

## CHAPTER IV

### SANKARDEVA AND HIS TIME IN AND AROUND BARPETA

Ancient Kamrup was a part of the then Kamata kingdom and continued up to the rule of King Indranarayan (1350-1365). And after that the Sultan of Bengal Sikandar Shah occupied Kamata kingdom. The Bhuyans afterwards established small states in the former Kamata kingdom. Sripati Bhuyan and Chandragiri Bhuyan established two states within that area which was bounded by Kaldia and Manas River. Patbaushi area fell under the state established by Chandragiri Bhuyan. In the passage of time, several rulers occupied this region time to time viz. Arimatta Kingdom (1365-1440), Khem Kingdom (1480-1498) and Sultan Shah (1493-1591). There after this region was again occupied by the Bhuyans. When Neo-Vaishnavite faith emerged and flourished in Assam, the Ahom and Koch kings were in the eastern and western parts of Assam. The Ahom kings were Chuhungmung (1497- 1539 A.D) Suklengmug (1539-1552 A.D), Sukhampha (1552-1611 AD). (Roychoudhury, 2018:32)

Barpeta came into prominence in the religious map of Assam during Ahom period with the advent of Saint Sankardeva. During 16<sup>th</sup> century, Koch kingdom came into power. Biswa Singha was the first Koch king of Koch dynasty. After him, Naranarayana ascended to the throne in the year 1540 and his brother Chilarai was declared as the commander-in-chief of the Koch relevant Vaishnavite army. The king assigned the portion to the east of the Sonkosh river comprising the Mongaldoi sub division, Kamrup and Goalpara districts and the eastern part of Mymeonsingh (now in

Bangladesh) to his nephew in 1581. The two kingdoms thus demarcated came to be known as Behar and Kamrup. That time Barpeta was under Kamrup region.

Barpeta's glory had reached its zenith at the middle part of 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (1544-1600) with the presence of Saint Srimanta Sankardeva (1449-1568), who was great social reformer, spiritual preacher, literary giant and the torch bearer of Assamese renaissance and his equally prolific disciple Saint Madhabdeva (1489-1596). These two preachers had lived here for a long period and transformed this place into a most sacred, spiritual and elite place. They gave a universal religion (*Eka Saran Nama Dharma*), music, dance, *Bargeet* (devotional song), *Aankiya naat* or *bhaona* (theatrical performance), open stage (*ranga mancha*), fine art, literature, sculpture, architecture, and above all a well knit democratic social- spiritual institution of *Sattrā*, through which they preached their epoch –ideals. (Roy, 2016:8)

Saint Sankardeva left the Ahom kingdom and entered into Koch state Kamrup in 1546 with his disciples and large number of devotees. He had come by boat through the river Brahmaputra and cross different parts such as Kalakata, Sadhanar *Ghat*, Khagarikata, Kaliyarbar, Barkuargaon, Banbhag and Barbhag. Shrimanta Sankardeva along with his disciples stayed for six months at Kaplabari near Kapla *beel* (lake). That place is known as Karakuchi. In that place many of his *Bhakats* (devotees) had died in fever. Madhabdeva's mother also suffered in fever. Therefore he left the place and came to Tapabari through Chaulkhowa River. Some *Bhakats* died here due to polluted water and some became bold. So he said that place as Tapalar Bari (land of bold people) then he visited to Chenga. He took rest and washed his hand and mouth in a place which is known as "Sankardeva's Bhari Dhua Ghat". But he found that place was not suitable for

living and therefore came to another village named Sapara. He entered Barpeta town through the Galaya *jaan* (river stream) and stayed at Chinpora area of Barpeta town.

#### **4.1 Sankardeva at Chinpora *Bhithi***

Saint Sankardeva at first stayed at Chinpora on the side of Barpeta *beel* (lake). He stayed here for few months as the place was suitable for propagating Vaishnavism. When a rich and talented merchant named Bhabananda approached Sankardeva for initiation into *Bhakti*, Saint Sankardeva renamed Bhabananda as Narayana at his first sight and from that time onwards he was known as Narayana Das Thakur Ata. Within a very short time he took initiation to the new creed of Sankardeva. This new convert soon influenced the master with his firmness of mind and talent. He supplied *Sanchipaata* to both the *Gurus* for writing scriptures. As he was a rich merchant he provided economic support to the devotees. It was recorded in the biography that Thakur Ata donated two granaries (*bharal ghar*) full of rice to the *Sattras* of Sankardeva at the time of famine caused by draught. In Chinpora many people took *Nama Dharma* under Sankardeva. A clever person named Madhai of Jayantia (now in Meghalaya) and Burha Gopal took initiation at that place. In Chinpora, boat sailors kept boat in the river bank and made the place dirty. One day Sankardeva's wife told about these problem and they decided to leave the place. For the purpose, Madhai helped and gave information about Kumarkuchi.

#### **4.2 Sankardeva at Kumarkuchi**

After six months Saint Sankardeva shifted to Kumarkuchi from Chinpora and established a *Sattras* there and stayed for one year. He preached his religion for few years from there. After that he handed over the charge of that *Sattras* to his brother Bangayagiri.

As described in the *Charitputhi* the following reasons are responsible for leaving the place-

The first reason, at Kumarkuchi, he lost his daughter Bishnupriya, found death in her bed at night which was beyond imagination;

Second reason was the three different castes such as Hira, Kumar and Kaibartyas lived in south, east and west direction of the place. They had disturbed the *Bhakats* in performing prayers or *Naam Prasanga*; and

Third reason was one day a cat brought a half piece of fish from neighbouring house and kept in his kitchen and due to it, Sankardeva was bound to clean the entire campus. (Bezbarauh, 1914:76)

### **4.3 Sankardeva and Initiators at Patbaushi**

Sankardeva gave initiation to many great followers to his *Eka Saran Nama Dharma*. For this he never judged the community or religion of those people who came towards him for undergoing initiation. Some of the great followers of this newly formed religion are as follows-

#### **4.3. a. Madhabdeva**

Majuli was one of the nerve centres of the Vaishnavite Movement during its heydays. It was at Majuli (then known as Dhuwahata, Ahom territory) that Saint Sankardeva met his foremost disciple and apostolic successor, Saint Madhabdeva for the very first time, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At first Madhabdeva used to believe in the *Sakta* religion (believe on *Shakti*). At the first meeting Madhabdeva debated with Sankardeva, in the debate Sankardeva told Madhabdeva, “a tree has many branches and they all need

water and minerals and it is good enough to give water to the root of the tree, from the root, the vascular system will carry the water to all the branches. It is foolishness to give water to every branch. Just like that praying to Krishna (who is the supreme God as Vaishnavism believes, he is one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu and also known as Vishnu himself) would be like praying every god and goddesses, as he is the source of all energy of Universe”. With such examples Sankardeva explained to Madhabdeva to believe in one God is more appropriate, peaceful than believe in many Gods. After realizing the wise lesson Madhabdeva became his pupil and began to learn of religion from Saint Sankardeva. This event of union is known to as *Manikanchan Sanyog* which is the single most epoch-making event in the history of the Vaishnavite Movement. After this meeting, Vaishnavite Movement gained momentum and the medieval caritas (the hagiographies) are full of references to Majuli. (Sharma, 2003:13)

Saint Sankardeva in the long run had arrived at Baraljar from Kumarkuchi as two devotees viz: Baga Doloi and Damodar donated a plot of land for the *Sattra* of Sankardeva at Patbaushi on the west of Danukhanda *Jaan* in the later part of 1549 AD. At that time Madhabdeva established a *Sattra* at Ganakkuchi and went to Sankardeva’s *Sattra* to serve his Guru and for regular discussion and discourses. To preach the *Eka Saran Nama Dharma* those of that who joined and took initiation were Sriram Ata, Madhab Ata, Anantakandali, Kanthbhusan, Gobinda Ata, and those took initiation under Saint Madhabdeva were Gopal Ata, Barbishnu Ata, Laksmikanta Ata, Mathura Das Burah Ata, Keshab Charan or Bhatou Ata, Pariya Ata, Lechakaniya Gobinda, Bongshigopal, Jadumani, Srihari, Ramcharan Thakur and Padma or Badula Ata. (Talukdar, 2014:101)

Madhabdeva was like a shadow of Saint Sankardeva. He helped Sankardeva in all the activities during his life time even after the death of Sankardeva, Madhabdeva took responsibility for looking after Kalindi Aai. At Patbaushi, Saint Sankardeva inspired Madhabdeva to give full attention to literary work. As order of Gurujana, he translated two scripts viz Janma Rahasya and Aadi Kanda Ramayan as well as he wrote the best manuscripts Naam Ghosa (Hazar Ghosa). Both of them engaged in literary works and made the place as *Sahityar Barpeeth* (Hub of literature) (Roychoudhury, 2018:205)

One day when Sankardeva was travelling by boat at that time he heard the word “Krishna” uttered by a Chandal, a lower class people. Sankardeva thanked the man and told him that he was higher than a *Dadas Guniya* Brahmin (Brahmin with twelve types of knowledge). After some time, crossing the way he heard the word “Krishna” again taken by a cowherd. He instantly stops the boat and tear came out from his eyes in love and told “what a clever boy”. He had again observed natural views and returned to Patbaushi. Several such types of incidents are related to Sankardeva during the time he spent at Patbaushi. (Bezbaruah, 1914:78)

#### **4.3. b. Chandasai**

When Shrimanta Sankardeva was at Patbaushi and Madhabdeva at Ganakkuchi, there was a tailor named Chandasai of Muslim community who resided at Kamatapur. As a rumour he always scoffed the *Bhakats* those used to come to Patbaushi for *Hari Naam Kirttan* on the road. Some time on their way he struck them with stone, split their cloth, taken their *bakulmala* (chain made of Spanish Cherry flower) from their heads and hung those on dog’s tail. The *Bhakats* informed about their disgrace to Saint

Sankardeva. Sankardeva advised them as that “endurance and patience is an ornament of *Mahanta* (noble person)”.

One day Chandasai was going somewhere and peeped near Sankardeva’s residence. At that moment he became confounded in the unexpected appearance of Sankardeva. He saw that after taking bath, Sankardeva was pressing cloth to remove water with two hands and combing hair with another two hands. Then he considered Sankardeva was a man of super power, not an ordinary one. After witnessing the divine power and dignity, he repented and cried for his offence and requested Madhabdeva to take him in front of Sankardeva for begging. Saint Sankardeva gratified on him and the next day gave him a lesson about Vaishnava religion. From that time Chandasai had known as Jawan Jaihari Ata and engaged for propagating *Eka Saran Nama Dharma*. He offered a shirt to Sankardeva which had four hands too.

#### **4.3. c. Damodardeva**

Saint Sankardeva met one Brahmin disciple named Damodardeva at Patbaushi. Damodardeva came from the village Nalacha of Bardowa and stayed nearer to Sankardeva’s *Sattra* at Patbaushi. He selected agriculture as his occupation so he was known as ‘Kor Damodar’. Later he was easily converted to the *Eka Saran Nama Dharma* and the preacher recognized him as his disciple. After the death of Sankardeva, Damodardeva created a new sect of Vaishnavite religion. The difference between this and the former one is, worship of idol is permitted in this new religion. But the sacrifice of animal to which *Sakta* religion is accustomed is not permitted. According to some scholars, Damodardeva bifurcated from the origin religion due to the power imposed

upon Madhabdeva by Sankardeva as Madhabdeva was younger than Damodardeva. (Hazarika, 2013:109)

#### **4.3. d. Harideva**

Harideva was another great disciple of saint Sankardeva. He has great contribution in preaching Vaishnava religion in Assam. He was born in Narayanpur of North Lakhimpur in 1493 (1415 *Saka*). The Ahom ruler of that time found guilty as Harideva was propagating Vaishnavism among them. He issued a warrant to arrest Harideva and due to that he ran away to Kamrup. He stayed in several places like Hajo, Malipara, Bahari and lastly at Maneri. At that time he was influenced by the *Eka Saran Nama Dharma* and met Saint Sankardeva at Patbaushi regularly. In the research work, Syatendra Nath Sarma described that Sankardeva recognized Harideva as Dharmacharjya.

#### **4.3. e. Gobinda Atoi**

During the period of his stay at Patbaushi, a few Garo families were residing at a place called Katakali *Beel*, presently known as Na- Khanda. Then Madhabdeva was staying at Ganakkuchi and Narayana Das Thakur Ata at Janiya. Everyday both of them came together to visit Sankardeva at Patbaushi. One day while they were proceeding towards Patbaushi, on their way, they noticed a Garo cultivator ploughing his land with a pair of bullocks and heard while pushing the bullocks forward for ploughing the land, shouting '*hey, hey*'. After noticing that, they asked the farmer, instead of shouting '*hey hey*' why was not he driving the bullocks chanting '*Rama Rama*'. The farmer ignored them and continued his action. Then they asked him again to chanting '*Rama Rama*'. Finally, out of sheer disgust, the farmer said, "all right I am saying



Rama, but tell what would be its outcome?’ Thakur Ata replied that, when *Ramanaam* (name) is chanted even the Yama (the god of death) would run away. Then the farmer chanted the word Rama several times and stared laughing in insulting tone.

After lapse of some time, the Garo farmer, he was quite aged; suddenly fell seriously ill due to certain misdeeds and violent ways of his living, the messengers of Yamdoot came, tied him with ropes and got ready to take him along with them forcibly. He was scared so much that unknowing, he urinated and also defecated. Suddenly, he remembered what Thakur Ata said to him. He was shouting the name Ram Ram repeatedly. Then he noticed the Yamdoot simply ran away out of fear, so he repeated Rama Rama with greater vigour. While he recovered he met Thakur Ata and told him that his *Ramanaam* was extremely effective in driving away the Yamdoot. Then Thakur Ata took him to Madhabdeva and requested to give him knowledge about *Hari naam*. Accordingly they took along the Garo person to meet Sankardeva at Patbaushi. At first, Sankardeva enquired him weather it would be possible for him and then told him that he would have to lead his life like his disciple *Bhakats*. After that he was given initiation and inducted to the faith, Sankardeva told him that from that day onwards he would be called as Gobinda. Gobinda was given admission into the sanctorum and given the knowledge of all the mysteries of *Eka Saran Nama Dharma*. From that day onwards Gobinda has been known as Gobinda Ata. (Rajkhowa, 2012:272-276)

#### **4.3. f. Brahmin *Pandit* (scholar) and Sankardeva**

Sankardeva incurred the wrath of the Brahman Pandits who had failed to win over the saint in religious debates. The emissary Pandit lodged a false complaint before the king Naranarayana, against Sankardeva, stating that the former, who was Sudra by

birth used to recite the Bhagawata, initiated the Brahmans, the Kaivartas and the Sudras to the *Hari Bhakti*. Who would not show any respect for the *tulsi* leaf and the holy Ganga, was averse to the *shraddha* (rituals related to death) ceremony for the death, disrespectful to the Brahmans and also did not allow any worship of the God or Goddess. Thus he was spreading unhealthy practices in the Kingdom. After hearing that, Naranarayana got so much infuriated and as a result he ordered his *Garmaulis* (soldiers) in this manner,“ Garmoulis – you rush out, arrest all of them and produce before me. Once I come across Sankara, I shall make *dabas* (a kind of drum) stitched with his skin. I shall not spare any of his companions to live”. (Rajkhowa, 2012: 276)

The soldier failed to arrest Sankardeva but Narayan Das Thakur Ata and Gokulchand were arrested and taken to Coochbehar and subjected to inhuman torture, but they did not divulge the location where their *Guru* was staying.

In the meantime, Chilarai, the General of the Koch army and the younger brother of Naranarayana, who had been influenced by the Vaishnavite religion and married Bhubaneswari, the cousin of Sankardeva arranged for Sankardeva’s meeting with Naranarayana in 1552. As he moved up the steps to the throne, Sankardeva sang his Sanskrit *totaka* hymn (composed extempore) to God and he sat down, he sang a *bargeet*. Narayana was overwhelmed by the personality of the Saint. The king then asked Sankardeva’s opponents to prove their complaints. Sankardeva had defeated them in the debate and as a result Naranarayana declared him free from all the allegations. Sankardeva began to attend Naranarayana’s court following his request.

Though some of the Brahmin Pandits of that time were against the religion propagated by Saint Sankardeva, yet Ananta Kandali, Sarbabhoumya Bhattacharya and

Chakrapani Dwij who was a relative of Narayandas Thakur Ata took initiation from Sankardeva.

Ananta Kandali translated the middle and last part of Bhagawata Puran as the wish of Sankardeva and he was also known as Bhagawataacharya.

Another disciple Sarbabhoumya Bhattacharya described Sankardeva's name and fame in the books "Saru Swargakhanda" and 'Bar Swargakhanda'.

Besides these above mentioned followers of Saint Sankardeva; Paramananda, Jotiram, three sons of Khira Morol viz. Madhab, Gopal and Mukunda; Boloram, Gakulchand, Udar Gobinda, Nao Bhanga Gobinda, Sape Khoa Gobinda, Brahmananda, Murari Borkoch, Buradoloi, Padmanav, Rajkhowa Gobinda, Narayan Laskar, Raghupati Dhoba also took initiation from him at Patbaushi. (Talukdar, 2014:96,101-102)

#### **4.4 Activities of Sankardeva at Patbaushi**

Sankardeva stayed at Patbaushi for a period of 18 years and six months. During that period he completed some valuable activities which are always remarkable for the Vaishnavite religion and Assamese culture. The activities are given below-

##### **4.4. a. *Brindabani Bastra* at Tatikuchi**

Saint Sankardeva's contribution is mentionable in both direct and indirect to the economic welfare of the people of his time which were clear from a number of his major initiatives. Sankardeva was a great reformer of cottage industry, of which handloom weaving occupied his unique attention. That was beautifully illustrated by his designing and on the job of supervision of the weaving work of the famous "*Brindabani*

*Bastra*". *Brindabanni Bastra* was a unique example of creativity of the *Tantis* (Weaver) of Barpeta.

The *Brindabani Bastra* made from Tatikuchi (Barpeta) in 1567. It is one of those reflections that holds, both artistic virtuosity, and weaving adroitness together with the intelligence of bringing people closer to Lord Krishna. The cowherd Lord revealing in marvellous boyhood feats and playful merry making as well dalliance with the cowherd maids. This is a way which transcended the cluster of Vaishnava philosophy as a devotion to a personal God, to all level of common people, as a popular religion where the child Krishna is in its centre, in highly poetic and passionate renditions. The *Brindabani Bastra* is 120 meter long piece of cloth.

One night the daughter of Ram Rai, Bhubenashwari was singing song of Sankardeva. Her husband Shukladhaj was listening attentively and asked her about the writer. When she told about the great religious Vaishnavite *Guru* Shrimanta Sankardeva, he wanted to meet Sankardeva. For this purpose he sent people to receive him very honestly. After a few days the brother of Sukladhaj (Choto Raja), the king Naranarayan knew about Sankardeva from him and gave interest to meet him. Sukladhaj told him about the information of the king Naranarayan and they arrived near the king. The king Naranarayan honestly received him and gave him a bunch of thread to make the *Brindabani Bastra*, a breath of 30meter (aprox) that depicts the epic of Lord Krishna.

The Koch King Naranarayana and his brother Shukladhaj were interested to know about Bishnu and *Vaishnav katha*, *Baikuntha*, Brindaban, Shri Krishna and Gop-Gopi. As their wish, Sankardeva gave charming description on the above. They

requested him to draw on *pat* how the Brindaban was. Sankardeva told them to provide different kind of colourful thread to weave the views. Sankardeva called some weaver at Tatikuchi and taught them how to prepare the *Brindabani Bastra*. In order of Sankardeva; the weavers wove various charming views viz. At first, the birth of lord Shri Krishna in confinement, Basudeva was carrying, Shri Krishna in waist from crossing Jamuna to arrived at Nanda's house, breast feeding of Putuna, Chakrabat *badh*, earth eaten, broken curds granary, *Arjun Bhanjan*, *Agha badh*, *Ban Bhojan*, *Birinchimohan*, *Talfal Bhakhsan*, *Dhenukasur Binahsan*, *Kalidaman*, *Anbanhipan*, *Gopinir Basthra Haran*, *Anna Prathan*, *Gobardhan Dharan*, *Bristi Nibaran*, *Gopini Raman*, *Songkhasur Badh*, *Kari Gopi Uddhar*, *Pralamba Badh*, *Arista*, *Byom*, *Keshi Akhur Badh*, *Kongshar Dhanu Bhanga*, *Kabalaya Hasti Badh*, *Kongsha Badh*, etc. (Hazarika, 2013:145)

For this work, Sankardeva always went to Tatikuchi for investigation. One day Sankardeva had asked Madhabdeva to go there due to his illness, and on that day Madhabdeva proceeded more than Sankardeva. Sankardeva rewarded Madhabdeva for his work and called him as "Borar Po". It was completed within 6<sup>th</sup> months by 12 numbers of weavers.

After completion, Sankardeva brought the *Brindabani Bastra* at Patbaushi for showing the villagers. The cloth was so massive and long that it needed 60 people to spread and display it. Sankardeva gave the cloth to the king Naranarayana in Coochbehar and described each view minutely of Brindaban. The king Naranarayana awarded him for his skilfulness and intelligence. Later on it was carried from Coochbehar to Bhutan, Tibet. At present it is preserved in 12 pieces in British Museum, London.

#### 4.4. b. Literary works at Patbaushi

The most important time of his life had spent in this *Sattr*a since 1549 to 1567. In this *Sattr*a he did not pay interest only to spread *Eka Saran Nama Dharma* but also had great contribution to Assamese literature and culture in development Assamese society. In the language of Hem Baruah “Sankardeva with a view of propagating his religious doctrine and tenets, began to compose various literary works, *Bargeets*, poems and dramas” [Assamiya Khabar (12.10.2016)].

In this *Sattr*a he wrote a large number of scriptures. Sankardeva used three different languages to write his scriptures and *Bargeet* viz. Brazabali, old Assamese and Sanskrit.

##### i. Scriptures

Sankardeva wrote the beginning part of Kirttan Ghosa at Bardowa but finished it at Patbaushi. He wrote Jarasandha Badh, Kaljawan Badh, Syamantak Haran, Musukunda-Stuti, Bipra Putra Anayan, Bedstuti, Lilamala, Shri Krishnar Baikuntha Pranayan, Bhagawat Tatparjya and Urekha-Barna. Dr. Maheswar Neog in his book “Sri Sri Sankardeva” described that Sankardeva translated Srimat Bhagawat’s parts 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and Balichalan Kurukhetra, Anadi Patan, Nimi Nava Sidha Sanbad. According to Laksmi Nath Bezbaruah Rukmini Haran Kali- Daman and Bhakti Pradip wrote at Patbaushi. Sankardeva acted in *Bhaona* named ‘Chinhayatra’ when he was 19<sup>th</sup> years old. He wrote his first drama ‘Patni Prasad’ at Dhuwahata Belguri and the last one “Ram Bijoy” at Coochbehar in 1568. (Neog, 2006:80)

Sankardeva wrote another drama viz. Konsha badh, Janma Yatra at patbaushi but unfortunately these two dramas are not found at present. Sankardeva wrote Bhakti

Ratnakar in Sanskrit language at Patbaushi. The subject matter of this book was borrowed from Ved, Vedanta, Geeta and Bhagawata. The book is composed of 28 chapters, here exhibited the clear picture of *Eka Saran Nama Dharma*. It was translated to Assamese by Ramcharan Thakur Ata.

### **Nimi Nava Sidha Sangbad**

Nimi was the son of the king Iskhuk (Surya Dynesty). There were nine numbers of male followers come to the king and the king asked them nine questions. Those answers of the question were written here. (Mishra, 2002:38)

The local people of Patbaushi believe that Shrimanta Sankardeva wrote 37 numbers of manuscripts in this *Sattra*.

### ***Bhurukat Haati Bhoroa* (Stuffing an Elephant into a jar)**

The king Naranarayan once asked some court poets to give him a gist of the Twelve Cantos of the Bhagawata – Purana in Assamese verse to be completed in a day. Saint Sankardeva heard the king's wishes and completed the work Gunamala Containing 376 verses in all, and presented a copy of it to Naranarayana, the completion of this marvellous work is also described as an episode of *Bhurukat Hati Bharoa*. (Rajkhowa, 2010:137)

### **ii *Bargeet***

The devotional songs composed by Saint Sankardeva and Saint Madhabdeva are called *Bargeet*. They spread *Eka Saran Nama Dharma* through their songs. Sankardeva and Madhabdeva used classical plain Indian ragas in their compositions. There is a special place of *Bargeet* in Assamese society. While on Sankardeva's first pilgrimage,

he was enthralled when he heard devotees sing the song of poets. He felt how a soulful lyric sung melodiously takes a message straight to the devotees' heart. Deeply inspired, he composed his first hymn 'man mari ram saranhi lagu' at Badarikasram in 1490- 92 AD. Sankardeva wrote his *Bargeet* and *Bhatima* in Brazabali language. It is believed that Sankardeva had composed about 240 hymns at Patbaushi, only 35 are remaining. Sankardeva had lent his hymns to Kamal Bayan. But unfortunately his house was set fire and most of the *Bargeet* were lost. Sankardeva was distraught at the loss and did not write any more songs. Madhabdeva retrieved his Guru's songs from whatever was retained in the memory of the disciples and composed new one himself and wrote almost 157 hymns, in all, they come to 191. Besides he was creator of *Satriya* dance and *Bhatima*. (Phukan, 2010:96)

#### **4.5 Socio-economic Reformer**

Saint Sankardeva introduced the system of distributing *Prasad* to the *Bhakats* as well as to the devotees after *Naam Prasanga* ceremony is over at the places of religious congregation. The *Prasad* is known as *Gazi Prasad*, a mixture of pulses like mung or green gram, available seasonal fruits, ginger, betel leaves and nut, coconut and sugarcane. Since each family had the *Baari* or homestead land, where these crops were grown, Saint used these for social good and his followers put in extra efforts for increasing the production of these items. Sankardeva encouraged them for trade and commerce.

Brass and Bell Metal industry was promoted by his introduction of different kinds of *taal* (cymbals) which are usually used in *Naam- Krittan* at *Sattra*, *Naamghar*, public ceremonies and individual households. These are still in existences like special kinds of brass and bell metals articles, such as *Satriya Ban Kanhi* (dish with stand), *dagdagi lota*, *sarai*, *barchariya*, *ghati* (a kind of water jug). Similarly, *sheetal pati*



(cooling mat made of cane) were also extensively used. Besides these Sankardeva introduced various kinds of musical drums like *khol*, *daba* and *mridanga* also which are popular at present. A special musical instrument *khanjara* was also introduced by him. (Rajkhowa, 2012: 218)

#### **4.6 Origin of *Rangial* flower (Flamboyant Flower)**

Ganakkuchi *Sattra* is considered as *Milan bhumi* (place of uniting) of both the *Gurujanas*. As a spiritual concept, while Sankardeva was travelling for second time to Coochbehar, he had given all the responsibilities of Vaishnava religion to Madhabdeva. Therefore, Sankardeva and his son Ramananda went to meet Madhabdeva at Ganakkuchi. That day Sankardeva requested Madhabdeva to cook meal but Madhabdeva denied doing that. Then Madhabdeva requested Ramananda to prepare food for that night. After having meal Sankardeva wished to sleep with Madhabdeva on same bed. At night Ramananda noticed that both Sankardeva and Madhabdeva merged into one body. After that Madhabdeva returned back to his origin form and Sankardeva stood with four hands keeping *sankha* (the conch), *chakra* (wheel), *goda* (a thick club) and *padma* (lotus flower) in each hand. According to Katha Guru Charit, during the assimilation of two the body one seed created from that. Then Sankardeva told Madhbdeva to plant the seed and from that which plant would grow up will always be the remembrance of both of the *Gurujanas* among the Vaishnava followers. This flower is known as *Rangial* plant which was planted by Madhabdeva for first time. There is a faith that if a couple having no offspring offers prayer in front of the *Rangial* flower, they certainly become parents. These flower and leafs are used in all the *Sattras* of Barpeta as *Nirmali*. (Das, 2015:24-26)

#### **4.7 Sankardeva's *Pada Dhuli* (Dust of one's feet) and Shri Ram Ata**

The use of *Pada Dhuli* (foot dust) is a traditional custom seen in religious institutions of Assam. The Vaishnava devotees had taken *Pada Dhuli* of *Gurujana* on their head to achieve virtue and to reduce their crime in their life. At first *Jiban Mukta Purush* Shri Ram Ata had taken on head the *Pada Dhuli* of Saint Sankardeva at Ganakkuchi Sattra. Since then the custom has been following on. At Patbaushi, at the end of the discussion of the scriptures Shri Ram Ata collected the *kaths* (mat) of Sankardeva and Paramananda which were always propagated to sit on the *kath* at beginning. Shri Ram Ata collected the *Pada Dhuli* of *Gurujana* and kept in a corner regularly. He brought the dust in a packet to Ganakkuchi once in a year and kept in a round shaped new vessel mixing in water and dried up sunshine. Later on, it was used to give mark on forehead of the *Bhakats* in religious programme or *Naam Prasanga*. (Das, 2015:29)

#### **4.8 Use of *Kath* (Sitting Mat)**

Earlier the *Bhakats* used wooden mat for performing *Naam Prasang* with Saint Sankardeva. But, one day Saint Madhabdeva came with a mat made of dried banana plant and told Sankardeva that the *Bhakats* might use this type of mat for performing *Naam Prasanga*. He named this mat as *Kath*.

#### **4.9 Sankardeva's Second Pilgrimage:**

In 1550, Saint Sankardeva went for second pilgrimage with Madhabdeva along with 117 numbers of *Bhakat* from Patbaushi. They aimed to travelling Ganga, Srikherta, Brindaban, etc. They were going to pilgrimage on foot. They arrived at the bank of the river Torsha near Coochbehar, there was a big tree at the place where they were taking

rest. Mahapuruash Sankardeva and Madhabdeva were also taking rest under the tree and at that time they saw a bee hive in a hollow in the tree. Sankardeva then told Madhabdeva that in future the Madhupur Sattra would be established in the very place. (Katha Guru Charit: 188)

**Table 6. Tour Calender of Sankardeva from Patbaushi**

Sl. No.	From	To	Year	Duration
1	Kumarkuchi	Patbaushi	1548-49	1 Year
2	Patbaushi	Puri	1550	6 months
3	Patbaushi	Ramrai Kuthi	--	15 days
4	Patbaushi	Coochbehar	1564	3 months
5	Patbaushi	Coochbehar	1565	6 months
6	Patbaushi	Coochbehar	1567	1 month 15 days
7	Patbaushi	Coochbehar	1568	6 months

Source: Roychoudhury, 2018:169

#### **4.10 Sankardeva's Descendant at Patbaushi:**

When Sankardeva was at Patbaushi, the Kayasthya Bhuyans inhabited together with him. Sankardeva's three son viz. Ramananda, Kamallochan and Haricharan grew up at Patbaushi. His eldest daughter died at Patbaushi after the death of her husband who was killed by Ahom soldiers. His elder son Ramananda Thakur married Sindhumati at Patbaushi. His second and third sons also wedded at Patbaushi. But Kamallochan died before having an offspring. Two grandsons of Sankardeva were born

at Patbaushi viz. Purushottam was the son of Raramananda and Chaturvuj was the son of Haricharan. When *Mahapurushiya* religion divided into four *Samhati*, Purushottam coined Purush *Samhati*. (Mishra 2002:21)

#### **4.11 King Naranarayana's Request and Death of Sankardeva**

In February-March of the year 1568, Saint Sankardeva set sail from Patbaushi for Cooachbehar leaving his family and earthly affection behind. He halted journey at Ganakkuchi to spend the night with Madhabdeva. They had shared a meal and enjoyed their last intimate discussion. After his arrival at Kakatkuta *Ghat* (river bank) of Coochbehar, King Naranarayana welcomed Sankardeva and made the well arrangement for his accommodation. Sankardeva everyday visited the palace to meet the king and recite the chapters of Bhagawata. In the passage of time the king was attracted to Vaishnavism. He told Sankardeva about his willingness to take initiation from him. Sankardeva told the king that if the king would take initiation in Vaishnavism, he or they will not be able their duty properly. But the king did not agree to it and expressed his intense desire to take initiation as soon as possible. Sankardeva requested the king to give him a little time for the initiation. Actually Sankardeva did not want to give initiation to any king. After that incident, for some days Sankardeva did not visit the king. In the mean time, Sankardeva felt ill due to one boil on his right hand. He had been suffering from fever for several days. The king sent his ambassador to bring back Sankardeva to his place, but Sankardeva refused to visit the king excusing his illness. But unfortunately Sankardeva breathed his last on that day after suffering from fever. Hearing the sad news, the king and his brother Chilarai arranged all the necessary commodities for funeral of the saint on the bank of the river Torhsa. The elder son of the Saint performed the final rites and returned back to Patbaushi with the *Bhakats*. The

king realized that he made mistake by pressurising Sankardeva to give initiation and that was the cause of his death. The king and his brother Chilarai gave all the commodities for last rites along with some people to Ramananda. (Talukdar, 2014:161-166)

At Patbaushi, Madhabdeva along with other disciples of Saint Sankardeva completed all the rites and Madhabdeva dedicated himself for looking after the family of his guide cum philosopher Saint Sankardeva. Sankardeva's first and second death anniversary were arranged by his chief devotees Saints Madhabdeva, Thakur Ata, Ramrai and Kalindi Aai at Patbaushi.

#### **4.12 Madhabdeva and Kalindi Aai at Patbaushi**

After the death of Saint Sankardeva, his wife Kalindi Aai faced many problems. She had lost her elder son Ramananda who died in pox and Haricharan in mental disorder. During that time Madhabdeva was only well wisher and support for her. He always came to Patbaushi from Ganakkuchi for getting information and to provide some cooperation to her. Some peoples disliked Madhabdeva and blamed on him. It was unbearable to him and decided to leave Ganakkuchi. Then he shifted to Sundaridia following the advice of the *Guru Patni* (Kalindi Aai). Later on he got her information from Shri Ram Ata and Mathura Das Ata. From Patbaushi, one day, Kalindi Aai sent a "lau" (water gourd) to Madhabdeva with Shri Ram Ata. Madhabdeva became angry for this activity and worried about newly constructed house. He ordered to Mathura Das Ata to cut the tree. But Mathura Das Ata worried because he was obedient to both of them. At first he removed the tree from roof of the house and kept that on a *chang* (net

made by bamboo) and then cut a part from the root. Madhabdeva rewarded him for his job. (Mishra, 2002:28-29)

When Koch kingdom had occupied by the Mughal then Kalindi Aai left Patbaushi and settled at Sundaridia with her daughter- in- law Kanti and Grandson Chaturvuj.

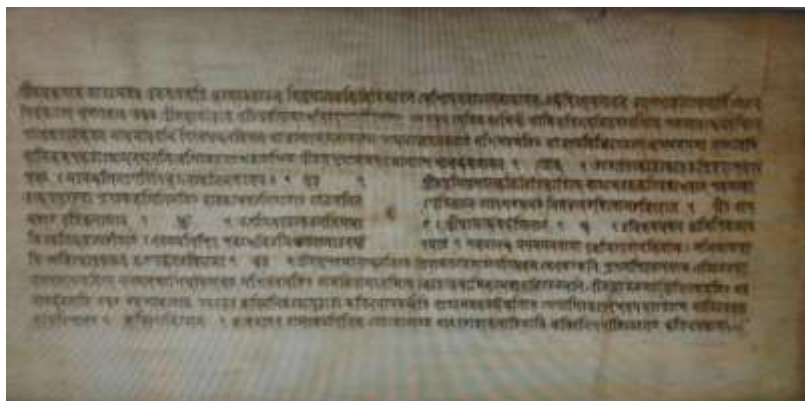
Saint Sankardeva bestowed his life for the all round pervasion of his religion. Nevertheless, he cared deeply for his family. Though he was uncompromising, yet he had full dedication to his family. He was a dedicated husband as well as a father. Without any objection he tolerated his spouse's indulgence in various cults and her idolatry.



**Plate 16: Brindabani Bastra (Source: Google Photo)**



**Plate 17: Mat (Kath) used by the Bhakats**



**Plate 18: Ancient Script written on Sanchi Paat**