

A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF MADHAVADEVA

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Introduction

Govindagiri, father of Madhavadeva was a resident of Banduka on the Dharla or Dhaliswari River. In those days it was a place lying within Kamrup, though now it in Bangladesh. According to another view, Govindagiri lived at place called Dighalpur in Karnasuvarna (Rangpur) for which reason he was known by the name "Dighalpuria". *He was a man of learning and had some disciples in Banduka.* In the descending order his forefathers were Krishna Bhuyan- Vishnu- Gopal- Kipal Rama- Janardan- Sri Rama- Mukunda. Another record presents them in this order. Brahmaguri- Dharmagiri- Anantagiri- Bhavagiri- Dighalpurigiri- Ramakantagiri..

Anucita, wife of Govindagiri died at a young age leaving behind a son, Damodara or rupachandra. After the marriage of Damodara Govindagiri left for Bardowa and there he met the Bara Bhuyas, Kusumavara father of Sankaradeva recognized him as a Kinsman and offered him in marriage a girl from a Barabhuya family. Thus govindagiris second marriage was performed with Monorama (Manonari) and he was appointed by Kusumvara Bhuyan to the respectable position of a Bara at a place near Rauta. Rauta is a river of the present day *mangaldai* Sub- Division. A few years later, Govindagiri had to leave the place in an atmosphere of warfare with his wife he traveled from place to place as a penniless wanderer. Luckily he gets the favour of harisinga Bara, an officer of the *Ahom* King. Harisinga Bara took Govindagiri and his wife, who was then in a state of pregnancy to his own residence Narayanpur, where Madhavadeva was born in 1489 A.D. (In the *Saka* year *Jyuishta* 1411).

A Review of Literature

Dr. Banikanta Kakati in his book *Lyrics of Madhavadeva* has collected and compiled all the lyrics of Madhavadeva while Kaliram Medhi in his book 'Aspects of Madhavadeva's Art' has discussed multiple dimension of Madhavadeva's Art. Moheshwor Neog has clearly discussed different aspects in his book *Madhavadeva's Art & Literature*. Partha Pratim Sarmah, in his book 'Aamar Madhavadeva' has discussed various religious aspects of Madhavadeva. Dr. Karabi Deka Hazarika in her book 'Madhavadeva Sahitya Kala Aru Darshan' has elaborated the literary contribution of Madhavadeva. Dimbeswar Neog in his elaborative book *Sankaradeva and his times, Early History of the Vaisnava faith and Movement of Assam* has gone into the contribution of Madhavadeva.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives have been followed to complete the research study:

1. To study prevailing social system of medieval Assam where social evils like superstitions, caste system, child marriage, purdah, sati or suttee, having no socio-religious equality and harmony in Assam.
2. To study the role of Madhavadeva on the process of elimination of all such social evils.
3. To study how Madhavadeva contributed in the neo trends of Arts, Architecture and paintings of the Country.
4. To study the meaning and nature of Vaishnavite Movement in general that brought social change in the society of Assam.
5. To study the development of Vaishnavite under the leadership of some popular pontiffs of Bhakti Movement.

Methodology

The research conducted by the researcher is based on Primary data collection. But of course, the researcher will take in to consideration the information collected from the secondary data as well as. This is Life History Method/ Life Narrative Method research paper based on secondary data. Data have been found out from different websites, books, research paper and journals.

To study the Contribution of Madhavadeva in deep propagation of Vaishnava Movement on Assam in general and in Barpeta district in particular to bring wide spread social change in the society.

Childhood Life

Madhavadeva was loved by every body around him because he was intelligent and good nature from his childhood. He spent a gay and playful early life while living with Harisinga Bara's family. He was a sharp witted, fearless and good hearted that people beloved him to be a child having some super natural power. Madhavadeva, who often accomanie the Bara (the Ujir), showed his skills in helping collection of taxes from the Villagers.

After a few years Govindigiri went to a new seperate house in the village of letekupukhuri and where his family was soon affected by dire poverty. Govindagiri was also affected with peculiar disease and his small savings were soon exhausted. Madhavadeva, then but a very young boy, tried to support the family on his own strength. The family found it very difficult to stay *Letekupukhuri*, where they had no relatives to help them. Thus the early days of Madhavadeva's life were heard and full of straggle. He had to face so many troubles and problems due to the poverty and ill health of his father. Often the family had to live by begging, particularly when a famine broke out. Sometimes they had to satisfy there hunger by eating wild Fruits. Gobindagiri went to the doors of his relatives with of gating some relief, but he was disappointed. Finding no wayout Gobindaragiri took his family in the house of his friend Ghaghari Maji, a boatman took shelter at Habung. The poor family at least found warm shelter, and their bad days seemed gradually to come to an end.

Madhavadeva's Education at Banduka

Madhavadeva met his elder step-brother for the first time in Banduka. Gobindagiri made arrangement for giving proper education to Madhavadeva, and took him to the Chatrasal (School) of Rajendra Adhyapaka. Within a short time he acquired in good knowledge of *Nyaya*, *Tarka* (philosophy, Logic), Sanskrit poetry and the Science of office administration. Soon after this, Gobiondagiri breathed his last and Madhavadeva carried the sad news to his mother at Hokorakuchi. For the occasion Madhavadeva return to Banduka again and found his brother Damodara lying very ill. He had to manage the office of the Mauzadar (Mazumder) in lieu of his brother for some days at the court of the Banduka shift. Then he took up a little trade in betel and nuts, sailing.

Madhavadeva's conversion into the Neo - faith of Vaisnavism

When Madhavadeva was in Banduka, somebody informed Madhavadeva that his mother had been seriously ill. With much anxiety in his heart at hearing the news he vowed to offer a pair of white goats in sacrifice to the Mother Goddess. Madhavadeva found his mother fully recovered from her illness. So he asked Gayapani to buy him a pair of white Goats for the sacrificial purpose. Gayapani had been converted by Sankaradeva and had taken ordination in the Neo-Vaisnava faith and was renamed Ramadasa by Sankaradeva. Ramadasa expressed his inability to buy Goats for Madhavadeva and spoke to him against the practices of blood sacrifice.

Madhadeva save from the death sentence

Once the Ahom King arranged an elephant catching operation, but as they could not stop wild elephants from escaping, the King Suhummung sent his men to arrest Sankaradeva, who was the head of the Bhuyans. Failing to catch Sankaradeva, they arrested Madhavadeva along with Hari, the Son-in-law of Sankaradeva. Hari was beheaded and he was singing a Bargit "Bhayo bhai savadhan" in the early hours of the fatal day; the executioner suddenly happened to hear him sing and enquired where the voice had come from. The officer of the Ahom kings Suhummung order to release him.

Madhavadeva Migrated to Koch Kingdom

Madhavadeva after completed his education, he embarked on the mission of spreading Vaisnavite ideology and the message of social reform. He was accompanied in this mission by many devotees and disciples. This mission got a boost when the dynamic and scholarly Mahapurusha Madhavadeva joined the cause Srimanta Sankaradeva had pioneered. This union of these two Mahapurushas is known as 'Manikanchansanjog'. They first came together in 1444 shakabda (1522 A.D) at Dhuwahata.

Pilgrimage of Madhavadeva

In about 1550 Madhavadeva went out on pilgrimage with Sankaradeva and other companions in a group of one hundred and twenty pilgrims. Sankaradeva during the journey with an intention to visit the Vrindavana the biography ascribed to Ramacarana places the meeting at Caitanya's own village. The biography attributed to Ramacarana says that the pilgrims visited the village of Bilvamangala.

The pilgrims remained at Puri for some days. Though Sankaradeva wished to visit Vrindavana, Madhavadeva did not agree to accompany him there, remembering the request of Sankaradeva's wife. So the group made their return journey and back Patbausi in the month of Vaisakha.

Socio-Religious works of Madhavadeva

Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, the two saint of Assam established satra institutions to fulfill the socio-religious need of the people of Assam. It was the result of vaisnava movement of Assam. The Neo-vaisnava movement was initiated throughout the whole of Assam during the 16th century. Satras are the chief centre of Assamese culture. Bhaona-sabah, classical dance and music, art and culture, dramatic performance are main cultural activities of satras. The satra played a significant role as a socio-religious and socio-cultural centre of the society. Satria sangeet, satria nritya, satria Bhaona Sabah; utsab etc. directly or indirectly influenced the Assamese people. Satra played a great role for development of moral character and personality. Regularly the satras celebrates Srikrisna Deul utsab, Rash Yatra etc.

Madhavadeva's work at Ganakkuchi

Madhavadeva lived at Ganakkuchi for a long time and have done many socio-religious evelopment work. The two Gurus of Vaishavites in Assam are Sri Sankaradeva and Sri Madhavadeva. Madhavadeva first built Ganakkuchi Satra among a number of other satras. This is the place where Madhavadeva spent around 18 years, when he worked and composed his vaishnavite literature.

Madhavadeva's work at Sundaridia

The great saint Madhavadeva who was established the Satra (temple premise: called Satra in Assamese) in 1570. He spent 14 years and six months in this place which later turned into a place of pilgrimage of the vaishnavites.

It is in a village of Sundaridiya. Everyday visitors come here. Of course no rush I have seen. During "Doul Utsav" Holi time festival takes place. Every day the people offer their prayer from morning.

Madhavadeva's work at Barpeta

Barpeta Satra was established by Mahapurusha Madhavadeva in the Shakabda 1505 (1583 A.D.). After the demise of his Guru, Srimanta Sankaradeva, Mahapurusha Madhavadeva went to Sundaridia, a village towards the north-east direction of Barpeta Satra.

Madhavadeva's work at Baradi

Madhavadeva lived a few days at Baradi and preaching the vaisnava religion. The common people were greatly influenced by the preaching of this great scholar. There he established a satra named baradi satra. This satra became an important centre of learning.

Madhavadeva's work at Gomura

For preaching of new vaisnava Religion he lived a few days at Gomura and there established a satra named Gomura Satra and which is situated at a distance of 27 kilometer towards east from Barpeta town near Sarthebari.

Disciple of Madhavadeva and established satras

- i. Bar Vishnu Ata- Camariya satra
- ii. Mathuradasa Budha Ata- in charge of Barpeta satra
- iii. Gopal Ata- Kaljhar satra
- iv. Badalua Pudma Ata- Kamalabari satra
- v. Bhataukuchi Kesavacarana Ata- Bhataukuchi satra
- vi. Rama Charam Thakur- Guwagacha satra
- vii. Sri Hari- Laiati satra in Majuli
- viii. Govinda- Khatpara satra
- ix. Laksmikanta- Hajo satra
- x. Gopal Ata- Kahikuchi satra, Deberarpar satra

In this way spread the satra initiation system and sent twelve disciples to different parts of Assam to spread the message of Neo-vaisnava Dharma.

Madhavadeva's Service in Last Life

A plenty of songs, dramas, verse narratives and other types of literature composed by both Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, wherein they expounded and elaborated the tenets of the faith. This literary works acted as the chief instrument of propaganda and created to both enlightenment and pleasure to the people.

A Brahman scholar, called Ananta Kandali, the king of Hedemba, the Muslim tailor Chandsai and many others joined the Vaisnava camp.¹ With the number of supporters increasing and the patronage of the king forthcoming, Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva felt quite secure and Neo-Vaisnava movement gained a firm foundation to stand upon. Although a

section of people tried to disturb the movement, Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva were able to carry on the mission with greater success and increasing popularity. Chilaraya managed to build him a Satra near the Capital, which become later known as Bhaledonga Satra.

Madhavadeva's succession

Madhavadeva was nominated for spiritual successor by Sankaradeva. His son Ramananda approached Sankaradeva in his last moments for spiritual instructions; the latter advised his son to approach Madhavadeva to whom he had transfused all his spiritual authority. He also advised Ramananda to treat Madhavadeva as his guru and not as a friend or a co-disciple². On the day of Sankaradeva's *sraddha* all the followers came to know from Ramananda very publicly what had been said by his father about his spiritual successor. Accordingly, in all cheerfulness they all bowed down to Madhavadeva³, and from that day Madhavadeva held the pontifical position in the order.

Madhavadeva, the Poet-Singer and Dramatist

Madhavadeva can only be compared to Sankaradeva in sheer versatility of genius. No other Indian of those days could claim an equal status with Sankaradeva or Madhavadeva in scholarship and versatility. Starting in his literary career during the life time of his Guru, Madhavadeva carried it forward to its final flowering after his Guru passing away.

A poet as well as a lyricist Madhavadeva was also a popular singer. On various occasion he would compose and sing lyrics and ghosa- verses when his Guru's desired him to do so. Even though he was a devotee and a religious preacher, he was imminently successful as a poet artist and lyricist as well. There is room for belief that his lyrics won greater popularity than even those of Sankaradeva.

We have ample evidence of his poetic abilities in his poetical works and title *Rajasuya-Kavya* and the *ghosas* contained in the *Namaghosa*. As a poet of the bhakti cult Madhavadeva's genius find its brightest expression in his *Namaghosa* the touching note of absolute surrender at the feet of the Lord has transformed his religious verses in the *Namaghosa* into a set of poetic utterances.

Madhavadeva's personality

The immensity of his cultural capabilities embeded all his works with a dignity and beauty that itself was overwhelming. Madhavadeva's exposure to the bitter realities of human

existence early life in life together with his later association with Sankaradeva enriched and created a truly extraordinary personality in his religion, philosophy, art and literature. Sankaradeva planed seed of neo-vaisnavism Madhavadeva raised it to great heights. This was simply explained by Daityari Thakur as-

Sankara Bhakti prakasila matru Madhavadeva pracarila

(Sankaradeva only expressed bhakti, but it was Madhavadeva who spread it)

Madhavadeva was a very successful creator. He strengthened the root of the newly established cult. He consolidated the foundation laid by Sankaradeva by setting a set of indispensable rule and regulations in situations. This resulted in a strengthening of the Vaishnava cult.

His Literary works

After Sakaradeva, the next outstanding figure in Assamese literature is Madhavadeva (1489-1596) who was, in much respect, complimentary to his Guru. Like his Guru Madhavadeva too was a prolific writer. He wrote a number of Books in diferent literarary forms and complited the exegesis of the *Ek-sarana religion*. His works exhibit the author's versatile scholarship, sincerely and depth of thought. There is also a graceful flow in the Madhavadeva's style which is expressive and captivating as that of his master.

Madhavadeva's works can be classified under the following heads-

Works of philosophical nature

- (a) *Namaghosa*
- (b) *Bhakti-ratnawali*
- (c) *Janma-rahasya*
- (d) *Nama-malika*

Narrative renderings

- (a) *The Ramayana, Adikanda*
- (b) *Rajasurya-kavya*

Plays

- (a) *Chor-dhara*
- (b) *Pimpara-gucuwa*
- (c) *Bhojana-behar*
- (d) *Bhumi-letowa*
- (e) *Arjuna-bhanjana*

Bargits

Assamese Bargit or Bargeet romanized Bargeet, lit 'songs celestial are a collection of lyrical songs that are set to specific ragas but not necessarily to any tala. These songs composed by Srimanta Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva in the 15th and 16th centuries are used to begin prayer services in Monasteries, e.g. *Satra* and *Namghar* associated with the Ek-Sarana Nam Dharma; and they also belong to the repertoire of Music of Assam outside the religious context. They are a lyrical strain that express the religious sentiments of the poets reacting to different situations and differ from the other lyrical associated with the Ek-Sarana Nam Dharma. Similar songs composed by others are not generally considering Bargits.

A Bargit is a Vaishnava devotional song, popular in Assam that literally meaning great song. They were written in Brajaboli language. Madhavadeva authored more than 140 bargits.

Bargits are lyrical songs with specific raga. They express the religious sentiments of the poets reacting to different situations. Bargits now enjoys an important position in the world of Assamese Music.

To the five plays of the first group, Kaliram Medhi had added Govardhana-yatra of the third group to complete the list of six plays by Madhavadeva out of the Bara nats. The play Bhusana-harana is more a kin to Madhavadeva's style in its subject matter, to complete the list of Krishna's character.

Madhavadeva as an Artist, Actor and Musician

Madhavadeva was an artist and at the same time, an ingenious actor also. Like Sankaradeva he had a sound knowledge of music and dance. His dramas were more musical in style of presentation than the dramas of Sankaradeva. As stated in the old biographies, his plays Govardhana-yatra, Nrsimba-yatra and Rama-yatra bear testimony to his fine artistic skill. *In the play Govardhana-yatra* he made an artificial mountain, and had made various idols and big chariots too, for his play Rama-yatra. The Nrsimba-yatra was another example of his mastery over skillful and artistic presentation of a play on the stage.

The Last Days of Madhavadeva

Although he had to face so many trouble some situations all through his life, the last phase of Madhavadeva's life was comparatively peaceful. Recognition and patronage by king laksminarayan also helped his faith to stand on a still firmer footing with renewed strength and vigour, during this period, he offered bhakti-dharma to six scores of queens and the other members of the royal family. Viru Qaji and the Brahmans, who had stood against his faith

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could no more find an excuse to do him any wrong consequent on the establishment of the truth of his faith on a wider basis in the open debate with the scholars. In such a state of mental calm Madhavadeva was engaged in achieving two of his lasting performances. One was the composition of the ghosas (verses) of the final part of the Namaghosa which had already been composed partly and had been almost complete during his quiet stay at Sundaridia.

Madhavadeva had borne with complete ability the heavy burden of preaching the cult placed so rightly on his shoulders by his guru, Sankaradeva. He was a great organizer, who could unmistakably spot out the abilities hidden in the individual fellow devotees who flocked around him. As a result of the united efforts of the group, the neo-vaisnavite doctrine took definite and firm shape with numerous branches of Satra that had been established. But the heaviest task that the great preacher Madhavadeva had to perform was to select a worthy person as his spiritual successor was not an easy task.

His guru, Sankaradeva, was in a far advantageous position in this respect in finding in Madhavadeva himself the person of his choice. But now Madhavadeva saw no suitable person amongst his fellow bhaktas bearing the proper qualifications. Although he had appointed twelve selected devotees specially to preach the faith, he could now point at none particularly as his religious successor. So he adopted a novel procedure and offered to his following as his 'Success' the holy 'Namaghosa' in which all his life long experiences had been reflected. He remarked that those who would want him would be able to find him in very heart of the Namaghosa it self. Madhavadeva spent his life time quite peacefully, living it fully enjoyed life. He could draw respect and honour from everyone who came in contact with him. King Lakshminarayana had expressed his desire to take initiation to *bhakti* from him, but before it could be given effect to, the end came soon to his life, which occurred due to some troubles of the kidney. He breathed his last on the second bright (lunar) day of the month of Bhadre, saka 1518 (1596 A.D.).

Conclusion: Madhavadeva's childhood and adolescence passed in great misery, in later life, he nurtured an attitude of profound sympathy towards the distressed people and suffering humanity. He used to take pleasure in sharing the sorrows and miseries of everyone in distress. It was coupled with the charismatic situation of enjoying the constant company of Sankaradeva, whose ideas and through opened up a new vista of wider horizon of the spiritual life. In the wake of this situation, Madhavadeva discovered in himself the *tour de force* of a great lyricist and playwright, who could the pages of his writing with a heavenly bliss. In fine, Madhavadeva
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shall be remembered by generations to come the second greatest progenitor of the neo-Vaisnavite movement in Assam. In this way, Madhavadeva, the ablest disciple of Sankaradeva had received the message of enlightenment from Bhakti movement, learnt the teachings of Monotheism and devoted his whole life for the spread of the said religion.

Findings

- i. Madhavadeva was a social reformer.
- ii. Madhavadeva was a religious reformer.
- iii. Madhavadeva was a poet, singer and dramatist.
- iv. Madhavadeva was an artist, actor and musician.
- v. Madhavadeva was great literature writer.

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