

boiled with *Neem* leaf) was a major use besides occasional bath with *Neem* water was another way of treatment of skin. *Neem* water was further used in treatment of skin of a person after he/she has some kind of skin disease or may be after an attack by missals or chicken pox. Moreover Assamese ladies put on paste of turmeric, raw tealeaf, pilfer of orange and *Neem* stem in their facial treatment. Although knowledge about body perfume is much limited, pulp of sandalwood was definitely used for enhancing the body and facial beauty equally, and for fragrance as well. *Agar* plant grew plenty in this part of India and if the *agar* extract was made available for such purposes is not known. Scented herbs like *gondh birinâ* was in use as an additive to make the hair oil fragranced. *Keteki* (*Pandanus tectorius Soland.*) is a famous plant of attractive fragrance and was used with a few finger strokes at the two sides of the forehead and in fact, pollens of *keteki* brings the much attractive smell. Moreover flowers like *juti* (mogra), *kharikâjâi* and *tagar* were wonderful either to be put in water for bath or a facial wash as well, besides sometimes putting them in drinking water.

Assamese dress and ornaments are rated as one of the finest in the Indian Subcontinent and World over as well. Mention has been made about the quality of the Assamese fabric earlier. Ladies use a piece of *mekhelâ*, a *châddar*, a *rihâ* and a blouse as the national dress. However use of a blouse was confined with the royal and the aristocrats, and was never used by the common Assamese ladies before the British regime in India. Normally a lady in rural Assam uses a *mekhelâ* and a *châddar* with a veil. Dresses are made from both the cotton and silk yarn. Ornaments were of gold and silver. Assamese woman has varieties of ornaments that they wear on head, nose, ear, neck, wrist, arm, waist and at the ankle, and, every piece of them has

different names. A *jethi* which is called *chitipati* in Bengali is either a single or trident chain placed over the head of a lady and much particularly of a bride. A *jethi* having a single chain goes through the central furrow of head hair and the trident with three chains goes over the sides of the head besides one goes through the central hair furrow. Nose was adorned with varieties of *nâk-phool* made of either gold or silver studded with precious, semi-precious or fancy stones. *Kânphool*, *kerumoni*, *jâpi*, *lokâpâra*, *sonâ*, *kadam*, *jijiri kadam*, *thuriâ* or *keru*, *bâli* or *kân-bâli* and *kundal* either a *makar kundal* or a *karna singha* are some of the names of the different range of ear ornaments those vary from light to heavy in weight. Neck of an Assamese woman is adorned with a number of necklaces that are known as *galpâtâ*, *prajâpati hâr*, *jonebiri*, *benâ*, *dugdugi*, *shripad*, *moni*, *mâduli*, *dhol*, *charatiâ*, and *lokâpâra* may be exclusively on gold or with a combination of gold and beads of precious/semi-precious stones. Other may be made of beads and gold, gold studded with precious, semi precious or fancy stones. *Khâru* is a common word of wristlet (bangle). *Khâru* is either made on gold or silver and is equivalent to the size of a glass *churi*, a popular wrist ornament of ladies in the Indian Subcontinent. Assam has *gâmkhâru*, *muthikhâru* and *dhansirikhâru*- all massive bangles made of gold or silver and measures 6-7 Cms in length. *Gâmkharu* is a prized item of a wealthy lady and so also with the royal families and landlords. Precious stones are also embedded in them. A similar type of ornament is used at the upper arm and called the *baju*; and it may be a spiral bar of gold or silver. A golden or a silver chain at the waist made a thin waist of a lady more gorgeous. It has elaborate design and is called the *kardhani* or a *chandrahar* or a *mekhalâ*, *kingkini* and *katisutra* are its Sanskrit equivalents. *Bhor-khâru*, *bhori-khâru*

or a *chele-khâru* is mostly a silver anklelet with ringers the Assamese ladies wear around their feet. A mother makes her child to wear it to detecting the child's movement. In Assam region gold was extracted from the silt of the Brahmaputra River and also at *Sowansiri* River, a tributary of the former. Finally an Assamese lady wearing a gorgeous silk dress along with all kinds of ornaments in her body and with a gorgeous hair knot gives her a magnificent heritage status. Moreover a blotch of vermilion at her forehead and also at the furrow of her head hair, and with the said fashion in case of a Hindu woman brings her more splendid look.

The woman of Assam region is well known for their magnificent hairstyle similar to those of the mainland Indian woman, and in fact, they love to dress their meticulously maintained long hair everyday. Enormously long hair could be seen in this part of India as a part of a prime beauty of a lady and such a bunch of hair grow beyond their knee-joints. To arrange a lady's hair in the form of a braid ranging from one to three pieces is a common practice in case of an unmarried damsel; these may be later put into a knot (*khopâ*), which is called the *chele-khopâ* or *chela-khopâ*. Knot or a *khopâ* is a significant hair pastime of the married woman, and specially to a bride.

A *khopâ* has varieties of category besides the 1. the *chele-khopâ* or *chela-khopâ*. They are, 2. *Koldiliâ khopâ* resembles a banana blossom; 3. *Negheri-khopâ*, an especially stylistic hair-knot the *Devadâsi* at *Negheriting Dol* near Dergaon proficiently made in the past. It is also known as the *Udhaniâ-khopa* (similar to the *Udhan* or an earthen fire-pillar in rural Assam), *Uccha-khopâ* and *Natini-khopâ* (the hair-knot of a *Nati* or *Devadasi* or a temple dancer in a temple of Assam). These two hair-knots

are strikingly tall ones. 4. *Ghilâ-khopâ* meaning another hair-knot the woman makes like the seed of *Entada*. 5. *Ligiri-khopâ* is a quick hairstyle proviso the *ligiris* or maidservants made at a royal palace or at a landlord's place. *Ligiri-khopâ* was a tight hair-knot since the maidservant has to work at the palace like spindle and, therefore, hairstyle of the maidservants must never be deceptive at any moment. 6. *Doluâ-khopâ* is a compact hair-knot that a woman makes in their day-to-day life. 7. A *Kâcheri-khopâ* or a *Kachri-khopâ* is another style in hair-knots and is connected with the *Deodhâni* culture of tribals, and a *deodhâni* lady makes this knot while she dances in sitting posture before the altar. 8. *Kanâri-khopâ* is a not an indigenous hairstyle of the region. It is often found amongst the tea garden labour communities in Assam, who were brought from Kanara areas of mainland India. Specialty in this hair-knot, the hairs is tied on one side of the head. This is a common hair fashion found with the tribals living in the Chotanagpur plateau. Moreover in Assamese literature including the *Harmohan Upakhyân* in *Kirttan-Ghosâ* composed by Guru Shri Shri Sankardeva referred about the *Ucchal-khopâ*, an elaborative hairstyles of Assamese lady while narrating the wonderful beauty of a woman. Sometimes a beautiful lady makes a fabulous but loose hair knot with an inherent tendency to make a show of her sparkling long and massive bunch of hair together with her grandiose beauty in a voluptuous '*hansa-gâmini* foot step' meaning the stylistic footstep of a swan. Woman of Assam region are well versed with the art of maintenance of beauty, and could make grandiose appearance with beautiful dresses and ornaments together with emphatic hairstyle and with or without a vermilion spot on her forehead. Their gorgeous appearance becomes much attractive with beautiful dress and ornaments at the Bihu festivals, on the

occasion of marriage ceremonies and other festivals of Assam region. Moreover they like to dress themselves beautifully at the time of paying social visits.

While describing the heritage dress and ornaments of an Assamese lady, the innumerable tribals of Northeast India have their individual dresses and ornaments and they are used on an occasion of their festivals. The Jaintia ladies of Meghalaya wear heritage apparel at the time of the *Nokrem* dance, which is held at Smit in Upper Shillong every year. It is a most prestigious dance of the Jaintias, and the King of Jaintias at Smit in Upper Shillong annually organizes the *Nokrem* dance festival at the premises of his traditional royal palace. The Garo woman has their own heritage attire with plenty of bead necklaces that cover almost two-third of the chest from neck to the waist and a kind of black dress. Garo damsels also wear colourful quill on their heads besides a cloth turban at the time of *Wangala* festival, the high-status national dance form of the Garos.

To be continued

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SHRI SHRI SANKARADEVA AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION OF INDIA

Maheswar Neog

In August-September 1449 Sankardeva was born in a Kayastha family in village Bardowa on the southern bank of River Brahmaputra in the present-day district of Nagaon, Assam. His father, Kusumavara was the *Sromani* or overlord of a number of chiefs or landlords known as *Bhuyans*, who ruled over principalities of varying sizes lying on both the banks of the River Brahmaputra. He was, as popularly believed, the fruit of a boon obtained from Lord Siva enshrined in a nearby temple, and came to be known on that account as Sankara or Sankaravara. He lost his mother, Satyasandhya, soon after his birth and his father left him to the loving care of his grandmother Khersuti. Sankara grew up to a well-built and lovely lad. But his boyish pranks knew no bounds. He loved ever to live an open air life, going after the cattle, swimming across the strong currents of the mighty Brahmaputra, wrestling with his playmates and playing all the time. He was twelve years of age, but had no mind to go to school. One day his grandmother took advantage of his sitting to a heavy meal to remind him how scholarly were his forefathers and how he made a sad contrast by proving himself to be no better than a street urchin even at the age of twelve! Sankara was cut the quick. He submitted himself to the control of his grandmother, who took him to a renowned *pandit* Mahendra Kandali and put him into Kandali's