

The Bhakti Cycle of Assamese Lyrics: Bargits and After

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www.tributetosankaradeva.org presents before the readers a pioneering paper on the Vaisnava music of Assam, authored by Dr. Maheswar Neog. It covers virtually every aspect of the devotional lyric of the Sankaradeva Movement (and also traces its progress through time). This paper was written in the early part of the latter half of the 20th century when *Bargit* research was still at a nascent stage.

Editing note(s):- Diacritics has been used sparingly; generally only the long diacritic (macron) pertaining to a/A has been highlighted and that too, depending upon the context.

Introduction

In the latter half of the fifteenth century **Sankaradeva** (1449-1568 A.D.), a Kayastha by caste, founded a school of neo-Vaisnavism in Assam. This religion has a monotheistic doctrine based on the *Bhagavata Purana* and is called **Eka-Sarana Nama-Dharma**. It enjoins the worship of the one Supreme Deity or Visnu, specially in His incarnation as **Krsna** and interdicts its followers from the worship of any other god or goddess. The Radha-Krsna cult is not acknowledged in his system of Vaisnavism. Of the different modes of bhakti or devotion, the *dasya* (servile) mode was insisted upon by Sankaradeva. (Dr. B. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, 1948, pp. 75-77). The attitude of the votary is to look upon Krsna - not as a play-mate as in *sakhya* (friendship), not as one's child as in *vatsalya* (filial love), not as the male lover as in *madhura* (conjugal love), nor as an impersonal Being as in *santa rasa* (calm sentiment) - but as the master demanding love and veneration of the devotee as of a servant.

There was efflorescence of a great literature with the advent of neo-Vaisnavism in Assam. Sankaradeva and his favourite disciple **Madhavadeva** composed a great number of songs, dramas, verse-narratives, wherein they expounded the teachings of the faith they wanted to propagate. Organisation of numerous **Satras** (monasteries) and **nama-**

gharas (village chapels) followed and carried the message of bhakti far and wide into the country.

Of the many poetical works of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, we shall in these lines concern ourselves with the devotional lyrics called *bargits* (Skt. bara gita, literally, 'great song'). It has been suggested that bargits mean noble songs as differentiated from popular songs, love lyrics, etc., that were prevalent at the time of Sankaradeva (Dr. B. Kakati, *Purani Asamiya Sahitya*, 1940, pp. 55-58). Some people however wish to connect them with barā gānā, a name given to the serious type of Hindustani music as opposed to the lighter varieties called chotā gānā. But it appears the name has scarcely anything to do with Hindustani barā ganā. The word 'bar' (big, senior) in Assamese is extensively used to differentiate a higher grade of the same class of things or persons. We have kapor (a cloth), barkapors; kah (a gong), barkah; japi (a sunshade), barjapi; Phukan (a headman of a class of common people or labourers), Barphukan (the Ahom viceroy and commander-in-chief in lower Assam); Baruva (a chief officer of a class of people or secretary of a particular department of service), Barbaruva (the chief of the Baruvās, the chief justice of the Ahom royal court); Kakati (a clerk), Barkakati. On the same analogy bargits may be supposed to be so called because of their superior status among the Vaisnava prayer-songs. They are a group of devotional lyrics constituting a class by themselves and are held in great veneration in religious circles. Other songs similarly composed are never ranked as bargits.

Sankaradeva composed altogether 240 bargits for the purpose of prayer-services. The only manuscript copy of the bargits was accidentally consumed by fire in the house of a musician disciple of his, Kamala Gayana by name. The saint was extremely sad on account of this and urged upon his worthy disciple Madhavadeva the task of composing a fresh set of hymns. The latter readily agreed; and putting first the few bargits of the preceptor that were memorised by the bhakats (devotees putting up in the monastery or Satra) he set to making new ones. Some gits were either composed by Sankaradeva himself even after this though he had only about two years to complete his long life of one hundred and nineteen, or were recovered from loss much later (M. Neog, *Sri Sri*

Sankaradeva, 1949 § 69). These particular bargits are placed towards the end of the bargit manuscripts. The number of such lyrics came to a total of 191 (Katha Carit, leaf 60, MS). People however still refer to the bargits as numbering *bāra kuri* that is twelve score, twelve being a magic number.

The language of the lyrics

Most of the bargits are written in a form of language, popularly called **Brajāvali bhāsā** in Assam¹. There developed a similar idiom in Bengal and Orissa, where it was called Brajabuli or Brajabulī. Speaking about the origin and nature of Brajabuli Dr. Sukumar Sen says, “Brajabuli is a Mischsprache. Maithili is the basic part, while Bengali, with oddments of Hindi and Brajabhakra, form the superstructure. Brajabuli is really a dialect - only it is literary - of Bengali, and in the sense that it had originated and developed in Bengal and has been cultivated exclusively by Bengali poets. Another form of Brajabuli almost indistinguishable from that of Bengal, originated in Assam at about the same time ... What we have just said about the Assamese Brajabuli is applicable mutatis mutandis to the Brajabuli of Orissa ... Assamese Brajabuli seems to have developed independently through direct connection with Mithila, but in Orissa we can legitimately expect Bengali influence in the matter” (S. K. Sen, *A History of Brajabuli Literature*, C. U., 1935, p.1). It may be pointed out here that all Brajabuli poetry mainly centre round Kṛṣṇa’s activities in Braja (Brndavana). This Brajabuli idiom has not however any direct connection with, nor is it an offshoot, of Braj-bhakra, the central Indo-Aryan dialect of Western Hindi spoken round about Bareilly, Aligarh, Agra, Mathura, Dholpur and Kerauli (Dr. S.K. Chatterji, O. D. B. L., CU. Press, 1926, § 56). Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva utilized the Brajabuli idiom only in their bargits, *bhatimās* (originally, songs of bhātas or wandering minstrels, and in literary practice, odes to gods and eulogies of important personages), and dramas called *ankas*.

¹ The word Brajāvali is an adjectival formation like *candrāvali* (*candrāvali rajani dekhiya bitopana*, the moon-lit night looks beautiful-Sankaradeva); *vamsāvali* (*teo bilākar vamsāvali sakaloke*, all belonging to their family- Gunabhiram Baruva, *Asam Buranji*, p.131).

Date of composition in Brajabuli

Sankaradeva went out on pilgrimage in 1481 and after wide travels in Northern India (and in the south according to some) came back home in 1493 (M. Neog, *Sri Sri Sankaradeva*, 1949 § 16-17). It was at the sacred place of Badarikasrama to the extreme north at one of the many sources of the Ganges that the young pilgrim composed his first bargit: -

rāga dhanasri

*mana meri, Rāma-caranahi lāgu /
tai dekha nā antaka āgu // dhrum //*

*mana, āyu khene khene tute /
dekho prāna kona dīnā chute //
mana, kāla-ajagare gile /
jāna tileke marana mile //
mana, nichaya-patana kāyā /
tai Rāma bhaja teji māyā //
re mana, i sava visaya dhānadhā /
kene dekhi nedekhasa āndhā //
mana, sukhe pāra kaiche ninda /
tai cetiyā, cinta Govinda //
mana, jāniyā Sankara kahe /
dekho Rāma bine gati nohe //*

Rest my mind, rest on the Feet of Rama;
Seest thou not the great end approaching?
My mind, every moment life is shortening,
Just heed, any moment it might fleet off.
My mind, the serpent of time is swallowing,
Know'st thou death is creeping on by inches.
My mind, surely this body would drop down,
So break through illusion and resort to Rama.
O mind, thou art blind;
Thou seest this vanity of things,
Yet thou seest not.
Why art thou, O mind, slumbering at ease?
Awake and think of Govinda.
O mind, Sankara knows it and says,
Except through Rama there is no hope.
(Translated by B. Kakati, *Sankara Deva*, 1921, p. 10)

As this small poem was composed during Sankaradeva's first pilgrimage (1481-93 A.D.), *we can safely consider it to be the first lyric to be written in Brajabuli in Assam, Bengal, and Orissa*. The earliest Brajabuli lyric in Bengali literature is the one by Yasoraja Khan in which the poet makes mention of Hussain Shah, the ruler of Gauda, 1493-1519 A.D. The famous poem, *pahilahi raga nayana-bhanga bhela*, by Ramananda Raya Kavi, political agent of king Pratapa Rudra (Gajapati), 1504-32 A.D., is the first such composition in Orissa (S.K. Sen, *A History of Brajabuli Literature*, pp. 23-25).

In his Kirtana-Ghosā Sankaradeva speaks of Kavira's verses being sung in sacred places like Banaras and Puri: -

*Uresā Bārānasi thāve thāve /
Kavira-gīta sistasave gāve //*

The learned sing the songs of Kavira in places like Uresa (Orissa) and Baranasi.

He possibly heard the mystic dohas of Kavira and other lyrics of northern India poets and saw how these spread like wild fire with the message of a new faith during his sojourn in that part of the country. And he got the idea of using this 'curious poetic jargon' in his devotional songs and dramas.

The place of *bargits* in the scheme of Satra ceremonials

The place of bargits in the programme of occasional and daily prayer services is unique. In the Satras or Vaisnava monasteries of Assam the daily services are divided into three, four, nine, ... or fourteen units, each one called a *prasanga*. Whatever is the number of these units the daily routine has to begin with a bargit. The majority of the Satras sing the following composition of Sankaradeva invariably without tāla (beating time): -

rāga āsovāri

jaya jaya Yādava jalanidhijā-dhava dhātā
sruta mātra khila-trātā /
smarane karaya sidhi dina-dāyā-nidhi
bhakati-mukuti-pada-dātā // dhrum //

jaga-jana-jivana ajana Janārdana
danuja-damana dukha-hāri /
mahadānandakanda paramānanda
nanda-nandana bana-cāri //
bibidha-vihāra visārada sārada
indu nindī parakāsi /
sesa-sayana siva Kesi-nāsana
pita-basana avināsi //
jagata-bandhu bidhu Mādhava Madhu-ripu
madhura-murati Mura-nāsi /
Kesava-carana saroruha-kimkara
Samkara ehu abhilāsi //

Glory be to Yadava, the consort of the daughter of the Ocean (Laksmi), the great preserver (**Visnu**), the saviour of all the universe through mere hearing of His Name;
thinking of Whom brings the (eight) perfections, the sea of kindness for the poor, the giver of devotion and of final beatitude;
the life of all people of the world, the self-existent, the governor of Maya, the killer of demons, the destroyer of all woes;
the source of the great bliss, (Who Himself is) the greatest bliss, the son of Nanda, the wanderer in the forest;
the expert in all sorts of divine sports, the one more resplendent than the autumn moon;
the sleeper on the Sesa (Naga), the good, the killer of (the demon) Kesi, the wearer of yellow apparel, the eternal;
the friend of the universe, the container of the universe, the son of Madhu (of the Yadu family), the killer of (the demon) Madhu, the handsome-bodied, the destroyer of (the demon) Mura.
Sankara, the servant of the Lotus-Feet of Kesava, says this in expectation of it (the Lotus-Feet of Kesava).

It is followed by bhatimā, kirtana (verse-narratives of Krsna's exploits, regularly interspersed with a ghosā or refrain) and other items. The position of the bargits is unassailable and that is one reason why they are called 'great' songs.

Subjects of the songs

Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva selected subjects for these lyrics with reticence. They are free from *srmgara rasa* or sentiment of conjugal love. This would look strange when we compare these poems with the vast mass of Vaisnava lyrics with that sentiment predominating, composed by the Maithili poet Vidyapati, Ramananda Raya of Orissa, Yasoraja-Khan, Govindadasa, Jnanadasa and other Bengal poets. It is related in one biography how Sankaradeva while travelling outside Assam happened to hear some minstrel singing songs of amours of Krsna and Radha and in disapproval of the sentiment thereof asked Madhavadeva to compose something with more propriety. The latter composed a bhatima with *vatsalya rasa* (the sentiment of filial affection) (Katha Carit, leaf 47, MS.). This anecdote indicates the general attitude of Assamese Vaisnava poets towards *madhura rasa* and the Radha-Krsna topic. The Vaisnavas of this province hold that the bargits have in them six *rasas* (sentiments):-

- *lilā* (divine sports of Visnu during his avatara or descent on earth mainly as Krsna)
- *paramārtha* (knowledge of the Supreme Brahman)
- *viraha* (pangs of separation from Krsna in the hearts of Yasoda and other milkmaids)
- *virakti* (apathy towards worldly objects)
- *caura* (Krsna's playing the thief and stealing milk-products from milk-maids' houses) and
- *cāhuri* (Krsna's cleverness and evasive replies to charges of naughty acts).

This division of *rasa* into six is evidently different from similar classifications in the literature of other systems of neo-Vaisnavism. The songs of *lila* on their part are subdivided into four classes:- *jāgana* (Krsna's waking up in the morning), *calana* (going with the cows to the grazing ground), *khelana* (pastoral sports) and *nrtya* (dancing). The bargits have moreover been known by such descriptive names as *phāgur git* (songs of phalgutsava in Brndabana), *Uddhava-yānar git* (songs of mission of Uddhava to

Brndabana from Mathura), *bhojana vyavahārar git* (songs of pastoral picnics), *dadhi-mathanar git* (songs of churning butter out of milk) and so on.

The songs of viraha have ‘the depth and not the tumult of the soul’. The *gopis* (milk-maids) of Brndabana give vent to their pangs of separation from **Krsna** before his messenger Uddhava in these words:-

O Uddhava, what shall we say? How shall we express our hearts? Without Govinda, Gokula has gone into complete ruins. Our huts and the forest of Brnda have become a great void : a moon-less night does not look bright. He will no longer tend cows beside the black river (Yamuna); nor will He play on flute below the kadamba tree. The beloved of all gopis will be in Mathura; how will our life hold without Kesava?

With separation from Madhava our senses are getting numb and life is not keeping within the body. Without Kesava the moon, sandal-paste and the soft Malaya breeze rain poison on our bodies; Madana is shooting his five arrows at us time and again; the cuckoo is simply taking our life with its cooings; lotus-leaves and cool water have also become harmful to us; and clusters of bees are bringing veritable death upon us. At such moments our beloved, our very life stays away at Madhupuri. Such is the *rasa* Sankara, the servant of Krsna, sings.

These feelings were shared by all in Brndabana, trees and herbs not excluded. Sankaradeva seems to have held that the devotion of the milk-maids was not perfect until they took themselves as *dasis* (maid-servants) of Krsna.

The sense of wonder at the Supreme Being’s turning a cowherd prevails all through these poems. A philosophic tone pervades the gits of Sankaradeva’s composition. He reminds us that human life is transient and illusory. But we can make it real by devotion to Hari, for there is nothing real here on earth other than that devotion. *Dasya* is the permanent bhava in His poems. In some of Madhavadeva’s bargits the same ideas persist but what he excels in as a poet are the lyrics depicting the frolicsome life of **child Krsna** in Brndabana. *Vatsalya rasa* permeates these beautiful lyrics of his. In this phase of his poetry, Madhavadeva can be compared only to Suradasa among north-Indian poets. The majority of His lyrics (and dramas also) are only studies in child-psychology.

The gits of jagana, calana, khelana and nrtya begin with Yasoda's awakening **boy Krsna** when dawn scarcely peeps in. He goes out to the forest of Brnda on the Yamuna along with twelve other cowherd boys. They carry their food, curd and cooked rice on their shoulders, because they will have to roam about all day long in the thorny field and thick forest. Krsna sometimes exhibits his superhuman ability by killing huge monsters. He at other times charms the gopis and even the insensate things of nature by playing on the flute, which the poet takes to stand for *adya prakrti*, the material cause of the world being worked upon by the Supreme Being. We would often find Krsna dancing to the gopi's clapping of hands for a few toy ornaments or a pound of sugar and butter. With all his childish frolics and innocent wickedness, he would turn home in the evening - again a child who would not creep out of its mother's lap.

Hari complains to Yasoda, 'I shall not take bath today. I was roaming about in the forest in search of cows, and the thorny grass have scratched my whole body; if I go for bath my body will burn, the scratches coming in contact with water. I shall not eat anything this evening but shall simply go to bed'. The great lady was touched with affection; tears flowed down her cheeks. 'My child, listen to me, take your bath and weep not for being a poor woman's son. I shall rub the finest butter on your body and shall give you cool water only for your bath. Your body will not burn but feel soothed. You will take nectar (very sweet) food after bath'. Madhava prays, O Hari, I have only a little complaint: How can the body of Brahman get scratched?

We also find Madhavadeva falling into a trance over the imagination of Krsna's body, resplendent with all beauty.

Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva made no difference between **Krsna** and **Ramacandra**; both were the Supreme God; *Srinathe Janakinathe abhedah paramatmani*. So there are a few songs based on the Ramayana story.

Belonging to the same class of music, compositions of other Assamese poets of the day differed from the bargits by the lack of this depth, dignity and reticence.

Sankaradeva once after he had left the Ahom kingdom wanted to know what poets were there in the country of Kamarupa. He was told of Pitambara, who rendered the story of the carrying away of Rukmini into verse but when he found that Pitambara could put such sensual effects as in the following *pada*, he was filled with righteous indignation.

bilāpa kariyā kānde devi Rukamini /
kona ange khuna dekhi nāilā Jadumani //
(Katha Carit, leaf 28, MS.)

Another pre-Sankaradeva poet Pitambara wrote lyrics on Aniruddha and Usa's marriage, which are characterised by their sensuousness. Durgabara Kayastha, a senior contemporary of Sankaradeva, composed short lyrics, with the story of Ramayana and that of Behula and Lakhindar (Padma-Purana). All these were tuned to classical ragas and were sung and are still sung by *oja-pali* (chorus consisting of one oja<upadhyaya, or leader of the band and several palis or assistants singing the refrain on cymbals).

Bargits distinguish themselves from these songs by being mostly prayer-songs of devotional enthusiasm of **Eka-Sarana Nama-Dharma** of Sankaradeva.

The character of Radha in the poem

Elimination of the character of Radha as the unmarried consort of Krsna from these lyrics is in line with the principal sentiment of *dasya* in this school of Vaisnavism. Radha appears only in five songs of Madhavadeva known as gits of *bhusana-harana* (stealing of ornaments); but then, these songs do not show any sentiment of love. **[Moreover, they are held to be spurious – editor@atributetosankaradeva.org]**

The episode of theft is this:-

One day the child Krsna was sleeping all alone under a kadamba tree on the bank of the Yamuna. Radha was going to the river with pitcher in hand when she saw the sleeping child. Apprehending that some body might rob him of his ornaments, she took them away from his body. Hiding the things, she awakened Krsna and asked him where

he had lost them. The child found no answer to give. Radha made her way home, and made over the valuables to Yasoda.

Krsna now approached his mother for a fresh set of ornaments. He had lost his old ones, he said, for no fault of his. A milk-maid gave him some sweetmeat to eat and on taking them he turned senseless and lay beside the kadamba tree. It was no body else but Radha, he knew, who had stolen his property at this hour.

Krsna then charged Radha of theft saying, 'You had the audacity to commit such an act on the high way in broad daylight. Would you refrain from going out to steal at night? You could not conceal the ornaments and have therefore given them to my mother'. Radha retorted, 'I have saved your life and your ornaments from robber's hands. Is that only a fault of mine? If you were so innocent, why could not you answer my question then and there? Why have you been hiding in gopis' cottages for fear of your mother?'

The clever boy then appealed to Yasoda, stating that it was this particular gopi who stole away his ball when he was playing with his mates. When questioned, she called Krsna a thief in turn. She was moreover, he alleged, speaking ill of him everywhere in Gokula.

Yasoda scolded Radha and drove her away.

The *rāgas* in Bargits

In all bargit manuscripts each lyric is connected with some *rāga*, *rāginis* being nowhere employed. Almost all the names of ragas mentioned are found in Sanskrit *sangita-sastras*. It is not known if raga Kau which name is not found in such sastras has anything to do with Skt. Kukubha or Kausika.

Ragas used in Sankaradeva's bargits:-

Āhira, Āsovāri (Āsāvāri), Bhupāli, Dhanasri (Dhanāsri), Gauri, Kalyāna, Kedāra (Kedārā), Māhura, Māhura Dhanasri, Nata-Mallāra, Suhāi (Suhā), Sri, Tud (Todi), Bhātiyāli (Bhattiyāra), Vasanta.

Ragas used in Madhavadeva's bargits:-

Āhira, Āsovāri, Barādi (Barāri, Barāti), Belovār (Balihāri, Bilāvala), Bhātiyāli, Dhanasri, Gauri, Kāmoda, Kānādā (Kānadā, Karnāta), Kau (?), Kedāra, Lalita, Māhura, Māhura Dhanasri, Mallāra, Nata, Nata-Mallāra, Sindhurā, Sri, Sri gāndhāra, Sri gauri, Suhāi, Syāmagadā or godā (gārā), Tud, Tud-Bhāthiyāli, Tud-Vasanta, Vasanta.

Each bargit is divided into two main parts **dhruva** (refrain) and **pada** (ordinary lines of verse which are not repeated like the refrain); the *tāl* (beating time) is not indicated. But in the case of three lyrics, called '*sadachandar git*' (literally, songs of six metres), each is divided into three independent songs with three dhruvas, three pada portions and, uniquely enough, three talas.

The letter 'dhrum' is placed at the end of the refrain, while the word 'pada' is sometimes put at the beginning of the padas. Dhruva is popularly called dhuvā or dhurā.

Bargits as instruments of propaganda

The role of bargits in Sankaradeva's scheme of religious propaganda is quite considerable. They more than anything else greatly helped in the spread of the cult of bhakti and with other branches of Vaisnava literature formed the basis of its permanence. With all their edifying contents, literary beauty and appealing music, the bargits attracted people to the new faith and became the solace of distressed hearts.

One of Sankaradeva's disciples Narayana Thakura, was first attracted to the religion through **Bhaskara Bipra** who could sing the saint's gits on the instrument *rabab*, and later, to his delight, met some bhakats singing '*mana meri Rama-caranahi lagu*', who led him to the Guru. Sukladhvaja or Cilarai, younger brother of king Naranarayana of Koc Bihar and commander-in-chief of his armies, married Kamalapriya or Bhuanesvari, the daughter of Sankaradeva's brother [cousin] Ramarai. Cilarai one day heard Kamalapriya sing one of Sankaradeva's songs, *pamara mana Rama-carane citta dehu*, and was so much charmed by the beauty of the composition that he decided upon getting initiated into the faith of its author.

With the spread of the Satra system and multiplication of Namagharas (village chapels) the popularity of these songs was ever on the increase. Written in a language the meaning of which is not easy of access in many places and out to classical tunes not easy to master, the bargits are nevertheless, known to all Hindus and non-Hindus of Assam.

There is a popular saying, ‘nom-negur-barjit; sio gay bargit’ (The most wretched person - he also sings bargits!). This speaks of people’s veneration for the bargits and how they reached to the lowest of the low in society and became property of common folk. There was a stupendously large number of imitations of bargits in post-Sankaradeva times to which we are presently coming.

II

Later imitations of bargits

In the post-Sankaradeva period the popularity enjoyed by the bargits inspired poets and saints to make some attempts on the line. On the other hand, the exclusive position of these compositions of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva in Satra ceremonials, the lack of any prospect for new creations being similarly treated, the difficulty of writing in an outlandish language-form, and the comparative ease with which ordinary people could read other poetical works, became retarding factors in their growth. But it will be wrong to suppose that ‘the growth of Brajabuli was extremely restricted’ in the country (S.K. Sen, A History of Brajabuli literature, p.1). It was productive of prose and lyric of the dramas, hymns called bhatimas, and above all numerous ‘imitation’ bargits. Songs imitative of bargits were composed by Gosvamis and Mahantas who were heads of different Satras, till the eighteenth century. Many of these lyrics are merely imitative and decadent in form and spirit, but there is everywhere a ring of sincerity which cannot be doubted.

Are the imitations bargits?

The post-Sankaradeva lyrics are composed and sung in the style of bargits and in some Satras, are used in the ceremonials like bargits. But they are referred to simply as *gits*; like imitation pearls they are only imitation bargits. While bargits have their place in all Satras of Assam, gits of a later poet can have any formal use in the services only in those Satras with which the poet himself is connected.

The git-writers

The Assam school of Vaisnavism, which sprang from Sankaradeva, in later times broke off into four main sects called *samhatis* - the *Brahma samhati* whose monastic heads are generally Brahmins; the *Purusa samhati*, composite of Satras originating from Sankaradeva's grandsons Purusottama Thakura and Caturbhuj Thakura, Narayana Thakura and others; *Nikā samhati* (nikā=clean), of which two main Satras are Kamalabari in the Sibsagar and Barpeta in the Kamrup district, *Kāla samhati*, which originated from Gopaladeva Ata of Bhavanipur, one of the great disciples of Madhavadeva. The Kala samhati discarded all rituals and put absolute faith in the Guru. The pages of Assam history are dotted with acts of royal persecution of Mahantas of this samhati generally at the instigation of ritualists and priests. The preceptors of this denomination have contributed most to the devotional lyric literature of Assam in the post-Sankaradeva period.

Gopaladeva Ata (1541-1611 A.D.) Himself wrote three dramas and a number of gits. Of the six Brahmins and six non-Brahmins, whom he set up as heads of different monasteries, **Srirama Sarma** (known as Srirama of Ahatguri) composed 81 gits, **Jadumanideva** (known as Bar Ata of Bahbari or Henguliya Jadumani, 1564-1618 A.D.) wrote 142 and **Aniruddhadeva's** (1553-1626 A.D.) number came up to 182 gits. Srirama's son **Ramananda Dwija**, Ramananda's son **Ramagopala**, several of the successors of Jadumanideva in the Dihing Satra including **Kaivalyanandadeva** (1715-1782 A.D.), 161 of whose gits we have been able to recover, several of the successors of Aniruddhadeva including **Nityanandadeva** who with some of his followers was massacred at the instance of king Curampha (1649-52 A.D.), are among those who have composed a considerable number of lyrics. Some of the minor git-writers of this samhati are **Padmapriya** (Gopaladeva Ata's daughter), **Ramakrsna**, **Ramananda Kayastha**, **Brahmananda**, his son **Sukadeva** and his brother **Jayadeva** and **Caturbhuj**.

The Nika samhati also has its contribution, though by no means as considerable as that of the Kala samhati. Sankaradeva's grandsons **Purusottama Thakura** and **Caturbhuj Thakura**, Madhavadeva's nephew **Ramacarana Thakura**, **Narayana Thakura** and his son **Paramananda Thakura** have all left us a few gifts of which only Purusottama's number approaches a score. The other two samhatis do not seem to have been much productive of lyrics.

One Mohammedan disciple of Sankaradeva, **Candsai** or **Candkha** by name, has a few gnomic verses to his credit. There is moreover a great number of anonymous compositions, all ascribed to Madhavadeva in the colophon - *kahaya Madhava dase, Krsnara* (or *gurura*) *carana hrdaye dhariya dina Madhava dase gay*, etc. Madhavadeva was a great singer as he was a great poet and scholar. For his sweet voice and musical accomplishments he has been called a gandharva incarnate. Songs that had the seal of Madhavadeva's name on them readily became popular. Gopaladeva Ata wrote his first drama '*Janma-Yātrā*' and approached Madhavadeva saying, "Father, I place this at your Feet. Have the kindness to insert here a song of your composition. People will accept the thing if there be a word coming out of your lotus-mouth. Let the jackal put on his neck what is fit for the lion". (Katha Carit, leaf 104). This explains the zeal of later poets in ascribing their own compositions to the great Madhavadeva. It seems to have almost become a literary convention to put Madhavadeva's name in the colophon of lyrics. There are besides a few lyrics ascribed to the famous mystic poet **Kavira** (called Kavira or Kavir Gosai in Assam), **Visnupuri Sannyasi** of Tirhut and Dvija Brndabanadasa of Brndabana, about all of whom many anecdotes are told in this province.

There are a few lyrics belonging to the circle of the Ahom royal court of Rudrasimha (1695-1714 A.D.) and Sivasimha (1714-44 A.D.). These poems were written by the two monarchs, and by Ramanarayana (better known as Kaviraja Cakravartti) patronised by both and Gopalacandra, who in one of his lyrics eulogises king Sivasimha.

Language and style of later lyrics

The language of the new lyrics is not uniformly Brajabuli. Where attempts are made at writing that ‘literary jargon’, the result is good, bad or indifferent according as the merit of the poet. Gopaladeva Ata, Jadumanideva and Aniruddhadeva are good literary successors of the two great teachers in this respect. The Brajabuli idiom attracted many of the poets while others composed their songs in plain Assamese, sometimes with tincture of Brajabuli forms; The verses of Candsai and the anonymous lyrics ascribed to Madhavadeva have a ring of homeliness comparable to folk-poetry in style and diction. Experiment in new metres is rarely met with. **Jadumanideva** however introduces a metre of five syllables each foot. **Kaivalyananda** illustrates it in the following small poem.

rāga belovāra

*Brahma bhāvanā /
lilā karanā //*

*pada krpā karanā/
jano dharanā//
Krsna-caranā /
bhava taranā //
bhakti bhāvanā /
pada sevanā //
prema-caranā /
Kaivalya bhajanā //*

Brahman is born (as man), makes divine sports and exhibits grace. O men, stick to Krsna’s Feet, which can save you from rebirth. Concentrate your thoughts on devotion and worship (God’s) Feet. At the Feet of Prema Kaivalya places his devotion.

(Prema - Premabhusanadeva, father and religious guru of Kaivalyanandadeva)

Subjects of later gits

The essential difference between matter (deha) and energy (atman), the idea of the world and all relations as mere illusion, eulogy of bhakti and all-powerfulness of **Krsna**,

the devotee's hypothetical confession of sins, his absolute faith in **Krsna** as the only way, the sense of wonder at the Supreme Being descending on earth for the sake of devotees and playing the part of a cowherd, the childish pranks of **Krsna**, the motherly love of Yasoda, of the sorrow of the milk-maids and Yasoda at Krsna's departure for Mathura, the mission of Uddhava, the usual festivities in Brndabana, the Ramayana story - these are perennial subjects for the gits as they were for the bargits. The git-writers scarcely felt any necessity of enlargement of their scope upon these. They repeated these subjects in their own way. We also find many instances of bargits being adapted by these later writers with only slight variations. The jaganar bargit of Madhavadeva, beginning:-

teja re Kamalāpati parabhāta ninda /
teri cānda mukha pekho utha re Govinda //

O consort of Kamala, give up your morning sleep; let me see your
moon-like face, get up O Govinda.

found several imitators - Jadumanideva, Srirama, Ramananda Dvija and Kaivalyananda among them. The pathetic sentiment in the gopi's longing for Krsna then away at Mathura moved many a writer to poetry and Gopaladeva Ata wrote a drama with several fine lyrics on the subject. Sankaradeva and his place of birth Bardova in the present district of Nagaon were additional subjects for this new poetry. The great teacher was extolled as **Visnu** descended upon this mundane world for its benefit.

Growing importance of the guru

Beginning from the Upanisads and Bhagavadgita, all sacred scriptures lay down that the guru's precepts must be followed by the disciple if attainment of ultimate knowledge is desired. In tantric rituals, the guru is indispensable. In the Hinayana school of Buddhism and among the sahajiyas, help of the guru (whom they call sad-guru or vajra-guru) is necessary at every step forward. The Vaisnavas of Assam pin their faith on *four vastus* (realities, principles) - *Nāma* (remembering or calling the Names of God), *Deva* (self-surrender at the Feet of one God), sat sanga [*Bhakta*] (taking company of the good, that is Devotees) and *Guru*. It is said that Sankaradeva revealed the first three

principles of faith taking them from *Sahasra-nama khanda* of the **Padma Purana**, the **Bhagavadgita** and **Bhagavata Purana** respectively. To these the fourth principle, that is faith in the Guru, was added by Madhavadeva (Katha Carit, leaf 11). The Kala samhata laid the greatest stress on and put all faith in the guru, in whom they found everything that could be desired; God was also personified in him. Gopaladeva Ata took Sankaradeva and his own guru Madhavadeva as indistinguishable. Sankaradeva was **Hari Himself**:-

rāga gauri

*sevaha mana bhajahu mana
Sankara-pada dui /
jo pada-rajā parasi kalita
agatira gati hui //dhrum//*

*jo Hari Yadu kule avatari
pracāri yasa vipula /
jagata tārila bhāra samhārilā
nistārila Yadu-kula //
sohi Sankara nara-rupa dhari
Rājadhara kule āsi /
kula uddhārilā loka nistārila
Krsnara yasa prakāsi //
gita-kavitva sunante lokara
amrta varise mane /
Mādhavara pada renu sire dhari
dina Gopāle ehu bhane //*

O mind, bow down and worship at the Feet of Sankara, at the touch of the dust of which the doomed finds the Way. Hari, Who incarnated in the family of Yadus and through the broadcast of His glories saved the world, destroyed the burden of its sins and gave protection to the Yadus, has again become a man in the form of Sankara born to the family of Rajadhara and has saved His own family and all people by revealing the glories of Krsna. It rains nectar on the minds of people to hear the songs and poems of His. Poor Gopala says this with the dust of Madhava's Feet on his head.

Faith and absolute dependence upon the Guru are seen enhanced in the Mayamariya (or Movamariya) sect of **Aniruddhadeva**. This is evident from the colophon of each of the majority of his gits, where 'the Feet of the Guru' or 'the Feet of

Gopala' (Gopaladeva Ata) is repeatedly mentioned. Guru is the only way through which bhakti can be attained. Aniruddhadeva sings:-

Know, O my mind, know, it is the rule of the scriptures that bhakti is not born except through the mouth of the preceptor. Dirty things come out of the eyes, nostrils, ears, mouth, vagina and anus of the cow. If otherwise an opening is cut in the body, blood will come out. It is only the nipples in the udder that can give milk. In the same way bhakti is not known if not through the advice of the preceptor.

The Mayamariyas could deny anything on earth except the Guru; they bowed their head only to Him and to none else. One of their gurus, Nityanandadeva, was killed under orders from the Ahom court in 1650 A.D. and another successor of his, Caturbhujadeva was insulted in the Ahom capital during the reign of Sivasimha (1714-44 A.D.). The infuriated Mayamariyas in their secret conference promised:-

māri jāo mari jāo, gurura rina suji jāo.
Let us kill and be killed and thus the debt to our Guru repay.

The Movamariyas broke out in revolution and shook the country to the very bones; and there was to be no peace for nearly three decades (1769-94 A.D.).

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