

and *bhatimâ*) in an artificial idiom created by him for the plays and the *bargitas*. His writings still reign supreme among devout people, and his songs are ever on their lips.

Sankaradeva bequeathed a very rich legacy of classical tradition in music and dancing to his people. His dance-dramas make a community with such heritages as *bhagavata-melâ* and *Yakshagana* of the South and *Rama Lila* and *Rasa Lila* of the North. Much of this tradition has withered away for want of proper culture, but a good deal of its beauty still persists. The Vaishnava culture of Assam also nurtured the growth of a school of painting in Assam.

The philosophical basis of Sankaradeva's Vaishnavism is *Vedântic*. His *Vedântic* views have a large monistic bias thus making up a peculiar religious mysticism.

To conclude, I (1955:121-122) would like to quote from my work : "Sankaradeva's benign influence has been felt for the last few Centuries in all fields of the cultural life of the Assamese people. Thousands of devotees still visualize to themselves every day the physical beauty of the Master in its resplendent and almost transcendent glory, as has been painted by his dearest follower, Madhava.

Equal to Sankara's physical strength and beauty was his intellectual stamina and excellence. A versatile genius, he combined in himself many wonderful qualities. He was an administrator (as a *Siromoni Bhuyan*) and later a *gomâstâ* under Coch regime and social reformer, poet and dramatist, painter, musician and actor in dance-dramas. Wide and deep was his reading, and firm and persistent his intellectual grasp. In

religious disputations he pushed his antagonists with sincere and persuasive arguments to the defeated corner. He often worked up the citations put forward by the opponents to his own advantage and made them move of themselves to his conclusions. His organizing capacity manifested itself in the way he placed the doctrines of his faith on a firm soil in the teeth of the bitterest opposition. Although he was 'a menace to the heretics' as Madhava has described him, his was a charming personality which attracted and pleased those who were near him. A householder, he resigned himself and his all to God, and remained detached from the pleasures and pains of the world. His weal and his woe depended on that of his followers. The culture of *bhakti* among his disciples in the proper manner was his delight. Always busy with his writing of books and the holding of discourses on religion and philosophy, he was not devoid of humour, which often broke forth in the course of his narratives, dramatic works and in common talk.

Sankara brought the message of the religion of love to the people, released the soul of the common man from the oppressive burden of sacerdotalism and indicated to the individual that his voice could be heard by God if only it rose from a pure and sincere heart. His religious activities formed the basis for the growth of a culture and a literature, both rich and varied. The common man in the backwoods of the valley or on the hills could now embrace a simplified and democratized Hinduism without his having to be looked down upon by the 'high' castes. The new faith had to struggle against Tânticism in its varied and sometimes horrid forms, and it gained sufficient ground within the very life-time of Sankara."

"The great Sankaradeva movement thus brought about a new and comprehensive outlook on life and a distinctly healthy tone to social behaviour. It accelerated the pace of a renaissance of literature and fine arts like music and painting. The dignity of the individual endeavour of man as a distinct religious being and not as 'the thrall of theological despotism' was declared. Assam discovered herself as an integral part of the holy land of *Bhâratavarsha*, and gloried in that discovery. The holy books in Sanskrit, the *litterae humaniores* of India, could no longer be sealed to the common man's view by a rigid oligarchy. The use of the local language in expositions of theology and philosophy was in itself a challenge to the erstwhile guardians of secret doctrines, who understood the significance of the challenge and 'protested very much'. The new humanism eyed askance at the numerous blood sacrifices, including the immolation of man, and the nice sacerdotalism that was the order of the day in Hindu society. The use of Assamese, an *Indo-Aryan* tongue, which formed but an island in a Tibeto-Burman ocean as the medium for the propagation of the new-*Vaishnava* faith led to its emergence as the language of all the people. The ancient Kingdom of Kâmarupa was now undergoing a huge change, and it was having almost a regeneration, political and social, which timed well with the cultural resurgence initiated by Sankaradeva; and the first possibilities of a unified and modern Assam was now in evidence" (1955:378).

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THE BHUBAN HILL IN CACHAR, ASSAM: ITS ORIGIN AND AFFINITY

Sujit Choudhury

The earliest archaeological site of the Barak Valley of Southern Assam is the Bhuban Hill situated around 23 Kms South East of Silchar. At present the hill is considered as the most important cult-spot of the valley where thousands of pilgrims flocked together to attend the annual fair that takes place on the most auspicious occasion of *Shivaratri*. Obviously it is a *Saivite* cult-spot and the hill earns its present name from this association.

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A pond is located atop the Bhuban Hill at an altitude of 930 m AMSL. It is a dug out pond at the source of a natural stream that flows down the hill. The pond is held sacred and the visiting devotee pilgrims take holy bath in it before offering prayer to the presiding deity, the *Bhubaneswar* accompanied by his consort *Bhubaneswari*. It is customary to every pilgrim to spend a night at the site and to take at least one nocturnal meal over there.

Just below the peak there is vast flat space in the form of a yard, which is partly canopied by two projected large rocks. A couple of large icons stand beneath this natural roof. These icons are now identified as that of Lord *Bhubaneswar Shiva* and Lady *Bhubaneswari Parvati*. A modest shrine has been constructed close to this that houses a number of broken statues lying scattered in the hills. Fifty years back there were more and