

# Literature and Education in Ancient Assam

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**Abstract:** The earliest inhabitants of Assam were non-Aryans and their language belonged to extra- Aryan families of language. Three kinds of languages in Assam existed; these are mainly Sanskrit as the official language, non-Aryan tribal languages of the Austric and Tibeto-Barman and a local variety of Prakrit . It was assumed that Assamese script was derived from Brahmi and Devanagari through success stages until it reached its final form. Macdonnell points out that Assamese possess an important literature and its literary style does not suffer like Bengali from the excessive use of Sanskritisations. Assamese literature is as old as the Bengali. Like Oriya, Assamese is a sister, not a daughter of Bengali. Ancient Assamese literature consists of much unwritten poetry and proverbs and these are mainly pastoral ballads, bihu folk songs, and cowherd and boat songs and so on. The writing materials used in ancient period were mainly inner bark of the bhurja patra, also wood and Sanchipat tulapat or cotton cloth, wooden board, palm leaves, animal substances, clay, metal stone, brick etc. Ancient education system and curriculum in kamrupa were prescribed by the dharmasastra and education was centred round the guru-griha. Two types of education were in ancient Assam viz. vidya and kala. Vidya is literary study and Kala is professional activity. Education in ancient Assam was not spread over a large area and people as it is today.

**Keywords:** Assam; Education; Early; Language; Literature.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The earliest inhabitants of Assam were the speakers of the Indo-Chinese language of the Mon-Khmer family which has been characterized by Schmidt as the Austric family of languages. The most important tribe belonging to this group is the Bodos and thus the earliest inhabitants of Assam were Non-Aryans and their language belonged to extra-Aryan families of language. With the process of Aryan colonization Naraka and his successors transplanted to ancient Assam the Aryan culture including its language, namely Sanskrit. The kings, who continued to govern Pragjyotisha after the establishment of Aryan rule by Naraka invariably, used Sanskrit as the court language up to the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A careful examination of the contents of the anthology and also of the inscriptions since discovered will show that the irregularities of corrupt forms have a method in them and establish the existence of a local Prakrit language side by side with the chaste literary Sanskrit language of the royal court. Regarding the probability of the existence of a prakrit dialect and its influences on the Sanskrit of the epigraphs, B.M.Barua says ‘The archaic forms crept in these records and held their rightful place through the inadvertence on the part of the local composers, or that of the local scribe-engravers or that of both, in spite of the conscious attempt made for producing the legal documents, the land grants, in authentic Sanskrit.

Thus there existed three kinds of languages in Assam, these are mainly Sanskrit as the official language and the language of the learned few, Non-Aryan tribal languages of the Austric and Tibeto-Barman families and a local variety of prakrit(i.e., an M.I.A. language) wherefrom, in course of time, the modern Assamese language emerged as an M.I.L. The next development of the Assamese language during the period under review is seen by the language of the Caryas. The Caryas are mystic and spiritually didactic songs composed in an early Apabhramsa dialect by a number of followers of the esoteric Buddhism of the vajrayana sect. The language of the caryas has certain striking affinities with the Assamese language. Many of the Assamese case-terminations are found in the Caryas, e.g., nominative case-ending e in kumbhire khaa, core nila. So far as the vocabulary is concerned, in the Caryas we find certain words which are non-tatsama and

typically and exclusively Assamese as they are rare not only in the other NIA languages of Eastern India, but even in the Assamese vaisnava literature, e.g. dala(no 1)

Assamese language of the formative stage is also seen in epigraphs one of the stone inscriptions discovered at Ambari, Guwahati, contains the text: adityasama-srisamudrapala-rajye. Prabala-sarvasika-satra saguna-krya sanvasina bole dana punana saja. yogihati. saka isa vana cakra mudha bhanati. Here the language is mixed with certain Assamese expressions. The Gachal Octagonal stone pillar inscriptions, which were read by P.C.Chaudhury and the entire text contains some developed Assamese forms and idioms.

It was probable that the Assamese script was derived from the Brahmi and Devanagari through successive stages until it reached its final form. It is stated that Assamese script may be the descendant of the kutila variation of the Gupta script of Eastern India. The earliest known script of Assam was Devanagiri, rather North Indian Brahmi, and the art of writing in Assam was known as early as 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In the Kanaivarasi Rock inscription at North Gauhati, dated saka 1172, we find specimens of a few Assamese characters and Assamese alphabets had taken more or less their present forms beginning around the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In the Buddhist dohas, composed by the Tantrik-Buddhist siddhas, most of whom were from Assam, may be found the earliest specimens of both the Kamrupi script and the language which at once time constituted the parent speech of eastern India, including no doubt North Bengal, Mithila, Vidhya, Orisa, Nepal and Tibet. The early evolution of the Assamese script perhaps explains for its universal use in producing both the Sanskrit and Assamese manuscripts. The aksaras of the early inscriptions of particularly the Kanaivarasi inscription, and the Ambari stone inscription, as has been pointed out, present a clue to the gradual transition from Brahmi and Devanagiri to the early Assamese script, or more appropriately the Kamrupi, which was marked subsequently by four schools, and which in process of time merged, producing more or less a common script. Many aksaras of the old manuscripts tend to be almost similar with those of Devanagari of a mixed form and the older the manuscripts are the more marked and the similarities. Even after the evolution, the parallel development and the use of both the languages may have continued throughout the ancient period. The Mon-Khmer speech had perhaps an earlier growth, though no written literature of the period has come down to us.

## 2. EVOLUTION OF ASSAMESE LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

The Assamese script was derived from North Indian Brahmi and Devanagari and the language itself belongs to a branch of the Neo-Indo-Aryan languages or rather the outer band of the Indo-Aryan groups, with a definite admixture of the Dardic speech of the Alpines, its vocabulary is not entirely based on the Sanskrit. Some of the Assamese formations has already been noted and even are found in the present forms and used in the same sense. To cite a few instances, the name of a man 'kalita' used at present in the same form, occurs in the Nidhanpur grant; Naka(nose) of the Tezpur rock inscription of Harjjar in modern Assamese naka. kua, joli. jan etc. also used in the same sense in today as it was earlier. These instances show that the Assamese language is not entirely based on the Sanskrit, and its evolution on independent lines began very early. It is evident that Assamese originated from the same group as the Bengali, Oriya, and Bihari derived, from the eastern variety of the Magadhan Parikrt, more appropriately Kamrupi Parikrt. Due to this common origin and similarity of alphabets that a claim is made about Assamese being nothing but a dialect of Bengali. But it is clear that not only in vocabularies but also in grammar and accent the two languages have a marked difference Assamese. But it is certain that both "started on parallel lines with peculiar dialectal predispositions and often developed sharply contradictory idiosyncrasies" Therefore Assamese were never an offshoot of Bengali but an independent speech. In this regard S.K. Chatterjee rightly points out "Assamese became an independent speech, although her sister dialect North Bengali occupied the vassalage of the literary speech of Bengal."

MacDonnell points out that the Assamese possess an important literature and its literary style does not suffer like Bengali from the excessive use of Sanskritisations. Assamese literature is as old as the Bengali. Like Oriya. Assamese is a sister, not a daughter of Bengali. It comes from Bihar through North Bengal, not through Bengal proper, the origin of Assamese literature, therefore goes back to antiquity, and it is as rich as other provincial languages of India. The independent character of Assamese literature is shown that it had origin in the eastern variety of the Magadhan apabhramsa based on Kamrupi Prakrt, it contains more non-Aryan words and it had also close similarities with the western group and even the Marathi language. In other word it can be said Assamese is a mixer of Sauraseni and, Magadhi apabhramsa or a mixer of the eastern and western groups of the outer band of the Indo-Aryan languages, containing many dardic elements. To show

a few instances of similarities, the Assamese word ai(mother) is the same in Marathi and found in dialects near Gujarat, jon(moon) is the same in Kashmir and jui(fire) in Avestan. In short, the contributions made by the Aryans and Non-Aryans like the Austric and the Tibeto-Burmans, enhanced the richness of the Assamese vocabulary. Like the composite character of the Assamese culture, the language has also absorbed these various elements, which are mainly Austric, Kolerian, Malayan, Bodo and other elements contributed in the formation of the Assamese Vocabulary. In these cases we can cite a few instances. The Assamese apa(boy) has its Mundari equivalent in appu; Assamese dada(elder brother) in Santali , dada; bai(elder sister) in Gond bai; beli(sun) in juong, bela. The Assamese alahi (guest) in Mikir, alahi arleng (guest); khang (anger) in Chutia, khang; tekeli (earthen jar) in Garo, tikli, dalong(bridge) in kachari, dalang, dong(irrigation channel) in Kachari and Mikir in dong. Some Assamese words have even similarities with words of other Indo-European languages. As Assamese abu(grand- mother) has the Latin equivalent, avia; ata(grand-father) in Greek, atta and so on

The earliest specimens of the Assamese are supplied by the Buddhist dohas, recovered from Nepal, and the writings of the Tantrik-Buddhist siddhas, most of which were composed in old Magadhan Apabhramsa, allied to old Kamrupi, and were current in Bengal and Bihar including Tibet. The testimony of Yuan Chwang that the speech of Kamrupa differed only a little from that of Mid-India can possibly be justified by the fact that Assam held very intimate cultural contact with Videha, Magadha and Mithila. It is mentioned in the early history of Kamrupa that “ It is not therefore, at all strange that the language of the Buddhist dohas, composed in Kamrupa during the tenth and the eleventh centuries should be a mixed Mithali-Kamrupi language bearing close resemblance to modern Assamese, the direct off-spring of the old Kamrupi dialect.” The Buddhist dohas exerted a considerable influence on the writing of the Prevaisnava and vaisnava writers of Assam, specially Anka Nats and Baragitas of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva and it was confirmed by the close of dohas that Kamrupi speech originated from the said dohas.

Ancient Assamese literature consists of much unwritten poetry and proverbs and these are mainly pastoral ballads; Bihu folk songs; cowherd and boat songs and so on. Assamese language is very rich in proverbs and nothing perhaps can better illustrate the cultural achievement of a people than those proverbs, which are contained in a work ‘Dakabhanita’ attributed to Daka, written in old kamrupi dialect. Though ancient Assam produced literature both in Assamese and Sanskrit, but a very few specimens of writing is come into light. The Sanskrit compositions included, besides the epigraphs of the period, works relating to astrology, astronomy, palmistry, arithmetic, medicine and voluminous Tantrik works, most of which however, do not belong to the period prior to the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The epigraphs both in prose and verse are written with stately diction and poetic style and some of them may be compared with any other compositions of the period from ancient India. Some of the verses in the epigraphs contain passages from Kalidasa and Bana, and the scribes tried to imitate their style. As for instance it may be mentioned that the Nowgong grant contains passages from the Raghuvamsa. An important Sanskrit work of an earlier period is the ‘Kamarupa Nibandhaniya-Khandasadhya’, dealing with planetary worship and ascribed to about A.D. 665. The Mudraraksasa of Visakhadatta, Tantra sara and Tantraloka of Abhinavagupta, a Kamrupi Buddhist scholar, Kalika purana, Yagini Tantra, Hara-Gauri Samvada etc providing much historical information and written in Sanskrit. Besides all these, Tantrikism, Smriti, Astrology, Astronomy, Palmistry, Medicine and Mantra puthis also were written in Ancient Assam.

It is mentioned numerous scholars that in the formative period of Assamese language and literature, or prior to the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. there were only a few Assamese writers. Writers like Aniruddha Bhatta, Nitivarman, and Purusottama Vidyavagisa flourished in or about the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The earliest writers of the Pre-Vaisnava period were Hema Sarasvati and Harivara Vipra who composed Prahalad Caritra and Babruvahana Parva respectively under the royal patronage of the Kamata King Durlav Narayan, who flourished towards the end of the thirteenth century or the early part of the fourteenth century A.D. Rudra Kandali, Kaviratna Sarasvati, Madhaba Kandali, etc. were the prominent poets and translators who composed a lot of valuable works in the period of the fourteen century A.D. All these works give us some idea of the literary traditions and activities of the people, and indicate that these were by no means insignificant.

The writing materials used for composition of manuscripts in ancient period were mainly inner bark of the bhurjapatra, aloe wood and sanchipat, tulapat or cotton cloth, wooden board, palm leaves, animal substances, clay, metal, stone, brick etc. The use of clay, copper and stone as materials for writing, is shown by the existing epigraphs of the period, as for instance the clay seals of Bhaskarvarman, the Tezpur Rock inscription of Harjarvarman and Nidhanpur copper plates of Bhaskarvarman. Most of the Sanskrit and Assamese manuscripts, so far discovered, have been found written on this

material, and some of them are in their original condition with fast coloured ink. The use of ink was common. In Assam, ink was usually prepared from silikha and bull's urine. Pen and Pencil were made of bamboo, wood, reed, animal horns, metal, chalk etc. and were commonly known as lekhani or varnaka. The yagini Tantra refers to holders and pens of bamboo, reed, copper, bellmetal, iron and even of Gold. In regard to preservation of Manuscripts Pratap Chandra Choudhury remarks that 'If an exhaustive search is made for Assamese manuscripts hitherto discovered and traced are thoroughly catalogued, we have a firm belief that a far greater percentage of the Indian masterpieces will be found translated into Assamese than in any other vernacular literature-some manuscript hunter in Assam may come upon a manuscript which will be as momentous as the Arthasastra of Kautilya, the dramas of Bhasa and Samarangana of King Bhoja.'

### 3. EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ANCIENT ASSAM

Individual attainments, State and social service, and a preparation for the realization of the higher ends in life were the main aims of education in ancient time. In the light of the inscriptions and literary or religious works, it is presumed that formal education except the hereditary professional learning was first introduced by the Aryans who migrated to Kamrupa or Pragjyotisha about the beginning of the Christian era. It is narrated in the Kalika purana that Narakasura also made provision for the study of Vedas. The earliest reference to the migration of the Aryans to the adjoining region of Kamrupa is found in the Satapatha Brahmana that the Indo-Aryans penetrated into north-eastern India prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. When they migrated to Pragjyotisha they were already equipped with the knowledge of the script. It is presumed that Vedic learning must have been cultivated by a section of Aryanised people of this country before the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It is found that the kings of kamrupa claimed themselves as upholders of varnasrama, clearly indicates the observance of the duties allotted to the four castes and asramas was under the control of the state. Early rulers of kamrupa patronized the learned Brahmanas versed in Vedic lores and sacrifices with land grants (agraharas) in their efforts to propagate the Aryan languages and culture.

From the epigraphic and literary sources it can be remarked that ancient education system and curriculum in kamrupa were prescribed by the dharma-sastra. Education was centered round the guru-griha. Schools were maintained by private individuals, or at village schools provided by the Brahmanas of a Agrahara village and the Vedas, the system of philosophy, and various other branches of learning were taught in those schools. Non-Brahmana students were also admitted into those schools with the Brahmana student. Sankardeva was a non-Brahmana by caste who received his education at a tola maintained by a Brahmana guru Mahendra Kandali. Under the gurukula system from the upanayana till the ceremony of samavartana the pupils studied at the house of his guru and carried on his academic life according to the code of conduct prescribed by the dharmasastras. It is mentioned in the Balavarman's Nowgong plate about a Brahmana named Srutidhara who having performed the samavartana ceremony at the preceptor's house returned to lead the life of a householder and acquired the title Kathakanishta for the proficiency in reciting ancient lores. Gangadatta and Bharata who were constantly engaged in discharging the sixfold duties (satkarma) of a Brahmana which is mentioned in Ratnapala's Bargaon grant and Dharmapala's subhankarapataka grant. B.K.Barua in his 'A cultural history of Assam' is mentioned about sixfold duties of Brahmana of which adhyapana was the most important. The grant of Balavarman refers to the samavartana ceremony which was performed at the end of Brahmacharya period. An auspicious day for the ceremony was selected and the students were required to shut him up in a room throughout the morning. At midday, he or they came out, cleansed his or their mouth, saved head and beard. Then relinquished girdle (mekhala), deer-skin (ajina) etc., the insignia of the students' order. The guru then bathed him or them in fragrant water. Then a gift of new clothes, consisting of ornaments, garlands, collyrium, turban, umbrella and shoes, the use of all which had been taboo to him or them during the period of studentship. These were officially offered by his preceptor with the recitation of proper mantras. It was expected that the parents or guardians would furnish a double set of the above articles, one for the guru and for his pupils. He was then formally introduced as a competent scholar by his teacher and returning home, he or they would bid farewell to his teacher, after paying such fees as he could afford.

The village school sometimes used to be held in the porch of a temple. The village shrine was a centre of popular education through the constant recitation and exposition of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Puranas. The priests and the leaders of the religious sects used to expand the principles and philosophy of their own sects in the temple precincts. Music, dancing, recitation, play, and pantomime are the remarkable part in the cultural life of the people by which villagers could able to extend the knowledge of religious dogma.

It is found that most of the kings were keenly interested in the spread of learning and education and made large grants for that purpose. The Chinese pilgrim remarks that King Bhaskaravarman was fond of learning and the people initiated him. Hiuen Tsiang rightly remarked that men of abilities came from far to study here, which can be proved that Sankaracarya (788-820 A.D.), Nanaka (1549-1649 A.D.), and Guru Tag Bahadur (17<sup>th</sup> century) came to Kamrupa to hold learned discussions with reputed scholars of the country. The author of the Rajatarangini credits the kings of Kamrupa, possibly of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D... as being the patron of Buddhist Sarvakas, for he entertained in his court Stoumpe, a Buddhist, Sarmana from Loh-country or Tibet. Like other parts of India, in Assam also both Brahmana and non-Brahmana scholars and teachers arranged debates and disputations with teachers of rival sects in the various place of the state. Later on the defeated teachers would usually give up his own doctrines and embrace those of the winner. As for example it can be cited that Madhabdeva accepted the vaisnavite faith and acknowledged Sankardeva as a spiritual guru though he was a stunt follower of Sakti faith before meeting with Sankardeva. Generally kings in their courts invited scholars and poets, who were encouraged to compose and compile treatises on various subjects. As for instance, two great epics were translated into Assamese at the court of Kachari king Mahamanikya in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and Koch king Maharaja Narayanarayan in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 4. DURATION OF STUDY

A long period is prescribed for the study of the Vedic learning where Gautama cited that twelve years is necessary to study one Vedas. It was not possible for the general students to spend twelve years on which subject for which some short cut measures were applied by reducing the numbers of years. The duration of the study has been limited to twelve years but in actual practice it depended on the nature of the subjects of study and willingness of the students. Sankardeva, the greatest saint of Assam is said to have spent twelve years in the pathsala under the guru of Mahendra Kandali. Numerous holidays were allowed, viz. on the days of the new moon and the full moon and also ancient authorities sanctioned a long list of inauspicious days. These holidays are still observed today in the traditional institution of Sanskrit learning, viz. tols and catuspathis.

#### 5. CURRICULUM OF STUDY

The epigraphs mention about two types of education, viz. vidya and kala. Vidya is literary study and Kala is professional activity. Four Vedas, the four upavedas, Dhanurveda, Gandharvavedas, Tantras, Six Vedangas, Itihasa, Puranas, Smritis Arthasastra, Kamasashtra, Silpasastra Kavya etc. are included in the purview of Vidya. The Puspabhadra grant refers to a Brahmana well-versed in Sruti, Smriti, Mimamsa, and Canakya (Arthasastra) It is mentioned in the Katha-Gurucarita that Sankardeva studied four Vedas, fourteen Sastras, eighteen Puranas, eighteen Bharatas, fourteen Vyakaranas, eighteen Kavyas, eighteen Kosas, Samhitas, Amara, Canakya and Yaga sastra. This list however represents the entire traditional culture carried on in the curriculum of study in ancient Assam. Besides all these Jyotisa-vedanga, represents the study of the movements of the planets and the stars, Aurveda, the science of medicine, were carefully and extensively studied in ancient Assam.

Veterinary science was also an important part of study in ancient Assam. In this regard Ralph Fitch remarks that "they have hospitals for sheep, goats, cats, birds, and for all living creatures. When they are old and lame they keep them until they die." Elephant logy or the study of the disease was also given attention at that time. Again, the science of music, containing singing, playing of instruments, dramatic performance, dancing etc. were the part of the curriculum of the study. In regard to the study of the science of music B.K.Barua in his book ' A cultural history of Assam ' " mentioned that the early Assamese literature consists mainly of songs and it refers to various ragas such as ahira, akasamandala, baradi, belovara, bhathiyali, calani, devajini, devamohana, dhanasri, gunjari, malasri, manjari, marovara, meghamandala, pata-manjari, ramagiri, sri gandhakali, sri gandhara, suhai, vasanta under which the songs were sung." The Art of painting was also the part of the curriculum of the education. The Vaisnavite movement led by Sankardeva burst into a new direction into the art and painting, where sankardeva himself painted celestial figures on scenes for dramatic performances known as Cihna-Yatra. The study of Tantra is another branch of curriculum in ancient Assam and it was extensively studied by a number of Tantrik-Buddhists.

Literature was one of the popular subjects of educational curricula. In regard to this branch H.K.Barpujari remarks that 'The classical poets and dramatists like Kalidasa, Magha, Bharavi etc., were studied and earlier works on poetics and

dramaturgy like those of Bharata, Dandi and Bhamaha must have been included in the syllabus for kavya study.' During the medieval times the study of literature was also one of the favourite subjects in tols and pathasalas.

## 6. SPREAD OF EDUCATION

The main centre of learning of education in ancient Assam were Pragjyotishapura, Hatapesvara (Haruppesvara), Kamrupanagara and Durjaya. Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-tsang reveals that king Bhaskaravarma was fond of learning and man of high talents. King Bhaskarvarmana granted land (agraharas) to Brahmanas for spread of education and also provided financial assistant to maintaining schools or pathasalas. A lot of scholars went to study to the universities of Nalanda, Vikramasila, and odantapura of east India with the inspiration of king Bhaskarvarman as he desires to establish cultural link with other states. The copper plate inscription of Anantavarman, the Ganga king of Kalinga mentioned about the land grant by his brother Jayavarman, on the occasion of his daughter's marriage to one Bishnu-Somacarya, a Brahmana of Sringitakagrahara in Kamrupa-Visaya well versed in the Vedas and Vedangas. In regard to the spread of education P.C.Choudhury in his book 'The history of civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century A.D.' remarks that 'The settlement of the Brahmanas and other Aryans in the land under the patronage of rulers was largely responsible for the spread of education, as in other parts of India, and Kamrupa, as reported by Yuan Chwang in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D., was a noted centre of learning. Bhaskara, he states, was fond of learning and the people followed his example. His association with the University of Nalanda, one of the noted centres of learning in the period, and with the pilgrim and Harsa, one of the most enlightened monarchs of Northern India, indicates his (Bhaskara's) desire for the acquisition of knowledge, which he spread among his people. In fact, Assam owes a great deal to the personality of Bhaskara.' Moreover, some well-known scholars of India are directly link and associated with kamrupa. K.L.Barua and some other writers believe that even Kautilya, whose knowledge of kamrupa was intimate, may have belonged to Kamrupa. During the rule the Salastambha's king some noted Buddhist and Brahmana scholars flourished in Kamrupa, as instance Abhinava Gupta, a Buddhist scholar of the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. belonged to Kamrupa and Sankaracarya (788-820) came to engage in a religious discussion with him. Kumariabhata, a Brahmana scholar of about 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Visakhaadatta, patronized by Avantivarman etc. were belonged to Kamrupa. Most of the Tantrik-Buddhist scholars of Eastern India, who contributed a lot of to the spread of Tantrik education and culture, were from Kamrupa.

The numbers of educated women in ancient kamrupa were very low. We find reference to women as rulers of Kadali Kingdom in Nowgong, The literary education of women is indicated by the fact that the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva was cimpoused by Manoratha in conjunction with his wife Padma. It may be pointed out that ancient practice of womenfolk in kamrupa to listen to the contents of the Epics and the Puranas, read out to them by the pundits. From the above lines, it may be pointed out that the general level of culture of Assamese women in ancient period before the Reformation movement of Sankardeva was in no way high.

## 7. CONCLUSION

From our discussion it is clear that education in ancient Assam was not spread over a large area and people as it is today. Though the Brahmanas were the learned class in ancient Assam, yet the common people were not totally illiterate. In this regard it may be pointed out that vyavaharis (lawyers), lekhakas (scribes) and some other officials were all educated. Formal education in ancient Assam was not wide scale; the great bulk of the population no doubt remained illiterate and uneducated. The non-Aryan did not enter the school of education at all. Had there been a spread of general education among all, irrespective of their racial origin faith, present day conditions would have been quite different and Assam would have achieved cultural homogeneity at an early period of her history. The true Aryan culture touched the people of ancient Assam a few but the tantric education and culture attracted the people very much which took them away from the right tract of education. The Hindu culture and education were restored in ancient Assam and also established the people in rightful place under the leadership of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva through the establishment of Vaisnava education in the fifteenth-sixteenth century A.D. With the view of P.C.Choudhury I would like to conclude that 'It were Sankardeva and Madhabdeva who through their catholicity in outlook and universalism in the spread of Vaisnava literature and education, destroyed the artificial barriers of peoples, races and classes, and gave Assam a common cultural meeting ground and created favorable conditions for the much needed linguistic and cultural homogeneity of this ancient land. It is pertinent to observe that Assam's progress in education and literature in its early period, as in the later one, beginning

with the thirteenth century A.D., could be possible because of the patronage of literary talents by most non-Aryan but Hinduised rulers, viz the Kachari, Kamata and Koch kings of Assam.'

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