and carried the message of *Bhakti* to the masses.³

Before Śaṅkaradeva, Vaishnavism was not unknown to the people of this eastern part of India. The introduction of Vaishnava cult in Assam took place sometime in the fourth century. It can be inferred from the Umācala inscription of Surendra Varmā (280-320 A.D.) on the erection of cave-temple of Bhāgavata Balabhadra Swāmī.⁴ The earliest recorded reference to the worship of *Viṣṇu* in Kamrupa occurs in the Badāgangā Rock inscription of Mahābhūti Varman (554 AD) which refers to the king as *Parama-Bhāgvata*.⁵ Gradually the centres of *Viṣṇu* worships, i.e., *Vāsudeva Pīṭha* and *Hayagrīva Pīṭha* were developed. Even Śaṅkaradeva found a statue of Lord *Viṣṇu* at Alipukhuri when he constructed the *Kirtanghar*.⁶ However, Vaishnavism prevailed on the eve of the neo-vaishnavite movement was *pañcaratna* Vaishnavism. This form of Vaishnavism is quite different

³ Das, N. (2013). *Assam Vaishnavism: An Account*. in S. C. Bora and Biswajit Kalita (ed.), Śaṅkaradeva Studies- Selected Articles from Mahapurusa Jyoti. P.17

⁴ Sarma cited by Roychoudhury, B. N. (1985). *Comparative Study of the Thoughts of Sankaradeva and Tulsidasa*. p.22

⁵ Baruah, B. K. (2011). *A Cultural History of Assam*. p.172

⁶ KGC, p.27

from the one introduced by Śaṅkaradeva.⁷ Here Viṣṇu worship was associated with *mūrtti*, *mantra* and *dīkṣā*.⁸ Choudhury remaked,

Both literary and archaeological sources signify that the worship of Vishnu and his incarnations was established in the land from early times. It is admitted by all that during the pre-Sankarite period a large number of poets, writers in ancient Kamarupa professed and actively supported Vaisnavism. A significant number of Vaisnava thinkers wrote on early Vaisnavism and practised it to save the society from further degeneration and disintegration.⁹

3.1: Life of Śaṅkaradeva

Birth:

Śaṅkaradeva was born in the month of ‘*Āhin*’ (September- October) of 1449 A.D in Bardowa in modern Nagaon district of Assam. His father’s name was Kusumbar Bhuyan and mother’s name was Satyasandha. The parents considered the baby as a boon of Lord Śiva and accordingly he was named Śaṅkara. Śaṅkaradeva himself mentioned Bardowa village as his birth place in his literary compositions.

bardavā nāme āchileka grāma
*ṭembuvāṇī bandhe sārā*¹⁰

bardavā nāme grāma śasye matsye anupāma
*lohityara āti anukūla*¹¹

ṭembuvāṇī bandhe grāma bardovā yāra nāma
*lohityara jale anukūla*¹²

ṭembuvāṇī bandhe baisāilā pravandhe
*bardovā nāme grāma*¹³

⁷ Sarma, S. N. (2016). *The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement and the Satra Institutions of Assam*. p.5

⁸ Baruah, A. (1989). *The Religious Form of life in Assam with special reference to the Vaishnavism of Śaṅkaradeva*. p.6

⁹ Choudhury, M. (2011). *The Vedanta Philosophy and The Vaishnavism of Assam*. p.33

¹⁰ *Bhāg. 8th Canto*, vs. 309

¹¹ *Ibid, 10th Canto*, vs. 1476

¹² *HU*, vs. 292

¹³ *RH*, vs. 529

Childhood:

Śaṅkara lost his parents at an early age and was brought up by his grandmother Khersuti. Śaṅkara spent a completely free childhood amidst the nature. He used to play with his friends all the day, go for catching the birds and other animals, climb the trees in the forest to pluck fruits, swim in the river etc. They were playing games like *ghilā*, *dhop*, *koṭorā*, *bhaṭā*, *dugdugali*, etc. Śaṅkara had the fond of catching deer and birds, tortoise and porpoise and other wild animals.¹⁴ However, he showed love to the animals and birds at that time itself. After catching the birds and animals, he and the friends play with them for fun and freed later on. One day the group of boys played a deadly game of swimming across the swelled mighty river Brahmaputra. They kept two boats behind them as safety measure.¹⁵ Few could cover one-fourth, few half and only Rāmrām and Śaṅkara could cross the river. However, only Śaṅkara could be able to swim back.¹⁶

Education:

Up to twelve years Śaṅkara had continued the very wild life. This caused much dissatisfaction to his grandmother Khersuti. One day after serving food she reminded Śaṅkara that his forefathers were all renowned scholars, and that it was up to him to make or mar this glorious tradition of the family. She also explained him the importance of education in the life of a person. Without learning or knowledge of scriptures, he would not be respected in society. Even physical strength without

¹⁴ Neog, M. (2008). *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam: Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*. p.102

¹⁵ GC, p.259

¹⁶ KGC, p.19

education will not alleviate poverty.¹⁷ She pursued him with the proverb *rājāka swadeśehe pūje, bidyāvanta sarbbadeśe pūjya. mātā śatru pitā bairī, yena bālya na pāthitā. sabhāmadhye na śobhante haṁsamadhye bako yathā*.¹⁸ It means “A king is revered in the country only, but the educated person is respected everywhere. Those fathers and mothers were enemy to a child who would not send him to a school. An uneducated person remained un-shine in a gathering just like amongst the goose one heron is matchless”.

The suggestion had its impact and Śaṅkara agreed to go school. He then assured his grandmother, “Send me to a teacher. I will satisfy you by completing my studies within a very short period.” Listening to that Khersuti was delighted and took him to the school (*ṭol*) of Mahendra Kandali, who was a renowned teacher and Sanskrit scholar of those times. “Thus the education life of Śaṅkaradeva was started in the month of ‘Bhada’ (August-September) of 1461 A.D.”¹⁹

From the very beginning Śaṅkara started to study wholeheartedly. He could immediately remember whatever the teacher taught him. Once something was told to him, there was no need to repeat. He had such the extraordinary talent that he composed one poem of ten lines describing the attributes of lord *Viṣṇu* only after learning the consonant (*karatala kamala kamaladala nayana/ bhabadaba dahana gahana bana śayana...*). Śaṅkara dedicated his entire time for study. He worked so hard that he could complete the course of studies within less time than was required ordinarily. The *Kathā-Guru-Carit* provides the information of his way of study and a

¹⁷ Goswami, S. (2014). *Yugasrashta Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev*. p.34

¹⁸ KGC, pp. 19-20

¹⁹ Borkakoti, S. K. (2015). *Srimanta Sankaradeva: a Multi-faceted Genius*. p.11

detailed list of subjects and works studied by him in the *Tol*. He used to sleep only few hours, that again in the study table (*dowāl pirhā*) itself. He kept two books and two lamps on each side of the bed along with betel-nut. He read one book, relaxed on the bed, took turn and started to read the other book. Śaṅkaradeva virtually covers all branches of Indian learning available at that time— the Vedas— *Ṛka*, *Sāma*, *Atharvba*, *Yajura*, *Tṛbeda*; fourteen *Śāstra*— *Śikṣā*, *Kalpa*, *Jyotiṣa*, *Rīti*, *Nīti*, *Nirukta*, *Chanda*, *Śruti*, *Smṛti*, *Mīmāṃsā*, *Tarka*, *Kalāpa*, *Tṛka*, *Nyāya*; eighteen *Purāṇas*— *Śiva*, *Matsya*, *Baiṣṇava purāṇa*, *Skanda*, *Kūrmma*, *Garuḍa*, *Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Bhāgavata*, *Bāmana*, *Barāha*, *Liṅga*, *Bhaviṣyata*, *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Baibartta*, *Vṛhata*, *Nāradi*, *Brahma*, *Padma*; two epics— *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*; eighteen *Samhitās*— *Sut*, *Byās*, *Gautamī*, *Nāradi*, *Agaṣṭi*, *Baśiṣṭi*, *Mārkeṇḍeya*, *Brahma*, *Vṛṅgi*, *Parāśara*, *Biśwāmitra*, *Bharadvāja*, *Durbbasā*, *Baiśwānara*, *Kapila*, *Aṅgirasa*, *Sauri*; fourteen grammars— *Pānini*, *Kalāpa*, *Pañjikā*, *Śabdaratna*, *Mugdhabodha*, *Jñānāṅkuśa*, *Padma*, *Swarapradīpa*, *Śabdajñāna*, *Praśnabodha*, *Prākṛta*, *Sandhi*, *Bṛtti*, *Kṛti*, *Ākhyata*; eighteen *Tantra*; eighteen *Kābya*— *Māgha*, *Bhārabī*, *Bhāratī*, *Naiṣadha*, *Hitopadeśa*, *Bṛndabana*, *Candradhārī*, *Anyāpadeśa*, *Mohmudgara*, *Pradhāna*, *Hanumantī*, *Himavantī*, *Meghdutajñana*, *Navaratna*, *Pañcaratna*, *Daridra*, *Aaṣṭaka*, *Muñjāṣṭaka*, *Bidyābiduṣṭi*, *Śāntiśataka*; eighteen *Koṣa*- *Daṇḍi*, *Prabodhacandra*, *Ānandalahari*, *Śṛṅgara-Tilaka*, *Śrutabodha*, *Ṛtumañjari*, *Hāsyārṇaba*, *Kabiratna*, *Amara*, *Hārāwali*, *Medinī*, *Śabdaratna*, *Kalāpa*, *Pañjikā*, *Śabdajñana*, *Praśnabodha*, *Śrutabodha*, *Śrutibodha*; *Amar* and *Cāṇakya*.

Śaṅkara composed his first masterpiece *Haricandra Upākhyāna* in Assamese verses based on *Mārkaṇḍeya Pūrāṇa* in the *Ṭol* itself.²⁰ “The pupil’s pleasant bearing and mental resourcefulness, nay his signs of greatness, so impressed his teacher Kandali from the very start that the epithet of ‘deva’ was conferred on him.”²¹ After that everyone began to address Śaṅkara as Śaṅkaradeva. Murthy summarized the achievements of Śaṅkaradeva in the *Ṭol* as “During the course of his student career, Śaṅkaradeva made himself thoroughly efficient in Sanskrit, Scriptures, songs, dance, music, dramatic performance and painting, still current in the country. In other words, pious imagination supplemented by an extraordinary precocity of intellect made him a prodigy that master all branches of learning.”²² Śaṅkaradeva completed his schooling within five years.

Responsibility of *Śīromoṇi Bhūñā* and Start of Reformatory Life:

After returning home from the *Ṭol*, Śaṅkaradeva was more inclined to have a studious career rather than to take to the ordinary ways of the world. But he had to take the responsibility as the *Śīromoṇi Bhūñā* at the age seventeen years due to the force by his grand fathers, Jayanta, Burhā Khā and other superiors. Soon he became popular among his subjects and admirer as *Ḍekāgirī* or young leader.²³ During those times Śaṅkaradeva used to practice *Yoga*. It made his health stronger. Even he could become able to defeat one wild ox when the later tried to attack him. But he was more interested in reforming the society. In the words of Medhi,

²⁰ KGC, p. 21

²¹ Choudhury, P. C. (1996). *Jagatguru Srimanta Śaṅkaradeva*. P.2

²² Murthy, H.V. (1961). *Vaisnavism of Śaṅkaradeva and Ramanuja: A Comparative Study*. P.64

²³ GC, P.283

From his school days Śaṅkaradeva revolted against the prevailing religious practices. He condemned slaughter of innocent animals and birds in the name of religion, looked with disfavor the distinction of castes and classes, and felt shocked at the general ignorance and helplessness of the masses in the religious matters. He resolved very early to emancipate them from the religious and social thralldom and to devise a popular and true philosophic religion based on Ahimsa, equality and truth²⁴.

His education and realization got him out from the prevailing barriers of religious dogmatism, superstitions, taboos and many other social inhibitions. Besides administrative duties, Śaṅkaradeva used to spend his times in spiritual studies and discussions. His resourceful talks and gentle behavior were happening to attract the people. He gradually started to teach the common people that it is better to devote Lord Kṛṣṇa than worshiping many Gods and Goddesses. In the year 1468, Śaṅkaradeva established *Kīrttana Ghar* (initially it was called *Deva Mandira* or *Deva Gṛha*) for the first time at Bardowa.²⁵

Cihna Yātrā:

When Śaṅkaradeva was nineteen years old, he enacted one dance drama called *Cihna Yātrā* (dramatic representation with painted drop scene in the background). According to Ramacarana Thakur's description, one day Śaṅkaradeva's grand fathers Jayanta and Madhava as well as some other senior Bhuyan people met him and asked to visually show them the activities of *Vaikuṇṭhas* (paradise). The Bhuyans had already convinced about the scholarly acquaintance of Śaṅkaradeva. They said, "You are well versed in all learning and have completed the study of all scriptures. Give joy to all of us by showing the picture of the paradise". To fulfill their wish Śaṅkaradeva

²⁴ Medhi, K. (1997). *Aṅkāvalī*. pp. XLvi- XLvii

²⁵ PKGC, pp. 35-36

himself prepared the paintings of the celestial abode of God on cotton made paper called *Tulāpāt*.²⁶ Borkakoti wrote,

Chihna Yātrā was a great cultural event. Srimanta Sankaradeva showed the seven Vaikunthas (abode of God) through different stages, drop-scenes etc. There were dance and music, both directed by Srimanta Sankaradeva. Thirty men acted in the drama including Srimanta Sankaradeva himself. People were dumb founded by his matchless artistic talent. About ten thousand spectators enjoyed this great show, which continued for seven days.²⁷

Even after completion of the drama, people from long distance used to come to see the paintings for several days. The drama had such significant impact on the people that Śaṅkaradeva's teacher Mahendra Kandali declared in front of the crowd that he accepted Śaṅkaradeva as his *Guru* (preceptor). Other people like Rāmraṁ, Caturbhūja, Narottama, Jayanta, Mādhava etc. also wanted to initiate to Śaṅkaradeva at that moment. But Śaṅkaradeva advised them to come later. He completed the composition of *Udhava Saṁbāda* and initiated the people in front of this holy book.²⁸ This was the formal beginning of his *EŚHND*. Through *Cihna Yātrā*, Śaṅkaradeva tried to spread the basic principle of *EŚHND*, where *Viṣṇu* is worshiped solely without Lakṣmi. In *Cihna Yātrā*, while Śaṅkaradeva was acting as *Viṣṇu* in the seventh *Vaikuṇṭha* (or *Paṅkaja Vaikuṇṭha*), there was no character of Lakṣmi near him.

However, the *Kathā-Guru-Carit* and the *Bardowa-Carit* recorded that the *Cihna Yātrā* was performed by Śaṅkaradeva after returning from first pilgrimage. Other hagiographers like Daitrari, Rāmānanda and Bhusana are silent on this subject.²⁹ But Borkakoti argued that if *Cihna Yātrā* was enacted after first pilgrimage its

²⁶ GC, pp.191-193

²⁷ Borkakoti, 2015, p.13

²⁸ GC, pp.311-316

²⁹ Neog, 2008, P. 107

language would certainly be *Brajawali* as the case of other plays of Śaṅkaradeva. Similarly, its techniques were different from other plays. So, *Cihna Yātrā* was enacted in 1468 A.D.³⁰ Neog in his work *Yuganāyaka Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva* also has mentioned that *Cihna Yātrā* by Śaṅkaradeva was enacted before his first pilgrimage.

Marriage and Domestic Life:

After *Cihna Yātrā*, people widely accepted Śaṅkaradeva as a preacher. People gathered around Śaṅkaradeva to hear religious matters from him. He used to tell the people about Lord Kṛṣṇa. One day when he was twenty one years old, decided to build a *Doul*. With the help of fellow Bhuyans he constructed the *Doul* and celebrated the *Holi* festival.³¹ In the same year, i.e, 1470, Śaṅkaradeva got married to Suryavati aged fourteen, daughter of Harivaragirī Kāyastha. In spite of a busy schedule of being a householder and an administrator, Śaṅkaradeva continued his deep studies of various scriptures. Besides he kept himself busy in studying the culture of different ethnic groups at that time. However, the couple had a girl child three years after the marriage and was named Manu or Haripriyā. But unfortunately Suryavati died when Manu was nine months old only.³²

First Pilgrimage:

Suryavati's death had massive impact on Śaṅkaradeva. He now devoted most of his times in study. He wanted to visit the then renowned centers of knowledge, but could not do so due to the responsibility of his daughter. Śaṅkaradeva conducted the

³⁰ PKGC, p.46

³¹ GC, p.326

³² KGC: 23

marriage of Manu when she was nine years old to Hari, a *kāyastha* youth. After few days, he handed over the responsibility of household to son-in-law Hari and the affairs of administration to Jayanta-dalai and Mādhava-dalai³³ and set out for his first pilgrimage at the age of thirty-two years. Seventeen persons including Mahendra Kandali, Rāmraṃa, Sarvajoy, Paramānanda, Balorāma, Śrīrāma etc. were accompanied to Śaṅkaradeva. The means of transport was mainly boat and foot. On the way, Śaṅkaradeva composed his first *Bargīta* at Roumari in lower Assam which was—*rāma meri hṛdaya paṅkaje raise/ bhāi citta cintasa kaise....*³⁴

After two months and twenty one days the group reached the Ganga River. From there they headed towards Gaya where they stayed three days. They reached back the Ganga on tenth day. Twenty one days later, the group reached Jagannath Kṣetra. Śaṅkaradeva sent back all others from Jagannath Puri except Sarvajoy, Balorāma and Paramānanda. The four then went to Varanasi, Prayag, Sitakund, Uttar Bahini, Ayodha and Bhardwaj Ashram on the way to Vrindaban.³⁵ During the tour, Śaṅkaradeva got the opportunity to involve in discussions and discourses with many scholars. Highly impressed by his knowledge of the scriptures, many admirers became his disciples. At Vrindaban, one ascetic by the name of Rādhā along with Rupa, Sanātana Goswāmī and Vṛndābana Dāsa became his disciples.³⁶ From Vrindaban, they visited Hastinapur, Indraprastha, Kurukshetra on the way to Badarikashram. At Badarikashram in the year 1489, Śaṅkaradeva composed the second *Bargīta*, (*mana*

³³ GC, pp.364-367

³⁴ PKGC, p.66

³⁵ GC, pp.382-397

³⁶ KGC, p.24

meri rāma caraṇahi lāgu).³⁷ From Badarikashram, they went to Chitrakut, Nepal, Nishad, Dravid-desh, Sweta-dweep, Mathura, Kanyakumari, Panchawati ashram and via Haridwar, reached Jagannath Puri. Here they rested for few days. During his stay at Puri, Śaṅkaradeva explained the legends of Lord Krishna to the devotees. After spending long 12 years on pilgrimage, Śaṅkaradeva returned home in the year 1493 A.D.³⁸

Returning from Pilgrimage and Second Marriage:

After return from the first pilgrimage, Śaṅkaradeva devoted wholeheartedly to the propagation of his cult and large scale initiation of people took place. He had no time now to look after his ancestral estates. But pressures from his relatives continued to come and had to enter domestic life again at the age of 48 (1497 A.D.) by marrying Kālindī. Though he had not retained the land lordship but he retained the responsibility of one hundred weaver families as he wanted to incorporate some new ideas and innovations in this industry.³⁹ In the year 1509 A.D., Śaṅkaradeva established the Bardowa *Thān* at a place where his forefathers used to cultivate mustard crop.⁴⁰ He designed the *Thān* complex in such that the *Kīrttanghar* was at the centre with houses for the devotees on the four sides. At *Kīrttanghar* prayers were held regularly and after that he sat together with the disciples to discuss religious matters. Very soon, Bardowa became the centre of the Neo Vaishnavite Movement. He now propagated the *Bhāgavata* faith, attributes of *Harināma* and *Eka Śaraṇa* based on Holy *Gītā* in a

³⁷ Ibid, p.67

³⁸ Goswami, 2014 p.54

³⁹ Borkakoti, S.K. (2007). *Place of Srimanta Sankaradeva in All-India Perspective*. P.19

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.20

systematic way. “In order to induce people to the new religion he first made the verses of the Kīrtana-ghoṣā, and when he saw that people were attracted towards the creed, Śāṅkara extended his range of literary activity, and adopted several other forms of literature.”⁴¹ Śāṅkaradeva at that time composed *Bhakti Pradīpa* based on *Garuḍa Purāṇa* and *Rukminī Haraṇa* based on *Haribaṅśa*.⁴² After that he had started to translate *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in Assamese language but faced difficulty as complete compilation of the original text was not available with him. He had to keep the work half done till the arrival of Jagadish Misra of Tirhut, a disciple of Brahmananda Sanyasi. The latter brought a complete copy of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, furnished with Sridhara Swami’s commentary, from Puri to Śāṅkaradeva.⁴³

Conflict with Kacharis and Leaving Bardowa:

The Kacharis, a neighboring tribe very frequently disturbed and panicked the Bhuyans. They beaten the subjects of Bhuyan territory, looted the agricultural crops and other assets. Unable to confront them directly, some senior Bhuyans like Burhā Khā, Ketāi Khā, Gābharu Khā, Rup Khā et.al planned to defeat them by deceit.⁴⁴ The Bhuyans offered their hand in friendship and invited the Kacharis for a feast at a place near Deora Beel. While the Kacharis were having the food, suddenly the Bhuyans attack them and killed as many as possible. When Śāṅkaradeva came to know about this ghastly incident he censured the Bhuyans and said that they must have to pay for their crime and advised them to cross the river Brahmaputra. Accordingly,

⁴¹ Neog, 2008, p.107

⁴² Goswami, 2014, p.61

⁴³ Neog, 2008, p.107

⁴⁴ KGC, P.33

Śaṅkaradeva and other Bhuyans left Bardowa in 1516 A.D.⁴⁵ They first settled at Singari and then at Rowta. After six months they heard the news of advancing the Koch army. So, Śaṅkaradeva moved to the east towards Āhom Kingdom and settled at Gangmow. He started to propagate the Vaishnavite faith. As in Bardowa, many people came to Gangmow to be initiated by Śaṅkaradeva. At that place they stayed for five years. During this period Śaṅkaradeva composed a drama *Patnī Prasāda*.⁴⁶ But at Gangmow also the Daflas began to attack Bhuyans and killed the cattle belonging to Bhuyans. To avoid conflict Śaṅkaradeva made the Bhuyans to leave Gangmow in the early part of 1522 A.D.⁴⁷ They made a brief halt at Komorakata for four months and at Maluwalor Ati for two months. Śaṅkaradeva's eldest son Rāmānanda was born at Maluwalor Ati and hearing the news Śaṅkaradeva composed the song *pāwe pari hari karoho*⁴⁸... The Bhuyans finally settled at Dhuwahata in the second half of 1522 A.D.⁴⁹

At Dhuwahata: Meeting of Chief Apostle Mādhavadeva:

On reaching Dhuwahata, Śaṅkaradeva set up a *Thān* with a *Nāmghar* at the centre. The Āhom monarch extended helping hand to the Bhuyans by providing land and royal duties. Śaṅkaradeva's cousin Jagatānanda, was given a government office with the title *Rāmrāi* and son-in-law Hari was made a local over-lord by the king. Śaṅkaradeva's other sons Kamala Locana and Haricarana and a daughter Rukminī

⁴⁵ PKGC, P. 93

⁴⁶ Goswami, 2014, P.92

⁴⁷ Borkakoti, 2007, P.22

⁴⁸ GCK. P.188

⁴⁹ Borkakoti, 2015, P.17

were born at Dhuwahata in 1524, 1526 and 1528 A.D. respectively.⁵⁰ Due to persistent effort of Śaṅkaradeva, *EŚHND* received widespread public acceptance and many people came forward to become his disciple. At Dhuwahata Śaṅkaradeva's greatest achievement was the meeting of Mādhavadeva, in 1522 A.D. At that time Mādhavadeva was thirty-two years old and was a businessman. He was a rigid *Sāṅkta* and was proud of his learning. He came near Śaṅkaradeva for a debate after knowing that his brother-in-law Gayāpani (Rāmdāsa) refused to procure two goats to be sacrificed to Goddess Durga. Gayāpani already initiated to Śaṅkaradeva and accepted Vaishnavism. Quoting his preceptor, Gayāpani said that one should never sacrifice any animal to please deities as the animal also a creature in which the God resides. Mādhavadeva did not accept the argument and set out for debate with Śaṅkaradeva. They debated about for four hours and a half. To defend his *Saktism* and the path of activism (*pravṛtti-mārga*), Mādhavadeva quoted different verses from various scriptures while Śaṅkaradeva with calm but mightier arguments tried to establish the superiority of the Kṛṣṇa cult and the path of detachment (*nivṛtti-mārga*). But Mādhavadeva was not satisfied and provided new arguments. At last Śaṅkaradeva cited the *Tarumūla Sloka* from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* which means, “as the branches, leaves, and foliage of a tree are nourished by the pouring of water only at the root of the tree, as the limbs of the body are nourished by putting food only in the stomach, so all gods and goddesses are propitiated only by the worship of Acyuta”⁵¹. Mādhavadeva finally convinced that Śaṅkaradeva was on correct stand, and very promptly he fell at the latter's feet and accepted him as his preceptor.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.18

Hostility of the Brahman Priest and Royal Persecution:

The combined effort of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva gave a strong impetus to the *EŚHND* and the Dhuwahata resonated with the sound of *Nāma-Kīrtana*. People from all walks of life came to Dhuwahata to become initiated to *EŚHND* propounded by Śaṅkaradeva. The rising popularity of Śaṅkaradeva's creed posed a stiff challenge to brahmanical priestly class.

Bhakti is the way open to all, irrespective of any caste barriers; it gives the same religious footing to the Brāhmaṇ and the Caṇḍāla alike. Śaṅkaradeva rendered the sacred scripture, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa into simple Assamese songs and verses, which even the illiterate could sing or recite or enjoy. He, moreover, declared that this simple singing of the tales of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa and the taking of refuge in him would be an effort sufficient for the attainment of final beatitude.⁵¹

His teachings minimized the importance of brahmanical priesthood and caused a threat to their livelihood. A section of the offended priests started abusing and molesting Śaṅkaradeva's followers. When intensity of such hostility increased, Śaṅkaradeva arranged a meeting at the residence of Burhā-Khā with the leaders of the Brahmins. Through scholarly debate Śaṅkaradeva made them admit that even from the traditional viewpoint his religious teaching was correct. Even after this, hostility did not decrease. Finally the priests complained to the Āhom king Chuhungmung (1497-1539A.D.), who summoned Śaṅkaradeva to his court for a debate with them. Śaṅkaradeva was able to convince the king that he was not a religious rebel and a threat to the social order, and the charges against him were dropped.

⁵¹ Ibid, p.111

Flight from Dhuwahata:

The political condition began to change. Chuklengmung ascended the throne in the year 1539 A.D. by assassinating Chuhungmung. In the west, in Koch Kingdom, Naranārāyaṇa ascended the throne after the death of Bishwasingha (1540 A.D.) and his brother Cilārāi became the commander in chief of the Koch Army. The new Āhom king could not take the rising popularity of Śaṅkaradeva easily. He began to think that in the garb of new religious faith, Śaṅkaradeva was trying for an independent self rule, and if he was not stopped, then his Kingdom would be at danger. The relationship between Āhoms and Bhuyans was gradually deteriorated. In the early part of 1540 A.D., Chuklengmung launched a big expedition to capture wild elephants with the wish to raise his elephant's strength to one thousand. The newly captured elephants were kept in a large barricade and asked different groups of people for guarding from different sides. Although the Bhuyans were totally inexperienced in such task but were ordered to guard the western side.⁵² A few elephants escaped from their side. For not executing the royal job properly, the king sent royal officers to arrest Śaṅkaradeva and his men. Hearing the royal order beforehand, Śaṅkaradeva remained underground. Unable to capture Śaṅkaradeva, the officers arrested Mādhavadeva and Śaṅkaradeva's son-in-law Hari and took them to the capital. After trial the king gave the order to execute Hari and six months imprisonment to Mādhavadeva.⁵³

Seeing the aggressive attitude of Āhom king towards the Bhuyans, Śaṅkaradeva realized that it would be impossible to propagate his faith in the Āhom

⁵² Borkakoti, 2015, p.22

⁵³ Goswami, 2014, p.116

Kingdom. He decided to migrate to Kamrūpa which was under Koch monarch. Śaṅkaradeva had communicated the sad plight of the Bhuyans through a messenger to Gābharu-Khā (a Bhuyan who was serving the post of commander in the Koch Army). The latter referred the matter to Naranārāyaṇa. The Koch King agreed to help the Bhuyans and asked Gābharu-Khā to lead a small contingent of soldiers for their rescue. The commander immediately proceeded eastward and stationed at Biswanath-ghāt with the soldiers. Knowing that, Śaṅkaradeva and other Bhuyans hurried to leave Dhuwahata. They arranged boats and loaded with their belongings. Just before the group started the journey, Mādhavadeva had arrived with the sad news of Hari's execution. The group sailed safely to the Koch Kingdom with military escort of Gābharu-Khā.⁵⁴

Final Settlement at Pāṭbāusi:

Śaṅkaradeva and his associates followed the river route of the Brahmaputra via Khāgarikata, Kaliyābar, Śīngari, Bardovā, Darrang, Kuwar grām, Banbhāg and Barbhāg.⁵⁵ The group reached Kapalābari in Koch Kingdom in later part of 1540 A.D. after twenty days of boat-journey.⁵⁶ With the advice of Gābharu-Khā, the group settled beside a lake. But the group had to move to Cunporā after six months as the water at Kapalābari was very alkaline which took lives of several members including Mādhavadeva's mother Manoramā. At Cunporā, Śaṅkaradeva meet Bhavānanda, a rich merchant who latter popularly known as Ṭhākur Ātā. Cunporā was crowded with many potters, cobblers, gold-smiths and lime-bakers. They all made a lot of noise.

⁵⁴ Rāmānanda, cited by Neog, 2008, p.112

⁵⁵ GC, pp.490-493

⁵⁶ Borkakoti, 2007, p.30

The devotees got disturbance during prayers. Besides, the atmosphere was polluted with foul smells from lime baking. Śaṅkaradeva was forced to leave Cunporā after staying six months.⁵⁷ They now settled at Kumārkuchi. But unfortunately Śaṅkaradeva's second daughter Rukminī died at this place. Also the noise resulted from the works of blacksmiths and the smell of unsold stale fishes coming from nearby village of fishermen made the place unhealthy. So after staying one year, Śaṅkaradeva and his associates left Kamārkuchi and finally settled at Pāṭbāusī in October-November, 1542 A.D. Pāṭbāusī was called *Baral-jār* as the place covered with deep forest with lots of wasps.⁵⁸

Cilārāi become Śaṅkaradeva's Disciple:

After a long time, at Pāṭbāusī Śaṅkaradeva could live in peace. He could now concentrate in his religious and literary works fully. Many dedicated personalities from different castes embraced *EŚHND* here. The notables among the newcomers were— Cakrapāni Dwija, Sarvabhauma Bhattācārya, Dāmodardeva and Harideva (all were Brahmins); Jayarāma (a Bhutia); Govinda (a Garo); Madhāi (a Jaintia) and Murārī (a Koch) etc. When Śaṅkaradeva came to know that Koch king Naranārāyaṇa along with brother Cilārāi was in Barnagar, he visited king's place in the early part of 1543 A.D.⁵⁹ Śaṅkaradeva's scholarly achievements were unknown to the king till then so their meeting was very brief and only a formal one. Two years later, Cilārāi married Rāmrāi's (Śaṅkaradeva's cousin) daughter Kamalapriyā, and was attracted towards

⁵⁷ KGC, pp.76-77

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.78

⁵⁹ PKGC, p.265

Śaṅkaradeva after listening to a *Bargīta* sang by his wife.⁶⁰ He became a disciple of Śaṅkaradeva in the year 1548 A.D. Cīlārāi offered royal patronage to Śaṅkaradeva and the latter took the responsibility as supervising officer of one hundred weaver families at Tāntikuchi.

Second Pilgrimage:

Śaṅkaradeva set for the second pilgrimage in 1550 A.D. Hearing the episodes of different activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa in places like Gokul, Vrindavan, Mathura, etc. from Śaṅkaradeva in the regular discussion after prayer, his disciples were eager to see the places by their own eyes. Accordingly Śaṅkaradeva had to arrange the trip. He asked the devotees to contribute the money according to their ability. The responsibility of few devotees who did not have money was shared by other devotees.⁶¹ Besides, “Śaṅkaradeva had another objective of the travel. He wanted to reunite with the learned scholars, saints and friends from his first pilgrimage”.⁶² Śaṅkaradeva started the journey with one hundred twenty devotees including Mādhavadeva, Rāmrāma, Rāmdāsa, Rāmrāi, Śrīrāma Ātā, Ṭhākura Ātā etc. in the month of *Āghona* (November- December). But Ṭhākura Ātā had to return after one day’s journey, as his uncle Chātan Ātai was unable to walk further. Mādhavadeva had taken the entire responsibility of logistics. The group visited Kashi, Gaya and Jagannath. Śaṅkaradeva and his companions wished to proceed further towards Vrindavan, but Mādhavadeva did not agree to accompany them. Mādhavadeva did this because Śaṅkaradeva’s wife Kālindī requested him to restrain her husband from

⁶⁰ KGC, p.85

⁶¹ KGC, pp.114-115

⁶² Goswami, 2014, p.130

visiting Vrindavan. She feared that Śaṅkaradeva would not come back home after visiting that place. During the tour Śaṅkaradeva also visited the place of Kabir. They met Kabir's grand-daughter there. The pilgrimage group finally returned to Pāṭbāusī in April 1551 A.D. after spending six months.⁶³

Allegation by Brahmin Priests:

Śaṅkaradeva resumed his usual religious and literary works. But, this time, he started to devote few hours every day to train up a selected group of disciples who would be torch-bearers of his philosophy and religious order after him. He sat with them to discuss deep philosophical issues.⁶⁴ Śaṅkaradeva composed many literary works during this period. The most remarkable was the *Bhakti-Ratnākara* in Sanskrit. At the same time he rendered many Sanskrit scriptures into Assamese verse to make them easily intelligible to common masses. The people joined Śaṅkaradeva's sect in large numbers, attracted by simple but deep meaningful compositions and their sweet melody. The growing popularity of Śaṅkaradeva created panic among the Brahmins priests. They feared of losing their employment if people at all give up worship of deities. They started to look for opportunity. Ultimately they got an opportunity when the statue of Lord *Viṣṇu*, built by Karola, was thrown away into the Dhanukhanda lake by devotees during *Holi* festival in 1552 A.D.⁶⁵ They immediately lodged a complaint to the Koch king Naranārāyaṇa with the allegation that Śaṅkaradeva had brought disaster to the state by advising the people not to perform the age old Vedic rituals like animal sacrifices, *yaṅga* etc. He also showed dishonor to God's icon. For their support,

⁶³ Borkakoti, 2015, p.30-31

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.31

⁶⁵ *ibid*: 32

they also presented before the king a skeleton of an icon of Kali collected from a pond near the capital. The king got angry on hearing the complaints and ordered Śaṅkaradeva's arrest. However, Cilārāi worked promptly, sent eight of his own soldiers ordering them to travel non-stop and reached Pāṭbāusī before the king's policemen (*Garmali*) could reach. After reaching Pāṭbāusī, Cilārāi's soldiers pretended to arrest Śaṅkaradeva and brought him safely to the palace of Cilārāi where he was received with great honour. Being unable to find out Śaṅkaradeva, the soldiers of Naranārāyaṇa arrested Gakula Cānda and Ṭhākura Ātā and brought them to the capital. When Naranārāyaṇa got the information that Cilārāi had hidden Śaṅkaradeva in his palace, he ordered the latter to produce the accused in front of him. But Cilārāi refused to do so. This deteriorated the relationship between the brothers, and even Naranārāyaṇa got ready to attack Cilārāi. Knowing this tense situation Śaṅkaradeva willingly offered to go to the royal court. Cilārāi then took the precaution of taking the horse of Naranārāyaṇa and one officer (*Tāmulī*) as hostage so that the king could not do any harm to Śaṅkaradeva.⁶⁶

Śaṅkaradeva at Naranārāyaṇa's Court:

Śaṅkaradeva came to the royal court with none for his help except his personal attendant Parāmānanda. When he entered into the court, the king was sitting in the throne placed on a platform over seven steps. The king asked him to come over there. While began to climb those steps, Śaṅkaradeva started singing the Sanskrit *Toṭaya, madhu dānava dāraṇa...*, a prayer to Lord Viṣṇu. Impressed by the personality and

⁶⁶ KGC, p.144

learning, the king at once ordered the attendants to show due honour and arrange a seat for Śaṅkaradeva near him. As he sat down, he sang a *Bargīta*, *nārāyana kāhe bhakati karo terā*. After that he also sang the *rāja-bhaṭimā* (laudatory verse) *jaya jaya malla nrpati rasabana*.⁶⁷ Śaṅkaradeva composed the *Toṭaya* and the *rāja-bhaṭimā* extempore. The king was mesmerized by Śaṅkaradeva's erudite scholarly knowledge and forgot that the former was an accused person. He politely asked Śaṅkaradeva what he could do for him. Śaṅkaradeva requested the king to verify the allegations against him. The king brought up the allegations made by the Brahman priests. Śaṅkaradeva then clarified that since he preached *Eka Śaraṇa*, so there is no question of worshipping other deities or performing sacrifices. He again explained that his path of devotion was very much within the Vedic tradition. The king was firmly convinced about the sublimity of the faith Śaṅkaradeva propounded. He showed high honour to Śaṅkaradeva and requested him to visit his court every day. After few days, Śaṅkaradeva requested Cilārāi to arrange a separate accommodation for him as he did not like to disturb anybody by staying too long as guest. Then Cilārāi selected a place at Bhelā on the bank of river Torosha and built a cottage. Śaṅkaradeva stayed there with his eldest son Rāmānanda (who was working as accountant in Cilārāi's office), and Parāmānanda. From Bhelā, Śaṅkaradeva used to visit the royal court once daily. "The monarch and the preacher became friends at the very first meeting, and they continued to be friends till the last. With both the king's and the commander-in-

⁶⁷ GCK, p.278

chief's support at his back, Śaṅkaradeva and his followers felt completely secure in their movements, and the Vaishnava Order thrived vigorously.”⁶⁸

Composition of *Guṇamālā*:

After the trial, Śaṅkaradeva was a regular visitor to the court of Naranārāyaṇa. Many scholarly debates were taken place. Śaṅkaradeva not only wins debates with local scholars but also with some foreign ones. Naranārāyaṇa was highly impressed by his vast knowledge as well as his emphasis on neat and cleanliness.⁶⁹ One day the king asked the scholars present there if it was possible to describe the summary of the *Bhāgavata* in a small booklet which could read in one sitting. The Brahmins termed it an impossible task akin to putting an elephant inside a small earthen vessel. When the king asked Śaṅkaradeva, he begged one day's time and departed from the court. From his earlier unfinished composition *Guṇa Cintāmoni*, he improvised overnight an abridged version of the *Bhāgavata* and named it *Guṇamālā*.⁷⁰ After that he painted an elephant's a picture over *Guṇamālā* and placed it inside an earthen vessel. Next day he presented the same to the king. Seeing the work the king was delighted and requested Śaṅkaradeva to read it out. “The whole work, composed in 378 nimble six-syllable rhyming quadruplets, is highly conducive to memory.”⁷¹ Lakshminath Bezbaroa, depending on the *Bardowā-Carit*, holds that Śaṅkaradeva had composed five sections out of the six sections much earlier. At Gangmau, he presented those sections to one

⁶⁸ Neog, 2008, p.119

⁶⁹ KGC, pp.147-153

⁷⁰ Borkakoti, 2007, p.45

⁷¹ Rajkhowa, 2012, p.138

Satananda or Devidasa.⁷² After staying three months at Koch Kingdom's capital (Koch Behar), Śaṅkaradeva came back to Pāṭbhāusī.⁷³

Making of *Vṛndāvanī* –*Vastra*:

Śaṅkaradeva had to visit Koch Behar every year as he was required to deposit to the royal treasury annually the tax collected in the form of cloth or thread from the weavers of Tāntikuchi. During his second visit to Koch Behar in the early part of 1554 A.D., one day he was narrating to Naranārāyaṇa the fun-filled childhood activities of Lord Krishna in Vrindavan. The king was overwhelmed and asked Śaṅkaradeva if there were any way to visually experience those activities. Śaṅkaradeva replied that it could be done through weaving, but it would be a costly affair. The king ensured royal support of providing the required threads, manpower as well as bearing other expenses. Accordingly, Śaṅkaradeva returned to Pāṭbhāusī, arranged a meeting with the weavers of Tāntikuchi to discuss about the royal project. Twelve master weavers (*Maral*) under the headship of Gopal were selected for the project.⁷⁴ Śaṅkaradeva prepared the design to be woven, chose threads of different colours (white, black, red, yellow, blue, grey and green) to be used. One hundred eighty feet long threads were prepared. Śaṅkaradeva personally supervised the weaving by visiting Tāntikuchi everyday from Pāṭbhāusī on boat. Each day six inches (*eka begeta*) of the cloth were woven. On a particular day due to Śaṅkaradeva's illness, his chief disciple Mādhavadeva supervised the work and was able to weave slightly more than his master. The weavers depicted, as designed by Śaṅkaradeva, the childhood activities of

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ GC, p.715

⁷⁴ PKGC, p.164

Kṛṣṇa in Vrindavan from his birth to the killing of Kāṁsa.⁷⁵ From its theme, the cloth came to be known as *Vṛndāvanī-Vastra*. The weaving of the cloth was completed after six months. The most popular belief about the length and breadth of it is 120 x 60 feet. But ‘While completed the length of the cloth was 90 feet and breath was 4.5 feet.’⁷⁶ The people of nearby villages were very curious about the cloth and persistently requested Śaṅkaradeva to show them. He arranged one frame made of bamboo in open space to exhibit the cloth. Then Śaṅkaradeva brought the *Vṛndāvanī-Vastra* to Koch Behar. At first he exhibited the cloth in Cilārāi’s palace and finally it was presented to king Naranārāyaṇa in the beginning of 1555 A.D.⁷⁷ Overwhelmed with the stunning work, the king ordered to construct a new and sophisticated accommodation for Śaṅkaradeva at Bhelā.

Mādhavadeva Nominated as Successor:

As Śaṅkaradeva was approaching towards the end of his life, he started to pass on his responsibilities gradually to Mādhavadeva. He decided to declare formally Mādhavadeva as the chief of *EŚHND* so that in future no leadership conflict aroused. He summoned all his disciples to Pāṭbāusī. Before the gathering, Śaṅkaradeva declared Mādhavadeva as the overall head of the cult. He assigned the responsibility to Mādhavadeva by putting a garland of Basil leaves on his head.⁷⁸ He instructed Mādhavadeva to look after the disciples properly. He also advised the disciples to abide by Mādhavadeva just like they obey him. After that, in the month of February-

⁷⁵ GC, p.720

⁷⁶ PKGC, p.587

⁷⁷ Borkakoti, 2015, p.42

⁷⁸ GC, p.757; PKGC, p.595

March, 1568 A.D., Śaṅkaradeva left Pāṭbāusī for Koch Behar for good with the objective of spending the remaining days of his life in solitude at his residence in Bhelā. In this journey, by boat, he halted for a night at Mādhavadeva's house at Ganakkuchi, had intimate talk for the last time and involved in deep discussion about future strategy of the movement.⁷⁹ He advised Mādhavadeva not to build big buildings for religious purposes and not to resort expensive rituals or festivals (*bara ghar naṭuvāka tumi nakaribā*).⁸⁰ Śaṅkaradeva was afraid that if those were done their religion would go away from the common people which would ultimately result unhappiness. In that discussion he also advised Mādhavadeva to author a book by compiling the beautiful prayers already composed by the later and authoring some other new ones that would be suitable to the Vaishnava faith.⁸¹ Śaṅkaradeva instructed that the book should be philosophically rich as well as sweet and melodious. It should be like a palm fruit with flesh is soft and sweet but the seed is hard. By obeying the order Mādhavadeva completed the book after a few years which latter came to be known as *Nāmaghoṣā* or *Hāzārighoṣā*.

Rāma Bijaya: the Last Composition:

After reaching Koch Behar, Śaṅkaradeva visited royal court at the wish of Naranārāyaṇa and Cilārāi and involved with them in spiritual and intellectual discussions. One day the king requested Śaṅkaradeva to initiate him in *EŚHND*. But Śaṅkaradeva refused to do so as the king was not able to give up his superiority ego. It would be impossible to Naranārāyaṇa to follow *dāsya bhāva* (attitude of total

⁷⁹ Borkakoti, 2015, p.42

⁸⁰ GC, p.764

⁸¹ KGC, p.172

surrender) as required in *EŚHND*. Śaṅkaradeva was afraid that the king would not be able to treat fellow disciples as a part of God after initiation, which would mar the principle of equality in future.⁸² Few days later Cilārāi appealed Śaṅkaradeva to compose a play based on a story of *Rāmāyaṇa* and assured to sponsor the enactment of the play. Accordingly Śaṅkaradeva completed the writing of the play, his last literary work *Śrī Rāma Bijaya*. It was staged and directed by Śaṅkaradeva himself. The entire task took almost three months. At the last part of the play he mentioned the time of composition of it in Sanskrit as *bindurandhra veda candraśāke* which means 1490 *śaka* or the year 1568 A.D.⁸³

Death of Śaṅkaradeva:

The death of Śaṅkaradeva came after four months from his arrival at Koch Behar in the year 1568 A.D. Most of the hagiographers accepted that his death was caused due to a painful boil (*biṣa phoharā*). Thus, Śaṅkaradeva's eventful life ended "on the second day of the lunar month on the bright side during *Bhāda* (August-September) month of 1568 A.D."⁸⁴ His body was set to fire on the bank of the river Torosha.

3.2: Śaṅkaradeva and the Contemporary Economic Background

During the time of Śaṅkaradeva the economy of Assam-Kamrup-Koch Behar was not in an organized shape. The economy was mainly agro-based, as it is at present.

⁸² PKGC, p.614

⁸³ Ibid, p.618

⁸⁴ Borkakoti, 2015, p.44

3.2.1: Profession

Agriculture was the main occupation of the people in those days, but a small number of them also engaged in some other professions. In his *Ureṣā-Barṇana* of *Kīrtana*, Śaṅkaradeva mentioned thirty-four professional castes like *Telī* (oilmen), *mālī* (flower men), *śilākuṭī* (stone breakers), *baṇiyā* (goldsmith), *sūtāra* (carpenters), *carmmakāra* (cobbler), *caḍāla* (outcastes), *kumbhakār* (potter), *kamāra* (blacksmith), *citrakāra* (painters), *kaṁsāra* (bell-metal workers), *kundāra* (watermen), *baidya* (medicinememen), *naṭa-bhāṭa* (actor), *narttakī* (dancers), *gāyana* (singers), *bipra* (priest) etc.

yateka bṛttiyā māne lagate laḍila
telī mālī śilākuṭī baṇiyā sūtāra
carmmakāra caḍāla kamāra kumbhakār
citrakāra kaṁsāra kundāra baidya yata
aneka kāyastha yāia rājāra lagata
naṭa bhāṭa narttakī gāyana aparjyapta
bipragana nṛpatira lagata calanta
prthivīta yateka bṛttiyāgana āche
*coutriś jātio yāya nṛpatira pāche*⁸⁵

[Professional people began to run with them so much: Oilmen, gardeners, sculptors, traders, carpenters, cobblers: Low castes, blacksmiths, potters were running as workers: With them were artists, bell-metal workers, turners, physicians: The king was also accompanied by many writers: There were many dancers, panegyrists, dancing girls, singers: Priests were accompanying the king ahead of others: Men, belonging to different trades, that are on earth: And people of thirty-four castes accompanied king's march.⁸⁶]

Different professions of those days were recorded in the KGC⁸⁷, e.g, *kamāra* , *nāpita* (barbar), *dokānī* (shop keepers), *baidya-jogī* (snake charmer), *baidya* (physician), *guvāla* (animal keeper), *yugī* (silk worm rearer), *mudai* (businessmen), *hālovā* (ploughman), *caṇḍāla*, *camāra*, *kumāra* (potter), *hīrā*, *mukhi* (lime maker by

⁸⁵ *Kīrt.*, vss. 2054-2056

⁸⁶ Saikia, P. (2005). *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradevara's The Kīrtana-Ghoṣā*. pp.987-988

⁸⁷ KGC, pp. 8, 14, 17, 34, 41, 44, 50, 59, 75, 76, 100, 96, 92, 158, 160, 161, 232, 238, 259, 287

burning shells), *bāḍhai* (carpenter), *khariā* (who sells woods for cooking), *dhobā* (washer-men), *darjji* (tailor), *baṇiyā*, *tanti* (weaver), *byadha* (person who capture wild animal and birds for selling to earn livelihood), *jālovā* (fishermen), *jilai* (artisan who made bamboo products), *pahāri* (hawkers), *teli* (oil-crashers) etc. Similarly, those who were employed by the kings have different designations—*barphukana*, *ujira*, *barā*, *baruvā*, *kakatī*, *bharārī baruvā*, *caudhārī*, *garmaṇi*, *māji*, *kara tolā biṣayā*, *lāhana baruvā*, *bargohāi*, *cipāhī*, *cākara*, *laskara*, *cākarī*, *piyadā*, *dhopdharā*, *garmali*, *mahalīyā*, *naṭa-bhāṭa*, *kāji*, *dalai*, *majindāra*, *paṭovārī*, *menā*, *thākuriyā*, *khātaniyāra*, *rajākhovā*. Few people were also involved in illegal activities like— *cora*, *dāku*, *beja*, *ojā*, *macala*, *beśyā* (prostitution) etc.

All the people were directly or indirectly connected with agriculture. In this context Gait said, “The chief pursuit of the people was, of course, agriculture. Generally, the products of their fields were sufficient enough to meet requirements of individuals and the state. Agriculture was looked upon as a noble profession, and every Assamese, except the Brahmanas knew how to plough.”⁸⁸ Even, the people who live in towns were involved in cultivation and sustained on the products of their own agriculture. The cultivators and labourers in rural areas worked mostly in the paddy fields. Different professional groups lived in the same village. “They were divided in communities on the basis of their occupation and were accorded respective position in the society”.⁸⁹ Professions were inheritably passed from one generation to other.

Many people thus made their living by the traditional or inherited professions of their castes. Mādhavadeva as a Kāyastha youth, got his training in the writer’s profession (kāyasthikā or kāythali vidyā, which included book-keeping and accounts) beside his

⁸⁸ Gait, E. (2006). *A History Of Assam*. pp. 269-270

⁸⁹ Roychoudhury, 1985, p.17

education in grammar and poetry. Śaṅkara's son, Rāmānanda, also was trained by one Cakrapāṇi Majumdār on the same lines and was for a considerable time in the employ of Cilārāya.⁹⁰

Some people were also engaged in occupations like rearing of goats, raising cash crops (mustard, betel-vine and areca nut etc.) and sugar manufacturing. Lending of money was growing slowly as a profitable occupation. While some other people earned their livelihood through astrology (*daivajna* or *gaṇaka*) and confection (*sālai*). The people of *Sonowals* community were engaged in extracting gold from the sands of the Brahmaputra and Subansiri.⁹¹ Few people engaged in Ivory works. Some people were directly linked to State like the *Kherkatiyā* (gatherer of thatching grass).

3.2.2: Consumption Pattern

In the time of Śaṅkaradeva, the food habit of the people of the region was non-vegetarian as it is today. “In the ‘Yogini Tantra’ it was said that one should not give up non-vegetarian meal in Kamrupa...ducks, pigeons, tortoise and pigs are edible; one who gives up these (items of food), he is sure to suffer from many distresses”.⁹²

The people took rice as the main food and *jalpāna* as refreshment. Generally four meals were taken per day. Rice as principal meal was taken at noon and evening while they took refreshment at morning and afternoon. The people usually used two kinds of rices e.g. *ukhuā cāula* (parboiled) and *ārai cāula* (non parboiled) to prepare their foods. *Komala cāula* (soft rice) made from a special variety of rice *cakuādhāna*, was used as *jalpāna*.⁹³ Gait also writes, “The staple food of the country was, as it is

⁹⁰ Neog, 2008, p.77

⁹¹ Gait, 2006, p.272

⁹² Rajguru, S. (1966). *Medieval Assamese Society*. p.247

⁹³ Borah, B. (1993). *Society in Medieval Assam with special reference to Women*. p.105-106

today, rice, pulses and vegetables. Meat and fish, specially the latter comprised common articles of food. It is curious to note that in Assam unlike the other provinces of India, the Brahmanas and the Vaishnavas both eat meat and fish without any social bar or comment.”⁹⁴ There are references in the hagiographies about Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva’s eating of both meat and fish. Śaṅkaradeva offered the anniversary feast of his father with the meat of deer while he was at the *ṭol* of Mahendra Kandali.⁹⁵ Another reference showed that he was given meat of deer at the court of Naranārāyaṇa. Similarly, Mādhavadeva had taken the meat of goat to regain physical fitness after suffering from disease at his early days of life.⁹⁶

In KGC⁹⁷, there were mentions of various food items— rice and *cirā*; milk, curd, dal, sugar, different spices, ghee, honey; refreshments— *ākai*, *pāyasa*, *panasa*, *curā*, *ghola*, *khīra*, *khīrisā*; *lavanu*, *paramāṇna*, *pheṇī*, *māṇḍā*, *manoharā*, *puri*, *luci*, *jelpi*, *modaka*, *jarā*, *purā*, *kalā*, *pithā*, *sāndaha*, *gura*, *taila*, *lona*; fish— *śala*, *bhāṅgana*, *bariyālā*, *kāvai*, *darika*, *rau*, *māgura*, *movā*, *baṭiyā*, *kātala*, *garai*, *kurhi*, *āri* and tortoise; vegetables— *śāka*, *kacu*, *ḍhekiyā*, *auṭeṅā*, *beṭgāja*, *kalāḍila*, *kākirala*, *tiyaha*, *cirāla*, *beṅgenā*, *marica*, *lāi*, *laphā*, *lāu*; fruits like *āma*, *kathāla*, *ṭeṅā jarā*, *leteku*, *panivala*, *kala*, *kuhiyāra*, coconut etc. Descriptions about various fish curries were found in the same reference like *śala* with *mala*, *kāvai* with *pāleṅ*, *darika* with brinjal, *rou* with *ou*, *māgura* with *cukā*, *movā* with *ḍhekiyā* and *baṭiyā* with *bābari*. Roychoudhury, writes “Śaṅkaradeva has mentioned different objects of food like - *īkṣhu*. *cūḍā*. *ākhai*. *daohi*. *dugdha*, *sandeśa*. *piṭhā*. *paramāṇna*. *cīnī*. *laddu*

⁹⁴ Gait, 2006, p.263

⁹⁵ KGC, p.21; GCK, p.177

⁹⁶ Ibid, pp.50, 201

⁹⁷ KGC, pp. 129, 12, 295, 62, 97, 327, 482, 107

etc... The use of arecanut after food is mentioned by Śaṅkaradeva at many places. It indicates a prevalent practice in Assam.”⁹⁸

The people of Assam were accustomed with curries of different tastes. “With their main meals at noon and in the evening the Assamese people used to take various curries, such as acrid , acid, slightly seasoned with alkali or curry prepared with fish or meat or green leaves and other vegetables fried in mustard oil. They also used to take vegetables and fish burnt in fire. Fish and meat are sometimes taken by roasting on a spit”.⁹⁹ To prepare curry pulses, such as *māṭi*, *magu*, *macura*, *kalāi* etc. were used. The spices used by the people were ginger, garlic, pepper, black pepper, *tejpāt*, *dhaniyā*, *jirā*, *mithi*, *gandha*, *ganṭhiyana*, *panaru*, *yanī*, *kāljiṛā* , etc. “Salt is very dear and difficult to procure. It is found in the skirts of certain hills, but is very bitter and pungent.”¹⁰⁰ Due to scarcity of salt the people prepared *khāraṇī* as its substitution from the ashes by burning dried banana barks. *Kharicā* prepared from bamboo shoots used to make fish curry. Another two commonly used foods were *khāroli* (prepared from pounded mustard seeds with alkaline solutions) and *pachalā* (curry of young banana tree or seeding).¹⁰¹

There was also the reference of the tradition of having *surā* (rice bear) among the tribal people, particularly the *Kachāries*.

⁹⁸ Roychoudhury, 1985, pp.200-201

⁹⁹ Rajguru, 1966, p.249

¹⁰⁰ Shihabuddin, cited by Gait, 2006, 146

¹⁰¹ Borah, 1993, pp.106-107

3.2.3: Production Pattern

Due to very limited industrialization in those days, agriculture was the main mode of production in Assam. Qadri states that “though essentially feudal, the mode of production in Assam is very different from elsewhere in India in scale and in quality of produce. The production forces are different...”¹⁰² Due to lack of demand the local industries and crafts were remaining under-developed. The demand was confined to a certain level of local consumption. Technology remained low as there was no incentive of increased demand. The economy was subsistence in nature. All efforts were made to produce goods enough only for local consumption.¹⁰³

During Śaṅkaradeva’s time the parts of the Brahmaputra valley under Āhom Kingdom were witnessing a transition from tribal economy to totalitarianism. The community ownership of land was shattering rapidly with the Āhom’s victory over different tribes.¹⁰⁴ Gradually the ownership of land had transferred to the crown or the state. The king enjoyed the right over cultivated and waste lands as well as over forests, ferries, mines and other natural resources. The Āhom rulers classified lands into three categories— cultivated lands, waste lands and homestead lands. “Cultivated lands were of various classes or types— the foremost being rupit or land under permanent cultivation where Sali or wet rice was grown. Rupit lands were treated as the first class land because this class of land formed the major source of the state’s total revenue collection.”¹⁰⁵ Another category of cultivated lands was called as *phariṅgaṭi*. This type of lands was initially covered with jungle and hence lying

¹⁰² Qadri, F. A. (ed). (2006). *Society and Economy in N E India*. p.92

¹⁰³ Borpujari, H. K. (1992). *Comprehensive History of Assam. Vol. II*. p.116

¹⁰⁴ Borkakoti, 2015, p.92

¹⁰⁵ Gogoi, J. (2002). *Agarian System of Medieval Assam*. p.36

uncultivated. The king encouraged the subjects to bring such lands under permanent cultivation. After clearing the jungle, the cultivators had grown seasonal or temporary crops for several years so that the surface of the plot became plain to make it suitable for *Sali* cultivation. The waste lands included forests, ponds and wet lands. In the third category of land i.e. in homestead lands, the ownership passed inheritably. Homestead lands included the housing plot, the area under flower garden and fruit or vegetable garden as well as the bamboo groves. This was non-revenue paying lands and was called *bāri/vasti*.

These were high lands and were suitable for gardening and dry crop cultivation like brinjal, and nursery bed for growing seedlings. Hence, some part of the bari lands were used for kalani (plantain garden), kathiatali (nursery bed for paddy), bengenatali (brinjal garden) and sak or sakani bari (vegetable garden). Bari lands were known as arajami or arakata mati (ancestral land) meaning legally inherited lands to which the occupant had his full ownership and nobody, even the king, could reclaim it.¹⁰⁶

The subjects had to pay *jāmin* (revenue) in the form of either labour or cash to the state for possession and cultivation of land. There was reference in the KGC that from seven villages the Koch king Lakshinarayan got four to six hundred rupees as *jamin*.¹⁰⁷ In the Āhom Kingdom, for *rupit* lands the cultivators had to pay revenue by serving physical labour in the implementation of state projects or serving as soldier (the system was known as *pāika prathā*). Those who were able to pay cash were exempted from physical labour. In that case the cultivators were required to pay Rs. 2 per *purā* (one *purā*= 4 *bighā*). But in case of *phariṅgaṭi* lands there were no option of paying revenue in terms of labour. The people had to pay Rs. 1 per *purā* in cash.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, pp.36-37

¹⁰⁷ KGC, p.458

¹⁰⁸ Gogoi, 2002, pp.36-37

During the time of Śaṅkaradeva, both tribal and non-tribal methods of cultivation were followed. Different tribes in the hilly regions were following shifting (*jhuma*) cultivation. The hoe was their main instrument of production. Plain tribes were also not accustomed with wet rice cultivation although they used wooden plough. Non-tribal method included wet land cultivation with plough. For pulling the ploughs both bullocks and buffalos were used. Only “a small group of people in the valley in earlier times, and the Bhuyans and the Āhoms in subsequent periods only had a developed agricultural tradition and were associated with high yielding transplanted varieties of rice cultivation.”¹⁰⁹ The Bhuyans even had the knowledge of building embankments. There are records in the KGC and other hagiographies about the building of embankments on the rivulets Tembuwani and Magurijan for protection of crops and houses. “The Āhoms brought with them the technique of growing transplanted rice on permanent wet lands, but this practice was mostly confined to the areas they ruled.”¹¹⁰ Along with the wooden plough other implements used in cultivation in those days were *jabakā* (wooden rakes), *dalimārī* (mallets), *mai* (bamboo harrow), *juwalī* (yoke) and *kāchī* (sickles). To store the crops bamboo items like *ḍulī*, *mera*, *kharāhī*, *pāchī*, etc. were used.

Paddy was the major crop in medieval Assam. Mainly three types of rice were cultivated— *Śāli*, *Āhu* and *Bāo*. The first type, i.e, *Śāli* was a transplanted wet rice. First the seeds were sown in the months April-May and then transplantation of the seedlings (*kaṭhīyā*) started in June-July. Harvesting was done in winter. In case of *Āhu*,

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p.63

¹¹⁰ Barman, cited by Rajkhowa, J. P. (2012). *Sankaradeva: His Life, Preachings & Practices*. p.33

sowing was done in the spring and harvested in summer. “Sometimes Ahu was also transplanted when it was known as kharma, but its production did not match to that of the Sali.”¹¹¹ *Bāo*, a variety of long maturing rice, was cultivated in low lying lands by sowing broad-cast. *Bāo* is a floating rice crop which is elongated with the rise of water level. The varieties of paddy which were commonly found in the early Assamese literature are—*mānikīmādhurī*, *mālbhog*, *jāhīngā*, *bagītarā*, *cakowā*, *suwāgmaṇi*, *kharikā-jahā*, *sāgar śāli*, *kapau śāli*, *raṅgā śāli*, *māgurī* etc. The KGC also references of several varieties of rice, e.g, *bar lāhī*, *pharamā*, *phaphari*, *barā*, *jahā*, *bāo maṭhaṅgā*, *māiguṭiā*.¹¹² “Some other popular varieties and sub-varieties are ahu, phapari, guni, nilaji, ahubari, pharma, lahi, khareka, jaha, gidapuri, bhabli, govind - tulsī, sarujul, mathanga, dolkachu, barmathanga, parujahinga, chakhru, bokajahinga, kataridabua, phatkathabara, kangrabara, bar- sohagmoni, saru-sohagmoni, barsali, saru-sali, malchur, kalasali, kaldharm, gendheli-sali, barjuts etc.”¹¹³

The people of Assam cultivated numerous pulses in those days. The reference of pulses which are found in the chronicles and contemporary literature included *mātimāha*, *magumāha*, *kalāmāha* or *khechari*, *arahara*, *macūra*, *buṭmāha*, *lecerāmāha*, *urahi* etc. The KGC mentions the cultivation of *dhāna* (rice), *kacu*, *kapāha* (cotton), *komorā*, *ālu* (potato), *sariyaha* (mustard) etc. by the tribal people in the hilly areas¹¹⁴. It also mentions about the cultivation of vegetable like *kākirāl*, *tiyaha*, *cirāla*, *beṅgenā*, *marica*, *lāi*, *laphā*, *lāu* in the plain area. Cultivation of mustard seeds was extensive. People applied an indigenous method to extract oil from

¹¹¹ Allen, cited by Gogoi, 2002, p.64

¹¹² KGC, p.406

¹¹³ Basu, cited by Borah, 1993, p.201

¹¹⁴ KGC, pp. 36, 303, 321, 327

mustard. Mainly two varieties of mustard seeds were cultivated, namely, white and red. Śaṅkaradeva himself was associated with the cultivation of mustard near Jnagydhari Beel at Bhararidubi. Banana was cultivated in almost every household. It had different varieties like *bhīma-āṭhiyā*, *bajariyā*, *manohara*, *purā*, *baratmani*, *mālbhoga*, *sondā*, *digjovā*, *gobindatulaṣi*, *bagitarā*.¹¹⁵ Sugarcane was cultivated everywhere in the region and people prepared molasses from its juice. Gogoi cited, “The *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, mentions that there were three varieties of sugarcane in Assam— red, white and black. Mohammed Qazim says that the sugarcane of Assam excelled in softness and sweetness.”¹¹⁶ Sesame cultivation was also done in considerable amount. The people of Assam used sesame in various purposes— for preparing traditional cake (*pīṭhā*) and other confectionaries, for preparing fish curry, in religious offerings as well as in medicines. Maize and indigo were also cultivated, but in limited extent.

In Kamrup, commercialization of agriculture took place to some extent. For instance, one of Śaṅkaradeva’s disciple Haridāsa cultivated different vegetables for sale. He could save rupees sixty from the sale of chilies, brinjal, gourd, pumpkin etc.¹¹⁷

3.2.4: Crafts and Industries

It has been already mentioned that the local industries and crafts in Assam were remained under-developed due to low- technology and low demand. In spite of these adversities, some cottage industries flourished in Assam during medieval period. Some mentionable cottage industries of medieval Assam were silk and cotton, gold

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.459

¹¹⁶ Gogoi, 2002, pp.71-72

¹¹⁷ Rajkhowa, 2012, p.291

washing, jewellery making, pottery, ivory works, wood carving, bamboo and cane works, iron works, boat making etc. Besides meeting the needs of the local people as well as of the state, those cottage industries produced surpluses to export. People were commonly associated with the industries like silk and cotton, bamboo and cane works etc. While some other industries were restricted to particular community. The state also extended direct patronage to certain crafts and industries.

Silk and cotton were the oldest indigenous industry of the region. Gait remarked,

Assam enjoyed a high reputation for producing silk of fine texture. The Muhammadan historians noticed that the silks of Assam were excellent and resembled those of China. Tavernier writes of Assam silk “produced on trees” and adds that “stuffs made of them were very brilliant.” They manufactured three principal varieties of silk, called Pat Endi and Muga. The first variety is the finest and the costliest quality. Endy is of the coarsest quality and is generally used by the poor. The last variety, Muga, is a stouter and more durable fabric than the Pat, but coarser and less glossy.¹¹⁸

There were professional weavers called *Tātī* in those days. They weaved cloth for money. They worked either independently or under *Marals* (Head of the *Tātī*). Every *Tātī* had to pay annually a loom-tax to the state. Śaṅkaradeva himself was an expert in textile as proved by his magnificent work called *Vṛndāvanī-Vastra*. He supervised the weavers in Bardowa as well as in Pāṭbāusī. Besides the professional weavers, weaving of cloth was done by woman in almost every household as a regular task. After fulfilling the requirements of cloth of the family members, some women could earn additional income. For instance, the wife of Haridāsa, Rūkmiṇī was able to accumulate rupees sixty from the spinning of yarns.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Gait, 2006, p.271

¹¹⁹ Rajkhowa, 2012, p.291

In the sands of rivers like Subansiri and Brahmaputra gold was found in abundance. Gold was extracted from the sands by washing. The class of people who associated with gold mining was known as *Sonovāla*. Gold jewellery gradually picked up.

Bamboo and cane items were common. The KGC refers different bamboo items used for fishing – *ḍiṅgarā*, *pāuri*, *cepā*, *khokā*, *palo*, *juluki*, *jakāi*, *ghaṇi* as well as utensils— *pāci*, *kāuli*, *dalā*, *palā*, *kulā*¹²⁰. *Dhāri* (mat) made of bamboo was used for drying paddy, rice and vegetables while *duli* and *mera* were used to store paddy and rice.

The potters were making articles for domestic uses like *caru* (cooking vessels), *malā* (cups), *ṭekeli* (vessel), *kalaha* (big Jar), *cāki* (small vessels for burning sacred light) and *khol* (drum). On the basis of technique the potters were classified into two categories—*Kumāra* and *Hīrā*. The former used the wheels to make pottery while the latter made without the wheel. The potters usually decorated with fine paintings the articles made for the use of the royal family.

Iron works was a basic industry in this region. There existed a separate caste for iron works called *kamāra*. They produced different articles of domestic use as well as agricultural implements— *dā* (knife), *kaṭāri* (small knife), *kāci* (sickle), *kuṭhāra* (axe), *kodāla* (spade), *phāla* (tip of plough) etc. The kings engaged them in manufacturing of weapons as well.

Since, boat formed during that period the most convenient and quickest means of transport and communication, boat-making industry made considerable progress.

¹²⁰ KGC, pp.419, 259

The common people as well as royal family used boat. Trade was also carried on boat. By collecting wood at free of cost from the forest the common masses made their own small boat. There was one community known as *Nāocaliā* employed by the kings for boat-building. Boat played important role in the wars. The Koch king used seven hundred boats in his naval force to attack Āhom Kingdom in 1562 A.D.¹²¹ Different types of boats were used by different classes of people. Name of some boats were found in the GCK—*pinica, mānchai, cereṅgāḍāri, kohrā, gamāri naukā, kondha nāo*, etc¹²².

3.2.5: Medium of Exchange

During those days very limited amount of monetization took place in the economy of Āhom Kingdom. Only in limited purposes money (*kari*) was used. In comparison to it barter system was widespread. Particularly in rural areas the people exchanged among themselves the ordinary commodities of daily use without going to the market. Coin was first introduced by king Suklenmung in 1543 A.D. In the words of Gait,

As was usually the case in India, the standard coin of the Āhoms weighed a tola (two-fifths of an ounce) or 96 ratis. The peculiarity of the Āhom coins lay in their shape. Instead of being circular, they were octagonal, in accordance with the sloka in the Yogini Tantra which describes the country of the Āhoms as having eight sides. The octagonal shaped coins also represented the eight states which were appended under the authority of the Āhom Sovereign. In other respects they bore a marked resemblance to the coins of the Koch Kings. The earliest Āhom coins bear a date equivalent to A. D. 1543 and were struck by Suklenmung Gargaya Raja in the fourth year of his reign.”¹²³

¹²¹ PKGC, p.579

¹²² GCK, pp.301, 303, 439, 444, 518

¹²³ Gait, 2006, p.276

However, the picture of monetization was better in Koch Kingdom. People were accustomed with buying and selling through money. With higher circulation of money economic activities were also in high level. King Naranārāyaṇa established a Mint in the year 1555 A.D. for supplying coins in huge quantities so that economic activities propelled.¹²⁴ “The coins of the Koch kings, called ‘Nārāyaṇi’ after the second part of their names, were accepted for currency in the surrounding states of Asama, Nepāl, Bhuṭān and others. The *Katha-guru-Carit* refers in one place to a Nārāyaṇi (distorted into Nāreṅgi) half-rupee (ādhali)”¹²⁵

The Bhuyan territory was also monetized. They used money from mid fifteenth century. When Śaṅkaradeva was enrolled in Mahendra Kandali’s *Ṭol* his grandmother Khersuti paid one rupee. Śaṅkaradeva himself once paid one rupee to his teacher for seeking leave of absence.¹²⁶

There were different denomination of coins — *ṭakā*, *ādhali*, *śikā*, *ānā*, *kaḍi* etc. A rupee (*ṭakā*, *rūpa* or *rupiyā*) was consisted of sixteen *ānā* or sixteen *pona* (one *pona*=80) *kaḍi* (cowrie) or one *kāoun kaḍi*. Half a rupee was known as *āda-ṭakā* or *ādhali*, a quarter rupee as *śikā* or *mahā* and half a quarter rupee as *āda-mahā*.¹²⁷ The KGC also mentions different denominations like *ātolā*, *mahā*, *āda-mahā*, *carāti*, *khāti*, *ṭakā*.

With regard to the purchasing power of coins of both Āhom and Koch kings, Neog mentions in the introduction part of GCK as,

¹²⁴ PKGC, p.566

¹²⁵ Neog, 2008, p.79

¹²⁶ Borkakoti, 2015, p.96

¹²⁷ Neog, M. (1990). *Aspects of Guru-caritra-kathā*. in B. P. Chaliha (ed.), *Journal of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Research Institute*, Volume I. p.7

A gold mohar brought 120 thick and warm parhis. The price of a deer was a Nārāyaṇi half-rupee; that of a peacock a quarter rupee; a small ṭuni bird cost 5 poṇs of cowries, and a sheaf of edible fern was worth four arās of cowries, while a big āri fish was bought for four poṇs of cowrie shells.¹²⁸

A *tolā* (11.6 gm) of gold costs eight or nine rupees.¹²⁹ Rajguru also mentioned “From the chronicles it is learnt that the value of an earthen utensil called ‘Charu’ in Assamese was two cowries. In one of the Bargits of Mādhavadeva, it is found that the price of an earthen pot called ‘Kalasi’ was two cowries only.”¹³⁰ The KGC refers the Bhutias sold two horses at two hundred rupees in Koch Kingdom. The same also refers that betel leaf was sold at two or four cowries in retail. The general price level was different in region wise depending on the availability of the commodities, their local demand and sometimes as per the prevailing situations like drought, famine and political instability. Generally, Kamrup witnessed higher price level than Āhom Kingdom due to higher population density, commercialization of products and repeated Mughal attacks. For instance, two full size *gāmocā* (napkin) had cost 8 *pons* (=640) cowries in Kamrup but the same was sold at 3 *pons* in the Āhom Kingdom.¹³¹

3.2.6: Savings and Credit

Saving habit among the people was low as majority of them were associated with subsistence economy where they produce only for consumption. Those who had surplus were saved in the form of gold. They dig hole in earth and put the money in it.¹³²

¹²⁸ Neog, M. (ed.). (2012). *Guru-Carita-Kathā*. p.138

¹²⁹ Shihabuddin, cited by Gait, 2006, p.146

¹³⁰ Rajguru, 1966, p.387

¹³¹ Neog, 2008, p.78

¹³² KGC, p.337

People had taken credit both for consumption and business purposes. Mādhavadeva's elder brother had a loan of rupees sixty at the time of their father's demise.¹³³ In other reference it was found that one person took various commodities worth rupees 120 on credit for business from another merchant. Its accumulated principal and interest was calculated to be rupees five hundred after seven years.¹³⁴

3.2.7: Trade and Commerce

In some limited products Assam was associated with external trade since very early times. Assam was famous for her textiles. Besides, valuable forest and mineral products constituted her trade. Those products were exported to Tibet, Bhutan and other places of then India. Gait by citing McCosh and *Tabaquat-i-Nasiri* referred that there were five roads connecting Sadiya and Tibet, and thirty five mountain passes (*duvār*) between Kamrup and Tibet via Bhutan. Horses were used to ferry goods.¹³⁵ However, water transport was widely used to perform internal trade. Products of trade were carried by boats through rivers with different parts of India. "Brahmaputra, with its tributaries, afforded the convenient routes. Mādhavadeva carried out his trade from Nārāyaṇpur and Gaḍgāo in the east to Bāṇḍukā in the west. Bhavānanda pushed his trade in the Kāmṛūpa, Asama, Gāro and Baṅgāl countries".¹³⁶

Trade was carried by different classes of merchants (*sadāgara, sāud, mudai*) and small traders or hawkers (*sajāi, samāi, kājuvā, pohāri*).¹³⁷ The KGC mentions about three types of merchants (*mudai*) according to the value of business they dealt in

¹³³ Ibid, p.48

¹³⁴ Ibid, p.433

¹³⁵ Gait, 2006, p.273

¹³⁶ Neog, 2008, p.78

¹³⁷ GKC, p.139

The best category of them were called *uttama hājaniyā dokānī* who dealt in jeweler (*hirā, ratna, rajata, subarṇa, bākhar, povāla, mānika*). The second (or medium) category was called *madhyama* who dealt in cloth and leather (*cāmara, kamalbānata, paṭuluhi, cāṭana simkhāpa, tāo, bālicari makhmala, pāṭciṭa*). The third (or lowest) category was known as *prākṛta* who sell salt and alkali.¹³⁸

There were some small grocery shops (*dokāna*) in Koch Behar and in Kamrup.

Those were permanent shops at the corner market place (*tini cukiā*).

The petty shops which sold articles to the customers were known as ‘Pohār’. The women of the fisherman community who used to go for selling or exchanging fish, lime and other daily necessities from house to house, were called ‘Pohāris’. A male ‘Pohāri’ who was sometimes a retail seller, sold articles in retail or exchanged for other commodities by purchasing them from the Mudais or Bepāris or from other places.¹³⁹

The KGC provided the names of various commodities which were bought and sold in the local markets—pulses, mustard, rice, molasses; fuel woods; *ḍhekiā śāka; lona* or salt, *povāla, bākhara, cita, tao, sindura*¹⁴⁰. The GCK also refers that the retailers sold *cirā*, banana, milk, ghee, sugar, areca nut and betel vine etc. There is also reference of selling of cotton in Māghnovāghāta and selling of brinjal.¹⁴¹ Even women could sell their hairs in the market of Cinatoli in Āhom Kingdom.¹⁴² The long distance trade took place mainly on the commodities like pulses, mustard, salt, betel vine and areca nut. The Āhom Kingdom was like a paradise for the merchants as they could procure valuable commodities at comparatively lower price. The state was famous for *sūbarṇa* (gold), *pāṭ-kapor* (silk cloth), *hasti-dāt* (ivory), *dāba-kaṭārī* (clasp

¹³⁸ KGC, p.386

¹³⁹ Rajguru, 1966, p.381

¹⁴⁰ KGC, pp. 46, 96, 240, 433

¹⁴¹ GCK, pp. 394, 247, 312

¹⁴² PKGC, p.179

knife), *jāti-maris* (chillies), *dildahiyā bar kāpor* (two-fold silk or cotton cloth), *jāpi* (sun and rain shed), black pepper, cotton. Those commodities were exported. Different tribes lived in the hilly areas had trade with the people of Brahmaputra valley. They mainly exchanged their products for rice and other materials.¹⁴³

3.2.8: Taxation

Both direct and indirect taxes were imposed on the people by the kings. The officials and artisans were liable to pay income tax. The subjects had the option to pay the tax in the form of money, or by paying a part of their total product or by providing physical labour to the state. The people were required to pay tax for using land, forest, water resource and other mineral resources. They had to pay revenue (*jamin* or *kar*) for possession and enjoyment of land, *jalkar* for fishing, *beth* for forest use etc. There were *cakis/duvārs* (customs outposts on roads) and *phāṭs* (outposts on rivers) to collect tax from businessmen. Different types of customs and general trade duties like *dān* (sales tax), *hāṭ* (tax on buying or selling in the market), *phāṭ* were collected. To collect tax officers like *cakiyāl*, *phāṭovāl* or *phāṭkhovā*, *ṭekelā* etc. were employed.¹⁴⁴ Other forms of taxes were

ghat (tax for using rivers for trade), phat (duty on marketing places), katal (payment made in lieu of personal service), pad (fee to be paid by paik on getting an assignment), panchak (contributions), beth (to catch wild elephants from the forest for the state), begar (forced labour obtained from paiks), chor (fine taken from thief), chinla (fine on paiks for adultery), dhumuchi (king's claim on the properties of those who died without heir), marecha (tax for acquiring land through a marriage according to vedic rites), ghamech (tax to be paid to the king for marriage), danda (fine for crime), bandha (keeping in confinement and compelled to do work), khut (tax on moveable articles), jalkar (tax for fishing), yavakshara (tax for production of gunpowder) etc.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Neog, 2008, p.79

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p.78

¹⁴⁵ Gogoi, 2002, pp.108-109

Even people were required to pay tax or a fee if they leave or enter the state.

Comparatively, the Āhom kings imposed a higher rate of taxes on the artisans.

The goldsmiths and the bell-metal workers had to pay Rs. 5 each per annum, the oilmen and the fishermen Rs. 3 and the silk worm rearers Rs. 2 each besides giving a portion of their produce as presents to their officers... All other artisans like blacksmiths, potters, weavers, carpenters, iron smelters, salt miners etc. had to pay taxes in terms of their produce or had to work for the king for about 3-4 months in a year in producing such items in which they were proficient.¹⁴⁶

The gold washers (*Sonovāl*) had to pay to annually one *tolā* of gold per head per year.¹⁴⁷

3.2.9: Transportation

Water transport was the fastest means of transport and communication during the time of Śaṅkaradeva. Journey through water was also convenient. There were many references in the hagiographies about Śaṅkaradeva's boat journey. People of all classes had their own boats. Besides, professional boatmen were also there. Neog writes in the introduction part of GCK as

The rivers provided the main long-distance public thoroughfares, along which plied different kinds of big and small boats with men and materials. The traders had their own boats to carry their merchandise; they as well as other boat-pliers (*māji*) transported persons on payment of money (*cukāni*, *bheron*). The officers of State had their own ships.¹⁴⁸

Both the Āhom and Koch kings gave emphasis on constructing roads. The Āhom kings engaged the *pāiks* in large numbers in building roads. The Koch king Naranārāyaṇa constructed an all weather useable road from Koch capital to Narayanpur of present day Lakhimpur district covering a distance of 547 k.m.¹⁴⁹ On

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, pp.105-106

¹⁴⁷ Gait, p.272

¹⁴⁸ Neog, 2012, p.139

¹⁴⁹ PKGC, p.577

the roads the common people travel on foot, the kings or officials on elephant's or horse's back, the high class people of the society in palanquins (*dolā*, *pīrā-dolā*) carried on men's shoulders. Bullock carts were not used. But there was one reference of a *sanyāsī* scholar who came to debate with Śaṅkaradeva by riding on a bullock.¹⁵⁰ The common masses had to depend on foot for travelling long. Even Śaṅkaradeva went on foot twice in the pilgrimage.

3.2.10: Costume

Since cotton and silk were produced abundantly in medieval period dresses of Assamese people consisted mainly of silk (*mugā*, *pāṭ*) and cotton fibers. The common masses usually wore dresses made of cotton. But on special occasion they used to wear silk dresses made from the ordinary variety of *mugā*. The people from upper classes of the society generally wore cloths made from *pāṭ* and *mugā* silk when they came out of home. The best varieties of *pāṭ* and *mugā* (*campā*, *mejaṅkari*) were meant for them.¹⁵¹ The women of sophisticated classes generally wore dresses consisting of three pieces— *mekhelā* (garment like a petticoat), *rihā* (a long ornamented scarf made of silk which was wrapped round the body and waist) and *celeṅg* or *cādar* (long cloth) placed over the *rihā*. Women of the lower classes wore only *mekhelā* and *cādar*. While at home they used *gāmocā* (towel) as *cādar*. The tribal women preferred colorful dresses and used *gāmocā* to cover the head. Men used to wear *bhuni* or *curiā* or *dhutī* as the main cloth (worn round the waist down to the knee) and wrapped round the body a *pacarā* or *celeṅg* (a piece of wide cloth). They also put a *gāmocā* on

¹⁵⁰ KGC, p.163

¹⁵¹ Baruah, cited by Borah, 1993, p.107

shoulder. Shirts were rare in Āhom Kingdom while it was more common to the officials in Koch Kingdom. Koch kings appointed trailers who made *daglā* (jacket with gold work decoration). One could wear shoe only with the special permission from the king.¹⁵²

Females worn various ornaments made of gold and silver on their necks, hands, ears and fingers. The KGC provided the information of some ornaments like *khāru, maṇi, biri, āṇuṭhi, kariyā, hāra*.¹⁵³

3.2.11: Education

In the time of Śaṅkaradeva formal education was beyond accessible to the common masses. It was only the privilege of the royal family and priestly class. *Ṭols* or *chātraśāls* or *pāṭhsālā* played the most vital role in imparting education. Those were residential schools and operated mainly by Brahmana scholars with royal patronage. The names of some renowned *ṭols* of the region in medieval period could be found in the GCK.¹⁵⁴ Examples of some such type of institutions were—Mahendra Kandali's *ṭol* at which Śaṅkaradeva studied, Rājendra Adhyāpaka's *ṭol* at Baṇḍukā where Mādhavadeva got education, Devadatta Adhyāpaka's *chātraśāl* at Sālkacā, Yādāindra Bhaṭṭācārya's *ṭol* at Cirhāṭī, Jaibar Adhyāpaka's *ṭol* at Pāṭaki at which Puruṣottama Ṭhākura (Śaṅkaradeva's grandson) studied etc. At that time Vārānasi, Haridwār, Navadvīpa, Nādiya-Śāntipura etc. were the centers of advanced learning which attracted students from this region. Koch king Naranārāyaṇa and his brother

¹⁵² Ibid, p.108

¹⁵³ KGC, pp.348, 357

¹⁵⁴ GCK, pp.175, 199, 284, 365, 554

Cilārāi were educated at Vārānasi. Similarly, the Brahman scholars Bhāskar went to Navadvīpa and Kaṇṭhbhūṣaṇa left for Kāśī after they lost debate with Śaṅkaradeva.

After the students got enrolled, the teachers selected an auspicious day to formally start imparting education to the students. The guardians of the students generally offer one or two gold or silver coins, cloth and some daily necessities such as oil, rice, areca nut and beetle vine etc. to the teachers as a mark of respect and honour. Age limit was not a bar for the admission in those days. Śaṅkaradeva himself started formal education at the age of twelve. The medium of education was mainly Sanskrit. Subjects like vedas, epics, astronomy, philosophy, grammar, literature, yogā etc. were taught to the students. The knowledge of accountancy (*kāithelī-bidyā*) was also imparted in some schools. Mādhavadeva studied *Kāithelī-bidyā* at Rājendra Adhyāpaka's *ṭol*.¹⁵⁵ On the basis of academic achievements the students were conferred degrees like *Ācārya*, *Kandali*, *Misra*, *Upādhvāya*, *Bharatī*, *Saraswatī*, *Bāgis*, *Kaviratna* etc. For writing the *sāci-pāt* (paper prepared from the bark of *sāci* tree) and *tulā-pāt* (paper prepared from cotton by putting weight on it) were used. Durability of *tulā-pāt* was very less in comparison to *sāci-pāt*. The ink used for writing was called *mahī*. Usually a goose-quill or a piece of reed was used as a pen.

3.2.12: Slavery

There prevailed a system of slavery (or bondage labour) in the medieval Assam. The slaves were required to render their services both in the household affairs as well as in the paddy fields of their masters. "They were bought or sold in the open

¹⁵⁵ Roychoudhury, 1985, p.18

markets, the price ranging from twenty rupees for an adult male of high caste to three rupees for a low caste girl.”¹⁵⁶ The slaves were known as *bandhā*, *golāma*, *bahatā*, *laṭhariyā* etc. In the Āhom Kingdom the higher officials had the right to keep a large number of slaves and retainers (*bilātiyā*) to work in their private estates. Again the rich persons who could afford enjoyed the facility to keep such slaves. In the Koch Kingdom, criminals were bartered for horses in the market attended by Bhutiyas. The disciples of Śaṅkaradeva, Nārāyaṇa Dāsa and Gokulacānda were bartered away for two horses by king Naranārāyaṇa to Bhutiyas.¹⁵⁷ Default of loan repayment was the main reason behind slavery. Since majority of the population had to live with limited means they were compelled to take loan in different purposes. But those unable to repay the loan ultimately had to be a slave to the creditor. However, they could buy back their freedom when they were able to repay the money for which they were bonded. For instance, Balorāma Ātai of Topā became a *bandhā* (slave) after unable to repay rupees five. Latter he was rescued by the disciples of Śaṅkaradeva.¹⁵⁸ “Most of the slaves were of local origin and were products of the economic oppression of the well-to-do class particularly in Kamrup and imbalance distribution of lands between the actual tillers of the soil and the managerial class.”¹⁵⁹ Since the economically sound and politically powerful sections were the beneficiaries of slavery, the system itself got the encouragement.

¹⁵⁶ Gait, 2006, p.265

¹⁵⁷ KGC, p.141

¹⁵⁸ GCK, p.225

¹⁵⁹ Gogoi, 2002, p.128

3.2.13: Begging

Begging was also existed in those days. They begged by going household to household. Even some physically able young people also involved in begging. Several disciples of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were previously engaged in begging. There are references in the KGC about some beggars who later became disciples, like Madhāi Ātai, Udār Ātai, Srīrām Ātā, Jaihari, Srīhari, etc.

3.2.14: Famines and Hardships

The common people had to face different kinds of hardships in those days mainly because of scarcity of food items. Famines were frequent occurrences. The crop failures due to droughts and floods caused food scarcity which ultimately led to famines. Mādhavadeva, in his younger days had faced a severe famine when he was forced to beg along with his father after remaining without food for two days.¹⁶⁰ During such famines, it was very difficult to get anything even by begging the entire day. Similarly, once in the month of *Jeṭh* (April-May) the scarcity was so intense that it was difficult to procure goods even from the market by paying money.¹⁶¹ There were references in the hagiographies that the affluent disciples and officials extended helping hands in famines. For instance, once Ṭhākura Ātā voluntarily offered a *bharāl* (contingent) of rice to the *bhakats*. Again, in another instance of famine after Śaṅkaradeva's demise Mādhavadeva, being unable to feed his disciples, was forced to

¹⁶⁰ KGC, p.44

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p.367

appeal for help in the court of Koch Kingdom and accordingly each officials shared the responsibility of some *bhakats*.¹⁶²

3.2.15: Income Inequality

There prevailed great disparity in the distribution of income and wealth. Lands were concentrated in the hands of few classes after the Āhoms extended their Kingdom. The common masses suffered lack of means. On the contrary wealth accumulated in the hands of the officials (*Barā, Bhūñā, Coudhury*), priests and merchants. Some of the Bhuyans were such rich that they could bet rupees ten each in the sports of boating in the festival of *Durgā Pūjā*. There are also references in the KGC about several merchants who were very rich. One *sadāgar* lent rupees four lakh to a businessman. Areca nut merchant of Dhuwahata, Dhanāi Mudai had business worth lakhs of rupees. Ujir Bora and Māji, who provided shelter to Mādhavadeva in his younger days, were rich people. The former had the possession of 140 families as slave and other manual workers.¹⁶³ Similarly, Damodara Ātai had four hundred rupees at his disposal and spent rupees one every day for living.

3.3: The *Bhakti* Movement of Śaṅkaradeva

Śaṅkaradeva, during his lifetime itself, was successful in building a solid foundation of neo-Vaishnavism in the entire area covering then Assam, Kamrup and Koch Behar. Although his *Bhakti* Movement was a part of Great Indian *Bhakti* Movement but it had certain peculiarities and characteristics which made it unique. He

¹⁶² GCK, pp.411, 464

¹⁶³ KGC, pp.373, 189, 50, 39

emphasized on stern monotheism, abolition of idol worship, discarding expensive rituals, stress on *Nāma* and *Kīrttaṇa* etc. Basic characteristics of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement are—

- i. Śaṅkaradeva propagating *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*. It means complete surrender to one and only God. In his order devotees submit themselves only to Lord Kṛṣṇa (i.e. Hari or Rāma or Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa). Worships of other gods and goddesses are strictly prohibited.
- ii. Śaṅkaradeva propounded *Dāsya-Bhakti* or surrendering oneself to the service of God like a servant, out of the nine forms of *Bhakti* (devotion) accepted in the Vaishnavite order.
- iii. The motto of Śaṅkaradeva's faith is *eka deu, eka seu, eka bine nāhi keu* i.e., there is only one God and only one service, and there is no other God to serve.
- iv. According to Śaṅkaradeva *Bhakti* itself is the end. He said *Bhakti* (devotion) is more important than *Mukti* (salvation).
- v. He discarded costly rituals and pilgrimages. He argued costly rituals instead of satisfying the God satisfied the economic interest of the priestly class. Similarly, he held people could never find God through pilgrimage; rather it would waste their valuable time and energy.
- vi. He prescribed only on two types of devotion—*Śravaṇa* or hearing the name and attributes of God and *Kīrttana* or singing or chanting the glories of God. Thus, he propagated a faith which is very simple, inexpensive and painless so that it could be followed by any person at any time.

- vii. In the religious faith preached by Śaṅkaradeva devotees are given utmost preferences. It considers a living devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa superior to lifeless idol (*mūrtī*).
- viii. The *śaraṇa* (initiation) practice of Śaṅkaradeva's faith is unique. When a person proselytes into *EŚHND* he has to prostrate and take solemn oaths before the scriptures composed by Śaṅkaradeva.
- ix. Idol worship was totally discarded by Śaṅkaradeva. So, instead of idols, a holy book (usually the *Bhāgavata* or the *Kīrttana*) is placed on the *manikuṭa* (a wooden pedestal) in the prayer halls (*Nāmghar*).
- x. Female deity is absent in Śaṅkaradeva's religious order. The dual-worship of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, or of Rāma-Sitā or of Rādhā- Kṛṣṇa etc. which is associated with other types of Vaishnavism all over India is not accepted in *EŚHND*. Śaṅkaradeva did not show any interest in the character of Rādhā. Instead he willingly avoided mentioning the name of Rādhā in his extensive literary compositions.
- xi. Śaṅkaradeva never supported an ascetic life or renunciation of household affairs. In fact, a householder's life was preferred to celibacy in his order. He only asked the people to chant the name of God while they work.
- xii. Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement was not a spiritual movement alone. It also became a remarkable socio-economic movement of the region. The movement did a lot for the welfare and emancipation of the socially and economically backward sections of the community.

- xiii. Since, for propagation Śaṅkaradeva used the media of music, dance, drama, painting and literature extensively, his *Bhakti* Movement created a cultural renaissance. Due to his insistent efforts the Assamese literature and arts received a new lease of life.

3.4: Socio-Economic Background of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement

The contemporary society of Śaṅkaradeva was consisted with different tribes and castes. The Āhom dominated the upper Assam while the Koch ruled the lower Assam. Other main tribes were the Kacāri, Mec, Gāro, Miri, Lāluṅ, Bhūṭiyā, Barāhī, Cuṭiyā, Morān etc. Similarly, the Brāhmaṇ, Kāyastha, Ganak, Baniā, Hīrā, Kalitā, Keot etc. were the major castes. Limited numbers of Muslim people were also there. Most of the tribes followed animism with their own rites and customs. Before Śaṅkaradeva started his reform, Saktism and Saivism were the dominant cults. A form of Tāntric Vaishnavism (Vasudevism) existed, i.e. Viṣṇu was worshiped with Tāntric rituals by some people. Besides a few minor cults like Nathism, crypto-Buddhism and the cult of Manasā (the snake goddess) were also there.¹⁶⁴ Almost all the religious cults were practiced according to the Tāntric rites where liquor drinking, sacrifices of animals and free sexual unions were openly allowed.¹⁶⁵ In Saivism “offerings (upahāra) of ducks and pigeons, wine and cooked rice and sacrifices of buffaloes and swine, cocks and he-goats were made.”¹⁶⁶ Saktism was the worship of a goddess of many name and forms. The goddess was worshiped with sexual rites and sacrifice of

¹⁶⁴ Sarma, 2016, p.6

¹⁶⁵ Gayan, A. (2014). *Music for Mobilization: Evolution and Role of 'Bargeet' in the Bhakti Movement of Śaṅkaradeva*. p.45

¹⁶⁶ Neog, 2008, p.80

animals or even of men in many cases. In such worships five Ma's (*pañca-makāra*) were indispensable. Those were— *madya* (wine), *māṃsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mudrā* (parched grain) and *maithuna* (sexual union). In Tāntric Vaishnavism, cow's milk, fish, venison, goats, porcupine and hare etc. were offered to Viṣṇu. Similarly, the Crypto-Buddhism also indispensably accepted the five Ma's and apprehended that the seekers of salvation should enjoy *Prajñāpāramitā* or perfect truth that resides in every woman.¹⁶⁷ The practice of open drinking of liquor and excessive sexual union in the name of god and goddess's worship tainted the morality of the people. It degraded the position of women in the society. Women had lost the security and self respect due to the practice of the *bhogī* where a handsome youth was selected to be sacrificed in front of goddesses and was given immense freedom for one year in which he can enter any house and have sexual intercourse with any women he desired. In some temples virgin girls (*Kumāri*) were worshiped. But the custom gradually got polluted and the priest started to exploit the girls sexually. The status of those girls (known as *Devadāsī*), was degraded to prostitutes.¹⁶⁸

The distinct caste division allowed the Brahmins to enjoy upper hand in the society. To protect their vested interest they kept the religious scripture out of reach of the lower class. Some of the unscrupulous Brahmins interpreted the scriptures in their own way and motivated the illiterate masses to follow their way of religious practices. Several unnecessary rites and rituals were imposed only to protect their economic interest. By forced to follow those practices the poor helpless class had to lose

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, pp.83-88

¹⁶⁸ Gayan, 2014, p.46

everything in the name of satisfying the god and goddesses.¹⁶⁹ Under such situation there was hardly an atmosphere for intellectual and mental development. All these affected production and stalled economic development.

The religious practices of the Hindus were very expensive at that time and common people were forced to perform those rituals elaborately. Animals were sacrificed at large scale which had a damaging impact on agricultural productivities. Pilgrimages were also a costly and physically hazardous affair. The most expensive one was the rites of a death person. For instance Dāmodara, the elder brother of Mādhavadeva, could not gather courage to perform the last rites of his father despite having a saving of rupees thirty in cash.¹⁷⁰ To relieve people of such encumbrances, Śaṅkaradeva had launched his *Bhakti* Movement. Discarding the expensive rituals he started propagating *EŚHND* which emphasized only on *Śravaṇa-Kīrttana*. He repeatedly said the people that God could not be found through ostentatious activities. His mercy could be achieved through devotion. Salvation could be attained not through undertaking costly pilgrimage, but through simply chanting the name of Hari. “The costly and complicated rituals, he said, are the servants of rules while the chanting of Harinama is the master of rules. Chant the name of Hari in any way you like and you will be purified.”¹⁷¹ Śaṅkaradeva had observed that the religious leaders lead a luxurious life by appropriating the surpluses generated by working class in the name of religion. To manifold their wealth they made enormous demands thereby making the lives of common people miserable. To reduce the exploitation by the

¹⁶⁹ Ibid

¹⁷⁰ PKGC, p.110

¹⁷¹ Barman, S. (2005). *SANKARADEV-The Apostle of Equality*, in B. C. Kalita and H. D. Mazumdar (ed.), *Śrīmanṭa Śaṅkaradeva Bhārata Bariṣe*. pp.50-51

priestly class Śaṅkaradeva adopted very simple method of worship. His way of devotion was free from expensive rituals. There was no idol, no blood sacrifice, no priest and no donation or expensive offering. Instead of installing an idol of the Lord Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, he introduced the system of placing a holy book on a wooden pedestal called *śimhāsana* in the prayer house, or in the place where prayer or *Kīrttana* was held. Any devotee could offer services before this emblem. His caste was not a barrier.¹⁷²

3.5: Economic Aspects of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement

Śaṅkaradeva believed that an ideal society is impossible if majority of the people live in economic misery. He felt that each individual must have adequate means for his physical well being. If he is physically fit then only he could be able to think of the society. Śaṅkaradeva believed that the religious part of an individual's life cannot exist in isolation. For a hungry man or a socially exploited person it is difficult to grow spiritually. So Śaṅkaradeva emphasized on a balanced growth of man, i.e. both economically and spiritually. Therefore, economic life of a person got importance in his religious order. The devotees of his order were asked to continue their economic activities so that they did not become burden on others. Attaining economic independence was another objective of his mission, so that the people could lead a meaningful life. Thus, Śaṅkaradeva did not deviate from the general stream of the *Bhakti* movement across the country, but made some necessary adjustments to suit the local situations.

¹⁷² Nath, R. M. (2013). *Srimanta Śaṅkaradeva and the Vaishnava Movement in Assam*. in Cultural Heritage of India. p.203

Similarly, to relieve the people from costly rituals he made his *EŚHND* very simple. His religious order is based on *Śravaṇa-Kīrttana* (listening and chanting the attributes of Lord Krishna). He only advised the people to chant or hear the name of God with devotion for salvation. He wrote in *Bhāgavata*, *Rukminī-Haraṇa*, *Bhakti-Pradīpa*, *Kīrttana* etc. like —

nāhi sikā ṭaṅkā byaya kāikleśa
bhakatita eko nāi
yena tena mate kṛṣṇaka smarile
*eteke mukuti pāi*¹⁷³

[There is neither expense of rupee nor physical hardship in *Bhakti*. Salvation is possible by remembering Lord Krishna in any way.]

śunibāko manoram śarīrato nāhi hāni
artharo nāhike eko hāni
nāś huibe yata bhai milibeka mahodaya
*ḍāki hari bolā save prāṇi*¹⁷⁴

[It is sweeter to listen the name of Hari: Not causes any physical labour or lose of money: Listening the name of Hari trims down the fear and rouses knowledge: So everybody should chant the name of Hari.]

yena phala pāve yata yajña tulā dāne
yena phala pāve koti koti tīrtha snāne
parama sannāse sādhe yi gati maraṇe
*pāvai sava phala eka nāma sumaraṇe*¹⁷⁵

[Those benefits whose arouse from *Yajnya* and philanthropies, from visits to pilgrimage sites, from *Sanyas*: The same benefits could be enjoyed by one only by remembering the name of God.]

nāi śikā ṭaṅkā hāni kṛṣṇara sevāta
*śarīrato nāhi śrama jānibā ihāta*¹⁷⁶

[There is no expenditure of money in the service of Krishna. Neither physical hardship is associated here.]

nālāgei bhāgara gāve nāhi dhana hāni
*śunante santoṣa ito rāma nāma bāṇi*¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ *Bhāg.*, 10th canto, vs. 1132

¹⁷⁴ *RH*, vs. 111

¹⁷⁵ *BP*, vs. 162

¹⁷⁶ *Bhāg.*, 10th canto, vs. 203

¹⁷⁷ *Rāmāyana*, *Uttarākāṇḍa*, vs. 515

[Neither has it caused tiredness to body nor expense of money: This name of Rama is very sweet to listen.]

dhana jana tapa *prabhāve tohmāk*
ārādhibe śakya nāi
gajendre kevale *bhakati karila*
*parama āpada pāi*¹⁷⁸

[There is no capacity to adore you with money, people and meditation: Gejendra only devotes you facing deep trouble and rescued.]

tīritha barata tapa japa yāga yuguti
*mantra parama dharama karama karatu nāhi mukuti*¹⁷⁹

[Pilgrimage, fasting, meditation, sacrifice as well as other elaborate priestly rituals could not be able to salvage a person.]

dharma artha kāma *yito abhilāṣe*
yī cāvai mokṣara patha
sio hari nāma *kīrttana kariā*
*pāvai sava manoratha*¹⁸⁰

[One who desires sanctity, wealth and lust: One who desires salvation: All are received by one simply doing chanting and listening to the name of Lord Hari.]

Only devotion is important—

bhakatise cita *bhakatise bita*
*bhakati mokṣara bīja*¹⁸¹

[Devotion gives the concentration: Devotion gives the wealth: Devotion is the seed of sanctity.]

¹⁷⁸ *Kīrt.*, vs. 440

¹⁷⁹ *Bargīta. Nāhi nāhi ramaiā bine*

¹⁸⁰ *Kīrt.*, vs. 201

¹⁸¹ *Bhāg.*, 10th canto, vs.220

