

## CHAPTER-VI

# ŚAṆKARADEVA'S CULTURAL DEVICES AND MASS COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

Culture usually is an attractive device. It magnetizes the people of all classes, castes, religions as well as ages. Śaṅkaradeva was not only a writer but also a cultural innovator. His tremendous contributions enriched not only the literary storehouse of Assam but also the cultural reservoir of the land. During the time of Śaṅkaradeva maximum people were illiterate. A limited number of people could understand the literature and others could not. Therefore Śaṅkaradeva innovated some cultural elements which included the songs, dramas, dances, musical instruments etc. All of those were too based on theological messages. The subject- matter of all those cultural elements was purely devotional. Those elements were very much attractive that even the illiterate people of different levels of age, sex and ethnic group could understand the core messages what the particular piece of culture was going to disseminate.

### 6.1 Śaṅkaradeva's Cultural Works: An Overview

Culture has a great power to impact the society. It is a powerful mechanism to make a society or an individual educated or cultured. Śaṅkaradeva, when lead the renaissance, adopted some cultural devices to disseminate the message of *Bhakti* among the masses. He developed the following cultural devices to propagate devotional ideologies:

- *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā*
- *Bargīts*
- *Bhaṭimās: Deva bhaṭimās, Nāṭ bhaṭimās, rāj Bhaṭimā*
- *Toṭaya*
- *Nṛtya: Sūtradhārī, Kṛṣṇa bhaṅgi, Gopibhaṅgi, Cāli, jhumurā, Nṛtyabhaṅgi, rāsa, Yuddhar nāc, Bhavoriār nāc, dhemālir nāc, Ojapalir nāc.*
- Musical instruments

## 6.2 Cultural Devices as Mode of Mass Communication

### 6.2.1 *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ:*

A special class of drama written in vernacular language by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavdeva is known as *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ*. And the performance or enactment of *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ* is called *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā*. Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavdeva called it *Nāṭka*, *Nāṭ* or *Yātrā*, not *Aṅka* or *Aṅkīyā*. It is thought that as the plays were written in one plot (*aṅka*) and did not have divisions, the followers called them as *Aṅkīyā*.

According to Kaliram Medhi the term '*Aṅka*' commonly means a book of drama whereas '*Nāṭ*' or '*Nāṭaka*' literally means an action or a thing. The Assamese drama came into existence not later than 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Though the framework of the Assamese drama was borrowed from the classical Samskr̥t drama, yet it grew up with ethnic as well as native flavor.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Medhi, K. (1997). *Ankawali*. Guwahati. P I, II, XI

Śaṅkaradeva was the first proponent of Assamese drama. The plots of the dramas were all taken from *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* except the *Rāma Vijaya nāṭ* of which the story was based on *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>2</sup> Lord Kṛṣṇa plays the central role in Vaiṣṇava faith and was thought to be the source of the whole universe. Śaṅkaradeva accepted the Kṛṣṇa based Vaiṣṇava faith and *Bhakti* (devotion) towards Kṛṣṇa as the focal mechanism to renovate the contemporary Assamese society which was torn by different forces in different aspects like political, social, religious as well as culture. Śaṅkaradeva used the extra-terrestrial power of Lord Kṛṣṇa as the core instrument to eliminate such social evils. In Vaishava faith *Bhakti* (devotion) plays the most important role. Devotion here means the utmost love and affection to Lord Kṛṣṇa. During that period of Śaṅkaradeva maximum numbers of people were illiterate. Most of them could neither read nor write. The written devices, for them, were not convenient means to acquire something regarding religion and so on. So farsighted Śaṅkaradeva thought that visual devices would be more effective to learn something than the audio one. To propagate *Bhakti*, therefore, an audio-visual device was thought by Śaṅkaradeva to be effectual one. As a result of which the *Bhāonā*-the first ever audio-visual medium of Assam was came into being.

*Aṅkīyā Nāṭs* composed by Śaṅkaradeva found in written forms are- *Patnī Prasāda*, *Kālī Damana*, *Keli Gopāla*, *Rukmiṇī Haraṇa*, *Pārijata Haraṇa* and *Rāma Vijaya*. According to Kāliram Medhi *Kālī Daman* was the first play written by Śaṅkaradeva in 1518. Again according to Dr. Maheswar Neog the first play written by

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<sup>2</sup> Neog, M. (2018). *Sankaradeva and His Times Early History of Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Assam*. P. 252

Śaṅkaradeva was *Patnī Prasāda* which was written in 1550. Anyway, it is true that the plays were composed on or before the middle ages of 16<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately two plays written by the playwright are not found in written forms.

Śaṅkaradeva composed the plays collecting various elements from various sources. *Saṃskṛt* plays were there before the time of Śaṅkaradeva. But the *Saṃskṛt* plays could not enter the hearts of the common masses as the language was a very tough one and was not easily understandable by common people. Moreover it was said to be a language of aristocrats and higher class people. So people felt hassle with *Saṃskṛt* language as well as the plays written in that language. But from the time immemorial there had been prevailing some folk dances and drama programmes. Among those the Yakṣyagāna of Karnataka, Kathakali of Kerala, Terukuttu of Tamilnadu, Bhawai of Gujrat, Lalita of Maharashtra, Rasa Leela and Ram Leela of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, Yatra of Bengal were the significant folk cultural programmes prevailed during that periods. As Śaṅkaradeva made two pilgrimages during his lifetime, so it was assumed that he acquired abundant knowledge and conception from those and applied them in local culture of Assam. But the plays composed and directed by him were not straightly copied from those folk cultures, but were partially influenced by them in production, management, maintenance and enactment.

The *Aṅkīyā Nāṭs* possess some significant characteristics.<sup>3</sup> They are:

- Predominance of *Sūtradhāra*

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<sup>3</sup> Sarma, S. (2013). *Asomiya Natya Sahitya*. P.11

- Prevalence of songs, *śloka*s and *payāra*
- Use of Brajāvalī language
- Poetical songs and dances
- Rhythmic prose

The main aim of *Aṅkīyā Nāṭs* was to communicate the message of *Bhakti* (devotion) among the common masses. The subject matters of *Aṅkīyā Nāṭs* were drawn from *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. They were composed with enthralled songs, dances, tuned dialogues, musical instruments etc. The *Aṅkīyā Nāṭs* bear some resemblances of *Samskṛt Nāt*.

A mass communication is a process whereby mass-produced messages are transmitted to large anonymous, hetero-generous masses of receivers. It is a component system made up of four essential components:

- Sender/s
- Receiver/s
- Message/s
- Channel/media/ medium

Here, the sender may be an author, a producer, an individual or an agency or institution etc. The receivers are the targeted audience to whom the sender sends or disseminate the message. The message is the content of information or news which is being sent to the audiences. And the channel or medium is that through which the

message, news, the entertainment content or the visual is being passed to a large number of people.

The works of Śaṅkaradeva can be divided into two main categories: literary works and cultural works. Among those worthy productions, the *Bhāṇā*, as an audio-visual programme, was considered to be more convenient and effective system to propagate ideas of devotional ideologies. Śaṅkaradeva also thought the *Bhāṇā* to be suitable mechanism to fulfill his mission of propagating *Bhakti*. So in the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ*s some devices or factors facilitate the same to become more popular medium of mass communication to disseminate *Bhakti* among those masses. Devīces of mass communication of an *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ* can be categorized as follows -

- 1) Theoretical devices
- 2) Practical devices
- 3) Physical devices
- 4) Psychological devices
- 5) Theological devices

The above-mentioned divisions again can be sub-divided into following categories-

#### **6.2.1.1. Theoretical devices:**

- i) Subject-matter
- ii) Language
- iii) *Pūvaraṅga* or *Dhemāli*
- iv) Nāndī verse (invocation or opening prayer)

- v) *Prarocanā*
- vi) *Prastāvanā* (prologue):
- vii) Songs
- viii) Dialogues
- ix) Use of *Sanskṛt* language
- x) Reflection of rural background

#### 6.2.1.1. Theoretical Devices:

##### i) Subject-matter:

A subject-matter is the nucleus of an *Aṅkīyā Nāṭs* which represents a purely theological sentiment. The devotional flavor that exists in the subject-matter of each of the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭs* played the most important role of a communicating device in propagation of *Bhakti*. Śaṅkaradeva wrote and enacted the *nāṭs* which represented the theory of devotion and submissiveness only to Lord Kṛṣṇa. In each play Lord Kṛṣṇa was being depicted as the supreme power of the universe.

*Aṅkīyā Nāṭ* was a dramatic innovation worked out by Śaṅkaradeva for the propagation of neo Vaishnavite ideals all around. Among the six *Aṅkīyā* plays, the stories of five centers round Lord Kṛṣṇa whereas the rest one centers round Lord Rāma. Thus to present the activities and glory of the supreme power in the form of Kṛṣṇa and Rāmā was the exclusive mission of the playwright.

***Patnī Prasāda:*** In the play *Patnī Prasada*, from the very beginning to the end a devotional sentiment is delineated. The entire story centers around the Kṛṣṇa-*Bhakti*.

The *Vipra Patnīs* (the wives of Bipras) were the lovers of Kṛṣṇa. Everyone left their respective households to meet Kṛṣṇa though they were resisted by their husbands. But when Kṛṣṇa told them to go their residences they denied to do so and said:

*O Lord Kṛṣṇa, we are your devotees and servants. We have heard about the holy scriptures. The devotees cannot be turned down. Do not leave us aside. Our husbands and sons will not allow us to enter our houses. We cannot go back home. So, don't leave us aside like this. Let us live the rest of our lives as your servants. So, O Lord, don't leave us.*<sup>4</sup>

Thus the story ends with a devotional sentiment which was portrayed by the *Vipra Patnīs*.

***Kāli Daman*:** The story of the play is developed centering round Lord Kṛṣṇa whereas the central motive was victory of truth over the falsehood. Like the other Kṛṣṇa-centric plays *Kāli Daman* is the play where the victory of Lord Kṛṣṇa is depicted. The story is based on a conflict between a venomous snake namely Kāli and Lord Kṛṣṇa. Kāli was a snake reigning in a lake named *Kāḷindī*. The snake always kept the water of the lake poisonous by its own venom. Whoever came contact with the water of the lake had to leave life instantly. One day Kṛṣṇa's playmates had to face such a fatal condition. Kṛṣṇa rescued their lives. For that incident the children expressed their devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. After the event Lord Kṛṣṇa was about to kill the proud snake and jumped into the water. First of all Kāli attacked Kṛṣṇa. And Kṛṣṇa lost his sense. After a while Lord Kṛṣṇa rose up and jumped over the hood and started

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<sup>4</sup> Pathak, D. (2015). *Playwright-Preacher Sankardeva His Plays*. P. 96



dancing. Kāli lost his sense and was about to death. The Kāli-wives prayed to Lord Kṛṣṇa and said-

*“O God Supreme! Hurt by the weight of your feet our husband is going to die. Without knowing your grace he (our husband) has bitten you. Now, O Lord, he has received his right punishment. O Lord Kṛṣṇa, spare him. Show your clemency to us. Don’t make us helpless. We beg your grace and compassion by our aprons. We beg you the life of our husband.”* Lord Kṛṣṇa was satisfied and saved the snake’s life.<sup>5</sup>

Again, as the people of Gokula celebrated the victory of Lord Kṛṣṇa over Kalināg in night a wild fire threatened the entire place and spread all around. Lord Kṛṣṇa saved all.

***Keli Gopal:*** It was more musical and less dramatic than the other plays of Śaṅkaradeva. The play is a unique example of both love and devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. The love is nothing but the spiritual love to the Supreme power.

The story of the play developed centering round the *Rasa Krīḍa* of Lord Kṛṣṇa with the *gopīs* of Gokula. The *gopīs* were very much crazy to have Kṛṣṇa with them. They lost their sense on the name of Kṛṣṇa and on the melody of flute and music of Kṛṣṇa. Even they denied to back home leaving Kṛṣṇa. As Kṛṣṇa told them to go back to *Brajadhām*, they cried but moved towards. They continued to feel a sensation within themselves even after reaching *Brajadhāma*.

So, Here in *Keligopāla*, also message of devotional sentiment towards lord Kṛṣṇa is portrayed. It leaves a message that only by hearing (*Śravaṇa*) and chanting

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. P.116

(*Kīrttana*) the glory of Lord one can get the happiness and salvation in his or her life.

It is said:

*hari bhakatika mahimā ki kahabo*

*āhe lokāi pekhu pekhu*

*kalita gati nāhi nāhi*

*jāni nirantare hari bola hari.*

(How can I explain the significance of devotion to the Lord? Try to realize the truth. In the *kaliyuga* only by hearing and chanting the divine name of the lord can one get the desired relief? Try to understand this and remember the holy name of *Hari* all the time.)

***Rukmiṇī Harāṇa***: Like the other plays of the author *Rukmiṇī Harāṇa* also carries a mythological subject matter and begins with an invocation to Lord. The story centers round the love story of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī.

According to the story marriage of Rukmiṇī, daughter of Bhīṣmaka, king of Kuṇḍil, was fixed with Śiśupāla, king of Chedi. On the otherhand, Rukmiṇī loved Kṛṣṇa and vice versa. She was not agreeing to marry Śiśupala. Kṛṣṇa came to know it. The Lord abducted Rukmiṇī on the day before her marriage with Śiśupala. Rukmiṇī felt happy. Rukmiṇī had a feeling of spiritual love for Lord Kṛṣṇa. She had devotional feeling towards Kṛṣṇa. For this devine love she even did not feel hesitation to leave her own parents and family and eventually went away with Lord Kṛṣṇa. This incidents

depicts an example of exceptional devotion towards the Supreme Being. Her craziness towards Kṛṣṇa reflects the pure devotion and utmost love to the Lord in this play.

***Pārijāta Harāṇa:*** It is another magnificent work of Śaṅkaradeva. The story is centering round a flower named *Pārijāta*. The story however ends with incantation of Kṛṣṇa. One day Lord Kṛṣṇa presented his first wife Rukmiṇī with a *Pārijāta* flower. The flower was considered as very precious which was found in heaven only. As soon as Kṛṣṇa's second wife Satyabhāmā heard about this, she became angry and shame being neglected by her husband. She became cool and satisfied after her husband brought the flower for her. As Satyabhāmā got immense pleasure after getting the flower, Rukmiṇī, the sober and cool woman, told to proud Satyabhāmā, "My sister, nothing is superior to Lord Kṛṣṇa. When I have the opportunity to serve Kṛṣṇa, who is also my husband, what more do I want? I will be happy in my service to the Lord. How can I waste my time and energy for a petal of *Pārijāt*?" she further said, "Nothing is superior to pure devotion to the Lord. Therein I get my supreme happiness."

Thus, the character Rukmiṇī is being portrayed as submissive to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Rukmiṇī represents the sentiment of pure devotion to the Lord which is above everything. In the play it is reflected that everything even the highest satisfaction in life can be achieved only through devotion in mind to the Supreme Being.

***Rām Vijaya:*** The last ever play written by the playwright *Rām Vijaya* is a *Rāmāyaṇa* based play. Although the *Bhakti* is not the central motive of the play yet the play ends with a devotional flavor. The marriage of Rāma and Sītā can be regarded as a

devotional phenomenon. The meeting of Rāma and Sītā can be said as extra terrestrial with profound devotional flavor.

## ii) Language:

Śaṅkaradeva composed the *AṅkīyāNāṭs* mainly to instigate spiritual dogma in hearts and minds of the masses and to involve their minds and souls in the devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Śaṅkaradeva returned from pilgrimage with abundant experiences and felt that *Bhāonā* would be the appropriate device to disseminate something among the masses. But for doing so he had to maintain mainly two important things. He had to uphold firstly the dramatic sincerity of the plays and secondly the comprehensiveness of the masses. Therefore he used the *Brajāvalī* language- which is a kind of Maithili mixed with Bengali in Bengal and Assamese in Assam with some earlier *Apabhraṃsa* and contemporary western Hindi (Brajbhasha) forms.<sup>6</sup>

*Aṅkīyā Bhāonā* went in the vicinity of the hearts and minds of the masses and succeeded to play the role of a communicating device for the following reasons:

- i) The local as well as spoken form of Assamese language was thought to be unsuitable for the characters like Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Rāma in *Aṅkīyā Bhāonās*. As a result *Brajāvalī* worked as suitable language for all the characters of the play.
- ii) *Samskṛt* was not easily understood by the common masses. So the audience found *Brajāvalī* very easy to understand while watching a *Bhāonā*.

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<sup>6</sup> Chatterji, S. K. (1970). *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India*. P.62

iii) *Brajāvalī* was a simple, standard, sweet and melodious language. So it had the capacity to attract the mind and attention of the common masses.

iv) As *Brajāvalī* possessed the influence of old Assamese language therefore the common masses found a domestic smell in the language used in *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ*.

### iii) *Pūrvaraṅga or Dhemāli* (preliminaries):

The *Saṁskṛt* dramatic theory requires a series of preliminaries which must be performed before the actual drama begins.<sup>7</sup> So *dhemāli* took place before the beginning of the *Bhāonā*. It was an instrumental reverberation of a group of some people. The performance of the religious drama is customarily preceded by a day long celebration of holy songs with musical instruments. The group of people who took place in that celebration were called as the *Gāyan*(singers) and *Bāyan*( players of instruments).

### iv) *Nāndī Verse* (invocation or opening prayer):

According to Maheswar Neog it forms part of the preliminaries which is incorporated in Śaṅkaradeva's plays.<sup>8</sup> In the Assamese plays the *Sūtradhāra* recites the *Nāndī* and there are two *Nāndī* verses- one in praise of Kṛṣṇa or Rāma and other hints the plot. In Śaṅkaradeva's plays *Nāndī* was a commendation prayer sung by the *Sūtradhāra* or by the *Gāyana* (singers)-*Bāyana* (players of instruments) chanting the glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Rāma. For example:

<sup>7</sup> Medhi, K. (1997). *Ankawali*. Guwahati. P.Xiii

<sup>8</sup> Neog, M. (2018). *Sankaradeva and His Times Early History of Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Assam*. P. 259

*jaya jaya jagajīva rāma /*

*kayalo paḍi paraṇāma //*

*yāhe guṇa nāma muhe gāi /*

*pāpī parama pada pāi //*

*ohi bhava tāpa apāra /*

*yāhe caraṇe karu pārā //*

(Hail! Hail! O Lord Rāma- The soul of existence- we pray to you/ by chanting whose name, one can gain the Lord's grace! By recalling whose name, one can get across the sea of pains and pathos...)

Thus the Nāndī verse carried the messages of Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Rāma and which were sent to the audiences.

v) **Prarocanā** (Laudatio or propitiation): It gives the content of the play and it arouses expectation by means of its praise. Before entering of the characters to the stage, the *Sūtradhāra* praises the play and the playwright addressing the audiences so that they get attracted towards the play.

*bho bho sabhāsada yūya śriṇuta sāvadhanataḥ I*

*keligopālaṁ nāmedoṁ nāṭkoṁ muktisādhakam II*

(O our audience friends, listen to me carefully. This play Keligopāla-is meant for one's redemption you will be spiritually redeemed by listening to this play.)

vi) **Prastāvanā**(prologue): Before the play went on, the *Sūtradhāra* along with his assistants made a conversation regarding how and when the characters would enter to the stage. Such dialogues and conversation drew the attention of the audiences towards the play as well as the characters.

vii) **Songs**: Songs were other glittering factors which facilitated the *Ankīyā Bhāonā* to work as a medium to communicate devotional messages. From the very beginning to the end of an *Ankīyā Bhāonā* some melodious songs and hymns were there. Three types of songs were seen in an *Ankīyā Bhāonā*-

- *Bhaṭimā*
- Songs with *Rāga* and *Tāla*
- *Payāra*

**Bhaṭimā (devotional lyric)**: It was one kind of panegyric song. It was generally sung in praise of emperor, divine being or God. Śaṅkaradeva added the *Bhaṭimā* in the plays in order to enchant the name of Lord Kṛṣṇa so that audience could not find any obscurity in grasping the glory. In general, in *Ankīyā Nāṭs* two types of *Bhaṭimā* were there- *Ādi Bhaṭimā* or *Maṅgalācaraṇa Bhaṭimā* and *Antya Bhaṭimā* or *Muktimaṅgala Bhaṭimā*. For example-

*Ādi or Maṅgalācaraṇa Bhaṭimā* (opening prayer):

*jaya jaya kṛṣṇadeva nija amśa /*

*līlā nāśita kaṁsa savaṁśa //*

*jākeri caritra bhakata avataṁsa /*

*kamalā keli kamala kalahaṁsa // (Pārijāta Haraṇa)*

(Hail, Lord Kṛṣṇa / The part of His incarnate scheme/ All for His divine acts/ One who destroyed Kaṁsa / And the demons/ The ornaments for the devotees/ Pure like the lotus adorning)

*Antya Bhaṭimā* or *Muktimāṅgala Bhaṭimā* (Benediction Verse):

*jaya jaya jagata janaka yadudeva /*

*pada paṅkaja raja aja karu seva //*

*yohi harala rukmiṇīkeri māna /*

*sohi karatu nitya mukuti vidhāna //(Rukminī Haraṇ)*

(O Lord, Your ways are divine/ your grace is inscrutable/ those who are devoted to you/ you become their redeemers/ just you have redeemed the Love of Rukmiṇī)

**Songs with *Rāga* and *Tāla*:** these were the intricate part of an *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ*. There are as many as one hundred and nineteen numbers of songs of this particular section of the six plays written by Śaṅkaradeva. This type of song is of three types:

- Songs of characters and circumstances
- Songs of mental situation of the characters
- Tuned Dialogues

Those songs strengthened the dimension of the plays. Rhythmic songs helped the audiences to grasp the focus area of the play.



**Payār:** Another section of songs found in *Aṅkiā* plays are *payār*. These are mainly narrative and panegyric. Some of these songs are sung with musical instruments and melodious dialogues.

So such songs grabbed the viewers' attention and also delighted them psychologically.

#### viii) Dialogues:

The dialogues used in *Aṅkiyā Bhāonās* were simple and natural but more dramatic. They were much tuned and enthralled that touched the hearts of the audiences. Hence the language had a domestic flavor so the audiences found it too easy to understand. The devotional aroma was properly reflected in the enchanted dialogues. Significantly the term “*āhe sāmājika loka*” had addressed to all the audience sitting in the auditorium and also represented the whole society. As a result, the society understood the message what the *Bhāonā* wanted to disseminate. The texts or speech revealed by the *Sūtradhāra* was another factor that helped to understand the message what the *Bhāonā* tended to disseminate. The *Sūtradhāra* simply explained the situation with lyrics what had taken place and what was going to happen. So the audiences could get the meaning easily.

#### ix) Essence of *Samskṛt* Language:

*Samskṛt* is called as *Devabhāṣa*. So use of *Samskṛt* increased the status of *Aṅkiyā Nāṭs*. In *Aṅkiyā Nāṭs ślokas* were used in *Samskṛt* language. So such *ślokas* attracted the attention of the masses.

x) **Reflection of rural background in *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ*:**

Though the subject matter of *Aṅkīyā* plays were taken from *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* or *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* yet in the plays there reflected some scenes of folk life of the contemporary Assam which helped the plays in getting popular among the masses of the contemporary society.

**6.2.1.2. Practical devices:**

- i) *Sūtradhara* and the actors
- ii) Conglomeration of different human and religious elements
- iii) Direct participation of public

There are some factors which themselves helped to make a communication between the masses and the *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā*.

i) ***Sūtradhār* and characters:**

***Sūtradhāra*:** It was one of the most significant elements of *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ*. He inaugurated the enactment with the recitation of *Nāndī śloka* and remained till the end of the play at the stage. He announced the entry of the characters and introduced them with the audience, directed them whatever and whenever to do something. The *Sūtradhār*, moreover, delivered a substantial and ethical subject-matter of the story. Thus the *Sūtradhāra* of an *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā* played the role of a/an-

- Director
- Analyzer

- Prompter
- Manager
- Coordinator etc.

Therefore,

- The audiences understood the subject matter easily.
- The audiences recognized the characters easily.
- *Sūtradhāra* made a communication between the *Bhāonā* and the audience
- The audience found the *Bhāonā* interesting.

**Characters:** An actor or a character was in those days called a *nartaka* or *naṭuvā* (dancer). Again today's common word *bhāvariya* is applied to mean the *nartaka* or *naṭuvā*. The terms *nartaka* or *naṭuvā* points to the predominating element of dance in dramatic representation.<sup>9</sup>. The characters of *Aṅkiyā* plays were regarded by the common masses as God or Supreme Being. But as the masses involved themselves in *Bhāonā* and performed themselves as Lord Kṛṣṇa , Lord Rāma, Nanda, Yaśodā, Nārada, Brahmā, Indra, Sītā, Daśaratha and so on and saw their activities reflected in their own activities they became more attracted towards *Aṅkiyā Bhāonā* and the messages of devotional sentiment which were intended to disseminate.

Another important thing is that costumes and ornaments, used by the actors attracted of the audiences. The body languages could influence the common people.

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<sup>9</sup> Neog, M. (2018). *Sankaradeva and His Times Early History of Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Assam*. P.268

As a result the masses enjoyed the *bhāonā* and tried to acquire the theological ideas from the subject-matters.

**ii) Conglomeration of different people and groups of people:**

People rushed to this musical function of *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā* from far and wide when one got the information and told the others. As one watched, one told the story to the other people or group of people. Thus all the people became attracted towards the *Bhāonā*. Thus a sentiment of Kṛṣṇa *Bhakti* or Rāma *Bhakti* developed among the masses.

**i) Direct participation of public:**

The people directly participated in the performance of *Bhāonā*. Thus they came to know the inner meaning of *Bhāonā* and became interested in it. :

**6.2.1.3 Physical Devices:**

- i) Spacious auditorium or theater hall
- ii) Masks and effigies
- iii) Costumes
- iv) Musical instruments

Some factors were used in the *Bhāonā* for a better dramatization. Such factors enchanted the programme and mainly succeeded in disseminating the inner meaning of the *Bhāonā*. Such factors were:

- i) **Spacious auditorium:** The auditorium of *Bhāonā* was very spacious so that a large number of people could gather for that musical extravaganza. Śaṅkaradeva set up *Hari*

*Gṛha* (which) his followers called *Nāmaghar* later on), a place of congregational prayer of masses. The *Bhāonā* function was held there. It was a spacious venue opened for all. No boundary wall was there at *Nāmaghar*. Therefore at *Nāmaghar* premise:

- a) A huge number of people could gather at the same time.
- b) The door was opened for all, so that people irrespective of religion, caste, class as well as gender could gather there for watching *Bhāonā*.
- c) The masses experienced an environment of acquiring something together.
- d) They could enjoy a live show of the heavenly activities.
- e) Hence people from various societies met together, they shared knowledge with each other.

So in a nutshell, in disseminating the internal and eternal messages of *Ankīyā Nāṭa*, *Nāmghar* played role of:

- i) An open theatre hall
- ii) A social institution
- iii) A discussion centre
- v) A meeting place
- vi) A religious center

ii) **Effigies and Masks:** Effigy was a man-made model or figure to represent something in a *Bhāonā*. Generally these were made from bamboo and were painted to represent demons or animals. In a play according to the demand a large size of effigy

was built and the man of the particular role entered to it to represent himself as demanded by the play and spoke from within the same. It was one of most significant items of a *Bhāonā* which made it easy to understand what the actors were going to perform. For example, a large size of serpent-demon Kāli was built to demonstrate the *Kāli Daman* play.

Mask was another man-made object used in the *Bhāonā* made of wood, paper, bamboo etc. It was a cover put on the face completely or partly. As the character put on the mask the real face of the persons concealed beneath the mask and the person changes to any animal, devil etc according to the play.

Thus effigies and masks aided the play to represent the popular character of particular play.

So the both helped the audience -

- i) to understand the dramatic story
- ii) to get attracted towards the theological meaning of the *Bhāonā*
- iii) to make the *Ankīyā Bhāonā* popular among the masses
- iv) to make the *Ankīyā Bhāonā* interesting for masses so that they become interested inr them

**iii) Costumes:** The costume was another important element of *Ankīyā Nāṭ*. Costume was important because whenever an actor wore the particular costume it represented that particular character of the play. Costumes were varied from actor to actor and were different for male to female. Specially:

- i) A particular costume pattern represented a particular character of the play.
- ii) The costumes were incorporated with ethnic flavor.
- iii) The costumes were colorful and decorated with ornaments.
- iv) The costumes maintained the reticence of the glamorous function.

Because of those characteristics the costumes were very much essential for attracting the audiences in the following ways -

- i) The costumes made the audience easy to recognize the character.
- ii) The ethnic flavor of the costumes helped the play to become popular among the ethnic groups and of the society.
- iii) The costumes attracted the minds and hearts of the audiences.
- iv) The colorful costumes made the plays very attractive.

**iv) Musical instruments:** The *Aṅkīā* plays were incorporated with melodious musical instruments. The audience found it to be very exciting and mind blowing and so that the people rushed to watch the performanc. In *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā* mainly *Tāl* and *Mṛdaṅga* or *Khol* were used.

#### **6.2.1.4. Psychological Devīces:**

- i) Source of entertainment
- ii) Source of motivation
- iii) Remedy of fulfilling curiosity

i) **Source of Entertainment:** The *Aṅkīyā* plays were compositions of singing, dancing, musical instruments, tuned dialogues and decorative dresses and so on. Those elements provided lots of quality entertainment and refreshment to the common masses.

ii) **Source of Motivation:** Those entertaining tools such as songs, dances, dialogues, costumes and masks, attracted the common masses to participate in the cultural functions and to learn easily the inner meaning of the plays.

iii) **Remedy of Fulfilling Curiosity:** the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭs* fulfilled the curiosity of the common masses of knowing devotional stories of God.

#### 6.2.1.5. Theological Devices::

- i) Customary actions cum spiritual objects
- ii) Spiritual circumstances

i) **Customary actions cum spiritual objects:** During the time of enactment of an *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā* some entity within the theatre premise played some significant roles. They were- the *agnigada* (a wooden frame decorated with nine earthen lamps), the *candratāp* (a piece of cloth hanging just above the performance locality or the stage) and the *ār-kāpor* (the curtain from behind which every actor made an impressive entrance towards the *maṇikūṭ*). The *agnigada* was composed of nine numbers of *āriyās*. These nine numbers of *āriyās* represent the nine ways of devotion. And among these nine, two were comparatively large in size, which considerably highlighted the two emphasizing ways of devotion i.e. *Śravaṇa* (listening) and *Kīrtana* (chanting). The *candratāp* represented the heavenly place where Gods and Goddesses did live. Before



entering the area just below the *candratāpa*, the actors offered a prayer pointing to the *maṇikūṭ* from behind the *ār-kāpor*. Here the *ār-kāpor* represented the earthly illusion of human being. Thus customary actions and objects made people learn that to meet the almighty all should have devotion in their minds and before being blessed of God the human being remain under illusion.

ii) **Spiritual Circumstances:** some necessary ingredients used in the *Bhāonā* programme were thought to be extra terrestrial as well as unearthly. For instance, the pendal placed for *Bhāonā* was thought to be unearthly one. The bamboo sticks of the pendal were believed to be the representatives of different chapters of *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Different places and corners of the premises were thought to be positions of different gods and goddesses, such as Śaṅkara in the east, Bhāskara in the west, Viṣṇu in the middle and upper portion where as the other parts were different positions of Candra and the assistants. Moreover the instruments used in the plays were thought to be heavenly.

Thus *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ* played a role of medium of communication in propagating *Bhakti*. This radiant program was first innovated by Śaṅkaradeva in Assam more than five hundred years ago. From that time till date it has been playing vital role as one of the strongest media of communication communicating religious philosophy. The time of Śaṅkaradeva was not of fastest technology. Communication and transportation system were very poor during that period. In spite of such lacking Śaṅkaradeva thought for the society, worked for the society people. To propagate philosophical ideas he innovated such an effective audio-visual medium called *Bhāonā*. And for this

he wrote out as many as six *AṅkīyāNāṭs*. He basically targeted those masses who were illiterate, who could not comprehend the *Samskṛt* language to read out the epics and those who were deprived by priestly communities. Such social phenomena forced him to think of such a program like *Bhāonā*. Today, in spite of availability of modern technology and communication facilities the *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā* has not lost its original magnificence and has been esteemed by the people of all levels and sections of the society.

### 6.2.2 *Bargīt*:

Śaṅkaradeva, the pioneer of Neo-Vaishnavism, used every possible means and tools to spread Bhakti cult in Assam in the form of *Ek Śaraṇa Hari Nām Dharma*. He chose music as an important mean for the same and created a very new and unique genre of music known as Śaṅkrī music. Songs were his important tools by which he tried to spread his spiritual and religious principles. Some of his songs were acknowledged as *Bargīts* by his followers due to their unique nature and significance. He created those particular types of songs with a very specific and sacred purpose. Later, following him, Mādhavadeva, the most prominent disciple of him carried forward that trend of composition of *Bargīts*. The word *Bargīt* is a composition of two Assamese words- *bar* and *gīt*. The English meaning of the word *bar* is great and *gīt* is song. Thus *Bargīt*, as the name suggests simply means great songs created only by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva during medieval period.

Many prominent scholars of Assam differently defined *Bargīt* according to their own interpretations. Dr. Banikanta Kakoti named *Bargīt* as ‘noble numbers’.

The great educationist Pandit Kaliram Medhi termed *Bargiīt* as ‘golden numbers’ or ‘song celestial’. Historian Debendranath Bezboruah mentioned *Bargiīt* as ‘holy songs’.

*Bargiīts* were created in between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Śaṅkaradeva wrote his first *Bargiīt* ‘*mana meri rāma caranehi lāgu*’ in Badarikasrama in 1489 during his first pilgrimage. He, himself, composed around 240 *Bargiīts* and recorded them on *sānchi pāt* (leaves of sanchi tree). A disciple of Śaṅkaradeva named Kamala Bayana took the manuscripts of *Bargiīts* to his residence to practice them. It was quite unfortunate that his house was engulfed in fire and the manuscripts were also got burnt. That incident made Śaṅkaradeva very upset and he stopped composing *Bargiīts* thereafter. Then he asked Mādhavadeva and wished from him to carry forward his legacy of *Bargiīt*. Mādhavadeva somehow recovered only thirty five *Bargiīts* of Śaṅkaradeva which were very fortunately remembered by Kamala Bayana. Mādhavadeva on his part also composed 191 *Bargiīts*.

The *Bargiīts* were basically devotional songs or songs of worshipping God because the subject-matter of the same is *Bhakti* (devotion). *Bargiīts* are purely devotional with spiritual sense and rich melody. *Bargiīts* glorify God Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, and highlights his greatness and supremacy and provide spiritual advices and knowledge.

*Bargiīts* were written in Brajawali language which was not the spoken language, but a mixture of three old languages, viz-Assamese, Maithali and Bengali languages.

The main aims and objectives of composing *Bargīts* were to motivate common people towards Bhaktism and to inculcate main principles and messages of Neo Vaishnavism so that they could easily get the knowledge of metaphysical world and mightiness of Lord Viṣṇu. The simplicity and greatness of *Bargīts* helped a lot to fulfill pre determined aims and objectives of Bhaktism.

The *Bargīts* have a unique structure. They were written in the form of verse. The first stanza of a *Bargīt* is called *Dhrung* which means ‘constant’ in Hindustani style of music. The rest of the stanzas of a *Bargīt* are called *Pada*. The *Dhrung* part is repeated over the due course of singing of rest of the verses.

The *rāgas* of *Bargīts* are time bound.

The songs written by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are only called as *Bargīt*. It is not definitely known how, why and from when this particular class of song composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Madhavadeva came to be known as *Bargīt*. These were the songs of high spiritual flavor. Those songs can also be called as prayer songs. The literally meaning of *Bargīt* is 'great song', 'superior song'. Those devotional lyrics composed by Śaṅkaradeva and his ardent disciple Mādhavadeva which were set in a distinct pattern of melody (*rāga*), which were sung individually as well as in congregational prayers.

**Devices of mass communication of *Bargīt* can be catagorised as follows:**

- 1) Theoretical Devices
- 2) Practical Devices
- 3) Physical Devices
- 4) Psychological Devices

The devices mentioned above can again be sub-devided into following catagories:

### 6.2.2.1 Theoretical Devices:

- I. Subject-matter
- II. Language
- III. *Rāgas* of the songs

**I. Subject-matter:** The subject-matter is the nucleus of *Bargiīts* which represents a purely theological sentiment. The devotional flavor that existed in the subject matter of each of the *Bargiīts* played the most important role as a communicating device in propagation of *Bhakti*. Śaṅkaradeva's *Bargiīts* represented the theory of devotion and submissiveness only to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Lyrics of *Bargīt*, written by Sankardeva, are classified into different catagories.

**Some of them are prayer based:**

Dhrung: *nārāyaṇa kahe bhakati karo terā;*

*meri pāmaru mana mādharma ghane ghana;*

*ghātuka pāpe nāchorā*

Pada: *yata jīva jaṁgama* *kīṭa paṭaṅgama*

*aga naga jaga teri kāyā /*

*savakahu māri* *pūrata ohi udara*

*nāhi karata bhūta dāyā //*

*īśa svarūpe hari* *sava ghaṭe baiṭhaha*

*yaicana gagana biyāpi /*

*nindā bāda piśuna*

*hiṁgsā hari*

*teri karoho hāmu pāpī //*

*kaku śaṅkara kaya karahu karuṇā nātha*

*yo na chāroho rāma vāṇi /*

*sava aparādhaka*

*bādhaka tuvā nāma*

*tāhe śaraṇa lehu jāni //*

(Refrain: O *Nārāyana*, how can I worship thee

O *Mādhava*, my mind becomes sinful so often

Destructive sins do not leave me

Verse:

All moving creatures

worms insects

Fixed vegetations hills univers are thy body

You fill that belley

killing every one

Not showing compassion to the creation

Hari as God

resides in all bodies

Jut as the sky is all pervasive

Condemnation

animosity devilry, Hari

We sinners perpetrate unto thee

Shankara says fervently

be compassionate, Lord

So that I do not give up Rāma's name

All sins are removed by thy name

Knowing that I take resort in it //<sup>10</sup>

(Borkakoti, 2012. Pg 8)

Knowing that I take resort in it.)

*Dhrung:*

*nārāyaṇa caraṇe karoho gohāri*

*viṣaya bilāsa pāśa chāndi indriya mohi*

*ohi luṭe bāṭovārī*

*Pada:*

*nāśā gandha*

*madhura rasa rasanā*

*śravaṇe bividha dhani dhāi*

*nayanā rūpa*

*paraśa tvacha cāhe*

*kāhe bhajaho pahu pāi*

*kāma krodha mada*

*māna moha meri*

*aisava bairī biśāla*

*śaṅkara kaha pahu*

*tuhu bine nāhiāra*

*sevaka pāla gopāla*

(Refrain: I pray at the feet of *Nārāyaṇa*

Organs bound me by rope of mundane pleasures

Thus the dacoit plunders me

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<sup>10</sup> Borkakoti, S.K. (2012). *Great Songs*. P.8

Verse: Nose seeks good smell                      palate seeks nice taste

Ears run after numerous sounds

Eyes seek form    skin seeks touch

How can I worship Lord's feet

Desire anger arrogance                                      respct attachment

These are my great enemies

Śaṅkara says O Lord                                      no one other than thee

Supporter of devotees and *Vedas*.<sup>11</sup>

(Borkakoti, 2012. Pg 10)

**Some bargits were advice based (*Upadeśa pradhāna*):**

*Dhrung:*                      *bolahu rāma nānese mukuti nidānā*

*bhava baitaraṇī, taranī sukha saraṇī*

*nāhi nāhi nāma samānā ii*

*Pada:*                      *nāma pañcānana*                                      *nāde pālavata*

*pāpadantī bhaya bhīta /*

*bulite eka*    *śunite śata nitare*

*nāma dharāma biparīta //*

*bachane buli rāma*

*dharama aratha kāma*

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. P.10



*mukuti sukha sukhe pāya /*

*saakahu parama*

*suhṛda hari nāma*

*chuṭe antakeri dāya //*

*nārada śukamuni*

*rāma nāma bini*

*nāhi kahala gati āra /*

*kṛṣṇa kiṅkara kaya*

*choḍa māyamaya*

*rāma parama tattvasāra //*

Refrain: Utter the name Rāma which only gets salvation

Boat to cross the river of mundane life comfortably

There is none like name

Verse: On the growl of name lion

the sin elephants flee in fear

As one utters, hundreds are liberated by listening

name is such a miraculous religion

On uttering Rāma, religion wealth desire and

salvation pleasure is achieved comfortably

The name Hari is the dearest of all

it dispels crisis of the end moment

Nārada and saint Śuka did not prescribe

any way other than the name Rāma

Kṛṣṇa's servant says give up illusions attachments

Rāma is the ultimate and essential truth.<sup>12</sup>

**Some Bargīts were glory based (Līlā based)**

*Dhrung:*      *dekhu sakhi madhura mūruti hari /*

*dhari adhare pūre mururī //*

*Pada:*          *tanu abhinava ghana kālā /*

*ure lule kadambaku mālā //*

*pāta ambara taḍita jyoti /*

*jvale kambu gale gajamoti //*

*maṇi kaustubha kaṇṭhata lule /*

*cāru śire śikhaṇḍaka ḍule //*

*nīlā alaka lule kapole /*

*karṇata makara kuṇḍla ḍule //*

*bhuja kaṇkaṇa rañje keyūre /*

*kaṭita kaṇaka kiṅkinī jhure //*

*pada paṅkaja mañjīra role /*

*kṛṣṇa kiṅkara śaṅkara bole //*

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. P.16

Refrain: See friend, Hari with beautiful countenance

Plays flute by holding it in lips

Verse: Physique extraordinarily deep blue

Garland of Kadamba flowers hangs on the chest

Lightening glow of yellow apparel

Elephant gem glows in conch-like neck

Kaustubha gem hangs from neck

Peacock tail feather oscillates in fine head

Blue hairs hang in forehead

Spider earrings oscillate in ears

Palms and arms decorated by bracerates

Gold band hangs from waist

Rattlers sound in ankles

Krishna's servant Śaṅkara says.<sup>13</sup>

*Dhrung: madhura mūruti murāru*

*mana dekho hṛdaye hāmāru /*

*rūpe anaṅga saṅge tulonā*

*tanu koṭi sūruja ujyāru //*

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. P.46

*Pada:*            *makara kuṇḍala gaṇḍa*            *maṇḍita khaṇḍita*  
                          *chānda rucismita hāsā /*  
                          *kaṇaka kirīṭa*                            *jaḍita ratanā*  
                          *nava niraja nayana bikāśā //*  
                          *catura ujjala kara*                            *kaṅkana keyūra*  
                          *bhuja maha motima hāru /*  
                          *līlā binodī*                                    *kambu kaumudī*  
                          *cakra kerī kañja dhāru //*

Refrain:        The enemy of Mura has a beautiful countenance  
                          O mind, see him in my heart  
                          The shapeless form comparable to  
                          Billion blazing Suns in beauty

Verse:           Spider-shaped earrings on ears beautify the cheeks  
                          Cultured smile over shadows the moon  
                          Gem- studded golden crown  
                          Eyes glowing like newly blossoming lotus  
                          Golden bangles in four bright arms  
                          Pearl necklace in between the arms  
                          Amusing sports bearing conch shell Kaumudi mace  
                          Playing by disc and bearing lotus.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Borkakoti, S.K. (2012). *Great Songs*. P.4

**II. Language:** One of the main reasons that Śaṅkaradeva composed the *Bargīts* was to instigate spiritual dogma into hearts and minds of the masses and to fill with devotional sentiment for Lord Kṛṣṇa in their minds and souls. After returning from pilgrimage with abundant experiences of religious things Śaṅkaradeva felt that songs and music would be appropriate devices to disseminate religious beliefs among the masses most of whom were illiterate. But for doing that, he had to look into mainly two important things. He had to uphold first, the musical sincerity of the songs and secondly the comprehensiveness of the masses. Therefore, he used the *Brajāvalī* language-the mixture of old Assamese, Bengali, Maithili and Odia to compose those songs.

*Bargīt* went to the vicinity of the hearts and minds of the masses and succeeded to play a role of communicating device for the following reasons:

- i) The local as well as spoken form of Assamese language at that time was thought to be unsuitable for the description of Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Rāma in *Bargīts*. As a result *Brajāvalī* worked as suitable language.
- ii) *Samskṛt* was not easily understood by the common masses. So the masses found *Brajāvalī* very easy to understand while listening a *Bargīt*.
- iii) *Brajāvalī* was a simple, standard, sweet and melodious language as it was a mixture of some vernacular languages. The words used in *Bargīts* had a local flavor. So it had the capacity to attract the minds and attention of the common masses.

- iv) As *Brajāvalī* possessed the influence of old Assamese language therefore the common masses found a domestic smell in the language used in *Bargīts*.

**III. *Rāgas* of the songs:** During the Vaiṣṇava era the *rāgas* were enormously used in the songs. Śaṅkaradeva composed as many as 34 numbers of songs. In all those songs a total of 13 *rāgas* were used. Different ragas were used at different times. There were some definite rules regarding the appropriate times for the use of a particular *rāga* while singing a *Bargīt*. The following are the reasons behind the *Bargīt* became a medium of communication-

- The use of *rāgas* made the *Bargīts* more melodious.
- As the *Bargīts* were sung in different times of a day according to their particular *rāgas*, the audience as well as the common masses were able to catch the inner meaning of the particular song along with an enthralled tune. As a result people became interested towards that particular type of songs and subsequently got attracted towards devotional sentiments.

#### **6.2.2.2. Practical Devices:**

- i) Act of singing
- ii) Act of playing musical instruments
- iii) Direct participation of public

**i) Act of singing:** The *Bargīts* were purely devotional. The subject matter of a *Bargīt* was developed centering religious sentiments. Act of singing a *Bargīt* includes proper pronunciation of verses, proper knowledge of a *rāga* and use of it, proper timing,

accompany of musical instruments, seating arrangement and proper dress code. Generally presentation of a song can attract the audiences easily and *Bargīts* did the same. Śaṅkaradeva tried to express the internal meaning or objectives of a *Bargīts* through an enthralled form which helped him to attract the common masses towards his religious orders. Both the literate and illiterate masses, as a result, could grasp the devotional meaning conveniently through the *Bargīts*.

**ii) Act of playing musical instruments:** Accompany of musical instruments is an essential part of performing *Bargīts*. Khol and tāl are the prime musical instruments developed by Śaṅkaradeva to play with it. The players must know which particular tāl (rhythm) had to be used with a particular *Bargīts*.

**iii) Direct participation of public:** The common masses came to the places where they could listen the *Bargīts*. That helped them to know the inner meaning of *Bargīts* and essence of *Bhakti*.

#### 6.2.2.3. Physical Devices

- i) Spacious Auditorium
- ii) Musical Instruments
- iii) Dress code of the singer and instrument player

**i.) Spacious auditorium:** The performance of *Bargīt* was held in a spacious auditorium where a large number of people could gather for that musical programme. Śaṅkaradeva set up *Harigr̥ha* (which his followers called *Nāmaghar* later on), a place of congregational prayer of masses. The Bhāonā function was held there. It was a

spacious venue opened for all. No boundary wall was there at *Nāmaghar*. Therefore at *Nāmaghar* premise:

- a) A huge number of people could gather at the same time.
- b) It was opened for all so that people irrespective of religion, caste, class as well as gender could gather there for listening a *Bargīts*.
- c) The masses experienced an environment of acquiring something together.
- d) They could enjoy a live show of such heavenly music. Hence people from various societies met together; they shared knowledge with each other.

So in a nutshell, in disseminating the internal and eternal messages of Bhakti through *Bargīts*, *Nāmghar* played role of:

- i) An open theatre hall
- ii) A social institution
- iii) A discussion centre
- iv) A meeting place
- v) A religious center

**ii. Musical instruments:** The *Bargīts* were incorporated with melodious musical instruments. The audiences found it very exciting and mindblowing and so the people rushed to watch it. *Tāl* and *Mṛdamga* or *Khol* were played to perform *Bargīt*.



**iii. Dress code of the singers and the instrument players:** While performing a *Bargīt*, the performer used to wear a particular pattern of dress which was different for male and female.

#### **6.2.2.4. Psychological Devices:**

- i. Source of entertainment
- ii. Source of motivation

**i. Source of entertainment:** Performing a *Bargīt* means compositions of singing, musical instruments, *rāga*, melody, dress code and so on. Those elements provided lots of quality entertainment and refreshment to the common masses.

**ii. Source of motivation:** Attraction creates motivation. Composition of singing, musical instruments, *rāga*, melody and dress code while performing a *Bargīt* could attract the masses. Apart from this, listening to *Bargīt* filled hearts, souls and minds of the masses with a heavenly feeling of peacefulness and devotion.

#### **6.2.3. Cihnayātrā:**

*Cihnayātrā* was a painted play. It was dialougeless. Śaṅkaradeva painted the pictures of heaven with the gods and goddesses setting the same in their respective positions and designed an imaginary world of God. That grand painting, as Śaṅkaradeva called, was *Cihnayātrā*. Painter Śaṅkaradeva himself acted the role of Viṣṇu and was also the director of that speechless drama.

Thus *Cihnayātrā* was a painting and the background for a dialougeless play, perhaps the first play ever composed and enacted in the history of Assamese drama.<sup>15</sup>

According to its history, once Śaṅkaradeva's followers wished to see the Vaikuṇṭha-the land of gods and goddesses and requested their master to show the same in an alive form.

*sāta vaikuṇṭhar a*                      *sātagota nāma*  
*pāriṣada gaṇa mane /*  
*cahibāka prati*                      *savadhāne mati*  
*dekhāō tāka yatane //*<sup>16</sup>

Śaṅkaradeva assured his devotees to show a live picture of the great land, Vaikuṇṭha.

*tomāsāra vākye*                      *sannyāsīta śiki*  
*dekhāibo baikuṇṭhapur /*  
*cihnayātrā nāme*                      *karibo vidita*  
*hariṣa pāibā pracura //*

Accordingly in order to portray the heaven Śaṅkaradeva had to manage something new and arrange them in a unique manner. He went to a potter on the bank of river Kapili and ordered to make a khol.

*ehi buli pāche*                      *yebe save āche*

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<sup>15</sup> Pathak, D. (2012). *Beautiful Mind of Srimanta Sankardeva*. P.90

<sup>16</sup> Thakur, R. (2016). *Guru-Charit* . P. 291

*śaṅkare guṇila mane /*

*kapilī mukhata*

*kumāra āchaya*

*śunu kave sarvajane //*<sup>17</sup>

Śaṅkaradeva painted pictures of the seven heavens on *tulāpāt* with the colors of *heṅgul* and *hāitāl*. The names of the seven heavens were: *Śvetavilāsa*, *Citravilāsa*, *Kupinivilāsa*, *Ambaruvilāsa*, *Puspavilāsa*, *Kanakduttavilās* and *Paṅkajavilāsa*. Śaṅkaradeva arranged fourteen *pāriṣads*, they were Sunanda, Kumuda, Nanda, Puspadanta, Prabā, Vijaya, Jaya, Ujjvala, Jayanta, Kumudākṣa, Biśvasena, Śrutadeva, Garunda and Sātyaki.<sup>18</sup>

*heṅgual hāitāla tetikṣaṇe ānilanta /*

*yatna kari pāte vaikuṇṭhaka lekhilanta //*

*sāto vaikuṇṭara sata likhilā īśvara /*

*thāne thāne lekhilanta dighi sarovara //*

Like other *Aṅka*'s of Śaṅkaradeva the *Cihnayātrā* was also a complete play with the components like *dhemālī*, *śloka*, *sūtra*, *bhaṭimā* and *rāgas* like *Timir*, *Meghamaṇḍlī*, *Vayumaṇḍalī* etc. and also the *gāyans* and *bāyans*. Musical instruments like *khol*, *bortāl*, *bhortāl* were also used. The masks and effigies were also used in *Cihnayātrā*.

*śaṅkare bolanta bāhu lāge cāri khāna /*

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. P. 292

<sup>18</sup> Majumdar, T. (2014). *Srimanta Sankardev: Sahitya-Sanskritir-Jilingoni*. P.124

*śuna ketāi garuḍara mukhā ethā āna //*<sup>19</sup>

*brahmāra mukhāka saṇḍharāye pindhi gailā /*

*harara mukhāka pindhi raṅge dhvajā gailā //*<sup>20</sup>

In *dhemāli* of *Pūrvaraṅga* in *Chihnayātrā*, Śaṅkaradeva beat nine *khol*s togetherly at the same time which was really an excellent task. In *baradhemāli* too Śaṅkaradeva beat five *khol*s.

*bara dhaimālita pañcagoṭa bāilā khola /*

*bāsukīmaṇḍalī vādya bāibāka lāgila //*

*pāce dharilanta deva dhaimālika gai /*

*āge pāce nabagoṭā khola guru lai //*<sup>21</sup>

In *pañkaja vaikuṇṭha* Śaṅkaradeva himself acted as Lord Viṣṇu where his friend Rāmrām played the role of *sūtra*. Again in another *vaikuṇṭha* Śaṅkaradeva played a role of *sūtra* where Rāmrām was Viṣṇu. The remaining five *vaikuṇṭhas* were designed with five characters of Nārāyaṇas and six Lakṣmīs along with the fourteen *pārisads*.<sup>22</sup> Significantly all the characters were equipped with proper costumes, crowns and ornaments etc.

*prathame praveśa nilā śaṅkare śrīhari //*

*rāmrāma guru pāce sūtra diyāilanta /*

<sup>19</sup> Thakur, R. (2016). *Guru-Charit*. P300

<sup>20</sup> Ibid P301

<sup>21</sup> Ibid P300

<sup>22</sup> Neog, M. (2012). *Guru-Charit-Katha*. P183

*aṅgī bhaṅgī kari śrīśaṅkara ye nācanta //*<sup>23</sup>

*ehi chayajana lakṣmī praveśa karāila /*

*chayaro hātata padmamālā gān̄thi dilā //*

*chaya vaikuṇṭhara chaya īśvarara pāśe /*

*gailanta praveśa diyā nāci bahu lāse //*<sup>24</sup>

We find some descriptions of some extra terrestrial incidents in the *Carit puthis* when the *Cihṇayātrā* show was going on in the *Harigr̥ha* premises. In the play when Śaṅkaradeva himself sung the songs in *Meghamāṇḍalī* and *Vāyumaṇḍalī* rāgas fell the leaves of *pātisandha* down.

*vāyumaṇḍalīta rāga dilanta śaṅkara /*

*pātisandha eka vr̥kṣa āche bhayaṅkara //*

*yetikṣaṇe śaṅkare rāgaka tuli dila /*

*dui carana dite pāta samaste sarila //*<sup>25</sup>

The giant waves were seen in the rivers. Day and night and male and female all became one. According to *Caritputhis*, the show continued for seven days and seven nights where nearabout ten thousand people gathered to watch the function.<sup>26</sup>

After the enactment of *Cihnyātrā* some changes were noticed among the common people regarding religious matters. Some Brahmins came to Śaṅkaradeva to

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid P301

<sup>24</sup> Ibid P304

<sup>25</sup> Ibid P299

<sup>26</sup> Neog, M.(1977).Bardowā, Gurucarit. P.62

take initiation. After the performance of that excellent show, common masses became more and more attractive towards splendor of Lord Viṣṇu and at the same time towards the excellence of Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva's teacher Mahendra Kandali, friend Rāmrām and his brother Catūrbhuja and the Brahmin pundits like Kabīratna, Karnapur, Bidyāratna, Rāma Sarasvatī etc, the Bhūñās like Buḍhakhā, Sarbajaya, Baloram, Śrīrāma, Jayarām, Haridās Baniā, Harihara etc came to Śaṅkaradeva to take initiation under him.<sup>27</sup>

*rāmarāma guru caturbhuja narottama /*

*sabe hante bole āmi paśilo śaraṇa //*<sup>28</sup>

*balorāma udāra śrīrāma jayarāma /*

*haridās rāmdās harihare eri kām //*

*satye satye satye śaṅkaraka guru lailo /*

*kāyavākyamane āna caraṇe bhajilo //*

*ubanā banbarā dhvajā mādhai cānderi /*

*save hante śaṅkaraka nāmaskāra kari //*<sup>29</sup>

After that cultural show Śaṅkaradeva too became more fervent to God and religious ideology and all these impacted the common people too. A new genre of devotional sentiments arose among the common people. They began to think lord Viṣṇu as the supreme Being.

<sup>27</sup> Lekharu, U. C. (2006). *Katha-Gurucharit*. P28

<sup>28</sup> Thakur, R. (2016). *Guru-Charit*. P.311

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. P315

#### 6.2.4. *Nāmaprasaṅga*:

As already stated, among the nine ways of devotion, *Śravaṇa* (listening) and *Kīrttana* (chanting) were considered to be the best and supreme ways of devotion in the religious order of devotion. For that purpose i.e to practice both the ways Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavdeva composed four spiritual books, viz. *Kīrttana*, *Daśama*, *Nāmghoṣā*, and *Ratnāvali*. Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavdeva considered *Kīrttana* and *Daśama* as the base books of *Nām Prasāṅga*. Listening and chanting of God's name by an individual or a group of persons in rhythmic manner is called *Nāmaprasaṅga*.

*Kīrttana* is considered to be one of most significant spiritual books composed by Śaṅkaradeva. This book was greatly related with the social and religious life of Assam at that time and is till now also. In this book the glory of Lord Viṣṇu is depicted. As the writer moved from one place to another during his life, he had to compose different parts of the book in different places. Different chapters were scattered in different corners of Assam. One day Mādhavdeva told Rāmacaraṇa that his 'Guru' Śaṅkaradeva wished and ordered him to gather all the chapters of *Kīrttana* scattered in the different places of Assam. But he could not do that. So Rāmacharana had to do that.<sup>30</sup> Later Mādhavdeva praised and thanked Rāmacharana for collecting and compiling the *Kīrttana* composed by his *Guru* Śaṅkaradeva from different places of Assam.

*Daśama* is the Assamese rendering of the first part of 10<sup>th</sup> *Skandha* of *Bhagavatapurāṇa*. It is a book where the life history of Sri Kṛṣṇa is depicted. In

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<sup>30</sup> Lekharu, U. C. (2006). *Katha-Gurucharit*. P357

Assamese social and religious life *Daśama* is considered to be one of most prominent books.

As most of the people were illiterate during that period, so they found the Holy Scriptures very difficult to read and to acquire knowledge from them. As a result the common people remained deprived of learning the spiritual knowledge. Farsighted Śaṅkaradeva therefore thought for something new and extra. He knew that the literary devices, he composed, would not be succeeded to fulfill his desires of making people knowledgeable in religious matter.

Therefore Śaṅkaradeva arranged a congregational chanting system. He chose *Harigr̥ha* as a suitable venue for such congregational prayer.

*śaṅkare kīrttana ghare basilanta āsi /*

*vakata sakale beḍhi basila hariṣi //*

He, along with his other disciples, decided to recite the verses of *Kīrttana* and *Daśama* through a rhythmic and melodious way at *Harigr̥ha* and later that was known as *Nāmprasaṅga*.

*nāmara kīrttana kari samarpiya thailā /*

*daśama payār meli paḍhibe lāgilā //*

There were two systems of chanting the *Kīrttana*-

1. *Kīrttana pāṭh*
2. *Prasaṅga*



In *Kīrttana pāṭh* the *pāṭhak* (reader) started to read the verses and let others to listen the same. Sometimes the reader himself read the verses and listened himself too. Again in *Prasaṅga Kīrttana* one started to recite the verses with melody and the others used to do the same following him. Significantly some of the verses or the padas were sung repeatedly at the end of a particular verse. In this way when the verses were chanted repeatedly the people were able to grasp the literary meaning of the verses and involved themselves in the glorification of God.

1. **Subject matter:** As the basic sources of *Nāmprasaṅga* are *Kīrttana* or *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*, *Daśama*, *Nāmghoṣā* and *Ratnāvali*, therefore the subject matter of the verses of *Nāmprasaṅga* were highly spiritual. Śaṅkaradeva's *Kīrttana* and *Daśama* contains not only Bhakti, but other poetic Rasas also, like Śṛṅgāra, Vīra, Hāsyā etc.
2. **Language:** Most of the works written by Śaṅkaradeva's are in ancient Assamese language. The *Kīrttana* was also composed in the same language. Therefore the people, while chanted the verses of *Kīrttana*, found the language and its meaning very easy to understand.
3. **Rhythm:** For chanting of the verses of *Kīrttana ghoṣā* Śaṅkaradeva systematically congregated the people at a specific venue. The people conglomerated at that specific place. They sat together and chanted the verses together. Their congregational chanting of the rhythmic verses of *Kīrttana* was accompanied with musical instruments and the clappings. The clappings of the

people along with musical instruments made the chanting more melodious and attractive.

4. **Venue:** Śaṅkaradeva chose *Harigr̥ha* or *Kīrttanagr̥ha* for congregational chanting. It was a place where a large number of people could conglomerate and sat together. The premise of *harigr̥ha* was very spacious and people could chant the *Nāmparsaṅga* conveniently.
5. **Secrament:** The secrament was considerable component to attract the masses towards *Nāmparsaṅga*. It was the food item distributed at the end of *Nāmparsaṅga*. It consisted of fruits and cereals. Śaṅkaradeva knew that the fresh fruits and cereals were very good food supplements for supply of energy to human body and to make body healthy.

#### 6.2.5. *Nāmghar*:

Śaṅkaradeva considered *Śravaṇa* (listening) and *Kīrttana* (chanting) to be the supreme as well as best ways among the nine ways of devotion. He said that people would be blessed by the grace of God only through listening to and uttering of the name of God. *Nāmghar* is an intricate institution in the lives of Assamese people. It is the only institution which had constructed the base of and still has been providing the significant support as a strong platform for the Assamese nation. It was a common place where people from different societies came and sat together, worked together and prayed together. People from various societies sang and chanted the devotional songs and prayers regularly along with other religious discussions. Such a prayer hall was first founded by Śaṅkaradeva through which Vaishnavism was preached and

propagated. *Nāmghar* as a social institution enriched the social, cultural, religious, moral, spiritual as well as educational aspects of the society by playing a role of a medium of communication between the religious preachers and the masses.

At the age of thirty two, Śaṅkaradeva left for his first pilgrimage. Along with his teacher Mahendra Kandali, a company of devotees also went for pilgrimage with him in the year 1481. The team visited the most significant holy shrines of India like puri, Mathura, Vrindaban, Setubandha, Varanashi, Prayag, Gokul, Kurukshtra etc. After a long period of time of about twelve years, when Śaṅkaradeva was about forty four, the team returned home with new visions and views.

The twelve years of pilgrimage made Śaṅkaradeva and his company well-experienced on different grounds and counts. All of them met the well known scholars and religious '*Pandits*' of that time. There took place mutual communication among them and held discussions regarding different subjects like philosophy, religion, art, ethics, morality and the sociological aspects etc. Such discussions and exchange of views enriched the fertile minds of Śaṅkaradeva and his team-mates. After reaching home land, he wanted a society free from superstitions, social and economic exploitations and injustice and religious discriminations etc.

Śaṅkaradeva's mission was to reorganize the people on a common platform. The region, Śaṅkaradeva belonged to, was multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-lingual. Demography was varied with the variation of geography. So Śaṅkaradeva thought of a place where people from different lingual groups, castes and races could have same respect, could work and pray together without any hesitation and

discrimination in their minds. And the '*Harigr̥ha*' was developed as result of such thoughts and ignitions.

'*Harigr̥ha*', was the first formal and organized prayer hall of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* without any idol of God which was first constructed at Tembuwani. The idea of such institution was first formulated by Śaṅkaradeva and it was constructed under his direction and supervision.

*Nāmghar* has been considering as the spirit and soul of Assamese culture and this institution brought a new trend to the lives of Assamese people during the fifteenth century. This institution brought a drastic change to all the aspects of social, moral, religious, spiritual, cultural and educational. Moreover it became a center of entertainment for village people

The communication system was not like that of today during those days. No electronic or print or new media were there during that time. Today the media go a long way for development. But Śaṅkaradeva, during fifteenth century, made it possible to disseminate the messages of '*Bhakti*' only by his physical and mental abilities. For the propagation of his new views, he took the help of literary and cultural works which found a place in *Nāmghars* and thus it played the crucial role as a medium of communication.

**Religious:** *Bhakti* Movement was led by Śaṅkaradeva in Assam to disseminate the messages of *Bhakti*. Śaṅkaradeva decided to collect the people at '*Harigr̥ha*'- the common prayer house. He systematized all the activities that would be performed at

*Harigrha*, i.e *Nāmghar*. At *Nāmghar* prayer and chanting devotional songs were held regularly.

According to Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy, devotion is the best way to realize God. As has been already stated of the nine ways of devotion, Śaṅkaradeva preferred mostly only two- *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrttana*. Listening and chanting the names of God is the real path to attain God. Therefore Śaṅkaradeva and his followers performed *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrttana* of God regularly at *Nāmghar*. It was in a daily religious routine of the *Harigrha*. Devotional songs, hymns and prayers accompanied with musical instruments were chanted daily. Another important religious activity was to read and explain the *Gītā* and *Bhāgavata*. Such kind of congregational services were practiced from morning till night. Mādhavdeva and the other *Bhakata*'s, presented there, asked questions to Śaṅkaradeva and the later, the '*Guru*' answered with explanations and the *Bhakata*'s listened to them carefully.

Another religious practice that was held in *Nāmghar* was ceremony of ordination or initiation i.e. *Śaraṇa*. To be a member of the Vaiṣṇava community the first requirement of a person was to get himself initiated. It was provided by a '*Guru*'. After getting initiation by a '*Guru*', a person had to follow the code of conduct and the rules and regulations taught by the '*Guru*'. The process of initiation was called '*Śaraṇa lowa*'. This process was considered to be a much esteemed devotional practice held in '*Harigrha*'.

The *Cihṇayātrā*- a creative painting was a magnificent piece of work of Śaṅkaradeva. He painted the imaginary pictures of heaven, gods and goddesses. This

grand painting resulted in the form of a speechless play. As found in *Charit Puthi* the *Cihṇayātrā* was first enacted at the premise of the first ever constructed *Harigrha* of Tembowani. So it can be said that all the religious functions were held in the *Harigrhas*. The devotional songs or the ‘*Bargiūt*’, the ‘*Bhaṭimā*’s and the ‘*Toṭaya*’ etc. were chanted by Śaṅkaradeva and his followers only at *Harigrha* platform regularly.

**Cultural Significance of *Nāmghar*:** *Nāmghar* played a role with great extent on the cultural aspect of Assam. It was a cultural institution. Under the direction and leadership of Śaṅkaradeva *Cihṇayātrā* was enacted. *Cihṇayātrā* painting cum drama brought a new as well as the most significant trend to the world of Assamese music and drama and also opened a new chapter in the history of Indian dramatic culture. Significantly, *Cihṇayātrā* was first enacted at *Harigrha* (*Nāmghar*) campus. From that cultural extravaganza the religious cult propagated by Śaṅkaradeva became popular and attractive. Right after the painting show, Śaṅkaradeva organized the *Phālgūtsava* (the holi festival) at the same place. This programme was also fruitful enough to disseminate *Bhakti* cult among the common people. For the *Daulotsova* program Śaṅkaradeva wrote out seven songs and performed them.

During the time when Śaṅkaradeva was at Dhuāhāt-Belgurī, he wrote some verses of ‘*Kīrttana*’ and performed them publicly at *Nāmghar* campus. People from far and near came in large numbers to enjoy the functions. Moreover, Śaṅkaradeva along with his followers used to chant the devotional songs known as *Bargiūta* later on. The *Bargiūts* are devotional songs that praise God and is tuned to a particular *Ragas*

(melody). No doubt all such cultural programs were held at the campus of *Harigr̥ha*. Thus *Harigr̥ha* or *Nāmghar* finally became the center of cultural functions through which religious messages were disseminated.

*Aṅkīyā Nāṭs*, which Śaṅkaradeva called as *Nāṭ*, *Aṅka* or *Yatrā*, were a unique cultural elements which mainly waged or performed on the ground of *Harigr̥ha*. It was also a folk culture where all people irrespective of all caste, class, creed, religion could take active part. Those plays were actually audio-visual medium through which Śaṅkaradeva wanted to disseminate the messages of *Bhakti* cult. Moreover, other elements like costumes, make up, masks, models and effigies etc. played significant role in an *AṅkīyāNāṭ*. In this way *Harigr̥ha* or the *Nāmghar* became a center of culture and thus became a medium of communication for preaching *Bhakti* cult.

**Social Significance of *Nāmghar*:** *Nāmghar* is the only institution from where the composite Assamese society was born. It was typical institution where Śaṅkaradeva stayed and preached his religious views. Śaṅkaradeva and his followers met here for congregational prayers and religious discussions. Parallely, cultural functions and activities were also held, through which people conceived the religious messages. Gradually the *Nāmghar* became a center of social activities. The socio-cultural renaissance which gave birth to the *Bhakti* cult in Assam was first started from *Nāmghar*.

*Nāmghar* was a public institution. All people of the contemporary society irrespective of caste, creed, religion etc moved to the *Nāmghar* to join any function. It played a prominent role as a village court also. The villagers assembled at *Nāmghar* to

discuss various matters whether it was personal or public. Social disputes were also judged here. Different criminal and civil cases were also discussed here. The final decision in such cases was taken by the head of the *Nāmghar*.

The *Nāmghar* served as the public theatre hall. The collective cultural functions were generally held at *Nāmghar*. The congregational praying and chanting system made this institution a common place where the door was opened for all. Such activities helped in binding the communal relationship tightly. The audio-visual cultural function i.e. *Bhāonā* was also held at *Nāmghar* where all the people from different communities could take participation without any hesitation in their minds.

The most important social contribution of *Nāmghar* institution was upliftment of the backward classes and minimization of the social discriminations. The so-called untouchable and backward classes were provided the opportunity to take part in any religious and socio-cultural functions at *Nāmghar*.

Thus, the *Nāmghar* was not only responsible for keeping religion in proper direction but was also responsible to a great extent in maintaining the social harmony, peace and unity among people.

**Educational Significance of *Nāmghar*:** The educational role of the *Nāmghar* was no less considerable. During Śaṅkaradeva's time i.e. 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century a only minimum number of people were literate. A large number of people were deprived of their formal education and were unable to read the Holy Scriptures. But when the religious discussions were held at *Nāmghar*, the illiterate people were benefited tremendously. The regular '*Kīrttana*' of Śāstra at *Nāmghar* campus provided the village people the



opportunity to learn. As the illiterate people could not read the *Nāts*, the dramatic demonstration helped them to understand the religious philosophy contained in the *Nāts*.

Besides singing and chanting of devotional songs and prayers, Śaṅkaradeva along with his followers and friends, held discussion sessions on the Śāstra's. Certain volumes of Hindu religious literature were kept at the *Nāmgharas*. Since religious books and scriptures were reserved for the *Bhakats*, inspired and interested in such discussion sessions which were mainly chaired by Śaṅkaradeva.

**Moral and spiritual Significance *Nāmghar*:** The first and foremost formal institution of Assam from where Vaishnava philosophy was disseminated was *Nāmghar*. *Nāmghar* was believed to be a sacred place where God resides. Therefore, the people had to maintain strict moral discipline and conduct and also were instructed with some rules and regulations wherever necessary. The chanting and singing of devotional songs and prayers created an enthralled atmosphere where spirituality evoked in every one's heart. Every sort of public dispute was judged in the name of God at *Nāmghar*, so that the offender couldn't tell a lie. The arrogant and inhuman practices and manners of tantricism were absent in the monotheistic cult of Śaṅkaradeva, as a result morality and spirituality occupied an esteemed position at the *Nāmghar*.

**Entertainment:** *Nāmghar* no doubt was a center of entertainment. It is the only institution of that time centering on which all types of cultural activities were held. People assembled at that theatre hall to take part in the dramatic performance or any other cultural programme. People from far and wide rushed to enjoy the shows of

*Bhāonā*. It was the time when no entertainment sources or devices were available among the common masses and no print or electronic media were there to entertain with. In such circumstances *Nāmghar* provided lots of entertainment to the village people.

**Theological Significance of *Nāmghar*:** The *Nāmghar* was a center of devotional activities. The overall construction of the *Nāmghar* itself bore a characteristics of devotional sentiment. The structure of *Nāmghar* represented theological aspect.

The *Nāmghar* was constructed in the east-west direction considering the light of sunrise and sunset. The interior was very spacious and it had all total seven rooms with fourteen pillars. There the seven rooms represented the seven heavens and the fourteen pillars represented the fourteen councilors of *vaikuṇṭha*. The *maṇikūṭ* was situated at the eastern corner of the spacious hall. The *simhasana* was constructed with the image of elephant, tortoise and lion. The elephant represented sin, where the tortoise and the lion represented reticence and *nām* respectively. *Śrīmadbhagavata*, the Holy book, was placed on the *simhasana*.<sup>31</sup>

Thus the common people found a devotional scent in the objects of the *Nāmghar*. The objects which bore spiritual aroma helped in inculcating the religion of *Bhakti* among the people.

**Significance of Physical Devices:** In *Nāmghar* Śaṅkaradeva used some handmade objects. The pillars and walls of *Nāmghar* were made of wood and bamboo. Some other elements like *Thāpanā*, *Coghar*, *Nāṭghar*, *Ṭhagā*, *Gachā*, *Bhāskarjyas* etc. were

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<sup>31</sup> Majumdar, T. (2014). *Srimanta Sankardev: Sahitya-Sanskritir-Jilingoni*. P147

made from wood, bamboo, hay, cane etc. It made the people to engage themselves in cottage industry not for personal purpose but for social benefits. As the equipments made by the society people were used in and outside of the *Nāmghar*, the attraction of the people towards *Nāmghar* increased. As a result they used to come to the *Nāmghar* regularly and became devotees.

In *Nāmghar* during the time of congregational prayer and chanting no separate seats for higher and lower class of people were there. They all sat on the mats lying on floor. The people altogether could join in prayers or other cultural programmes without any discrimination of rich and poor or higher and lower. They achieved their designations in *Nāmghar* administration according to their quality and competency and they were selected democratically. The people themselves cultivated the green gram split, black chickpeas, bananas, sugarcane, ginger, coconut etc. which were distributed as sacrament after the congregational prayer in the *Nāmghar*. Such activities encouraged the society people to amalgamate in the *Nāmghar* campus and to take part in devotional activities. Moreover the people developed a cottage industry in the *Nāmghar* campus where they made various items from wood, bamboo, clay, jute etc. which developed a devotion-based communication among the masses.

**Spiritual significance of *guru āsana*:** *Guru āsana* is one of the most significant assets of *Nāmghar*. *Nāmghar* was a religious institution. It disseminated the religious as well as devotional messages among the common people. Each and every object of a *Kīrttanaghar* or *Nāmghar* had its devotional significance which made the *Nāmghar* a divine place.

A *Nāmghar* is incomplete without the existence of *Āsana* (the pedestal). The *Āsana* is known as *Simhāsana*, *Guru Āsana*, *Mayurāsana* and *Garu Āsana*. But in general all the *āsana* are known as *Simhāsana*.

An *āsana* had seven steps and each step was designed with the tortoise, nāmsimha, elephant, Garuḍa, peacock etc. Each of the parts had its own spiritual significance. They are as follows-

**Tortoise:** The tortoises were placed in the four corners of the base of the *Āsana*. Tortoise is the symbol of the *Kūrma* incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. *Kūrma* was the second incarnation of Viṣṇu. Tortoise is the symbol of patience and tolerance which are considered to be the characteristics of a real devotee. During ‘*samudra manthana*’ or churning of the milky ocean by the gods and demons, the tortoise held the Mandara Mountain on the back. In reality, when the tortoise senses of a hunter or an enemy, it deactivates its sense organs and hides them inside its hard skeleton. In that sense the tortoise also represents the symbol of reticence.

**Elephant:** In *Āsana* the elephants are placed just above the tortoises. Elephant is the symbol of sin and brutality. In the pedestal the mighty elephant is seen torturing the tolerant tortoise. In that sense elephant represents the symbol of power and energy. Both the symbols represent the torture of sinner upon the real devotees.

**Nāmsimha:** *Nāmsimha* means the lion. Its position is just above the elephant and it symbolizes that it ruins the sinner elephant. As the sinner elephant is likely to destroy the patient and tolerant devotees, then the *Nāmsimha* is likely to kill that elephant.

**Garuḍa Pakṣī:** The position of *Garuḍa Pakṣī* is above the lion. *Garuda* is the vehicle of Lord Viṣṇu. The *Garuḍa Pakṣī* saves the devotees from their problems.

**Mayūra:** In some guru Āsanas *Mayūra*, are kept instead of *Garuḍa Pakṣī*. The peacock show is related with Lord Kṛṣṇa.

**Rājahaṁsa:** *Rājahaṁsa* is rarely seen in the *guru āsana*. *Rājahaṁsa* is the carrier of Lord Brahmā.

**Āmahi ghar:** The top and the last step of the *guru āsana* is *Āmahi ghar*. It represents that Vaikuṇṭh where Lord Viṣṇu resides. The Holy Scripture Bhāgavata, as the symbol of lord Vishnu, is kept at *Āmahi ghar*.

**Vastra:** The *guru āsana* is always covered with a piece of *vastra* (cloth). The Vaikuṇṭha is invisible or is imaginary. So the seven symbolic Vaikuṇṭha s in the *guru āsana* are always covered with a sacred and flowery cloth. This cloth is traditionally known as ‘Phul kāpor’ or ‘Phulām Gāmocā’.

#### 6.2.6. Musical Instruments:

Śaṅkaradeva used some musical instruments in the performances of cultural programmes. Among those musical instruments the famous was *Khol* which was developed by Śaṅkaradeva himself at the time of enactment of *Cihṇayātrā*.<sup>32</sup> According to *Carit Puthi*, the *Khol* was made by a potter of the bank of the river Kapili. During the enactment of *Cihṇayātrā*, Śaṅkaradeva beat nine khols together which was quite an extra ordinary task.

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<sup>32</sup> Lekharu, U. C. (2006). *Katha-Gurucharit*. P357

In *Carit Puthi* there is found another name of an instrument which was used while performing a *Bargiit*. The name was Charengdar. One day Chilārāi asked his wife Kamalāpriyā to sing a song composed by Śaṅkaradeva, her father's elder brother, and she sung a *Bargiit* playing Sarengdar. After listening to the song accompanied with such a sweet melodious sounded instrument Cilārāi became attracted to Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* and took initiation under him.

Thus Śaṅkaradeva's musical instrument helped as a significant tool in propagating *Bhakti dharma*.

#### **6.2.7. Vṛindābani Vastra:**

Another epoch making innovation of Śaṅkaradeva was *Vṛindābani Vastra* (weaved and depicted cloth) which was prepared on the request of King Nara Nārāyaṇa to show pageant of Lord Kṛṣṇa in Vṛindābana.

*rājā bule tumi bāpa īśvara sākṣāta /*

*vṛindābana kṛṣṇa līlā vāstre ākā aita //*

Śaṅkaradeva was provided all the necessities to complete the task by the King himself. Śaṅkaradeva made all arrangements and the weavers started to weave pageants of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The cloth was one hundred and twenty feet long and sixty feet wide. The task took six months to complete.

The cloth was designed and depicted with the imaginary pictures of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Vṛindābana, Gokula, Dvāraka, Govardhana, Yamunā, the ten incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu, birth of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Killing of Kaṁsa, the *Gopa-Gopīs*, *Dhenu*, *Rāsa līlā*,

*Vatsa* etc. Moreover pictorial presentation of *Arjjuna Bhañjana*, *Bakasur Badh*, *kali Daman*, *Banāgni pāna*, lifting up of Govardhana Parvat, *Śamkhacūḍa Vadha* and journey to Mathurā etc. were shown to the audience present there.

The masses of Tāntikuchi, Ganakkuchi, Sundari, and Baradi rushed to see the *Vṛindābanī Vastra*. The scenes depicted in the piece carried a significance of spirituality. The illiterate masses that were not able to read and write also could see *Vṛindābana*, Lord Kṛṣṇa and his activities in that cloth. Śaṅkaradeva explained the meanings of all designs depicted in that piece of cloth. Some similarities between the meaning and subject-matter of depicted designs of the both *Cihṇayātrā* and *Vṛindābanī Vastra* were seen significantly. Śaṅkaradeva prepared the *Cihṇayātrā*, the imaginary art form, at an early age of his life whereas the *Vṛindābanī Vastra* was designed towards his later part of his life. But both the excellent pieces represented the extra terrestrial activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa, in which the common people got a chance to understand and to know the same through a convenient but attractive medium.

### **6.3 Messages of *Bhakti* through Cultural Devices:**

As in the case of his vast literary contributions, the literary compositions, the chief objective of Śaṅkaradeva for creation of different cultural productions was also to disseminate the messages of devotion among common people or to inculcate the same in everyone's mind and heart. Devotion is the supreme love for God. It is not material love but natural and spiritual. But the concept of devotion was supposed to be established among the masses only after social and religious reformation. The

messages carried and spread through Śaṅkaradeva's literary and cultural devices reformed different fields of society.

Through the messages of religious reformation different changes took place in the following aspects-

### **6.3.1 Messages of religious reformation**

- i) Reformation in devotional practices
- ii) Reformation in expensive rituals
- iii) Reformation in cooperation of all class and casts

### **6.3.2 Messages of social reformation**

- i) Moral education
- ii) Mass education
- iii) Recreation
- iv) Socialisation

## **6.3.1 Messages for Religious Reformation:**

### **6.3.1.1 Reformation in devotional practices:**

Some anti-social devotional practices were prevailed in the pre-sankarite society. Idolatry, animal-worship and sacrifice etc. were seen during that period. Śaṅkaradeva opposed those all. He wanted the devotional practices to be reformed. As



Śaṅkaradeva thought *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrttana* as the best ways of devotion and wanted to remove the priestly activities of worshipping God from the society.

The cultural productions he innovated were based on the two ways of devotion i.e. *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrttana*. All the *Aṅkīyā* plays composed by him were based on spiritual subject matter. All the six dramatic crystals focused on devotion as the supreme way of worship.

Among the six *Aṅkīyā* plays, as already stated, the glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa was depicted in five and glory of Lord Rāma was depicted in the remaining one. In all the plays Lord Kṛṣṇa and Lord Rām were the central heroes and the glories of the both were presented in front of the people. Every element of *Aṅkīyā* plays carried characteristics of devotional significance and messages of victory of truth over the falsehood. Farsighted Śaṅkaradeva felt that such dramatic performances would easily enter into the minds and hearts of people and help them to understand the messages of devotion.

In the play *Patnī Prasāda* a sentiment of devotion of the *vipra patnīs* (wives of brāhhmaṇas) towards Lord Kṛṣṇa was seen. Everyone left their respective households activities to meet Kṛṣṇa though they were resisted by their husbands. But when Kṛṣṇa told them to return to their residences they denied to do so and requested Him not to leave them as they all were servants of His. In *Kālī Damana*, the story developed centering Lord Kṛṣṇa whereas the central motive was victory of truth over the falsehood. Thus *Kālī Damana* was the play where a victory of Lord Kṛṣṇa was depicted. The story was based on a conflict between a venomous snake namely Kālī

and Lord Kṛṣṇa. Kālī was a snake reigning in a lake named Kālindī. One day Kṛṣṇa's playmates were going to be died because of venom of Kālī, the giant snake. Kṛṣṇa rescued their lives. For that incident the children expressed their devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Lord Kṛṣṇa was about to kill the snake, but his wives requested Kṛṣṇa not to kill him. Lord Kṛṣṇa was satisfied and saved the snake's life. *Keli Gopal* was more musical and less dramatic than the other plays of Śaṅkaradeva. The play was a unique example of both love and devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. The love was nothing but the spiritual love to the supreme power. Like the other plays of the author *Rukmiṇī Haraṇa* also carried a mythological subject matter and began with an invocation to Lord. The story centered round the love story of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī. Her craziness towards Kṛṣṇa reflects the pure devotion and utmost love to the Lord. In the play *Pārijāta Haraṇa*, the character Rukmiṇī was being portrayed as submissive to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Rukmiṇī represented the sentiment of pure devotion to the Lord which was above everything. In the play it was reflected that everything even the highest satisfaction in life could be achieved only through devotion in mind to the Supreme Being. *Rām Vijaya* was a *Rāmāyaṇa*-based play. Although the *Bhakti* is not the central motive of the play, the play ended with a devotional flavor.

The *Bargīts* composed by Śaṅkaradeva were purely spiritual. Those were rhythmic prayer songs which were sung in melodious tune. Śaṅkaradeva created those prayer songs only to glorify Lord Kṛṣṇa through singing. Hence singing and listening of *Bargīts* were considered as the ways devotion.

Śaṅkaradeva innovated *Nāmprasaṅga*. Chanting of God's name by one person or a group of persons was *Nāmprasaṅga*. Only the devotional songs were chanted with melody in *Nāmprasaṅga*.

### **6.3.1.2 Reformation in expensive rituals:**

The pre-Sankarite period was dominated by priestly community. The ritual activities were very much expensive. But the worshipping system propagated by Śaṅkaradeva was less expensive than before as it was based on *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana*, i.e. the listening and chanting of God's name. That system was very much convenient for common people.

*Aṅkīyā* plays and *Bargīts* of Śaṅkaradeva were also less expensive than other priestly ritual activities. In *Aṅkīyā* plays people used local materials which were very easy to collect from anywhere and it was also an easy entertaining function through which devotion to God could be done. In the same way *Bargīt* was also an easy cultural activity of worshipping God. People chanted the name of God in a rhythmic way accompanied with musical instruments.

*Nāmprasaṅga* which was first introduced by Śaṅkaradeva was not anyway an expensive ritualistic activity. People gathered at a particular venue and chanted the glory of God altogether.

### **6.3.1.3 Co-operation of all classes and castes:**

The basic ideology of Śaṅkaradeva's religion was to form a society free from social discrimination. The Sankarite period was torn by different divisive forces which

degraded the society day by day. In the meantime Śaṅkaradeva through his cultural creations took the initiatives to tie up the people without any discrimination. *Harigr̥ha* or *Kīrttanaghar*, a congregational prayer hall, was set up by him. It was a place where doors were always opened to welcome all classes of people of the society and could take part in the religious activities held there. The cultural outputs were not confined to a specific group of people. All people were allowed to sit and chant together and to watch the cultural programmes. All the people irrespective of castes and classes considered the *Harigr̥ha* as their common public platform of worship. People belonged to any religion or caste could enjoy those cultural programmes without any hesitation. The casteism, prevailed in the priestly community, thus was not in Śaṅkaradeva's religious order.

### **6.3.2 Messages of social reformation:**

The society during the Śaṅkaradeva's time as has been stated earlier was in turmoil. The higher class of people tortured the lower class both socially and religiously. Cooperation, equality and unity were not there among them. Conflict, casteism, violence etc. made the society to weaker and weaker condition. During that turmoil situation Śaṅkaradeva's cultural outputs disseminated some valuable messages for reformation of the society and reconstructed it.

#### **6.3.2.1 Moral education:**

Where there is religion there is spirituality. And if there is spirituality there is morality. Religion always provides people spiritual knowledge. Spiritual ideology always shapes the morality of human beings.

The cultural productions created by Śaṅkaradeva were religion based and each of the creations had a moral message in it. Through the cultural creations Lord Kṛṣṇa and Lord Rāma were depicted as the idol of the universe. They were depicted as the Supreme being of the whole world. As people watched or listened to the glory of Kṛṣṇa or Rāma, their minds became naturally spiritual.

The stories of *Aṅkīyā Bhāonās* were based on heavenly activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Rāma. They disseminated messages of victory of truth over the falsehood and victory of the honesty upon the dishonesty. Such moral messages provided the knowledge of do's and don'ts to the people. In case of *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā*, which was an audio-visual medium, people could watch live shows of gods and goddesses with their heavenly activities enacted by the performers. Audience found a flavor of morality in those extra terrestrial activities of heavenly characters.

The *Bargīts* and the *Nāmprasaṅga* were also highly spiritual cultural functions. Common people found teachings of morality in such spiritual and cultural activities.

#### **6.3.2.2 Mass education:**

As has been already said, during the time of Śaṅkaradeva only few classes of people could read the scriptures written in *Saṁskṛt*. Those people did not provide the opportunity to read those Holy Scripturesto to backward classes of people. As a result, the common peoples were deprived of being read them as well as to acquire religious knowledges of those books. At the same time a system of discrimination was created between two classes- literate -illiterate and priestly - non-priestly. Śaṅkaradeva, as a

savior of the weaker sections of people, arranged the aforesaid attractive cultural programs centering Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Rāma and their divinely activities as the basic subject-matters. Among those cultural innovations some were audible, some were visual and some were audio-visual. Peoples of all categories irrespective of literate or illiterate of the society could easily understand the meaning of those cultural productions had intended to disseminate.

### **6.3.2.3 Recreation:**

Although some folk cultures were there during the time of Śaṅkaradeva, yet they were not in popular form. The people during that time were busy with their cultivation or other domestic activities. On the other hand no electronic entertainment or devices were there as of today. So cultural programmes introduced by Śaṅkaradeva provided much amusement to the people. The programmes were both audible and audio-visual. Peoples derived a lot of relish watching those cultural functions.

### **6.3.2.4 Socialization:**

Śaṅkaradeva's cultural creations were the compositions of different elements of different ethnic groups. So masses from different castes and tribes found ethnic flavour in the cultural creations of Śaṅkaradeva. In fact, all classes of people were allowed to co-operate in those cultural programs. The *Hari Gṛha* introduced by Śaṅkaradeva, was an open venue for all categories of people without any religious or communal discrimination.

### 6.3.3. Receivers:

Through the literary works of Śaṅkaradeva only the literate people were benefitted. But the numbers of literate masses were very less during that time. Śaṅkaradeva's mission was not only to cover only a particular group of people, but people of all classes and categories. In order to do it, Śaṅkaradeva did not confine himself to literary works only. He innovated new devices which were very much eye-catching and could entertain the audience. The devices targeted the illiterate masses. For those illiterate masses Śaṅkaradeva created some cultural devices. Among those cultural elements the songs, the dance form and the dramas were considered to be very much significant innovations. The people who could not read the devotional scriptures written either in *Samskṛt* or vernacular language, the cultural productions helped them to understand the devotional messages.

Śaṅkaradeva composed some songs which were rhythmic in nature and accompanied by musical instruments when sung. Those were sung in a particular melody with different *rāgas* and were purely devotional. The language of those devotional songs was *Brajāvalī*. That kind of cultural form was known as *Bargīts*. Śaṅkaradeva innovated another cultural device to disseminate *Bhakti*. It was an audio visual medium. He himself called it as *Nāṭ* or *Yātrā* i.e. drama. The enactment of the drama was called as *Bhāonā*. He composed as many as six dramas where all the stories were developed centering round Lord Kṛṣṇa and Lord Rāma. Śaṅkaradeva used *Brajāvalī* language to compose the dramas which were known as *Aṅkīyā Nāṭs* later on.

Thus, these cultural productions brought a new era to the society and created waves of devotional ideologies. The illiterate masses, who could not get formal education, found newer and newer devotional ideologies in those cultural elements and acquired them. The formal education imparted in *ṭols* and *pāṭhśālās* was not widespread as to cover all sections of the population. It was mainly confined to the upper stratum of the society, viz the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Kāyasthas* and the *Kalitās*. There are no evidences or records that students belonging to other castes were debarred from admission to schools, but the number of students belonging to other castes was extremely limited; the parents and guardians did not consider it necessary to have education of their sons and wards. Education appeared to have been the privilege of the males. The females, the educated and well-to-do families were taught at home how to read and write in though they did not attend schools.

Again, in that society some people were there who could neither read nor understand the *Brajāvalī* language. For that class of people Śaṅkaradeva developed a new cultural form which was one kind of audio-visual media and was considered to be very convenient. This excellent device was nothing but the *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā*, the drama written and enacted in *Brajāvalī* language. Śaṅkaradeva wrote a total of six numbers of *Nāṭs* and all the stories of those six plays were based on *Bhakti*. The people could acquire knowledge of *Bhakti* through those audio-visual cultural shows which were accompanied by songs, dances and musical instruments and people found it very easy to acquire the theological messages from them. Those eye-catching cultural functions were thought to be very powerful ways to disseminate messages of *Bhakti*. Moreover the contemporary society was pre-dominated by priestly community. The people of



lower castes as well as the non *Brāhmīṇ* communities were not allowed to take part in the devotional activities like *Yajña* etc. besides the *Yajñas* were very expensive. The people needed an alternate method of worshipping God in which everybody can participate with less expense. The common people started to welcome Śaṅkaradeva's method of worship in which everybody could take part, which was less expensive and was based only on devotion. As a result Śaṅkaradeva's cultural innovations propagated the devotional ideologies among common masses too who were betrayed by priestly community. In this way the cultural productions innovated by Śaṅkaradeva worked as a strong mode of communication to propagate his Bhaktism. Culture usually is a powerful instrument to attract the people of different ages and ethnic groups. At the time when no print or electronic media were there to disseminate any news to the targeted audience, Śaṅkaradeva propagated his principles of devotion successfully with the help of culture devices. Śaṅkaradeva's prime vision was to propagate the devotional messages among the common masses. All those cultural elements innovated by him were full of devotional sentiment and entertainment. The people who could not go through the literary output found those cultural devices very much easy and attractive to acquire something new. Thus the cultural productions innovated by Śaṅkaradeva played strong and effective elements of communication.

## **6.4 Śaṅkaradeva's Pilgrimage as Mass Communication System**

### **6.4.1 First Pilgrimage**

Śaṅkaradeva was a great mass communicator. It can be proved through different incidents which took place during his pilgrimages to the various holy places

of India. He went for pilgrimages twice in his life. During his pilgrimages he came into the contact of various kinds of people such as general, great, learned, unlearned etc. His pilgrimages played important role in the process of propagating *Bhaktism* and his own religious philosophy, ideologies and principles. He was successful enough to propagate his path of neo-Vaishnavism. According to *Carit puthis*, written by the followers or disciples of Śaṅkaradeva, during his first pilgrimage in 1481 he had visited many sacred places such as *Kasī*, *Gayā*, *Vṛndāvana*, *Purī*, and *Vārānasi* etc. Once when he visited *Prayāg*, *Puskara* he met a lady, wife of a man named *Rūp*, who took initiation under Śaṅkaradeva. When the lady met Śaṅkaradeva she at once realized and understood that Śaṅkaradeva was a super human who had divine powers and knowledge. She was deeply influenced by Śaṅkaradeva's divine personality and multifaceted talents for which she could not resist herself to take initiation under him. Apart from it when he was in *Vārānasi* and *Kaśī*, a great poet of that time named *Gopīnātha* also took initiation under him.<sup>33</sup> This interesting incident also proved his mass communication process. Śaṅkaradeva's divine wisdom and divine personality attracted the poet so much so that he became a disciple of Śaṅkaradeva. A similar kind of incident also took place in *Vṛndāvana* also when he visited that place. A monk named *Rādhā* and his wife also bowed down before Śaṅkaradeva's divineness.<sup>34</sup>

Śaṅkaradeva gave them knowledge about the essence or metaphysics of *Bhāgavata dharma*. He explained elaborately and in a very lucid manner about

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<sup>33</sup> Lekharu, U. C. (2006). *Katha-Gurucharit*. P.23

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. P.24

different simple ways of worshipping and attaining salvation from the complex world. Later Śaṅkaradeva advised them to spread the knowledge among common masses.<sup>35</sup>

#### 6.4.2 Second Pilgrimage

Śaṅkaradeva undertook a second pilgrimage also. His second pilgrimage was also very significant in the course of history of Assam. During his second pilgrimage many interesting incidents took place which showed his good communication with common masses. Many people took initiation under him during his second pilgrimage being attracted to his divineness and wisdom. One day, when Śaṅkaradeva and his great disciple Mādhavadeva were travelling with other companions, it rained heavily. They entered into a house to take shelter. There was only a lady at home at that time. That lady welcomed Śaṅkaradeva and his group and served with care and devotion. That lady soon realized that Śaṅkaradeva was not a normal human being and a ray of divine power was surrounding him. Śaṅkaradeva's divine personality attracted her deeply. She started to feel that God was standing in front of her. Śaṅkaradeva's precious teachings and ideologies made her to bow down to him. Thereafter she took initiation at the feet of Śaṅkaradeva. Another day while Śaṅkaradeva with his followers was going he saw that a farmer was ploughing his crop field. The ploughman was shouting 'hey hey' while ploughing. Śaṅkaradeva advised Mādhavadeva to tell the ploughman to say 'Rām Rām' instead of shouting 'hey hey'. Mādhavadeva followed his master's advice and told that man to do accordingly Śaṅkaradeva's advice. The ploughman became astonished. He observed Śaṅkaradeva

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<sup>35</sup> Bezbarooah, D. (edited) (1987). *Bar-Charit*. P.20

and found that a saint was standing in front of him. And that ploughman took initiation under him. During this pilgrimage once Śaṅkaradeva visited Kabīr's house, the great poet of India. Śaṅkaradeva met Kabīr during his first pilgrimage. But on his visiting day Kabīr's grand daughter was at home only. She knew about Śaṅkaradeva from Kabīr and getting Śaṅkaradeva in front of her she took initiation under him.