

CHAPTER –IV

ROLE OF WOMEN AS SPOKESPERSONS OF ŚAṆKARADEVA’S BHAKTI CULT AS REFLECTED IN HAGIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNTS

4.1. The origin and the growth of Hagiography in Assam:

Hagiography is a book about the life of a saintly or kingly person that eulogises the activities of that person. The writing style and the manner of dealing with the subject matter of a hagiography are different from that of a biography. In practice, a follower of a saintly person or a subject to a kingly person generally composes panegyrics and compiles them in a hagiography. The writer of a hagiography always overlooks the faults or shortcoming whatsoever the hero might possess, but eulogizes his good qualities, and even sometimes the writer adds superstitious power and qualities to the activities of the hero and exaggerates them.

“The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement ushered in by the saint created an unprecedented zeal for the culture of religious literature; and in the wake of the movement came to be born a rich biographical literature centering around the career and personality of Śaṅkaradeva. Within a few decades of his death, his life and the lives of his followers came to be written in verse. These early examples were emulated by later writers, and biographical works in verse and in prose multiplied with the advance of time. Many of the prose works in particular are anonymous, signifying

perhaps a collective effort.’’¹ In Assam, the message of *bhakti* was made the property of all through the activities of Śaṅkaradeva and other Vaiṣṇava saints. “A late but comprehensive biography of Śaṅkaradeva and his apostles, *Kathā-guru-carita*, (pp 1-2) informs us how the narration of the story of the Master came to be cultivated in Vaiṣṇava circles. In his own days, Śaṅkara used to celebrate the glory of Lord Rāma and kṛṣṇa in songs and to narrate their stories according to the wish of his chief disciples. But no systematic programme for ceremonials had then been evolved. When Mādhavadeva succeeded to Śaṅkara’s place in the order, he organized these ceremonials into fourteen sections each called *prasaṅga* (subject, or occasion). He also told the daily congregations tales of the Master. The apostles he sent out to carry the message of *bhakti* far wide into the country followed his example, and some of them particularly excelled in the art of narrating the activities of the Master. Therefore, even in the days of Mādhavadeva the telling of the story of the *guru* and listening to it became a part of the daily religious duty of the *sattra* clerics. A living tradition was thus, created, and this has brought down to us many of the minutest details of lives of Śaṅkara and his apostles. Even today the *burḍhā bhakats* (elderly monks or Elders; literally, old devotees) of many *Satras*, whose duty is to keep different *guru- caritas*, to copy them and to narrate the lives of the *gurus*, speak like books in an inspired language, the character of which has scarcely changed with the lapse of centuries. And what is strange is that in content and detail the narration of one *burḍhā bhakat* in one part of the country does not differ substantially from that another in different place. It was this practice of narrtaion that inspired some of the biographers to compose their

¹ Neog, Maheswar. (2nd Edn., 2018). *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*. p 1.

work in verse. (Daitār, 725-28: Bhuṣaṇa, 7-8, 628; Aniruddha, Guru-varṇaṇā, 3: Vaikunṭha, Santamālā, 575)”².

The composition of hagiography was started in Assam in the early seventeenth century. The eighteenth century was mark with the growth and development of hagiography written in prose. The noteworthy hagiographies written in prose are *Bar-carita* edited by Dinanath Bezbaroa, *Bardowā-carita* edited by Lakṣmīnath Bezbaroa, published in ‘*The Bānhi*’, *Kathā-guru-caritra* edited by Upendra Chandra Lekharu, *Gurucarit-kathā* edited by Maheswar Neog, *Bardowā-carita* composed by Puwārām Mahanta, *Sat-sampradāya-kathā* composed by Bhaṭṭadeva and *Santa-sampradāya-kathā* composed by Govinda Das etc. *Kathā-guru-carita*, *Bardowā-guru-carita* and *Guru-carita-kathā* – these hagiographies represent the prose style of the old Assamese language, and provide much information of not only the lives and activities of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and their apostles and followers, but also of the religious and cultural tradition, socio-economic structure and political status along with the background of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement of Śaṅkaradeva’s times. In addition to the hagiographies written in prose the other hagiographies written in verse are *Guru-carita*, *Śrī-guru-carita*, *Śaṅkar-carita* composed by Rāmcaraṇ Ṭhākura, Rāmānanda Dwija and Bhuṣaṇa Dwija respectively. It is revealed in the hagiographies that the authors incorporate supernaturalism in the description of the activities of their preceptors and impose godhead quality out of zeal and admiration, however, the underlying truth of these supernatural elements can be segregated through scientific analysis.

² Ibid, p 2.

4.2. Women in Hagiographical Accounts:

In the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite tradition of Assam, a few women have played vital role either directly or indirectly in spreading Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* movement, and their activities have been dealt in and compiled along with the life and activities of the saint in all the hagiographical accounts of the saint's life. These women were not officially appointed to carry out the duty of spokespersons nor ever they were aware of what they had contributed to Śaṅkaradeva's religion, yet they had played the role of spokespersons in preaching the saint-poet, master-preacher Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult. It is relevant to discuss the role of women in this context; therefore, the women who have contributed to the preaching of Śaṅkaradeva's religious principle, and are mentioned in the hagiographical accounts of Śaṅkaradeva, have been selected to discuss in this chapter.

4.2.I. Khersūtī:

Khersūtī, the grandmother of Śaṅkaradeva, who nurtured and moulded the life of Śaṅkaradeva, has to be mentioned at the outset of the discussion of the women characters of Śaṅkaradeva's hagiographical accounts. Śaṅkaradeva became an orphan in his early childhood, and therefore, Khersūtī, the grandmother of Śaṅkaradeva, looked after and brought up him. The orphan Śaṅkara loved to spend his time playing with his childhood playmates, and he did not want to go to school until he was 12 years of age. Khersūtī was worried at this, for she thought, if Śaṅkara kept himself busy with his playmates and herd of cows without going to school, he would not get education and would remain a foolish. She therefore, one day, having washed and fed Śaṅkara, gently chided him. *āru ekadinā āe guruṇanak snān bhojan karāi taila di bole*

Tāman, tor āru parḥibar man nāi: bhaṇṭā kheri garujākathe citta: bāre batsariyā halike: āmār baṅsat apaṇḍit nāi: tai murkha haba khuichane: daibajñe cāi paṇḍit haba buli kale sio dekho michā hal:’’ One day, she washed, oiled and fed Śaṅkara. She gently chided Tāman (Śaṅkara) for his being interested to the game, *Bhaṇṭā*, to the herd of cows and to other playful activities instead of being interested to study. She told him that they had not a fool in their family, and if he wanted to be a fool then the forecast of the fortune-teller would be a false one.’’³

Śaṅkaradeva would not have become able to contribute so much to the socio-cultural and religious domains of the Assamese society if Khersūtī had not guided him from his early childhood with strict vigil. Though, it is unknown if Khersūtī had any institutional education or acquired any knowledge from books, yet it is revealed in the analysis of her advice to Śaṅkaradeva on the necessity of education that she was an intelligent, resolute and a passionate inquisitor of learning. She told Śaṅkara- *rājāka svadeśehe pūje, bidyāvanta sarbbadeśe pūjya*.⁴ The King is respected only in his territory, because his tenants only know the power and valour of their King, but the wise one is honoured everywhere as his or her wisdom has no boundaries and pervades everywhere, and in all ages. Śaṅkara could realize these words of his grandmother, and made up his mind to go to school. Khersūtī was waiting for this opportunity, and without any delay, she admitted Śaṅkara in the *Tol* (a Kind of school in the medieval age) of Mahendra Kandalī. She moulded the life of Śaṅkaradeva in a religious and cultural atmosphere for which in later time, Śaṅkaradeva could enrich the

³ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edn., 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. P 175.

⁴ Lekharu, Upendra Chandra. (ed.). (5th Edn., 2006). *Kathā-gurucaritra*. P 16.

Assamese society with a new religion, language, culture, and above all, he could provide a new identity to the inhabitants of Assam as the Assamese Nation. Had there not been Khersūtī, the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite cult would not have evolved, and the history of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam would have been written differently. According to the *Gurucarita* of Rāmānanda Dwija, Śaṅkaradeva initiated his grandmother Khersūtī for the first time after returning from his first pilgrimage, and thereafter he initiated others. Thus, Khersūtī, taking initiation from Śaṅkaradeva at first, opened the door of Śaṅkaradeva's religion to the common people.

*prathame buḍhī āit nāma dharma kahilanta
tārabāka lāgi sarvajana I*⁵

4.2.II. Candarī Āi:

A number of women had played different roles in different stages of Śaṅkaradeva's life. Candarī Āi was such a woman, who played the role of a mother like the one Khersūtī did in the life of the orphan Śaṅkara from his early childhood. She brought him up taking him in her lap and shoulders. In the *Guru-carita*, composed by Rāmcharaṇ Thākura, reference of Candarī Āi was available from the very birth of Śaṅkaradeva.

*kusume bolanta ābe Candarī śuniyo I
snāna karāi putrakhāni kole tuli laiyo II
rajatara jhari goṭa parama bicitra I
ānilanta āro mahā subarṇara pātra II 376
sehi pātra bhari Candarīye jala āni I
tāte tuli dharilanta deva cakrapāṇi II 377*⁶

⁵ Adhikari, Narakanta. (1st Edn., 2014). *Ekabīṅśa Śatikāit Śaṅkaradeva Āru Satra*. P 144

⁶ Dutta Baruah. (ed.). (12th Edn., 1985). *Rāmcharaṇ Thākura Viracita Guru-carit*. P 74

(Kusumbara asked Candarī to take his son in her lap after having the child bathed. Candarī brought a pan-full of water and washing the baby took it in her lap.)

Candarī, though initially a housemaid, took the charge of a mother like Khersūtī did from the very childhood of Śaṅkara, and continuously carried it out after his becoming of the *Dekāgirī* also. She shared different household matters and put forward her opinion whenever necessary, even sometimes like a family member, she advised Śaṅkara, and therefore, she was addressed as *Āi*. Candarī Āi had the opportunity to pass her daily life amidst a religious environment, she could comment on the religious matters, though she had no formal education. She pointed out the pinpoint of the *Kalpatāru vṛkṣa* when Śaṅkaradeva had been painting the *Vaikuṇṭha paṭa* for the enactment of the play *Cihna Yātrā*, and was perplexed in determining the pinpoint. At that time, Candarī Āi was drying paddy in the courtyard. She came to Śaṅkaradeva and addressing him as *Dekāgirī*, asked him to put the *kalpatāru vṛkṣa* in front of the *saptamadvāra*, the seventh door near the Śrīmandira. *bole dekāgirī saikhhinite nidiyā kiya, śrīmandirar kākhe saptamdvāra āgkai?*⁷. Śaṅkaradeva thanked Candarī Āi for her advice, and put the *kalpatāru vṛkṣa* at the place as she suggested.

Candarī Āi was once again, mentioned in the hagiography of Śaṅkaradeva as a woman of exquisite knowledge of scriptures. When she confronted a group of Brāhmaṇa *paṇḍitas* who came to take a test of Śaṅkaradeva's religious knowledge, she showed her exquisite knowledge of scripture. A group of Brāhmaṇa *paṇḍitas* came to take a test of Śaṅkaradeva's knowledge, and they confronted with Candarī Āi. At that time, she was washing clothes at *Dhanukhandā Veel*, she then putting aside her

⁷ Lekharu, Upendra Chandra. (ed.). (5th Edn., 2006). *Kathā-gurucaritra*. P 28

washing of clothes, explained the essence of the *Gītā* to the Brāhmaṇa *paṇḍitas* as – “one could get rid of the bonding of this mundane world if one gets the blessings of Kṛṣṇa”. The Brāhmaṇa *paṇḍitas* looked at each other losing in amazement at her explanation, and imagining of Śaṅkaradeva’s vast knowledge, they ran away without meeting him, because they thought, one whose maid could explain the essence of the 18 chapters of the *Gītā* within one *śloka* how scholar her master would be.⁸

“On the basis of the ‘*śloka*’ explained by Candarī Āi, Mādhavadeva, later on, composed the verses of the’ *Nāma-ghoṣā*’ as

bhagavanta bhaktiyukta *puruṣara ātma bodha*
mādhavara prasāde milaya I
kṛṣṇara kṛpāta jānā *gucaya saṁsāra bhaya*
ehimāne gītāra nirṇaya II (Nāma-ghoṣā / 620).

(*self realization can be accomplished through the devotional accompaniment of God, and having been blessed by Kṛṣṇa, fear of mundane affliction can be avoided, and these are the contents of the Gītā*)”. It is revealed in this incident that scholars like Mādhavadeva too were influenced and benefitted by Candarī Āi. It is also evident from this incident why Śaṅkaradeva gave utmost importance on *bhaktas*.⁹ Moreover, Candarī Āi pointed out the breach of the chronology of the *Baṭabrṅṣa* in the *Vṛndāvanī vastra* that Śaṅkaradeva had having been weaved. The intellectuality of Candarī Āi that she developed with the company of Śaṅkaradeva, and Śaṅkaradeva’s paying importance to the words of an ordinary maid like Candarī Āi are the proofs of his

⁸ Ibid, P 91.

⁹ Borkakoti, Sanjib Kumar. (ed.). (2nd Edn., 2013). *Purnāṅga Kathā Gurucharit*. p 291.

uniform and impartial outlook towards women. She was mentioned for the last time when Śaṅkaradeva have had been weaved the *Vṛndāvanī vastra*. In the, *Vṛndāvanī vastra* the sports of Śrī Kṛṣṇa performed in twelve forests with His playmates have been knitted and described in knitted words. Śaṅkaradeva displayed the *Vṛndāvanī vastra* to the common people. People were amazed at the sight of this sheet, and they thought that Śaṅkaradeva was none but the incarnation of God, because it is impossible for anyone other than God to have had been weaved such a splendid sheet of cloth like *Vṛndāvanī vastra*.

Candarī was not at home at the time when Śaṅkaradeva displayed the *Vṛndāvanī vastra*. In the evening, when she returned home, Śaṅkaradeva informed her that everybody had seen the sheet except her. Candarī Āi wanted to see the sheet in the next day, but Śaṅkaradeva was reluctant to display the sheet once again. Candarī Āi became indignant at this, and expressed her indignation that once she had beaten a bull of Śrī Kṛṣṇa for grassing in her paddy field, and now, for this reason, Śaṅkaradeva did not want to show her the *Vṛndāvanī vastra*. She also threatened him that she would expose all the sports that he played with Rādhā at Gakula and Vṛndāvana if he did not show her the sheet. Śaṅkaradeva did not want to hurt her, so he raised a hanger, and showed the sheet to her. Candarī Āi observed the sheet carefully and detected two breaches, the first one was the breach of the chronology of the *bhātir baṭkeśi ghāta* (the lower *Baṭakeśi* port) and the second one was that the *Batabṛkṣa* was placed in the left instead of the right side of Yamunā. Śaṅkaradeva admitted and said that both the preceptors have had been weaved the sheet of cloth, but the intelligent old woman could detect its breaches, and after that the sheet was folded and put into a box. *dujanā*

*guruye kāpor bowāy burie dāy dhare, buri bar bhupā, tehe kāpar japā bāndhi thale.*¹⁰

The skill of acute observation of Candarī Āi is revealed here.

Candarī Āi was not only a housemaid, but also became a disciple of Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva initiated Candarī Āi and the other housemaids of his family along with his preceptor Mahendra Kandalī and some other Brāhmaṇa *paṇḍitas*.

ubanā banbarā dwajā mādhai cānderi I

save hante śaṅkaraka namaskāra kari II

sehi dinā hante save bhailanta bhakata I

*samaste dharilā deva śaṅkarara mata II 158I*¹¹

Candarī Āi became educated and skilled one in religious matters, for she had the opportunity to pass her daily life in an environment where *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* was practised and the discussion on religious matters was often held. She showed her skill in religious matters by pointing out the fault in the *Vṛndāvanī vastra*. When Śaṅkaradeva refused to show her the *Vṛndāvanī vastra*, she asked him how he could refuse her to show that, as the God is docile to His devotees. God is obliged to satiate the wish of His devotees. Candarī Āi took Śaṅkaradeva as the incarnation of God and herself as his devotee, she therefore, demanded him to show her the *Vṛndāvanī vastra*. Śaṅkaradeva realized the urge of the heart of Candarī Āi, and he showed her the sheet. Candarī Ai's observation and detection of the breach in the sheet proved that she acquired mastery in religious matters; however, an incident referred to in some hagiographies provided ample evidence that though she had

¹⁰ Lekharu. Upendra Chandra. (ed.). (5th Edn., 2006). *Kathā-gurucaritra*. P 166.

¹¹ Dutta, Baruah. (ed.). (12th Edn., 1985). *Rāmcaraṇ Thākura Viracita Guru-carit*. P 315.

knowledge of scriptures or religious matters, yet she could not come out from the periphery of the traditional caste system and classicism. The character of Candarī Āi is delineated differently in different hagiographies. She was produced as a housemaid in some hagiographies and in some others as a beggar who brought up Śaṅkaradeva like his grandmother Khersūtī did. It is unbelievable that a woman with the status of the grandmother of Śaṅkaradeva, and who resided with his family, mustered her livelihood by begging. However, according to *Purnāṅga Kathāgurucarita*, begging cast out pride from human mind, hence people of the then time, often went out for begging besides performing their household duties. The supernatural narratives of the pride, vanity and emotion of Candarī Āi can be regarded as the earnest intention of the devotees to regard their preceptor as the incarnation of God. The contribution of Candarī Āi in the preaching of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult cannot be ignored; she indirectly played the role of a spokesperson of his cult.

4.2.III. Bārabāhī Āi:

Of all the women characters of the hagiographies, Bārabāhī Āi, the wife of Nārāyaṇ Dās Ṭhākur Ātā, has occupied a large part of the hagiographies of Śaṅkaradeva. *sati āru gunavati tirutārgāt thākiba lagā baraotā lakṣaṇ eigarāki āit thakā kāraṇe teoñr ācal nām luṭṭa hai bhakta samājat bārabāhī āi nāme janājāt hal.* All the good qualities that have to be possessed by a chaste woman were in the character of Bārabāhī; hence, she lost her original name and was known as Bārabāhī Āi in the society.¹² Bārabāhī Āi was not simply a wife of Nārāyaṇ Dās Ṭhākur Ātā, but she was a true partner in his religious life also. *strī puruṣe haibā ekamati tebese*

¹² Mahanta, Premakanta. (1st Edn. 1997). *Gurucaritar Rasāl Kathā Āru Āisakal*. P 95.

sijiba harita bhakati - both women and men should be unanimous in every aspect of their lives to have the blessings of god, this proposition acutely suits the family of Nārāyaṇ Dās Ṭhākur Ātā. The development of a family depends upon the collective effort of both the husband and the wife of that family. Peace, prosperity and happiness come to a family if both the male and the female members of the family resolve each household matter through discussion in an environment of love and amity. In the same way, in respect of religious matters too, if the woman co-operates and takes active part that family will stand as an ideal one. Bārabāhī Āi fully co-operated her husband in performing his household duties as well as in practising his religious belief. This couple is an ideal one from this point of view.

One, Bhabānanda Sadāgar of Barpetā changed his name to Nārāyaṇ Dās after he had met and taken initiation from Śaṅkaradeva at Cūnparā. When he returned home after taking initiation from Śaṅkaradeva, he asked his wife if she would agree to accept Śaṅkaradeva as their religious teacher, she replied that she would. According to Chakrapāṇi Bairāgī, Nārāyaṇ Dās did not go home directly, but anchored his boat at the nearby port of his village after taking initiation from Śaṅkaradeva. His wife, Bārabāhī Āi, was astonished at such behaviour of her husband, and she wanted to know the cause of such manner. Ṭhākur Ātā told her that he had taken initiation from a mighty saint, and if his family members would now accept the religion that his religious teacher preached, then he would come home, lest he would give up his family and return to his religious preceptor. Bārabāhī Āi replied him that since he, as the head of the family, accepted Śaṅkaradeva as his religious preceptor, and he would feel hurt and would return to his preceptor if the other members of the family would

not follow him, then why they would not follow him. She also informed him that she had decided and had no objection to accept the religion that he had accepted. Ṭhākur Ātā became pleased, and directed to purify their house having heard the determination of his wife. Accordingly, Bārabāhī Āi washed and cleaned everything from the furnace to the cooking pane and from the courtyard to the ditches of their surroundings, and then asked Ṭhākur Ātā to enter the house. All the members of the family were remained in fasting that day, and next day, they visited the residence of the preceptor. Thus, the family of Ṭhākur Ātā accepted Śaṅkaradeva as their religious preceptor, and took lessons of morality and religious codes of conduct.

Bārabāhī Āi was an intelligent woman; she could solve any problem and could manage any situation very skillfully. Ṭhākur Ātā proceeded in the path of spiritual uplift taking Śaṅkaradeva as his religious preceptor, but Bārabāhī Āi excelled him in the development of her intellectuality more rapidly than Ṭhākur Ātā could. She could differentiate between honest and dishonest person, and respected the deserved ones. One, Jayanti Madhāi gave up his begging profession at the persuasion of Bārabāhī Āi, and since then she supplied his necessary things to his residence at Pāṭbausi.

Ṭhākur Ātā and Bārabāhī Āi, though they lived a conjugal life, maintained and practised those codes of conduct that a devotee has to maintain and practise. It is apparently evident from their life that no one has to embrace the life of a monk or nun getting out from the family circle to worship God; rather, one could enlighten and purify one's body and mind through devotion despite living within a family circle. They proved that they were ascetics, but householders and vice versa. The family of Bārabāhī Āi practised the chanting and listening to *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*

regularly, and helped other devotees in different ways to perform their day-to-day duties as devotee, thus, they played an important role in spreading the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*.

Some people seemed to be ascetic, and they exhibited their ascetic behaviour, but in reality they were householders, on the contrary, some others lived a very ascetic life, but they seemed to be householders. The couple of Ṭhākur Ātā proved, whether one has accepted the life of an ascetic or a householder, it depends on one's temperament. Bhabānanda, a merchant of sometime, became Nārāyaṇ Dās Thakur in touch of Śaṅkaradeva, and accepting the *bhakti dharma*, he and his wife set the example of householder devotees. Bhabānanda and his wife Bārabāhī Āi became indifferent to property and wealth and lived the ascetic life though their family was fulfilled with children and rich in agricultural production and other properties as they mustered their livelihood through agricultural activities. It is mentioned in the hagiography compiled by Maheswar Neog that once, when a great famine evoked, Ṭhākur Ātā wanted to offer a small part of his granary of seeds to the victims, but Bārabāhī Āi asked him to offer the whole granary of crops instead of the small granary. Here, Bārabāhī Āi's generosity, affability and her wish to sacrifice for the needy are obviously revealed in her words.¹³

Longing for ornaments and other worldly things are common in women, but Bārabāhī Āi gave up such longings and became indifferent to ornaments and other worldly things after she had accepted the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. One day, she asked Ṭhākur Ātā if he was more interested for her than for the apostles. Ṭhākur

¹³ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edbn. 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. P 438

Ātā replied that his relation with her was for that birth only, but the other apostles would remain his friend in the other birth also. *Tai ki ehajanmar saṁsāraloihe tāt, sevak bastuḥe paralokar sakhā sahāi.*¹⁴ She then, told him that he was lying. Ṭhākur Ātā went to Śaṅkaradeva and told him in grief that Bārabāhī Āi accused him of lying. Śaṅkaradeva, then, called in her and asked her why she had accused him of lying. “*Mur Nārāyaṇ Dāṣakhe enekai bole kiya:*” She replied that he had presented her a ring ornamented with gems at the cost of one hundred rupees for gold and twenty rupees for gems, but he could have spent the half of the money for the service of the devotees of God instead of spending for her ring. He favoured her, but lied that he favoured the devotees of God. She did not want to wear a costly ring in her finger; rather, she might be happy if he would spend the money in the service to the devotees of God instead of spending it to procure a costly ring for her. *bole bāp daṣit dai: teo bhakatat dayā buli mica kai: mor ei keyā āṅgulite rūp eśa bākhare saite cakuri dise sonār: āre ādkhānmān bhakataka di sudhile daho hai.*¹⁵ Śaṅkaradeva was pleased to support the arguments of Bārabāhī Āi, and he said to Nārāyaṇ Dās that he had nothing to say, because she outdid Ṭhākur Ātā in respect of *bhakti*. *Nārāyaṇ Dāṣ: tomāka uttare ghatāle mai ki bulim.*¹⁶ In the next day, Ṭhākur Ātā brought all his worldly properties and delivered to Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva divided the properties into three parts, and advised Ṭhākur Ātā to offer one part of his properties to the King as tax, the other to spend in the service to the devotees, and the rest to keep for his family.

¹⁴ Ibid, P 297

¹⁵ Ibid., P. 297

¹⁶ Ibid. P.297

Some influential personnel lodged complain to the King Naranārāyaṇa against Śaṅkaradeva and his followers that they wanted to establish socialism and abolish caste system through their *bhakti* cult. King Naranārāyaṇa became indignant and sent his men, *Garmali* (a messenger of the Koch king), to captivate Śaṅkaradeva. The men of Naranārāyaṇa could not trace out Śaṅkaradeva, so, they caught his followers Nārāyaṇ Dās and Gokul chanda Ātai and imprisoned them, but they could not persuade them to change their religious belief. In the prison, Nārāyaṇ Dās and Gokul Chanda Ātai continued chanting of the names of Rāma, the men of Naranārāyaṇa, having nothing option to control them, sold them to some Bhūtanese, but the Bhūtanese too, returned them again listening to their chanting of the names of Rāma. At last, the men of Naranārāyaṇa could not, but let lose their knots and unfold their hands. Bārabāhī Āi, though she was pregnant at that time, did not give up the company of her husband during the happening of these incidents. She was confident of her devotion to Kṛṣṇa, and she shared all the sufferings of her husband with deep faith in Kṛṣṇa. The devotion and responsibility of Bārabāhī Āi is praiseworthy. Nārāyaṇ Dās wanted to take a test of her devotion to their religious preceptor, and told her that they had to suffer so much trouble for their religious preceptor. Bārabāhī Āi was astonished at the words of her husband, and told him that he should not use such defamatory words to their preceptor. Apart from this, she told that one is liable to suffer the consequences of one's own act done in the previous birth, but the affliction one has suffered for the sake of one's religious teacher is the fruit of his or her holy actions done in his or her many previous births. Nārāyaṇ Dās, having listened to the precious

words of Bārabāhī Āi, highly appreciated her, and told her that from that very day, he would take her as a company of his spiritual practice along with Gokul Chanda.¹⁷

It is narrated in details in the *Kathā-Gurucarita* that Bārabāhī Āi was indifferent to worldly affairs and interested in chanting and listening to the names of Kṛṣṇa, and she praised the religious preceptors, Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Śaṅkaradeva even appreciated her attraction to religious matters, and her distraction to wealth, properties and other worldly affairs. Many a times, the society of apostles was benefitted for the philanthropic works of this mighty woman, Bārabāhī Āi. Congregational chanting and listening was frequently held at the hut of Śaṅkaradeva. The family of Nārāyaṇ Dās Ṭhākura Ātā supplied a large part of the necessary things for the recreation of the apostles gathered in the hut of Śaṅkaradeva.

Bārabāhī Āi always wants to join in the congregation, where the Supreme Being is worshipped through chanting and listening to His names. Once in the eleventh day of a lunar fortnight, Nārāyaṇ Dās had organized a religious assembly at the prayer hall of his residence, where Śaṅkaradeva explained the might of the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He also wanted to offer a snack to each of the devotees, accordingly he made necessary arrangement and asked Bārabāhī Āi to prepare *sāṇḍaha*, (wet rice parched and pounded into lumps). Bārabāhī Āi listened to the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa when Śaṅkaradeva was explaining. At the end of the assembly, Ṭhākura Ātā asked her if she had prepared the snacks. She replied that she did not prepare the snacks, but made all the arrangement to prepare it, because she would not have listen to the explanation of the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa if she kept herself busy in the preparation of the

¹⁷ Borkakoti, Sanjib Kumar. (ed.). (2nd Edn., 2013). *Purnāṅga Kathā Gurucarit*. P 497.

snacks. Moreover, she said that the pounding sounds would make a loud noise and would cause inconvenience to the devotees to listen to the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Ṭhākura Ātā became angry at her answer, and rushed to her with a fuel stick to beat her. Śaṅkaradeva, witnessing this, said that he would not leave Ṭhākura Ātā if he would beat her, because it would not be fair to debar her from listening to the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as he himself listened to it. Ṭhākura Ātā was ashamed at the words of Śaṅkaradeva. It is revealed through this story that Śaṅkaradeva wanted to establish equality between man and woman and sowed the seeds of renaissance for the uplift of women in the patriarchal society of Assam in the medieval age.¹⁸

Bārabāhī Āi was not contented with her daily service to the devotees, but she also had excessive passion for taking part in listening and chanting of the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. One day, Ṭhākura Ātā came to the residence of his master to take part in religious discussion. Śaṅkaradeva sent Śrī Rām Ātā to make a clandestine observation, how Bārabāhī Āi had passed her time. Śrī Rām Ātā went to her home, and waiting outside her room, he observed what she had been doing. He then, saw and heard that Bārabāhī Āi having her children lulled, and putting rice in a pane for cooking, repented in a soliloquy that her husband was drinking the nectar of the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa that their religious master extracted from the scriptures, and distributed among the devotees, but she remained in the dark hole of her home. She also spoke of her imagination of the assembly of the devotees. She imagined that her husband seated in the South, Śrī Rām Ātā seated in the East, Harihara Ātā seated in the west, Buḍha Ātā seated in the North, Bhabanipurī Ātā seated in the South-west, Dakṣiṇar Ātā seated in

¹⁸ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edn. 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. P 423.

the North-west, Behār Ātā seated in the South-east, Bhātou Kusiā Ātā in the North-east. In this way, they seated surrounding Śaṅkaradeva and Ṭhākur Ātā, and they sucked the nectar of the name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Thus, Bārabāhī Āi repented for not getting the opportunity to take part in chanting and listening to the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, for, she had to keep herself busy with her children and had to maintain her household affairs. Śrī Rām Ātā wondered at the firm and sincere devotion of Bārabāhī Āi, he therefore, saluted her from the core of his heart, and told Śaṅkaradeva that he never had heard about the devotion of a bereft heart like Bārabāhī Āi had, and he had no word to explain her devotion. *bole bāp āir prem khed bhakti ei mukhe kai anta napāñ: ene kārjyakārśanā dekhā sunā nāi saprem bhakti:*¹⁹ Having heard of the firm devotion of Bārabāhī Āi from Śrī Ram Ātā, Śaṅkaradeva said that Śrī Kṛṣṇa became the charioteer of Paṇḍavas being pleased at the firm devotion of Draupadī. The devotion and cooperation of Bārabāhī Āi helped Śaṅkaradeva to create a sound atmosphere among his devotees for religious practice.

Bārabāhī Āi was held in high esteem by Śaṅkaradeva. When Paramānanda Ṭhākur was returning from Madhupur to Manthai with the information about Śaṅkaradeva, the later, (Śaṅkaradeva), sent some cloths to Ṭhākur Ātā and Paramānanda along with a *Mārkāpur*, a sheet of cloth offered to a woman as a token of honour, to Bārabāhī Āi. Bārabāhī Āi, receiving this sheet of cloth, expressed her gratitude, and said that she got the absolute gift of her life.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid, P 431.

²⁰ Chakrabarti, Mukul. (1st Edn., 2008). *Guru-Carit-Kathar Rup-Ras*. P 74.

In the Assamese Vaiṣṇavite tradition, the contribution of Bārabāhī Āi is unique and remarkable.

4.2. IV. Kālindī Āi:

In the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite tradition of Assam, Kālindī Āi, the second wife of Śaṅkaradeva, was one of the women, who played the role of the spokespersons of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult. Kālindī Āi took charge of every household matter and carried out it smoothly almost sixty-five years without any hesitation. Śaṅkaradeva was absorbed in practising Art, Culture and Literature, and he could not pay attention to any household matters, Kālindī Āi, therefore, silently resolved every problem and did not let any problem to interrupt Śaṅkaradeva in continuing his practice.²¹

Śaṅkaradeva's residence seemed as a guesthouse and always crowded with apostles and devotees from different places. These apostles and devotees assembled there for congregational chanting and listening to the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and sometimes, for discussion of religious matters, and at others, for taking lessons on painting, dancing, singing and playing musical instruments. Kālindī Āi served them all as a host, and made it convenient for them to practise their own business.

Kālindī Ai proved herself as a wise woman through her great diligence in carrying out her responsibility to the apostles and devotees as well as to her husband though there is no solid evidence in hagiographies whether she was a literate one. She was an intelligent and skilled woman, and she uninterruptedly continued the Sankarite tradition after the demise of Śaṅkaradeva. Kālindī Āi could find out any book from the shelves and handed it to Śaṅkaradeva whenever he needed it. She was the librarian, in

²¹ Mahanta, Premakanta. (1st Edn. 1997). *Gurucaritar Rasāl Kathā Āru Āisakal*. P 91.

the modern sense of the term, of the great private library of Śaṅkaradeva. One Govinda Guru, a Brāhmaṇa devotee, left to observe the rituals of the Eleventh day of a lunar fortnight having found out a mistaken interpretation of a verse in the Eleventh canto of the *Bhāgavata* composed by Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva said, “My Rāmananda’s mother, bring the Eleventh canto of the *Bhāgavata*, I will delete the verse from it.”²² It is evident from the words of Śaṅkaradeva that Kālindī Āi had acquired the skill of finding out the books in the library of Śaṅkaradeva.

Kālindī Āi, though she was the wife of Śaṅkaradeva, did not give up her traditional practice of worshipping of the *Gṛha devatā* until Mādhavadeva explained the futility of her worshipping of the *Gṛha devatā*. Somer hagiographies narrated the story. One day, Mādhavadeva was listening to the explanation of the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa at the residence of Śaṅkaradeva. It was too late for Mādhavadeva to return to his home, so, he instantly returned, but again immediately came back to Śaṅkaradeva’s residence. Kālindī Āi realized that Mādhavadeva had cooked nothing. She asked Mādhavadeva through Śaṅkaradeva to take meal at their residence in the next day. Mādhavadeva told his religious preceptor that he had to inspect the kitchen before taking meal, and he went to the kitchen. In the kitchen, he saw a ‘*ghaṭa*’, an earthen jar wrapped with thread, was put up in a plinth. Mādhavadeva wanted to know the cause of putting up of such an earthen jar. Kālindī Āi replied that she established the earthen jar with a view to worshipping the *gṛha devatā* so that she could save her children from ill omen. Mādhavadeva was astonished at her reply, and told her that as God Himself is present at her home in the incarnation of Śaṅkaradeva, she need not

²² Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edn. 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. P 233.

worship other gods, because if the incarnation of the Supreme Being cannot save her children from ill omen, how the other gods can save them. This practice of worshipping the '*gr̥ha devatā*' was evidently an act of contradiction from her to Śaṅkaradeva, since she was the wife of Śaṅkaradeva. Mādhavadeva could not accept it. He collected all the things used in the worship of the *gr̥ha devatā*, and washed away them in the Kalākatā rivulet. Kālindī Āi washed everything, and observed fasting for that day. In the next day, she cooked rice for Mādhavadeva and offered him. Mādhavadeva was delighted at her being completely reformed, and he took the meal.²³ The same story is narrated in the *Barcarita* compiled by Dinanath Bezbaruah, but the difference is that, according to the *Barcarita*, Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva took the meal on the same day of Mādhavadeva's washing away the things used in the worship of the *gr̥ha devatā*.

Kālindī Āi could realize the futility of her practice, and taking initiation from Śaṅkaradeva, she dedicated her whole life in preaching and spreading the philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva after his death.

One, Baṁśīgopāladeva, had been staying at the residence of Kālindī Āi following the advice of Mādhavadeva, and he maintained the continuity of daily prayer at the *satra* of Śaṅkaradeva. Baṁśīgopāladeva had spent twelve years in west India with the company of celibates, sages and monks, and he formed the habit of not to take fish and meat in his meal. Kālindī Āi worried about Baṁśīgopāla's such practice, for she thought, the ideology of Śaṅkaradeva would be deviated from its original path, and there would arouse anomalies among the devotees if the other

²³ Ibid, P 204.

devotees gave up to take fish following the example of Baṁśīgopāla. She requested Baṁśīgopāla to take fish, and said that Śaṅkaradeva never prescribes to practise celibacy, sainthood, or monkhood nor ever he asks anyone else to discard fish. Baṁśīgopāla told Kālindī Āi that he did not give up fish for any religious belief, but this habit was formed as he had spent twelve years with the vegetarian sages and monks of West India. Now, he could not take fish for its scent. Kālindī Āi gradually changed the habit of Baṁśīgopāla adding a little fish in his meal.²⁴ Such incident mentioned in hagiographies proved that Kālindī Āi tried to keep Śaṅkaradeva's religious principles without any deviation, and she kept a close relationship with the *bhakatas*, who had come to Śaṅkaradeva's house to take part in listening and chanting the names of Lord Kṛṣṇa. She cooked food for the devotees and served them herself. In this way, she continued her service to them after the death of Śaṅkaradeva.

Kālindī Āi's life was engulfed by various misfortunes one after another. She had to take the charge of her family, and the charge of keeping continuity of the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*, which was in vogue when Śaṅkaradeva was alive. When Kālindī Āi heard the heart-rending news of the death of her husband from her son Rāmānanda, it was nine days over. The news choked and overwhelmed her with grief, but at the same time, she became aware of her duty to observe the tenth day's ritual. Kālindī Āi faced great penury to procure the necessary things for the ritual. She told Mādhavadeva that it would be a regrettable and shameful matter if she could not muster the necessary things for the ritual, because disciples from different places would gather at her residence. Mādhavadeva then collected everything and relieved

²⁴ Lekharu, Upendra Chandra. (ed.). (5th Edn., 2006). *Kathā-gurucaritra*. P 207.

her from such awkward situation. Kālindī Āi faced one after another misfortune after the death of Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva conferred the charge of his religion and everything else on Mādhavadeva before his death. Dāmodaradeva was resentful at the decisions of Śaṅkaradeva, and splitting from Śaṅkaradeva's religion, he started a new creed. Moreover, after one month later of Śaṅkaradeva's final deperature, Kālindī Āi's son Ṭhākur Rāmānanada had been suffered from small pox, and later he died of the same malady. Haricaraṇa, another on of her sons, lost his mental serenity, moreover, Rāma, the son of Mākani, one of the relatives of Kālindī Āi, also died at the same time. She had to keep alive the religion of Śaṅkaradeva as well as to maintain her family amidst these misfortunes and great economic hardship.

Mādhavadeva used to come to Pāṭbāusī to take care of Kālindī Āi and the other followers of Śaṅkaradeva. At this, Ratikānta, the son of Śaṅkaradeva's uncle, became envious and told Mādhavadeva impertinently, if he, being a celibate, was not ashamed of visiting Pāṭbāusī twice in a day regularly. Mādhavadeva was hurt, and he became disheartened at the spiteful behaviour of Ratikānta. He told Kālindī Āi about the malicious rumours spread by Ratikānta and the other members of Śaṅkaradeva's family, and sought permission from her to go and reside permanently at Behār. Kālindī Āi was a patient, bold and intelligent woman. She had to face many such malicious rumours in the society spread by jealous people out of spite, but she did not fear to confront nor ever did she bother with such rumours. She insisted on the purity and sanctity of body and mind, and believed that if one could keep purity and sanctity of body and mind until one's last breath, none could do any harm. When Mādhavadeva sought her permission to go to Behār, she asked him, why he should leave the place at

the words of jealous people, and if he went away, who would take care of her along with her three children. Even then, he wanted to separate himself from them, he should go and reside at Sundarīdiyā. *bāpu, tumi kiya jāba lāgiche; kāūrīr vākyat kiya sthān eribā. Tumi gale tinṭi bālakere saite mok kone pratipāl kariba? Tathāpi yadi tumi nilag hai yaba khujichā tente Sundarīte thākāgai.*²⁵ Mādhavadeva was upset at the advice of Kālindī Āi, because Śaṅkaradeva already advised him not to go to Sundarīdiyā, for, Śaṅkaradeva thought, he (Mādhavadeva) might be allured by the spells of the beautiful women of Sundarīdiyā, and be aided and abetted to deviate himself from the path of pursuing his celibacy. Kālindī Āi had ample faith on Mādhavadeva, and she realized that no spells of women could persuade Mādhavadeva, and envelop his better sense. She therefore, advised Mādhavadeva to go to Sundarīdiyā. Mādhavadeva at first hesitated to comply with the advice, for, he thought, if he went to Sundarīdiyā, it would be an act of disobedience to his religious predecessor. Kālindī Āi asked Mādhavadeva, how he regarded her and her husband Śaṅkaradeva. Mādhavadeva replied that he regarded Śaṅkaradeva as an incarnation of God, her as Lakṣmi the wife of God, and he reverently served both of them. She then told him that she had advised him with due deference to the advice of Śaṅkaradeva to set up a *Satra* (monastery) at Sundarīdiyā.²⁶ This incident is mentioned with slight difference in *Kathā-gurucaritra* edited by Upendra Chandra Lekharu. According to *Kathā-gurucaritra*, one, Satānanda of Śaṅkaradeva's family, wanted the beautiful widow of Kamalalocana Ṭhākur to get married to Bagaribariyā Choudhary. Kālindī Āi

²⁵ Bezbaroa, Laksmīnath. (5th Edn., 2012). *Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva Āru Śrī Śrī Mādhavadeva*. P 136.

²⁶ Ibid, P 145.

said that she would inform him after consulting the matter with the other members of her family. She sought the advice of Mādhavadeva, but Mādhavadeva told her that she should ask the wife of Kamalalocana instead of him. When Kālindī Āi asked the wife of Kamalalocana, she replied that she did not want to get married again, rather, she wanted to pass her life worshipping God. Kālindī Āi informed it to Satānanda, but Satānanda took it otherwise, and thought that Mādhavadeva debarred her to get married again; he therefore, plotted treason against Mādhavadeva and spread rumours, which severely hurt Mādhavadeva. Mādhavadeva decided to leave the house of Kālindī Āi, and wanted to live at Guwabacā. When Mādhavadeva informed Kālindī Āi about his decision, she asked him to stay at Sundarīdiyā.²⁷ Kālindī Āi could perceive it well that the beautiful women of Sundarīdiyā would not be able to entrap Mādhavadeva in their illusive spells; rather they would become free from the illusion of worldly affairs with the accompaniment of Mādhavadeva. What Kālindī Āi hoped in respect of Mādhavadeva was really fulfilled. Mādhavadeva went to Sudarīdiyā and took shelter at the residence of his brother-in-law, Rāmdās. The beautiful women of Sundarīdiyā came to Mādhavadeva and tried to seduce him by their carnal beauty, but Mādhavadeva being a determined celibate told them that they should not come to their son bearing in mind such attitude. They were ashamed at his word. In the next day, wreathing garlands of basil leaves at the advice of Urvaśī, the sister of Mādhavadeva, they came with garlands and knelt at the feet of Mādhavadeva with devotion. They earnestly requested him to initiate them. Mādhavadeva wore two garlands in his head, and giving one garland to each of them, he taught them, how to practise *Eka-Śaraṇa-*

²⁷ Lekharu, Upendra Chandra. (ed.). (5th Edn., 2006). *Kathā-gurucaritra*. P 182.

Hari-Nāma-Dharma. The women of Sundarīdiyā, having been initiated by Mādhavadeva, began to practise chanting and listening to the names of God, and they purified themselves. Mādhavadeva stayed at Sundarīdiyā for fourteen years, during this period, some far-reaching events of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* had taken place. He initiated Mathurādās Ātā, Harihar Ātā, Barviṣṇu Ātā and many others, besides establishing a *Satra* (Monastery) at Sundarīdiyā. Mādhavadeva, coming from Sundarīdiyā, established the Barpetā Satra, the second heaven as is regarded by the follower of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. If Kālindī Āi had not sent Mādhavadeva to Sundarīdiyā, the women of Sundarīdiyā would not have got the opportunity to purify themselves by taking initiation from Mādhavadeva, moreover, the *Satras* like Sundarīdiyā Satra and Barpetā Satra would have not been established.

Śaṅkaradeva resided sometimes at Kāmrūp and sometimes at Behār in the later part of his life. When Śaṅkaradeva stayed in lower Assam, the influence of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* was gradually decreased and about to extinct from upper Assam after his death. Mādhavadeva, therefore, sent Barṁśīgopāl Deva and Yadumoṇi Deva to upper Assam to preach Śaṅkaradeva's religion, but it did not become fruitful, hence, he again sent Padma Ātā to make the mission fruitful. Padma Ātā too could not reach at the desired goal of the mission. Kālindī Āi thought that Śaṅkaradeva's religion would get a new momentum if Bardowā (Batadravā), the place of the first inception of Śaṅkaradeva's religion, could be rediscovered, and therefore, she sent her nephew-daughter-in-law, Ai Kanaklatā, an intelligent and wise woman, to rediscover Bardowā. Ai Kanaklatā went to Bardowā at the behest of Kālindī Āi, and made search

to rediscover the Bardowā Satra, and after a hard toil, she found out it surrounded by forest.

When Śaṅkaradeva went out for his second pilgrimage, Kālindī Āi asked Mādhavadeva to request him (Śaṅkaradeva) not to visit Vṛndāvana, because as the Vṛndāvana was the sport ground of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, it was also the sport ground of Śaṅkaradeva, and if he went there, he would recall his sport and would not come back. Mādhavadeva, following the advice of Kālindī Āi, requested Śaṅkaradeva to return home without visiting Vṛndāvana. Śaṅkaradeva responding the request of Mādhavadeva returned home. If Śaṅkaradeva had not returned home, and stayed at Vṛndāvana, the *bhakti* religion of Assam would have got another direction, because Śaṅkaradeva contributed a lot to the *bhakti* religion and cultural domain of Assam after his second pilgrimage. It is evident from the above discussion that Kālindī Āi had played an important role in preaching and spreading of the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* both the time before and after the death of Śaṅkaradeva. Thus, Kālindī Āi played the role of a spokesperson of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult, moreover, the skill of an ordinary woman like Kālindī Āi in analyzing different matters or situations, and her advice to a great sage like Mādhavadeva, signify the elevated status and social importance of women of Śaṅkaradeva's time.

4.2.V. Satī Rādhikā:

Among the women, who influenced Śaṅkaradeva and his works, Satī Rādhikā was one through whom Śaṅkaradeva tried to abolish the class distinction from the society, and introduced humanism in his religion. She was born into a poor family belonged to *Kaivarta* caste, a so-called lower caste of the society, and she lived in

Nalaśā, a village on the bank of a river in the South of the village Ālipukhurī of Bardowā, with her parents. Rādhikā's another name was Sumthirā, her parents called her Jayantī, while her husband called her Tarāvatī. She married to Pūrṇānda a youth belonged to *Nadiāls*. *Nadiāls* were *Kaivarta* by caste. They lived in the banks of rivers by doing the business of boatmen, anglers and fishmongers.

Rādhikā and her husband Pūrṇānda met Śaṅkaradeva in a certain moment of the embankment of the Tembuwānī rivulet near Bardowā. This is narrated in prose in *Guru-Carit-Katha* of Cakrapāṇi Vairāgi, p-185, *Bardowā Guru Carita* of Puwārām Mahanta, Pp-32, 33. *Barcarita* of Dinanath Bezbaroa, Pp-34 to 37, *Santāwalī* of Baikunṭha Dwija alias Dwārikānāth Dwija p-13, and in verse in *Śrī Gurucarita* of Rāmcaraṇ Ṭhākur Pp-339 to 343. *Nalaśā*, a village situated in the South of the Śaṅkaradeva's birthplace Ālipukhurī of Bardowā, is known as Kubāikatā, and its nearby villages are Simalugurī, bowālgurī, Katahguri, Kahuwātali, Deurā, Kañhuāṭi, Gosāikhandā, Viṣṇupur etc. This *Kaivarta* dominant region had been affected by the flood of the river Brahmaputra before the birth of Śaṅkaradeva. The inhabitants of this region, of whom the majority were *Kaivarta* by caste, used to cope themselves with the flood caused by the Brahmaputra through its tributary Tembuwānī rivulet at least once in every year. The elderly old men of this region along with the Bhūñās - Ketāi Khā, Burḍhā Khā, Rām Khā, Hari Khā, Gabhuru Khā, Śrī Rām Khā, Harām Khā, Ruprām Khā, Birām Khā, Śrīhari Khā and several others decided to block the rivulet. They tried many a times, but failed each time to block it. At last, they called on a meeting to work out a master plan for blocking the channel. They invited Brāhmaṇa paṇḍitas - Ananta Kandalī, Mahendra Kandalī, Govinda Miśra, Kharā Miśra, Gorā

Miśra, Jarā Miśra, Chandra Sarswati, Rām Saraswati, Theṅgāl Saraswati, Sandhi Saraswati, Hari Bhattāchārya, Bāgi Bhattāchārya, Tarka Bāgish, Bhānu Bāgish, Kabi Ratna, Bidyā Ratna, Hem Ratna, Pañcha Ratna, Chandra Khari, Sūrya Khari, Bijay Khari, Ratna Khari, and Ratna Bhāratī alike along with Śaṅkaradeva to the meeting. Śaṅkaradeva told the Brāhmaṇa paṇḍitas that a chaste woman, who could fetch water from the Brahmaputra with a *Pala*, (a kind of a conic bamboo-basket for catching fish), could block the channel. The Brāhmaṇa paṇḍitas anonymously agreed with Śaṅkaradeva, because they took their wives as chaste, and it would not be difficult for them to find out a chaste woman. Next day, the Brāhmaṇa paṇḍitas went to Śaṅkaradeva and informed him that they could not find out a chaste woman, and for that, they were ashamed. In the mean time, one Pūrṇānda with his wife Rādhikā was sailing through the Brahmaputra. Rādhikā, witnessing the discussion between Śaṅkaradeva and the Bipras, wanted to know about the discussion. Pūrṇānanda told her that the Barabhūñās had searching for a chaste woman to block the Tembuwāni rivulet, but they did not find out such woman. On hearing this, she demanded herself as a chaste woman. Pūrṇānanda chided her for her venture, and asked her, how she, being a woman of the lower caste of the society, dared to demand herself as chaste woman, whereas the wives of the Bipras did not dare to demand so. Rādhikā told him that she was not interested to anyone, and she did not look up a man other than her own husband. Pūrṇānda then rowed his boat ashore, and asked Balada Modoi to inform Śaṅkaradeva about the chastity of Rādhikā. Śaṅkaradeva, having heard about Rādhikā, called on her. Rādhikā went to Shankaradeva and humbly saluted him. On the behest of Śaṅkaradeva, Rādhikā, wearing a new set of cloth, went to the

Brahmaputra to fetch water with a *Pala*, but she could not fetch a *Pala* of water. It was less of four fingers width than a *Pala* of water. Śaṅkaradeva asked the cause of her inability to fetch water from the Brahmaputra with a *Pala*. Rādhikā told him that, once, she saw the face of her brother-in-law, when she gave him a sickle to cut banana leaf, and that was the only sin that she had committed. Śaṅkaradeva then asked everybody to share her sin, and asked her to go to fetch water. In this attempt, Rādhikā succeeded in fetching water with the *Pala*. This incident is narrated in the *Kathā-gurucarita*. Some scholars are of the opinion that Rādhikā brought some soil only in the *Pala*.

*katu mukhe koi mātihe ānishe palare. save loke māti di khundi, bāndhile śāntijān nām hal: kutarki sucak karmi bāmunar mukhe cāi pelāi: śānti puba kāran sārī gal.*²⁸ Some people said that Rādhikā had brought soil with a *Pala*. Everybody joined hands with her and erected the dam in the rivulet. They defamed the conceit of the sophists Brāhmaṇas and named it after Rādhikā. Thus, Śaṅkaradeva blocked the Tembuwānī rivulet by a woman of so-called lower stratum of the society.

In the *Guru-Carit-Kathā* of Cakrapāṇi Vairāgi, Satī Rādhikā or Rādhikā Śānti was called Yogamāyā, and Rādhikā in the *Guru-Carita* of Rāmcarāṇ Thākura. It is impossible to fetch water with a *Pala*, perhaps the hagiographers had intentionally incorporated such super natural elements in different hagiographies to impose godhead quality to their heroes. There are ample super natural elements in Cakrapāṇi Vairāgi's *Guru-Carit-Kathā*, but Rāmcarāṇ Thākura's *Guru-Carita* has the touch of reality, because digging soil with spade and carrying in a *Pala* to block the rivulet as narrated

²⁸ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edn., 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. P 185.

in the *Guru-Carita* is more scientific than carrying water in a *Pala* that is narrated in the *Guru-Carit-Kathā*. The story of blocking the Tembuwānī rivulet can be regarded as true one based on reality, because it is named after Satī Rādhikā or Śānti Rādhikā as *Śānti-Jān* and it is still existed in Bordowā. There was an agenda underlying in Śaṅkaradeva's offering the opportunity to Rādhikā to block the Tembuwānī channel. He wanted to establish equality among the people irrespective of castes creeds and sex in terms of *bhakti*; he therefore, exposed the futility of the vainglory and prejudice of the so-called upper caste Brāhmaṇas selecting Rādhikā from the lower caste of the society.

It is mentioned in *Bordowā Carita* of Powārām Mahanta that Pūrṇānada and his wife became '*bhakata*' (disciple) of Śaṅkaradeva after blocking the Tembuwānī rivulet.²⁹ Rādhikā's getting the opportunity to reside near the residence of Śaṅkaradeva is the proof that she was a socially conscious and dedicated woman; moreover, the conversion of her home into a meeting place of the disciples and pure hearted souls is also note worthy.³⁰ On the super-natural touch in the story of Rādhikā, Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti commented, "Perhaps Śaṅkaradeva engaged women in the blocking of the rivulet after their men were become tired. Unfortunately, as this incident took place in the early part of his life, the real facts were not written properly, yet it is certain that Śaṅkaradeva established equality between men and women through this incident. This incident is the milestone of women's liberation movement."³¹

²⁹ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). 1st Edn., 1977). *Bardowa Carit*. P 60.

³⁰ Borkakoti, Sanjib Kumar. (ed.). (2nd Edn., 2013). *Purnāṅga Kathā Gurucarit*. P 68.

³¹ Ibid. P.69

4.2.VI. The wife of Bhabānīpurīyā Gopāl Ātā:

Bhabānīpurīyā Gopāl Ātā was one of the *bhakatas*, who had deep nexus with the Vaisnavite religion. Mādhavadeva and his apostles had a good relation with the family of this Gopāl Ātā. Once, Mādhavadeva with his sixty apostles of Barpetā went to Bhabānīpur and reached at the residence of Gopāl Ātā. They engaged themselves in the discussion of religious matters sitting in the prayer hall of Gopāl Ātā, and were lost in their discussion. When they became aware, it was about to dark, and then Gopāl Ātā went to his wife, and asked her if she had arranged anything for their dinner. The wife of Gopāl Ātā told him that she had already arranged all the necessary things for their dinner, and served parched-flat rice and milk to the other three sick *bhakatas* also. *āru gopāl ātāḥḥāilai gaiche guruḥjan tinikuri bhakte sahite: tāre tinijan kāhilā: pāi teṇar kīrttangrḥate bahi kathāsukhate gadhūli hal: sambarilat ātā uḥi bhitare gai bole: dāmodarmāk bhakatalai ki karica: ki ace: bole cāul caru tel lon khari pāt sāk māt yugutkai diyā haiche: bole nariyā tinijanalai karicā ki: bole tārāsavako dugdha cirā bhojan karālo khāo śule II.*³²

The wife of Gopāl Ātā served the *bhakatas* along with Mādhavadeva heart and soul, for she could perceive the might of devotion. Mādhavadeva was deeply impressed at the simplicity, generosity and dedication of the wife of Gopāl Ātā, and was happy at the service rendered by her. Gopāl Ātā highly applauded her service to the *bhakatas*, and deeply lamented at her demise not for losing his wife, but for losing his best companion, who dedicated her body and mind in the service to the utmost convenience of the *bhakatas* without his knowledge. He expressed his grief to the

³² Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edn. 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. P 418.

other Ātās of his age, and told them that his heart did not cry out of passion for a wife; for, he knew that passion for a wife is like a beast running after its companion, but his heart cried for one, who served the *bhaktas* without his knowledge. She was a woman of work. *bole ātaisava bolā jāno strīlaihe kānde: māyāt marmmat: āmi tālai nākāndo māyāmai bibhasva bisai: save jonite pāi: e bhakat guru āhile kone khuvāi-dhuvāi āljañjāl mārība: moi bhu nopovākai: tālai man kaihe kāndico: bar kāryar lok ācil II.*³³

The wife of Gopāl Ātā did not take part directly in spreading the religious principles of Śaṅkaradeva, yet she performed an important role in this respect, because she helped Mādhavadeva and his apostles providing them different necessary things in different moments of their lives. Thus, she created a congenial atmosphere for them, so that they could practise smoothly the religion of Śaṅkaradeva without any inconvenience. Had she not helped Mādhavadeva and his apostles or created an atmosphere conducive for them, they could not have continued their practice of Śaṅkaradeva's religion in Bhabānīpur. In this context, her service to Mādhavadeva and to his apostles can be compared with the service of a spokesperson of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult, who either consciously or unconsciously contributed to in the preaching and spreading of Śaṅkaradeva's religious principle.

4.2. VII. The wife of Jayanti Madhāi:

Of preaching and spreading the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* of Śaṅkaradeva, the male *bhaktas*, the followers of Śaṅkaradeva, primarily took active part but, nonetheless, many a time, women also played the role of pallbearer in this respect, and persuaded their counterparts to accept the religion of Śaṅkaradeva. It is a

³³ Ibid, P 419.

moot point, how far Śaṅkaradeva would be successful, if the womenfolk, though not as a whole, would not have volunteered for the preaching and spreading his religious belief. Śaṅkaradeva incorporated the practice of religious matters in the schedule of daily works of household affairs of his followers with a view to developing the spirituality of every individual as well as all round development of the society as a whole. As a result, women could develop their cognizance, and even sometimes, some of them could excel their counterparts in forwarding subtle opinion in respect of religious matters without any formal education, but through listening to the congregational discussion on religious matters. The wife of Jayanti Madhāi was such a woman among those women.

Jayanti Madhāi went to Śaṅkaradeva along with Nārāyaṇ Dās Ṭhākur Ātā, and being impressed with the genius of Śaṅkaradeva, he accepted his religion and decided to stay with him giving up his householder's life. He passed a few days with Śaṅkaradeva in a religious environment, but soon, he lost his attraction to such a life, and wanted to return to his wife. Śaṅkaradeva asked him to fix his mind, and told him that it would be better to practise celibacy rather than to have been chained by household affairs, but he could not resist himself from returning to the bondage of household affairs. This irresolute *bhakata* was provided spiritual teaching with a beautiful example by his wife. Jayanti Madhāi, leaving the company of Śaṅkaradeva, came to stay for a few months with his wives. He asked them to throw away the old panes for cooking and prepare their meal in new panes. One of his wives placed few drags of half-chewed betel nut on the dish of boiled rice arranged for him, and asked him to take his meal. Jayanti Madhāi became angry seeing the drags in his dish, and

wanted to know, why they had kept the drags in his dish. His wives, then, explained that he went to Śaṅkaradeva giving up their company to have the benediction of God, but unfortunately, he returned to them, because they were born as women and became his wives, and he could not give up his lust for sensual pleasure derived from their company. Jayanti Madhāi had lost the opportunity for salvation of his soul that he would have had with the company of Śaṅkaradeva, if he had not left Śaṅkaradeva's company to satiate his lust for sensual pleasure with his wives. Beast too can enjoy the sensuality, but the practice of spirituality is the sole privilege of human being, nevertheless, Jayanti Madhāi returned to have sensual pleasure leaving aside the opportunity for spiritual uplift. This wife of Jayanti Madhāi taught him about the futility of sensual pleasure through the placing of the drags of half-chewed betel nut in his dish. She made him to realize that they were the obstacles on the path of his spiritual uplift, because they entrapped him in house holder's life closing his better sense, and evoked his lust for sensual pleasure instead of showing him the path of spiritual uplift. They, like the drags of chewed and sucked betel nuts, have no use in the path of salvation; hence, he should avoid their company. He would proceed in the right path for salvation, if he could avoid them. Such type of advice on her part proved that though she had no formal education, yet she was highly educated in religious matters. In a time, when there was no provision of women's education, rather, women were compelled to carry out the household duties, the advice of deep-rooted spirituality from an ordinary woman was possible only for the religious environment created by Śaṅkaradeva, lest it would not be possible for any woman to forward such type of religious advice. Jayanti Madhāi, perceiving the importance of the words of his

wife, repented for his guilt and left his home. It is revealed in the words of Jayanti Madhāi, how grateful he was to his wife for her invaluable advice, because he addressed his wife as most helpful friend. *bole āji tumi mok saj rākhili jñanbodh di: mor parama bāndhava upakārihe bhārjā nahañe II.*³⁴ After this episode, Jayanti Madhāi, following the advice of his wife, gave up his longing for householder's life and accepted the life of an ascetic *bhakata*. He went to Śaṅkaradeva and told him about the spiritual knowledge of his wife. Śaṅkaradeva, having learnt about the purity and sanctity of heart of the wife of Jayanti Madhāi, was attracted to her. He allowed Jayanti Madhāi to stay with other *bhaktas*, and arranged a separate house distant to the residence of the male *bhaktas* for the wife of Jayanti Madhāi. Śaṅkaradeva offered her the duty to wash and swipe the courtyards of the residence of the other *bhaktas*. She could take part in the congregational chanting and discussion of religious matters along with other male *bhaktas* therein. In the hagiography compiled by Cakrapāṇi Vairāgī, the purity and sanctity of the wife of Jayanti Madhāi and her acceptance of the religion of Śaṅkaradeva are distinctly mentioned as — *tehe gurujane saj budhi suddha jiva jāni anāi dharmabastu prakāṣkai bāj hāti di: kāti khalā sarā macākai thale bhakatar sārīr bhāg di II.*³⁵

It is to be mentioned here that unlike Mirā Bāi, Ākkā Bāi etc, women preachers of different cults, the wife of Jayanti Madhāi did not move place to place to spread the principle of Śaṅkaradeva, but still it is noteworthy that she was one of those, who dedicated themselves to the spreading of Śaṅkaradeva's religious principle. She guided

³⁴ Ibid, P 229.

³⁵ Ibid, P. 229

her husband, a distracted follower of Śaṅkaradeva, to the right path of spirituality dissuading him from indulging in sensuality. It was possible for her, because of the religious discussion frequently held among the male *bhaktas*, which provided her the opportunity to acquire the knowledge of religious matters through listening to their discussion. It can be ascertained from the above discussion that in the preaching of Śaṅkaradeva's religious principle, women, like the wife of Jayanti Madhāi also played the role of a spokesperson of his *bhakti* cult.

4.2. VIII. The wife of Ananta Kandalī:

Ananta Kandalī, a renowned Vaiṣṇavite writer after Śaṅkaradeva, was a *Śākta* before he became a veteran preacher of the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* of Śaṅkaradeva. The woman behind Ananta Kandalī's becoming a follower and a preacher of Śaṅkaradeva's religion was his religious wife. In the *Guru-Carit-Kathā*, it is mentioned as - *mahāpundit Purāṇ Bhārat Bhāgavata Veda Jotiṣat pārgat tathāpi haribimukh śākta II dharmmak pūje santos hai pūjā bekta hai bṛṣabh swarupe grahaṇ kare nite II tārār patnīti mahāsānti Viṣṇubhaktā: Aśokār biprapatnīr sadṛś: āye nite hariguṇ gāi gurujanar mahātmā utkariṣā kari thāke II bipre nasai ānat lagāi mārile II*.³⁶ Ananta Kandalī, the great scholar, skilled and expert in Astrology, the *Vedas*, the *Purāṇas*, the *Bhāgavata* and the *Bhārata* was a *śākta*, the worshipper of power, but was reluctant to worship the God Viṣṇu. He worshipped only the *Dharmadevatā*, the God of power, and the same God accepted his offerings in the guise of a bull, the *Vṛṣabha*, on the contrary, his wife, like the wives of the Bipras, was a worshipper of the Lord Viṣṇu. She always chanted the names of the Lord Viṣṇu and remembered His

³⁶ Ibid, P 185

glory. Ananta Kandalī could not bear with her practice and engaged other men to have had her beaten.

Ananta Kandalī lost his peace of mind as the god he worshipped had left him for his evil behaviour to his wife. One day, while the wife of Ananta Kandalī asked him the cause of his mental agony, he told her that his god of worship left him. She, then, told him that god had left his place and went to the Supreme incarnation, Śaṅkaradeva, manifested at Batadrawā. He instantly went to Batadrawā, there he saw Śaṅkaradeva was discussing the glories of the Lord Viṣṇu with the other *bhaktas*, and his god of worship was standing behind Śaṅkaradeva in the guise of a black bull. Witnessing this sight, Ananta Kandalī was amazed, and when Śaṅkaradeva asked him, why he had come to him, he replied that he had come with a view to have a sight of him. He also expressed, how his god of worship left him and came to reside with Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva allowed Ananta Kandalī to bring back his god of worship, if he wants so, but he could not bring back his god in spite of utmost effort, and being ashamed, he returned home. He explained all the happenings to his wife and told her that his god of worship left him for the torture he had committed on her. Ananta Kandalī repented for his folly. He went to Śaṅkaradeva and accepted his religion to purge himself.

In the hagiography compiled by Cakrapāṇi Vairāgī, it is mentioned that Ananta Kandalī engaged other men to beat his wife, for she was a worshipper of the Lord Viṣṇu, on the other hand, in the hagiography of Rāmcarāṇ Ṭhākur and of Dinanath Bezbaroa it is mentioned differently. Rāmcarāṇ Ṭhākur wrote-

śaṅkare bolaya siṭo bṛṣabha nahaya I
siṭo dharmma jānā tayu grhata paśaya II
prakṛtira aṅśa jānā tomāra grhiṇī I
tāte punu srīharita labhiche śaraṇi II 3666
hena sahadharmminīka karichā prahāra I
sikāraṇe dharmma jānā haiche bidūra II
sīghre grhe jāi tumi bhāryyāka ādarā I
*āsiba ubhati dharmma nijaka pāharā II 3667*³⁷

Śaṅkaradeva said to Ananta Kandalī that the bull resided in his house was not a bull, but God Himself, and his wife is a part of God, yet she worships Him. God left him, because he had beaten his religious wife. Śaṅkaradeva also told Ananta Kandalī to forget himself and to adore his wife then God would return to his home.

It is revealed in the *Barcarita* of Dinanath Bezbaroa that the wife of Ananta Kandalī was a worshipper of the Lord Viṣṇu, and Ananta Kandalī was a worshipper of power, hence there arose conflict between them. Ananta Kandalī could not bear with her God of worship, and one day, he beat her, consequently his god of worship left him and resided at Batadrawā with Śaṅkaradeva. The rest of the story is the same with that of the other hagiographies.

The story of Ananta Kandalī and his wife is narrated with the touch of supernatural elements and more or less variations of events in all the hagiographies of Śaṅkaradeva. In the description of the conflict between Ananta Kandalī and his wife, almost all the compilers of hagiography of Śaṅkaradeva exaggerated the story

³⁷ Dutta Baruah, Harinarayan. (ed.). (12th Edn., 1985). *Rāmcaraṇ Thākura Viracita Guru-carit*. P 728.

incorporating supernatural elements. Perhaps it happened so to produce the might of devotion to the Lord Viṣṇu and to overpower other cults. Whatever the supernatural elements or variations of events might be, but the noteworthy point is that the wife of Ananta Kandalī was a worshipper of the Lord Viṣṇu, while her husband Ananta Kandalī was a *Śākta*, the worshipper of power, and for that difference, there arises the conflict between them. Finally, Ananta Kandalī, giving up his cult, accepted Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult and became a veteran preacher of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. Had there not been the wife of Ananta Kandalī, he would not have become a doyen of Vaiṣṇavite literature, and the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite religion and literature would not have been flourished so prominently. In this context, the wife of Ananta Kandalī can definitely be regarded as a spokesperson of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult.

4.2. IX. The wife of Teli Kṛṣṇa Ātai:

The family of Teli Kṛṣṇa Ātai had close relationship with the family of Śaṅkaradeva and with Mādhavadeva. The family of Teli Kṛṣṇa Ātai sent pieces of cloths to Śaṅkaradeva every now and then as a sign of their devotion to him. Dāyāl, the wife of Teli Kṛṣṇa Ātai, was a devout Vaiṣṇavite devotee, and she had ample knowledge of Śaṅkaradeva's religion. Cakrapāṇi Vairāgī, in his compilation of Śaṅkaradeva's hagiography, distinctly narrated that Śaṅkaradeva acknowledged the knowledge of Dāyāl on the religious matters of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. He, therefore, made her *Medhi*, an officer of a *Satra*, in charge of the duties of collecting the annual contribution from disciples. *āru Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa rājāra caikuri mādai sabeu āhi gurujanata bhakat halhi: sibolākar medhi pātale Telikṛṣṇa Ātair patni āi Dāyālak II coukuri gūt ghoṣākīrttan sikāi prasaṅga karāi harigrhakai: sabāre karaḍar*

*ṭakā bastra tuli sodhāi: Gurujanat bar bhakat sneharII.*³⁸ She was made the *Medhi*, (an officer of a *satra*, in charge of the duty of collecting the annual contribution from disciples), of the one hundred twenty queens of the King Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa when they became *bhakata*, devotees. She used to teach the queens the songs of the *Ghoṣā* and the *Kīrttana* sitting in a *Harigr̥ha*, (a hall for congregational chanting, listening and discussion of the names and glory of the Lord Viṣṇu), and deliver the things that the queens offered to the *Guru*, Śaṅkaradeva. Thus, she got the blessings of Śaṅkaradeva. It is evident that she created an environment conducive to preaching and spreading the principle of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* through providing the teachings of religious scriptures to the queens of the King Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa. The activities performed by Dāyāl were the activities of a spokesperson of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult, though Śaṅkaradeva did not appoint Dāyāl as a spokesperson of his *bhakti* cult, yet, Dāyāl, like many other disciples of Śaṅkaradeva played the role of a spokesperson of his *bhakti* cult.

4.2. X. Kamalāpriyā alias Bhuwaneśvarī:

One of the worth mentioning women of the Neo-vaishnavite tradition of Assam is Kamalāpriyā, the daughter of one, Rāmrāi, a follower of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* of Śaṅkaradeva. When the King Naranārāyaṇa and his brother Cilārāi were at Divanagar, one of their orderlies, Śrīrām, being amazed at the beauty of Kamalāpriyā, described her beauty to Cilārāi. On listening to the description of the beauty of Kamalāpriyā, Cilārāi instantly decided to marry her, and without any delay, he sent his men to abduct and bring her to him. Cakrapāṇi Vairāgī mentioned in the *Kathā-*

³⁸ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edn. 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. P 532

Guru-Carita that, at first, Cilārāi had abducted Kamalāpriyā through his men and married her, then, he sent his men to bring Rāmrāi. Rāmrāi was not agree to get married his daughter to Cilārāi, but Śaṅkaradeva explained to Rāmrāi's realisation that as Cilārāi was a King, protest made against his wish would be of no use, rather it would be a matter of harassment; therefore, it would be better to have got married his daughter to him.³⁹ Rāmrāi was convinced at the explanation of Śaṅkaradeva, and he had got married his daughter to Cilārāi.

According to the *Barcarita* of Dinanath Bezbaroa, Cilārāi did not abduct Kamalāpriyā, but he sent his men to bring her.

rāmrāira kanyā āti rupe guṇe dhanyā I

snān karāte dekhi rājāsito kanyā II

kāhāra jiyari buli sudhiyā takhana I

āika nibāka lāgi karilā jatana II 1383

dūta pañcileka kanyā nibāra kārane I

*rāmrāi bule dadā kikaro akhane II 184*⁴⁰

The *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* entered into the palace of the Koch kingdom and got royal patronage through Kamalāpriyā alias Bhuwaneśvarī after she was made the chief queen of Cilārāi. She was brought up amidst a Vaiṣṇavite tradition; therefore, she could sing well the songs and hymns composed by Śaṅkaradeva. One day, Bhuwaneśvarī was singing a *Bargīt*, one kind of holy songs composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, *pamara mana rāma carāṇe citta dehu*, at the request

³⁹ Ibid, P 230

⁴⁰ Bezbarua, Dinanath. Ed.). (1st Edn., 1987). *Barcarit*. P 96.

of the other queens of Cilārāi, at that time, Cilārāi arrived at home returning from hunting, and heard the song. The lyrics and the tone of the song impressed and attracted Cilārāi. When he went to bed, he again listened to the song through the mouth of Bhuwaneśvarī, and having listened to the song that revealed the sports of Kṛṣṇa, he became encouraged to take initiation from Śaṅkaraveda. Śaṅkaradeva, too, decided to initiate Cilārāi witnessing his earnest desire and devotion.⁴¹

The *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* received royal patronage as it entered in the palace of the Koch king. Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva preached and spread the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* in Koch Behār under the aegis of the Koch king, Naranārāyaṇa, without any obstacle. In this respect, the role of Kamalāpriyā was unique one. Moreover, it is mentioned in the *Barcariat* compiled by Dinanath Bezbaroa that King Naranārāyaṇa was highly satisfied when Śaṅkaradeva presented him the *Vṛndāvanī bastra* as a token of honour. He insulted and sent away the Brāhmaṇas who plotted treason against Śaṅkaradeva, and ordered his tenants to abide by the words of Śaṅkaradeva thereafter. Cilārāi and his wife Bhuwaneśvarī were pleased with the order of the King. Bhuwaneśvarī requested Śaṅkaradeva to compose such a book, keeping in view, the status of the women, in which, the story of the Creator, the Savior, and the Sports of God would be narrated, so that they could remember the names of God amidst their household duties. She request so, because they did not have spare time to listening and chanting the names of God, for, they have to keep themselves with the household duties. It is mentioned in the *Barcarita* as follows-

⁴¹ Lekharu, Upendra Chandra. (ed.). (5th Edn., 2006). *Kathā-gurucaritra*. P 85.

bhuwaneśvarīra ānandara nāhi pāra I
binaye parthilā āi gurura caraṇe II
utpatti pralaya āru īsvarara līlā I
*śāstrate thākibe lāge henaya sādhanā II 1460.*⁴²

Śaṅkaradeva told Mādhavadeva about the request of Kamalāpriyā and advised him to compose such a scripture.

śunā bāpo barārpū śātrakhāni karā I
karmma karanteo nāri kṛṣṇaka sumārā II
rātri dibā kare karma yata nārigana I
avasara nāi kṛṣṇa karite kīrttana II
bhuwaneśwarīra prārthe janānīra prati I
*karmma karanteo jena huwe kṛṣṇa prīti II 1462.*⁴³

On the behest of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva composed the scripture-*Janmarahasya*, The Mystery of Birth. This scripture is an indirect contribution of Kamalāpriyā to *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*, because this scripture would have not been written, if Kamalāpriyā had not requested Śaṅkaradeva to compose such a scripture. The determined steps that Kamalāpriyā had taken in respect of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* could make futile the attempts of the Brāhmaṇas in creating and spreading rumours against Śaṅkaradeva. She created a congenial atmosphere for the aegis of the Koch king in the preaching and spreading of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* in Koch Behār, and among the royal members as well as among the tenants. Moreover, the initiation of Cilārāi and his hundred queens was possible only for

⁴² Bezbarua, Dinanath. Ed.). (1st Edn., 1987). *Barcarit*. P 107.

⁴³ Ibid. P 107

Kamalāpriyā. From the above discussion, it is evident that Kamalāpriyā alias Bhuwaneśvarī had played the role of a spokesperson of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult.

4.2. XI. Hariparbā Dayāl, the wife of Kehu Hājarā:

Kehu Hājarā was the eldest of the group of five brethren and votaries of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* of old Behār. Mādhavadeva regarded this group as 'Pañcapāndava'. Hariparbā Dayāl, the wife of Kehu Hājarā, was a religious woman and a passionate follower of *bhaktas*, (the votaries) of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. She inspired her husband to serve the disciples of Mādhavadeva after he had accepted Mādhavadeva as his *Guru*, the preceptor. Whenever her husband brought something to her, she always insisted on the service to the *bhaktas*, the votaries, of Vaiṣṇavism, and reminded her husband about his responsibility to them. She always offered a part, whatever she got, to the *bhaktas* before sharing them with the other members of her family. One day, when Hājarā returned from the King's palace, he brought precious stones, vermillion and a necklace to his wife, Dayāl, and when he gave her these things, she asked him what he had brought for the *bhaktas*. She advised him that he could have the benevolence of God in the other birth, if he would offer benefaction to the *bhaktas* in this birth. The offering or presenting precious gifts to one's wife could do nothing in respect of having the blessings of God, rather seemed throwing away of useless things into garbage. He would attain salvation in the other birth, if he dedicates his service to the *Guru*, the preceptor, as well as to his disciples in this life. One who indulged in sensuality would get nothing, but begets progenitors and female partner like beasts and birds, and they seemed as obstacles in the path of one's salvation, therefore, he should not believe, adore or pity his children

and wife so much. *ekadinā rājār ṭhāite bākhar sindur maṇi āni diche: [Di bole] āmālai ānicā aibhor: mor gurubhakatalai ānica ki: bole āre ji hai dibi tae: bole mai dile morhe haba bhāgya: tomār ki hal: bole taino kār: bole thirkai bicāri cāle kāro keo nahai: Isvar [aṅśi] jiva: vṛkṣacāt jirovādi jirāico: āmāk ji dicā hāte kāne bakarāni khālathe pelāicā: gurusevakarkatḥihe pābā parañanmat: paśopakṣi yoni bhaji pāi bisair putra bhāryā āta biswās, dāyi, sneh karā II.*⁴⁴

These words of Hariparbā revealed, how wise she was in spiritual matters. She could provide spiritual knowledge to her husband, a *bhakata*, of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. She could give up her longings for wealth and mundane affairs, and could offer the things brought to her for the wellbeing of the *bhakatas*, because she had acquired the deep knowledge of spirituality. She could perceive that the relation among the family members is nothing, but the bonding of illusion. If one could realize this fact, it would appear to one that the sole relative of all living beings is only the Supreme Being.

The benevolent service of Hariparbā to the votaries of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* is revealed through her activities. Once, her husband Keku Hājarā brought two *Rihās*, a kind of scarf worn by an Assamese woman, to her, but he did not bring anything to the *bhakatas*. She was not happy at all with this, and therefore, she sold one of her *Rihās*, and bought rice and cakes for the *bhakatas*. Such benignity of Hariparbā towards the votaries of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* is the evidence that sometimes, women became the pathfinders and mentors of the *bhakatas*, and showed them the right path of salvation.

⁴⁴ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edn. 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. P 492.

Kehu Hājarā was one of the *bhakatas*, and he regularly visited the *Guru-Gr̥ha*, the residence of his Preceptor, to take part in listening and chanting the names of God. However, sometimes, he was reluctant to go to the *Guru-Gr̥ha*, and past his time in idle gossiping at his home, because he could not come out from the grasp of sensuality. Hariparbā did not like it at all, and she reproached him citing a verse from the *Kīrttana*.

kr̥ṣṇa katha eri sāte pāñce beḥi
āna kathā kai thāke I
amṛtaka teji yena biṣṭhā bhuñje
*gāṇḍi śukarara jāke II*⁴⁵

The verses implies that gossiping on a trivial matter in a group of five, seven or so without remembering the names of God is like the devouring of excreta leaving aside the honey by swine.

Hājarā realized his fault at the reproach of his wife, and giving up his bad habit, he started to go to his *Guru-Gr̥ha* for practising the chanting and listening to the names of God. In this way, Hariparbā Dayāl, the wife of Kehu Hājarā, indirectly performed the role of a spokesperson in spreading the principle of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult.

4.2.XII. The wife of Jinai Buḍhā of Dāukī village:

Jinai Buḍhā and his wife, an old couple of Dāukī village, lived by making and exchanging different types of tools of bamboo for fishing and household use. The old man made different tools of bamboo and the old woman went out to nearby villages to

⁴⁵ Lekharu, Upendra Chandra. (ed.). (5th Edn., 2006). *Kathā-gurucaritra*. P 409.

bring their necessary things in exchange of these tools. One day, the old woman reached at a *Hāti*, the place where the *bhakatas* of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* stayed, and returned home late, because the *bhakatas* exchanged rice, salt, oil, betel nuts and betel-leaves with *Juluki*, a kind of fishing basket, and asked her to bring more fishing tools. Jinai Buḍhā asked her, why she had returned so late and from where she had brought so much things. She replied that she exchanged and brought the things from the place where the *bhakatas* stayed. In this way, they passed their days. When the *bhakatas* asked her about her family the other day, she replied that she had only her husband, but had no child, then the *bhakatas* advised her to come and reside permanently near the *Hāti* instead of roaming different places. They also told her that she would have to swipe and clean the place of chanting and listening, and her husband could take part in the chanting and listening to the names of God along with the other *bhakatas*. Further, they informed her that they would arrange a dwelling place outside the *Guru-Gr̥ha* for both of them. She became happy at these words of the *Bhakatas*, and coming home, she proposed her husband to go and reside with the *bhakatas*. At first, Jinai Buḍhā was reluctant to go and reside near the *Hāti*, but finally agreed and went to the *Hati*, because his wife threatened him that she could no longer exchange things, and even if he did not go along with her, she would give him up and go to reside there. She released him from every household duty, and told him that he need not think of any household matter except cooking his own meal, but have to take part in chanting and listening to the names of Kṛṣṇa. Jinai Buḍhā told her that he did not know the names of God to be chanted. She, then, asked him to sit in the back of

the other *bhakatas*. *burie bule buḍhā toi nāma gā tai ekulou cintiba nālāge moi puhim rāndhi bāhi khābi mātra: bule ki nām bhuke nepāñ: bule pācate thākagai*.⁴⁶

Jinai Buḍhā used to take part in the chanting and listening to the names of God, but he could not learn how to chant the names. Once, when he returned from taking part in the chanting and listening to the names of God, his wife asked him the names that he had chanted, but he could not remember the names and told her that he had forgotten the names, then his wife told him that he could not have his meal. He felt hurt, and returning to the *Hāti* lied on the plinth of the *Hāti*. Balabhadra Ātai saw him lying in the plinth, and asked, why he had returned and lied on the plinth, he explained the whole story, and then Balubhadra Ātai taught him the names. Jinai Buḍhā, having learnt the names, came to his wife and beautifully sang the names when his wife asked to sing. His wife told him that she would carry out all the household duty and he need not worry of any household matter, but should have to learn and sing the names in this way to her ears. *tai bhāt kāpor cintiba nālāge: mai māgi munih di khowām: buḍhā ātaik nite khari pāt śāk māt ji pāi ni ghoṣā śikegai* I.⁴⁷

Of this old couple, the woman was more devoted to the *bhakti* religion of Śaṅkaradeva than her husband for which she could bring her husband to the path of devotion who was ignorant of the *bhakti* religion of Śaṅkaradeva and reluctant to worship God. She pressurized her reluctant husband so severely to become a *bhakata* that, sometimes, she even did not hesitate to stop his meal, if he did not pursue his duty properly in becoming a *bhakata*. In this way, she made her husband a *bhakata*.

⁴⁶ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edn. 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. P 372.

⁴⁷ Ibid, P 372.

The old woman of Dāukī village could realize it well that besides carrying out day-to-day duty, one should strive for attaining salvation through praying God, as salvation lies in chanting and listening to the names of God than in the satisfaction derived from mundane enjoyment. She sent her husband to accompany the *bhaktas* instead of herself, because she could not spare time from her household duty, but she wanted to listen to the discussion held among the *bhaktas* through her husband so that she could attain her salvation.

In the story, there might be some exaggerations, as exaggerations are obvious in hagiographies, yet if the exaggerations are segregated then it will reveal that woman like the wife of Jinai Buḍhā too took part in the preaching and spreading of Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* through her efforts of bringing her husband into the fold of this religion. In this context, the wife of Jinai Buḍhā of Dāukī village can be regarded as a spokesperson of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult.

4.2. XIII. Āi Dhāi:

The wet nurse of the Koch king Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇa was known as Āi Dhāi. According to the *Guru-Carit-Kathā*, in the reign of the Koch king Naranārāyaṇa, Cilārāi brought a good mannered damsel along with different gems and a white elephant from the Āhom kingdom after defeating the Āhom king, and appointed her as the wet nurse.⁴⁸ However, what was the relation of Āi Dhāi with that damsel whom Cilārāi brought from Ahom kingdom cannot be ascertained, but it is evident that Āi Dhāi was a religious woman conversant with sacred books. She helped Mādhavadeva in his different misfortunes. Mādhavadeva passed his days with various hardships and

⁴⁸ Ibid, P 231, 469

was in grief, while he was at Hājo in the reign of the King Raghudeva. The *bhakatas* and Āi Dhāi had heard of this, and consulting among them, they decided to bring Mādhavadeva to Koch Behār. It is mentioned in the *Śrī Śrī Gopāl Devar Caritra* that Āi Dhāi earnestly solicited the favour of the Koch King Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa to bring Mādhavadeva to Koch Behār. Moreover, “she observed the death rituals of Mādhavadeva for seven days after his death.”⁴⁹

Āi Dhāi had great influence on the *bhakatas* of Koch behār. Kṛṣṇa, a *bhakata* by name, once, had established an illicit relation of cohabitation with another’s wife and confessed it to Āi Dhāi, then, Āi Dhāi gave him shelter supposing to have had him rectified.

Āi Dhāi could realize it better that one should hate sin but not sinner. If a sinner is provided the opportunity to be rectified, sin will be decreased in the society; on the other hand, if a sinner is cast out from the society, and is debarred from assimilating into the society, the chance of increasing of the numbers of sinners in the society will be increased. Perhaps, she gave shelter to, one, Kṛṣṇa, an accused of infidelity, with a view to providing him an opportunity to be rectified. However, at this act of Āi Dhāi, resentment arose in the mind of the *bhakatas* and they even showed their resentment and irritation to Puruṣuttama Ṭhākura, the son-in-law of Śaṅkaradeva, when he, dishonouring the restrictions of the *bhakatas* and responding the earnest request of Āi Dhāi, visited her residence and accepted her offerings. After this incident, dissatisfaction gradually increased among the followers of Mādhavadeva in Koch Behār and in Purābhīṭhā of Barpetā, and they not only left her company, but also

⁴⁹ Hazarika, Minati. (1st Edn., 1997). *Asamar Madhyayugar Caritputhir Eti Adhyayan*. P 260.

returned the things that she had sent for them. *bole bhakata save āru āmāk nālāge I*. At last, she could save herself from this misfortune following the advice of Bhabānīpurīyā Gopāl Ātā.⁵⁰

When Mādhavadeva was at Koch Behār, Āi Dhāi sent to him a bundle of different cloths- *Barkāpor*, a coarse cotton cloth folded twice and used as a wrapper, *majali celeñ*, a thin cloth wrapped round the body or over the shoulders, *Pacarā*, a kind of cloth thrown over the shoulders, *Gamachā*, a towel etc. to distribute among the *bhaktas*. She categorized the *bhaktas* as *uttamattama*, the best of the bests, *uttama*, the best, *madhyama*, the middles and *sāmānya*, the ordinaries, and asked Mādhavadeva to distribute the cloths among them according to their ranks. Mādhavadeva became indignant, because he never differentiated the *bhaktas*. He declined to distribute the cloths himself and sent back the bundle. He said, “*kochjiehe bar saru coṭa prākṛtya bhakatar cine: āmi bhu nepāñ: sabeu haribhakti karice: bhajanar icā jāk ji fal īshware diba: bṛkṣa (cāi) cāyā: tehe gai saimate kalehi:*”⁵¹ Āi Dhāi realized her fault and sent the similar cloths to all the *bhaktas*, then, Mādhavadeva distributed the cloths among the *bhaktas* - *samān kāpar dice: guruḥjane punar bāñṇi diche sabāke II*.⁵²

The personality and the scholarship of Mādhavadeva influenced the Koch King Lakshminārāyaṇa so deeply that he asked Āi Dhāi to greet Mādhavadeva with flower, sandalwood, cloths, betel nuts and betel vines etc. Moreover, the King told her that all the *Satra* Institutions of his kingdom should run according to the philosophy of

⁵⁰ Ibid, P. 261.

⁵¹ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edn. 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. P 532.

⁵² Ibid. P. 532.

Mādhavadeva. At this, Āi Dhāi became very happy, and in the next morning, she requested Mādhavadeva through messengers to come to the palace of the Koch King.

ātā samanvite yata bhakat sabaka I

rājā buli āche dibe phula chandanaka II

(Daityayi Thakur: *Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva-Madhavdeva Carita*: P-274).

However, Mādhavadeva himself neither went to the palace nor did he send his nephew, Rāmcaraṇ Ṭhākur; rather he sent Achyut Guru and some others to the palace. Āi Dhāi was in grief for Mādhavadeva's not coming to the palace, she again sent *Dula*, a litter, to Mādhavadeva so that he could not remain at home deliberating his physical weakness, but come to the palace. This proved that Āi Dhāi had great influence over both the King and the tenants of Koch Behār, and for that reason, *The Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* was coming into force in Koch Behār without any obstacle.

It is stated in the *Śrī Śrī Gopāl Deva Kathā Carita* compiled by Ratnesvar Gosain that Āi Dhāi took immense care to the saints, sages, *bhaktas* and to the *Guru*, the Preceptor, at Koch Behār. She requested Lakṣminārāyaṇa to have had made every arrangement for the convenience of Mādhavadeva to stay at Koch Behār when Mādhavadeva wanted to go to Koch Behār. Mādhavadeva had faced a trouble in entering the Koch kingdom, because he had to cross the check post of the province of the King Raghu before entering the Koch kingdom, but without the permission from the King Raghu, it was impossible to cross the check post. Then, Āi Dhāi sent Bhṛgu, a Brāhmaṇa, and playing a trick through him, she made a safe passage for Mādhavadeva and his companions. She made arrangement of dormitories and chanting hall for the *bhaktas*, and a separate residence for Mādhavadeva at Koch Behār. She

was also behind the generous attitude that grew in the mind of the Koch king Lakṣminārāyaṇa towards Mādhavadeva.⁵³

King Lakṣminārāyaṇa had arranged a system for Āi Dhāi that she could get the tax collected from seven villages for her own expenditure, but Āi Dhāi could not manage her expenditure with the tax collected from those seven villages, as she had to support the maintenance of the ascetic *bhaktas*. She, therefore, told it to Lakṣminārāyaṇa and prayed for more villages to get much money. Lakṣminārāyaṇa insulted her for expending so much money in the maintenance of the ascetic *bhaktas*. Āi Dhāi, as an intelligent woman, retorted that the king praised the *Śāktas*, (the worshipper of power and antagonist of Hari), and provided them support and sustenance. He was like a sinned-hearted one, who praised only the sinners, but could not see the quality of the *bhaktas*, who chanted the glory of Hari. With reference to the *Gitā*, she again said, “one sees the same thing everywhere, what humour one has possessed.”⁵⁴ King Lakṣminārāyaṇa, having heard the reactions of Āi Dhāi, realized his fault and said that these *bhaktas* were the true devotees of God, and he would grant her more villages so that she could serve them well.⁵⁵

If Āi Dhāi could not change the attitude of the King Lakṣminārāyaṇa towards the *bhaktas*, she would not have provided her support to the *bhaktas*, then the *bhaktas* had to suffer more severely, and consequently the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* would not have put its footprint in the land of Koch Behār. In this prospect,

⁵³ Hazarika, Minati. (1st Edn., 1997). *Asamar Madhyayugar Caritputhir Eti Adhyayan*. P 262, 263

⁵⁴ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edn., 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. P 493.

⁵⁵ Ibid. P 532

Āi Dhāi played the role of a spokesperson in preaching and spreading the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* of Śaṅkaradeva.

4.2. XIV. Sumati Āi:

Sumati Āi was the wife of Mathurādās Buḍhā Ātā, the first *Satrādhikāra*, the head of a Satra institution, of Barpeta Satra. Once, when the sporting centre of the Barpeta Satra had been gutted in fire, Mathurādās Buḍhā Ātā became very sad with the accident, and he decided to go to Bhelā with eighteen numbers of his junior to stay near his Preceptor, Mādhavadeva. When he reached at Bhelā, Mādhavadeva asked him about the apostles of Barpeta Satra and his friend Nārāyaṇ Ṭhākur. Buḍhā Ātā told him that all the Apostles were living in peace, but the sporting centre of the Satra had been burnt into ashes. Everybody became sad hearing the news, and Mādhavadeva asked him whether the ever-burning sacred lamp of Barpeta Satra had still been burning. Ātā replied, “His wife, a servile devotee, heaped up the ashes in the plinth, erected a curved shade above it and lighting a lamp there on, she continued three times prayer along with other old women.”⁵⁶ Mādhavadeva was highly pleased, and praised the wife of Mathurādās Buḍhā Ātā. Sumati Āi, the wife of Mathurādās Buḍhā Ātā, had saved the ever-burning lamp of Barpeta Satra from extinguishing, and kept it burning.

A few days later of Mathurādās’s staying at Bhelā with Mādhavadeva leaving the Barpeta Satra, Mādhavadeva asked him to return and re-start the burning of the sacred lamp at the burnt plinth of the Barpeta Satra. At first, he hesitated to return, because he did not want to stay at Barpeta without Mādhavadeva. Mādhavadeva, then, giving Mathurādās two rupees with two pieces of cloths, said that he made him the

⁵⁶ Bezbaroa, Laksmīnath. (5th Edn., 2012). *Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva Āru Śrī Śrī Mādhavadeva*. P 182.

Adhikāra, the Head, of Barpeta Satra from that very day. As he regarded the Barpeta Satra as the *Dwārakānagara*, he made Mathurādās the Prince of this *Dwārakā* and sent him to Barpeta. Having heard of the returning of Mathurādās to Barpeta, Nārāyaṇ Dās, Bhabānīpurīyā Gopāl Ātā and Barviṣṇu Ātā came and took information about Mādhavadeva from him. Then Mathurādās called on the apostles of Barpeta Satra through a messenger and reconstructed the *Kīrttanghara*, the prayer hall, the *Maṇikūṭa*, the sanctum, and the *Hāṭi*, the dormitory for the devotees, and flaming the sacred lamp at the pedestal, started the chanting of the names of God. Thus, Mathurādās Burhā Ātā had reinstated the Barpeta Satra. If Sumati Āi, the wife of Mathurādās Buḍhā Ātā, did not maintain the continuity of the burning of the ever-burning sacred lamp and three times daily prayer of the Barpeta Satra, the history of the Barpeta Satra would have been written differently, and the practice of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* would have been disrupted and extinct in the pace of time.

In the *Bar-Carita* of Dinanath Bezbaroa, the earnest devotion of Sumati Āi is narrated through a story. One day, when Mādhavadeva was taking rest lying on the floor of the Kīrttanaghara, Sumati Āi sent her son, Balāi, with a lump of dried mud to bring it back smearing in the feet of Mādhavadeva, so that she could stick it as the dust of her Guru's feet. When Balāi smeared the lump of dried mud in the feet of Mādhavadeva, he instantly caught hold on the hand of Balāi and began to sing as – *ālu, śuṇā gowāler jāyābulaya Gopāla āmāra gāwe dhūlā dilā tumāra cawāle II*, and composed this song. Then, Sumati Āi prayed for apology outside of the Kīrttanghara.⁵⁷ It is revealed through the story, how the ordinary woman like Sumati Ai was deeply

⁵⁷ Bezbarua, Dinanath. (ed.). (1st Edn., 1987). *Barcarit.* P 181.

influenced by the religion of Śaṅkaradeva. In another context, Dina Nath Bezbarooa mentioned in the *Bar-Carita* that Mādhavadeva instructed the mother of Govinda Ātai and the other *Āis*, (the other old women), to perform the *Puwār-Nāmaprasaṅga* (Morning Prayer) along with Sumati Āi, the mother of Balāi, on the day of the performing of *Kuturā Khelā Bhāonā* at Barpeta satra. The role of performing Morning Prayer that has been started by Sumati Āi is still in vogue in Barpeta satra.

gurujane bole burhī pabhāta kālata I

balāi mātṛ sate karā prasaṅga satata II (2608)

ājiyo paryanta Barpeta srestha athane I

puwār prasaṅga kare sabe burhī gane II (2609).⁵⁸

It is evident from the above discussion that Sumati Āi had played a crucial role in preaching and spreading the *bhakti* cult of Śaṅkaradeva at Barpeta.

Besides the women discussed above, some other women too extended their helping hands in the preaching and spreading of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. These women performed different roles in different contexts of their lives respectively, without their knowledge, but became instrumental at long run in preaching and spreading the religious belief of Śaṅkaradeva. In *Guru-Carit-Kathā Adhyayana Āru Biśleṣaṇ* of Golukeswar Goswami, the author mentioned few women who accepted and practised the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* in different contexts of their lives. Such one woman was Harigati, the sister of Hari Khā, an official of the Koch King Naranārāyaṇa. She tried her best to release Nārāyaṇ Dās and Gukul Ātai from the captivation of the king Naranārāyaṇa, and at last, being indifferent to the household

⁵⁸ Ibid, P 182.

life, she accepted Śaṅkaradeva's religion along with her brother, Hari Khā, and became an ascetic *bhākata*. The wife of Barviṣṇu Ātā of the Southern sect glorified her life by accepting the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* and following the path of her husband. (*Guru-Carit-kathā*. Section 328, 331, 440).⁵⁹ The queens of Naranārāyaṇa and the queens of Lakshminārāyaṇa took initiation from Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva respectively, and they served and helped their preceptors in different ways. The beloved queen of the king Raghunārāyaṇa, being highly devoted to Mādhavadeva, volunteered to help him, and at last, she succeeded in releasing Mādhavadeva from the accusation of the King by establishing his purity in the eyes of the King that he kept distance from the harmful food, conjugation and slumber. (*Guru-Carit-Kathā*. Section 803,947).⁶⁰

4.2. XV. Āi Bhubaneśvarī:

One of the women who played the important roles in spreading and preaching Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult was the eldest daughter of Harideva, Āi Bhubaneśvarī. She was a wise woman with deep knowledge of Neo-Vaiṣṇavite philosophy. Harideva nominated her as the chief of the Maneri satra as he had no son. This was, perhaps, the first event that a woman had occupied the highest religious position in the *Brahmasaṁhati*, a division of the vaiṣṇavite religion, after the death of Śaṅkaradeva. Saitendra Nath Sarma mentioned in his thesis- "Harideva had no son and therefore, on the eve of his death nominated his daughter Bhubaneśvarī for the headship of his satra at Māneri. Perhaps this is the first instance of nominating a woman to the position of a

⁵⁹ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (4th Edn., 2012). *Guru-carit-kathā*. Pp 274,275,315

⁶⁰ Ibid. Pp 445,493

religious head. The later history of the sub-sect after Bhubaneśvarī is devoid of any notable event.”⁶¹

4.2.XVI. Sumālinī Buḍhī:

Sumālinī Buḍhī of Haju was by caste a woman of *Hirā* (a scheduled Caste). She served Mādhavadeva and followed the ideology of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* by heart and soul. Once she was in a conflict with some Brāhmaṇas, who were entangled with Mādhava temple, for her strict adherence to the philosophy of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*, that there is no God or Deity except Viṣṇu or Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This incident is mentioned in the hagiography of Śaṅkaradeva as – “One day, when Sumālinī Buḍhī had brought a bunch of ripened banana, some Brāhmaṇas saw her and asked her to bring the bunch of banana to offer it to the Deity of Mādhava temple. She told them that she knew well that they would take the banana in the name of offering it to their Deity, because their Deity does not take any offering as like as a corpse does not take anything. On the contrary, there is no provision of worshipping of a Deity in the religion she has been practising. The image that is worshipped in *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* is the Supreme Spirit, which is transcendent, unqualified, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and pure. The Supreme spirit accepts if offers, but does not seek, and grants as one wished.”⁶² The Brāhmaṇas were renowned as scholar particularly in the religious matters during the times of Śaṅkaradeva, but Sumālinī Buḍhī defeated such Brāhmaṇas of the Mādhava temple of Hajo, and they

⁶¹ Sarma. Satyendranath. (2016). *The New Vaisnavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam*, P-82

⁶² Lekharu, Upendra Chandra. (ed.). (5th Edn. 2006). *Kathā-gurucaritra*. P 353

became dumb at her words. This proved that Sumālinī Buḍhī too was skilled in religious matter especially of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*.

Mādhavadeva was impressed at the skilled counter of Sumālinī Buḍhī to the Brāhmaṇas of the Mādhava temple and her win. It was possible for her earnest devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa, the God of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*, and for her deep knowledge on religious scriptures. Mādhavadeva composed a *Ghoṣa* (a holy song) in honour of her resolute devotion. Everything in this world including *Māyā*, the illusion, are matters, only the Lord Kṛṣṇa is transcend and pure. The fools suffer worshipping the matters instead of worshipping the transcendental kṛṣṇa.

māyā ādi kari yata māne, samasta jagata jara

kṛṣṇese caitanya ātmā suddha I

Caitanya kṛṣṇaka eri jaraka bhajiyā mare

*kinu loka adhama mugudha II*⁶³

In the time of Mādhavadeva, a large number of pure, simple but resolute women of Assam like Sumālinī Buḍhī accepted the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Haria-Nama-Dharma* by heart and soul, and they adhered to practising of the chanting and listening to the names of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the method of worshipping God of the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. They created an atmosphere conducive to preaching and spreading of the religious principles of Śaṅkaradeva in the social life of Assam.

4.2.XVII. The mother of Govinda Ātai:

The mother of one, Gobinda Ātai, a disciple of Mādhavadeva, was one of the women followers of Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. When

⁶³ Ibid, P 354

Mādhavadeva had been preaching the religion of Śaṅkaradeva in lower Assam erecting the *Kīrttan ghara*, a chanting hall, at Barpeta, the mother of Govinda Ātai used to swipe the plinth, the courtyard, and the gateway of the *Kīrttan-ghara*, the huts and the clothes of the *bhakatas*, and thus, she passed her days with *bhakatas*. A story is narrated in the *Kathā-Guru-Carita* compiled by an anonymous compiler relating to the mother of Govinda Ātai where the propensity of the compiler to add supernatural element in hagiography is revealed. The story is- “One day, while the mother of Govinda Ātai was swiping the courtyard, suddenly she felt her waist locked, and hardly making her waist straight, she took the name of Lord Kṛṣṇa as *bāndhava Kṛṣṇa*. At that time, Mādhavadeva was discussing religious matters with *bhakatas*. He was aggrieved and resented having heard of her taking the name of Lord Kṛṣṇa as *bāndhava Kṛṣṇa*, because whom the *bhakatas* regarded as worshipable as the Supreme Spirit, and wanted to mingle with Him, she saluted Him as *bāndhava*. He, therefore, called on Śrī Rām Ātā and asked him to release the mother of Govinda Ātai instantly from from her duty. When Śrī Rām Ātā informed her, she became very sad, began to weep and left the place. All things were found clean every day, even after the mother of Govinda Ātai had left the place, everybody took that Śrī Rām Ātā had swept all, but Śrī Ram Ātā denied, when he was asked. Then, Śrī Rām Ātā was asked to inquire who swept and cleaned everything. Accordingly, he waited for three quarter of a night in the first day, but he did not see anything. In the next day, following the advice of Mādhavadeva, he lied on the stairs to watch the person who swept and cleaned everything. Śrī Rām Ātā saw that a heavenly ray radiates from an old couple. When he wanted to know who they were, they told him that they are Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, and

come to complete the works of the old woman being satisfied with her devotion”⁶⁴. The story has the touch of supernatural elements, but if the supernatural elements are struck out from the story, then it will appear that the mother of Govinda Ātai was a religious woman. It is also revealed in the story that Mādhavadeva got a precious lesson on pure devotion from the mother of Govinda Ātai. Whatever salutations a *bhakata* uses to address to Lord Kṛṣṇa, it does not matter, but the fact is that, if the salutations were saturated with ardent devotion, the devotee would get the blessings of God. The chief aim of incorporating the supernatural element in the story is to provide a teaching to the *bhakatas* that whatever relation they wanted to establish with God, but that must have possessed enthusiastic devotion to the God. According to the same *Carit Puthi*, Mādhavadeva again called on the mother of Govinda Ātai and engaged her in the same duty. The mother of Govinda Ātai became very happy, and being more spirited, absorbed in the service to the *bhakatas*.

Whatever the story relating to the mother of Govinda Ātai might be, but the fact is that she served the *bhakatas* whole-heartedly and became the role model of enthusiastic devotion to be followed by the votaries of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, and Mādhavadeva too got a lesson on ardent devotion through her. Thus, she indirectly preached the principle of Śaṅkaradeva.

4.2.XVIII. Āi Kanaklatā:

Āi kanaklatā was the forerunner among the women preachers of Śaṅkaradeva’s *bhakti* cult, and she could be conferred the best honour for her rendering of invaluable service in preaching and spreading of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* in the then

⁶⁴ Ibid, P 286.

upper Assam. She was the daughter of one Kānu Bhuñā of Koch Behār, and the wife of Caturbhūja Ṭhākura, the son-in-law of Śaṅkaradeva. When both Caturbhūja Ṭhākura and Puruṣuttama Ṭhākura the sons-in-law of Śaṅkaradeva lived in lower Assam, they made a group of twelve religious heads (*Mahanta*) taking six men each from non-Brāhmaṇa and Brāhmaṇa, and sent them to preach and spread the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* in different places of upper Assam. However, none of these two Ātās could spare time to go and preach the religion in upper Assam. Hence, Caturbhūja Ṭhākura conferred on his wife Āi Kanaklatā the duty of preaching and spreading the religion of Śaṅkaradeva in upper Assam.

Chaturbhūja Ṭhākura made Āi Kanaklatā his religious ancestor. When he was in his deathbed, he called on his followers and said, “my wife is as chaste as Lakṣmī, and she will keep alive the religion of Śaṅkaradeva. You should keep my words and respect her as you respect me.”

mora nija patniyei lakṣmī nāme satī I

śaṅkarara dharma tehe rākhibā samprati II

torā sabe mura eto bacana neribā I

*mohora samāna kari lakṣmīka mānibā II*⁶⁵

Āi Kanaklatā set out for upper Assam to preach the religion of Śaṅkaradeva at the time when the Āhom king Jaydhwaja Singha ruled in upper Assam. When she was preaching the religion in upper Assam, she sent the *Nirmāli*, (a garland of sacred flowers offered by a *Guru* with blessings), to the King, and the King too eagerly accepted the sacred flowers. On seeing the eagerness of the king to the *Nirmāli* sent by

⁶⁵ Nath, Jibakanta. (ed). (2017)., *Dharma/Biplavi Ramakanta Muktiyar Ata Jivan Racanavali*. p-158

Kanaklatā, a few evil-minded Brāhmaṇas could not bear it. They told the king that *Agni* is the *Guru* of the Brāhmaṇas, the Brāhmaṇas are the *Guru* of the other four castes, and a King is equal to such ten Brāhmaṇas, therefore, a very mean and impure non-Brāhmaṇa widow is in no way efficient to send *Nirmāli* to the King, and it is not acceptable. The King became angry at the words of the Brāhmaṇas and ordered his men to bring Kanaklatā and her companions for trial in the next day. Dāmodardeva, the maternal nephew of Āi Kanaklatā, saved her and her companions from this misfortune. Āi Kanaklatā could not preached the philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva in a congenial atmosphere, yet she did not give up her mission, whatever the atmosphere might be, but she made fourteen *Mahantas*, religious leaders, and imposed the duty of spreading Śaṅkaradeva's religion on them. According to the description of Kālindī Āi, Āi Kanaklatā along with her nephew, Dāmodar, rediscovered the Bardowā *Thāna* deforesting a deep forest. *Deul*, (the temple constructed by Śaṅkaradeva), *Kīrttan-Gharar barbheṭi*, (the tall plinth of the prayer hall), *Ākāśī Gaṅgā*, (a sacred pond nearby the temple), *Śilikhā brkṣa*, (the myrobalam tree), and even the stone plate used for grinding iron powder were discovered after deforesting the jungle. The rediscovery of the Bardowā *Thāna* and its re-establishment added a new dimension in preaching and spreading of the religion of Śaṅkaradeva all over Assam. Āi Kanaklatā along with her fourteen followers, both from ascetics and householders *bhaktas* faced hardship in mastering their daily meals during the time of rediscovering the Bardowā *Thāna* because of the famine caused by the break of cultivation due to the aggression of the Mughal emperor Mirzumla at that time. She managed the hardship with a little amount of rice and earnestly served each of the *bhaktas* everyday. Thus, she helped her

followers in overcoming the famine, and therefore, they regarded her as *Lakṣmī*, the deity of treasure.

At the behest of Caturbhja Ṭhākura, Āi Kanaklatā started to preach the religion of Śaṅkaradeva, but at the beginning, the Mahantas were reluctant to acknowledge her as a religious preacher, therefore, they gathered at a place to take a test of her eligibility to be a religious head. Accordingly, they collectively interrogated her about the deep-rooted meaning of the religious philosophy embedded in different scriptures. Āi Kanaklatā aptly answered to each of their questions without any hesitation. She explained the inner essences of the principle of *Eka-Śaraṇa –Hari-Nāma-Dharma* - the 24 *tattva*, the *Ātmā-tattva*, the *Brahma-tattva* and the characteristics of *bhaktas* to the Mahantas. The 24 *tattva* is explained as follows-

prathame sunio cabisa tattvara barṇan I
rupa rasa gandha sabda g ākāś I
prthvi apa teja bāyu daśaru parkāś II
asthi carmma ghrāṇa cakṣu jihvā samannita I
*ehi cabisa tattva lekha karilo bidita II.*⁶⁶

She again explained the characteristics of *bhaktas* –

śunioka sakhi kahu bhakatara lakṣaṇa I
avatāra kuti guru brahma ekajana II
najāni bhaktaka pāpī ninde durācāra I
sehise parama drohi gati nāhi tāra II
indriya bṛīta kicu nakare ākrośa I
*sehise parama sādhu alpate santuṣa II*⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ibid, p-181

⁶⁷ Ibid. p-187

The Mahantas were amazed at the scholarship of Āi Kanaklatā, and they whole-heartedly acknowledged her as the real ancestor of the religion of Śaṅkaradeva.

Āi Kanaklatā along with some *bhaktas* set sail by boat through the Brahmaputra to upper Assam with a view to have first-hand knowledge how the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* was preached and spreaded in upper Assam. She anchored her boat at the port of Jakhalabandha of Kaliabar and stayed there almost a fortnite, but she could not proceed in her mission further, for she had been suffering from small pox and breathed her last.

Āi Kanaklatā's becoming of the religious head, breaking all the constraints of the medieval patriarchal society of Assam and her preaching and spreading of the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* organizing the *bhaktas* from lower Assam to upper Assam is a remarkable event in the history of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* of Assam. In this way, she performed the role of a spokesperson of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult.

4.2.XIX. Padmapriyā:

Padmapriyā was the sole daughter of Bhabānīpurīyā Gopāl Ātā, a disciple of Mādhavadeva and the establisher of the *Kālasamhati*, a sub-section of the vaisnavite religion. She was brought up in an environment of vaisnavite tradition from her childhood, and was influenced by and attracted to it. Gopāl Ātā advised his daughter to be impartial to everybody. She earnestly followed her father's advice, for which she could mould her character as good mannered one though she had no formal education. Mādhavadeva and Kālindī Āi highly appreciated her for her good manner.

One day, Padmapriyā wanted to accompany to her father when he wanted to go to salute his *Guru*, his religious preceptor Mādhavadeva. Gopāl Ātā told her that if she could show respect and salute the house cleaner of his *Guru*, he would bring her along with him, and then she replied that she could do so. Accordingly, when she saluted the house cleaner, the *Guru* asked Gopāldeva whose daughter she was. Gopāldeva replied that she was his daughter, and then the *Guru* appreciating her said she was a well cultured one.⁶⁸ In another myth narrated in *Śrī Śrī Gopāl Devar Caritra*, compiled by Pūrṇānda Dwija, Padmapriyā had to salute a house cleaner of Mādhavadeva. Padmapriyā had acquired deep knowledge of spirituality, morality and humanistic values from the moral and spiritual teachings provided by her father from her childhood, and these were manifested in her behaviour while she dealt with the people of different strata of the society. The parents of Padmapriyā selectet Jadumoni the best among the disciples of the Gajalā satra, and proposed him to be her life partner, but Jadumoni refused to accept the proposal, and thereafter she remained celibate for her whole life. There is another myth regarding the marriage of Padmapriyā. According to this myth, “Padmapriyā was married to a *Śākta*, a worshipper of power, after she had taken initiation from her father. She left her husband and returned to her parent’s home, because she could not practise the religion that her husband practised.”⁶⁹ The second myth is a moot point, because it is impossible for a veteran vaisnavite like Gopāl Ātā to have had his daughter married to a *Śākta*, as love has no tryst with hatred. Whatever the happenings centering her married life might be, but it was

⁶⁸ Lekharu, Upendra Chandra. (ed.). (5th Edn., 2006). *Kathā-gurucaritra*. P 319

⁶⁹ Barman, Siba Nath. (ed.). (1st Edn., 1997). *Asamīyā Sāhityar Buḍhañji, Dvitīya Khaṇḍa*. P 612.

obvious that an indifferent attitude towards married life was gradually grown up in her mind for the trouble she had faced concerning her marriage, and she began to compose spiritual lyrics on Vaiṣṇavite philosophy. She praised her father along with Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva as integral parts of the Lord Viṣṇu in her lyrics, for she took him as her religious preceptor, not only that, following the foot prints of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, she introduced asceticism towards the illusions of the mundane world, and servile devotion to the Lord Viṣṇu in her lyrics.

Padmapriyā had engaged herself in composing Vaiṣṇavite devotional lyrics almost to the end of the sixteenth century, a period, when there was no provision of women education. She became the first Vaiṣṇavite woman lyricist of the *Kālasamḥati*. In the prospect of spreading and preaching the religious principle of Śaṅkaradeva, the lyrics she composed have greater importance, because Śaṅkaradeva's religious teachings have been meticulously embedded in those lyrics, and these are sung as devotional songs in the *satras* under *Kālasamḥati*. Moreover, this practice is still in vogue sporadically in the *satras* of present day's Nagaon district of middle Assam. It is evident from the above discussion that Padmapriyā unconsciously performed the role of a spokesperson of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult through her composition of devotional lyrics, unconsciously because she had no intention of spreading and preaching Śaṅkaradeva's religious teachings, but her lyrics have been carrying Śaṅkaradeva's religious teachings from generation to generations.

The women mentioned in the hagiographical accounts of Śaṅkaradeva and their relation with his *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* are discussed above, and it is revealed from the discussion that these women have immense contribution in the

preaching and spreading of the teachings of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. Most of the husbands of these women were disciples, or followers of Śaṅkaradeva, and they could practise Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*, for, they were relieved from their household duties by their wives. These women not only relieved their husbands from their household duties, but also helped the other *bhaktas* in different ways. They cooked meals and feed the *bhaktas* besides performing their household duties; even they stood by the side of the *bhaktas* whenever they faced any kinds of hardship. In this respect, the names of the wife of Nārāyaṇ Dās Ṭhākur Ātā, the wife of Gopāl Das Ṭhākur Ātā and Āi Kanaklatā can be mentioned. With the opening of the door of religion for women in taking part in religious matters, the Vaisnavite religion took a new turn and the Vaisnavite renaissance was started in the society. Śaṅkaradeva wanted to elevate the social status of the women of the lower caste of the society. The initiation of the maidservants like Candarī, Dhvajā, Ubanā etc., the selection of Satī Rādhikā to block the Tembuwānī rivulet and the appointment of women as religious head and *Medhi* elevated the social status of the women of the lower strata of the society. The womenfolk, getting an elevated status in the society, became interested to religious matters and began to practise *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* in free and fair mind. Those women who kept their relation with the *bhaktas* showed their servitude and generosity to the *bhaktas*, and being encouraged with the teachings of humanity, dedication and sacrifice of *Ekasāraṇa-harināma-dharma*, they dedicated their service for the well-being and convenience of the *bhaktas* in practising Śaṅkaradeva's religion smoothly.

It is revealed in the context of the society of medieval age that women have played important roles in preaching and spreading the *bhakti* cult of Śaṅkaradeva. They played their roles in some cases directly and in some others indirectly in the course of their social as well as household lives, moreover, in some cases they played their roles without their being aware of what they have done, but these have great impact in the spreading and preaching of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult. It does not matter how they performed their roles or contributed to in the preaching and spreading of the philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva, but it is evident from the above discussion that without their contributions, the *bhakti* cult of Śaṅkaradeva would not have been spread so widely nor would have been rooted so deeply into the core of the Assamese society.