



# Naamghar Association of America

## NEWSLETTER

WWW.NAAMGHAR.ORG

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### MESSAGE FROM THE *BOR-MEDHI*

Hope you all are keeping well and safe with "social distancing" and taking proper precaution with face mask covering when moving to a crowded place. Scientists around the world are working non-stop to find a solution and I am confident that a solution(s) will be available by the grace of God, but we will have to be patient in the meantime.

It is my immense pleasure to announce that we are getting ready to celebrate via Zoom our *Sankardeva's Janma Tithi* in late November from NAAM for the first time in the history of the North-East Assamese community. The agenda is taking shape as shown on the next page. Please visit us at our website, [www.Naamghar.org](http://www.Naamghar.org), for more updates as we make further progress. Also please feel free to communicate with us at [NaamInfo@Naamghar.org](mailto:NaamInfo@Naamghar.org) with your suggestions.

We are very thankful to the professional performing artists and music composers from Assam who are getting engaged with both our children and adults to give shape to the event. We also have participants from all across North America, particularly for the

collaborative Borgeet choir that you will notice in the agenda

On behalf of NAAM, I cordially invite you all for the *Janma Tithi* celebration on Saturday, November 21, 2020, from 2.00 to 3.30 pm EST. More details with Zoom link will be announced prior to the event. I also hope that NAAM will be able host this event in-person in 2021.

Last but not the least, we look forward to your regular feedback, active participation, and continued cooperation to achieve NAAM's goals.

Sincerely,

Dr. Binoy K. Bordoloi, *Bor Medhi*

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Please contribute to NAAM's effort to build a naamghar in North America:



**Tentative Agenda for Srimanta Sankardeva' Janma Tithi Celebration Function**  
**November 21, 2020, from 2.00-3.30 pm EST**  
 (Zoom link will be made available to the community ahead of time)

Item#	Item details	Presenter(s)/Performer(s) <sup>#</sup>
1	Host/Co-host explaining the Zoom guidelines	Co-hosts: Shyam DevChoudhury and Chiranjit Bordoloi  Emcees: Anupree Perlmutter, Malabika Brahma, Mark Bordoloi, and Vavani Sarmah
2	Bor Medhi's brief Welcome address	Binoy K. Bordoloi
3	North-East <i>Naam-Praxanga</i> / Prayer	NaamgharWG (Purandar Sarmah leading)
4	<i>Xatriya</i> Performance	Mallika Kandali, Guwahati, India
5	<i>Thiya Naam</i> / <i>Naam</i> by Sankarasangha	Paran Jyoti Das, Boko, Assam
6	<i>Daxavatar</i> Duo Dancers	Madhusmita Bora and Team
7	<i>Gayan-Bayan</i>	Kanxapar Satra, Dhekiajuli, Jorhat, Assam
<b>Tea/coffee Break (5 mins)</b>		
8	General Business Meeting for NAAM : -Announcement of Office bearer names, memberships, and fees -To send questions before Nov 2, please visit our website, <a href="http://www.Naamghar.org">www.Naamghar.org</a>	NAAM-EC Board of Trustees and principal office bearers; Q&A
9	Collaborative <i>Borgeet</i> in Choir form (10 from Assam and 10 from the US)	Rupam J Bora and his music school in Guwahati, Assam
10	Children/Student - <i>Daxavatar Nitrya</i>	Kabita Nath
11	<i>Diha Naam</i> and devotional contemporary song on Sankardeva	Jayanta Nath and his music school in Jorhat, Assam
12	<i>Abhinaya</i> in <i>Sattriya</i> – <i>Ankiya naat</i>	Prateesha (Saikia) Suresh and her students, Mumbai, India
13	<i>Brajawali Bhaona</i>	Arup Saikia and his team, Tezpur, Assam
<sup>#</sup> Unless noted otherwise, presenter(s)/performer(s) is from North America.		

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## FEATRUED ARTICLE

### ASSAM VAISHNAVISM AND BUDDHISM

By Dr. Rajen Barua

Buddhism was prevalent in Assam in one form or another from the times of the Buddha down through the Tantrik Buddhism of the middle ages till the Neo Assam Vaishnavism time propagated by Xongkordew (Sans: Sankardev) (1449-1568 ce) and beyond. The Vajrayana Xohojia (Sans: Sahajiya) Buddhists worshiped Xiwo (Sans: Siva) as a Buddhist god before Xiwo was adopted as a Hindu god by Brahmanism.<sup>(1)</sup> We also see prevalence of Buddhism through various literary forms in Assam: the *Charyapada*, (Buddhist Mystique songs), *Deh Bisaror Gits* (Songs of the Investigation of the body), *Twkari Gits* (Violin Songs), *Górókhia Gits* (Cowboy songs), *Dakor Boson* (Sayings of the Dak) as well as many folk songs in the form of *Nisukoni Git* (Lullabies), *Dhainam* (midwives song), *Biyanam* (wedding songs), *Naw Khelwa nam* (boat songs), *Halbwa git* (plowers songs) and others where this Xohojia Buddhist influence is reflected. In pre Xonkordew times, unto 11th ce, “*The Kamakhya temple on the Nilachala hills, near Guwahati, was a major Buddhist shrines in the past.*”<sup>(2)</sup> The overall impact of this long prevalence of Buddhism in Assam is manifold, and it has a much positive impact on the Assamese life which was never dominated strongly by Brahmanical culture. It was in general dominated by the village *Namghors* and *Xotros* (San: *Satras*), the origins of which are traced to Buddhism.

Buddhism is basically a religion where the idea of Bhakti arose in India long before Hinduism. Originally, Bhakti arose amongst the non Aryan Dravidians of Harappa culture for their devotion to lord Xiwo before the Aryans came to India, like it did a second time amongst the non Aryan Dravidian Alvars a thousand years later.<sup>(3)</sup> In the process, the Bhakti movement arose in the neo Vaishnavism in India not only with the influence of Buddhism but at the expense of Buddhism. The *Bhaktibad* of Buddhism was absorbed wholesale by this neo Vaishnavism all over India.<sup>(4)</sup> Besides this basic general *Bhakti* element, the revival of neo Assam

Vaishnavism was greatly influenced by the Buddhism that was prevalent in Assam before. This is evident in various aspects of Assam Vaishnavism: its institutions, its practice and even its doctrine.

The **XOTRO** (Sans: *Satra*): The Buddhist monastery is unlike the forest Ashram in Brahmanism where a sage would start an Ashram all by himself where students will come to study. The idea of the Xotro as a residential monastery is of Buddhist origin long before the time of Xongkordew. We find on record of a Buddhist residential Xotro that was built and donated by the king Xomudropal in Kamrup in 1232 ce.

We may note here that unlike the rest of India, Assam remained free of the Moghul occupation throughout its history. This has given the people of Assam a religious freedom to pursue any liberal religion of choice. We also find liberal form of Islam (Sufi) propagated in Assam which was influenced by Buddhism. We have evidence of having even Muslim Xotros in line with Buddhist Xotros, each Xotro headed by a Muslim *Gwxai* (abbot), and there were Muslim *Bhokots*.<sup>(6)</sup> This also means that there were Muslim *Namghors*.

The *Guru Sorit Kotha* (*Biography of the Guru*) has it that Xongkordew built in his forty-fourth year the first ‘*math*’ (named xotro later) with the ‘*Hari Griha*’ (God House) in the centre and with its four *hats* (barracks for the residential *bhokots*). Its construction resembles the Puri Jagannath temple<sup>(5)</sup> which was a Buddhist temple, and the associated *Ratha-yatra* a Buddhist festival, in the past as quoted both by Rabindranath Tagore.<sup>(7)</sup> and Vivekananda.<sup>(8)</sup>

Many other important elements of the Xotro, such as its democratic administration, its tradition of celibacy, its sustenance from donation from its lay disciples, are all elements of Buddhism and not of Brahmanism. Like the *Bhikkhus* in the Buddhist *Sanghas*, the *Bhokots* in Assamese Vaishnava *Xotros* (celebrates in particular) became the central unit of a Xotro.



The **NAMGHOR**: While most Indian villages have a village temple, Assamese villages have *Namghors* or *Vihars* (village Assembly cum Prayer hall). Here also the similarity with Buddhism is apparent. The tradition that everybody has free entrance in the *Namghors* irrespective of caste, is in conformance with Buddhism and not with Brahmanism. Now however, this custom is being compromised due to ingress of Brahmanism. The word, 'tup' that is used for the round shaped front portion of a *Namghor* is most probably derived from the Buddhist word 'stupa' which is a Buddhist prayer house. Prevalence of Buddhist Xotros suggest that at one time every village in Assam probably had a Buddhist Vihara with a stupa (tup) or prayer hall like we see even now in all Buddhist villages in Assam. Most probably these Buddhist Viharas in Assam were simply renamed later 'Namghor' for practice of 'Nam-Dhormo' under neo Vaishnavism. It may be noted that when Xongkordew built the first Namghor, he did not name it Namghor but named it *Hari Griha* (God's House).

Another important characteristic of Assamese *Nam Dhormo* is the distribution of 'proxad' (snacks: *mah-saul*) that include only uncooked food (fruits & nuts) for the *Bhokots*. This distribution of uncooked food is a characteristic of Buddhism which must have been in practice in Assam since early days, and Assam Vaishnavism simply retained this practice. It may be noted that all over India, the Hindu tradition is to offer cooked food.

**The PRACTICE:** (The Three Jewels of Buddhism): In Buddhism, one is typically initiated by taking Xoron (Sans: *Saran*) (refuge at the feet) in the three basic elements of Buddhism, called the three jewels or *tri-ratna* which are the *Buddha*, the *Dharma* and the *Sangha*. These three jewels of Buddhism were later further expanded to four jewels by the inclusion of a fourth item called the *Guru* during the Tantrik and Mahayana period when Buddha was elevated and worshipped almost like God.

It does not seem casual coincidence that in the practice of Assam Vaishnavism we see four jewels (*sari vastu*) in the form of: *Dewo*, *Guru*, *Nam* and *Bhokot*. Thus, in Assam Vaishnavism, a man becomes a devotee by the act of initiation by taking *Xoron* in four elements (*vastu*): *Dewot Xoron*,

*Gurut Xoron*, *Namot Xoron* and *Bhokotot Xoron*. It is important to know that this type of initiation similar to Buddhism is nowhere to be found in any other Vaishnavite sects in India.

**Basic DOCTRINE:** Assam Vaishnavism is termed *ek-Xoronia Mohapuruxiya Namdhormo*; *ek-Xoronia* meaning that the devotee takes refuge in one God only,<sup>(9)</sup> and that refuge is transformed to *Bhakti* for one God only who is Vishnu (Krishna). Buddhism is based on *Bhakti* for Vishnu (Buddha) only. Incidentally, both Krishna and Buddha are considered as two incarnations (avatars) of Vishnu according to the Hindu tradition.

The essence of Mahayana Buddhism is not to practice the *Dharma* alone but to do it in the association with other *Bhagavatas* (Monks) in the *Sangha* which is one of the three jewels of Buddhism. Assam Vaishnavism prescribes the practice of the religion along with other *Bhagavatas* (*Bhokots*). This is also related to the role of the *Bodhisattva* in Mahayana Buddhism. A *Bodhisattva* is one who is ready to attain *Nirvana* but who has decided to forgo *Nirvana* for the sake of preaching and helping others to show the path to *Nirvana*.

It seems that this *Bodhisattva* ideal has been adopted by Assam Vaishnavism in *Bhokot*. Thus, *Bhakti* becomes the end in itself and becomes more important for the *Bhokots* than the liberation or *mukti*. Thus, like Buddhism, Assam Vaishnavism also prescribe the role of *Bodhisattva* as the ideal devotee. That is why Madhabdew, the chief disciple of Xongkordew, sings in the very first verse of his *Namghwxa* (Prayer Book), considered one of the main pillars of Assam Vaishnavism:

*Muktitw nispriho jitw, xehi bhokotoko nomo, Roxomoyee magwhw bhokoti.*

মুক্তিতো নৃস্পৃহ যিটো, সেহি ভকতক নমো, বসময় মাগোহো ভকতি।<sup>(10)</sup>

Meaning: I salute the devotee who is not interested in *Mukti*, I simply beg for *Bhokoti*.

Sri Xongkordew also sings in similar line: "I refuse the salvation in which, being merged in thee, I miss thy lotus feet"<sup>(11)</sup>

In Assam Vaishnavism, the monotheism is transformed into a path of devotion which is associated not only with a modification in the concept of God to make Him assessable to devotion, but also with a reinterpretation of the final goal, *Bhakti* being substituted for *Mukti*<sup>(12)</sup>

Assam Vaishnavism is called *Mohapuruxiya dhormo*, *Mohapuruxiya* meaning of the tradition of 'Great Holy Man'. No other Indian Vaishnavite sects in India are called such. The word *Mohapurux* (Sanskrit - *Mahapurusha*) comes from Buddhist tradition, and was originally used to denote the Buddha because of his 32 noble attributes of a superior holy man according to the old Brahmanical tradition. The significance is also connected with the Buddhist Aryan-Kshatriya tradition of the ancient age as is shown also by a book J. Evola's *The Doctrine of Awakening*.<sup>(13)</sup> It may be noted that Xongkordew, like the Buddha himself comes from an Aryan-Kshatriya tradition.

Contrary to popular belief by many, Buddhism is not an ascetic religion. Rather it follows the path of middle way between the *Upanishadic* forest asceticism practiced by the Brahmanic *shramanas* on one hand and the sensual enjoyment of Vedic Sacrifices of Brahmanism on the other. "*In the Buddhist system we find that asceticism is strongly objected to on the one hand and lust is on the other. ... The Buddha himself is always represented as having been well clothed and well fed.*"<sup>(14)</sup>

Unlike Jainism and some other sects of Hinduism, and like Buddhism, Assam Vaishnavism disfavors ascetic practices and suggests the lay bhokots to remain inwardly detached whilst living as a householder.

Like Buddhism, and unlike any other Vaishnavite *Bhakti* sects in India, Assam Vaishnavism also prescribes the disciples (*bhokots*) for self-enlightenment through knowledge and wisdom besides practicing *bhakti*. Xongkordew declares the importance of spiritual knowledge in his book *Nimi Navasiddha Sambâda*.<sup>(15)</sup>

There are many other similarities between Assam Vaishnavism and Buddhism. One, like the Buddha himself, Xongkordew did not have any Guru, he was a self-enlightened person (a Buddha) like the Buddha himself.

Buddhism considers the world as real and describes the world by three marks of existence called three aggregates: *anitya* (Impermanence), *dukkha* (unsatisfactory condition) and *anatma* (non-selfhood). It does not consider the world as unreal.

On philosophy, Xongkordew seems not to follow strictly any particular Hindu branch of philosophy. In fact, overall, the doctrine of Assam Vaishnavism seems more similar to Buddhism than to any branch of Hinduism. Unlike Adi-Sankaracharya who declared the *Jagat* or creation as *Mithyâ* or false, Xongkordew treated the *Jagat* as the play-field of God and thus real.

Like Buddhism, Xongkordew sings of impermanence (*anitya* অনিত্য) in his *Borgits Holy Songs*:

*Othiro dhono jono, jibono joubono, othiro ehu xonxaro.*

অথিৰ ধন জন, জীৱনযৌৱন, অথিৰ এহো সংসাৰ

Here the Assamese word '*othir*' অথিৰ comes from the original Sanskrit word '*osthir*' অস্থিৰ which means temporary, unstable. This does not mean unreal or false. Thus, the meaning of the song will be: In this life everything is temporary (impermanent): youth, wealth, friends, family, son, wife everything. Thus, everything seems meaningless.

This is what D. C. Ahir the eminent Buddhistologist of India commented on Assam Vaishnavism, "*...Sankaradeva in the 15th century popularized a new type of Vaishnavism in which Buddhism was presented in a new grab.*"<sup>(16)</sup> Buddhism that prevailed in Assam before Xongkordew was a corrupt form of Buddhism, and was in practice a mixture of Buddhist and Hindu Tantrik rites. "*This corruption continued for a long period until the great reformer, Sankaradeva came to revive and reform the old Vaishnavism in 15th century ce. However, when reformed and preached by him, it appears to have been influenced by the Buddhism faith, and the doctrine that he preached bears a clear relation with Buddhism than with Hinduism.*"<sup>(17)</sup>

It is much to the credit of Xongkordew to make the transformation of a corrupt form of Buddhism into a reformed and liberal form of Hinduism. "*The spiritual forces that were released by Sankaradeva in the Assamese society all along the banks of the Brahmaputra ultimately led to the transformation of a social heritage of the Buddhist past into the form of the Satra institutions of Assam.*"<sup>(18)</sup>



The question is often asked, what happened to Buddhism in India? The proper answer maybe it was absorbed by the Vaishnavite sects in India to different degrees. In case of Assam Vaishnavism, we see that Buddhism has so much been absorbed in its practice, institutions and even in its doctrine that it is difficult to say if Assam Vaishnavism is a sect of Hinduism or Buddhism. We can definitely say that Buddhism is not dead in India. In Assam it is alive and well within Assam Vaishnavism itself so much so that, if we are allowed to coin a new term, we may very well say that Assam Vaishnavism may be called *Mahayana Hinduism*. Or we may say that Assam Vaishnavism is Vaishnavism on a Buddhist pedestal.

Overall, Assam is the only country in India, nay in the world, where Buddhism, in one form or another, has such a long history. It is the long prevalence of Buddhism that has given the Assamese people the easy going open minded friendlier smiling outlook in life, irrespective of their religions, and Assam may rightly be said to be a Buddhist country, and the Assamese culture basically a Buddhist culture. By nature, the Assamese like the easy-going slower pace of lifestyle and may be said to be a Buddhist by nature. Assamese use the typical phrase '*hobo diok*' (হ'ব দিয়ক) in their conversation, and it is significant. It means 'Let it be'. It is something like the Arabic phrase '*Insa-Allah*' (God willing) except that the Assamese phrase does not have the God element. I think the Assamese picked up this term due the long Buddhist influence. We may even see some influence of Taoism (Lao Tzu) in the phrase.

One must admit that the Assamese are friendlier by nature compared to other Indians. It is no wonder that the noted journalist Mr. Kushawant Singh recently remarked that the Assamese are the friendliest of all Indian people; they don't have any hang-ups with the caste system. Edward Gait, the

British historian on Assam, commented that this liberal attitude of the Assamese was due to the long prevalence of Buddhism in Assam. Same is the view of the Assamese historian Gunabhiram Barooah.<sup>(19)</sup> I think this is the greatest impact Buddhism has made on the life and culture of Assam.

**NOTES:** Guide for pronunciation of the Assamese words used in the article: a as a in arm; e as e in bed; i as i in pin; o as o in boy; ó as o in bone; u as u in put; w as w in war; x as ch in the German word Bach.

#### REFERENCES:

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- 2) D. C. Ahir – *Buddhism Declined in India – How and Why* – BRP, New Delhi, 2005 – p vii
- 3) Dr. Rajen Barua-Buddhism in Assam-Appendix II *Buddhism and Bhakti* p239
- 4) Rabindra Nath Tagore - Bengali Article - *Boudhodhorme Bhoktibad*
- 5) Maheswar Neog - *Guru Chorit Kotha* p 150
- 6) Edward Gait - *The Census Report*, 1891 - Dr. Satyakam Phukan - Article *Muslim Satras*
- 7) Rabindra Nath Tagore - Op Cit
- 8) Swami Vivekananda – *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*- Advaita Ashrama Pub, Calcutta - p 188
- 9) Dr. Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti - *Sankaradeva – Total Personality* -- p 81
- 10) Sri Xongkordew - *The Kirton*
- 11) Sri Madhobdew - *The Namghuxa*
- 12) Audrey Cantlie - *The Assamese* - p 259
- 13) Bhaben Barua – Article - *Saint Sankaradeva, Indian Civilization and the Philosophy of Vaishnavism* – Also see : *The Doctrine of Awakening* - J. Evola's p. 16
- 14) Rhys Davids - *Buddhism in History and Literature*- p 148
- 15) Dr. Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti-- op. cit. p 139
- 16) D.C. Ahir - *Himalayan Buddhism* -p 117.
- 17) Sri Gauri Nath Chakravarti - *The Mahapurushiya Sect in Assam*- (Journal of the Buddhist Text Anthropological Society, Calcutta, 1917, as quoted by S. Sasanananda, *History of Buddhism In Assam* p 228
- 18) Bhaben Barua – Op Cit
- 19) Dr. Rajen Barua - Op Cit p215

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## FEATURED ARTICLE

### *SRI SANKARDEVA - THE GREATEST ASSAMESE*

By Dr. Umesh C. Tahbildar

As we are about to celebrate the Tithi of Sri Sankardeva this year, it is an opportune time to reflect upon this great Assamese who contributed so much to what we perceive as an Assamese identity today. There is hardly an aspect of imitable Assamese ethos that is not traced to Sri Sankardeva. During the span of his checkered life of 119 years, Sri Sankardeva displayed his multifaceted and super human genius through excellence in endeavors ranging across a broad spectrum of work- literature, religion, dance, drama, music, administration, organization, sculpture and much more. By spreading his *Nama Dharma*, Sri Sankardeva rescued the Assamese society from certain downfall and transformed it for a righteous course that has to date sustained for more than five hundred years. What Albert Einstein said about Mahatma Gandhi that "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth" is applicable to Sri Sankardeva even more. In fact, Sri Sankardeva is considered to be an *Avatar* of Lord Krishna Himself.

Sri Sankardeva was born at a time when Kamrupa and the surrounding region was a center of a form of Tantrism which was an aberration of mainstream Hindu thought that crystallized into Samkhya and Vedanta philosophies. Tantrics believed in bloody sacrifices of all animals including human beings. History tells us that after Kalapahar, the Muhammadan general, destroyed the Kamakhya temple, Naranarayan, the great Koch king of Kamatapur rebuilt it and on the day of opening the temple, 140 human lives were sacrificed and their heads were offered to the Goddess on copper salvers. Similarly, after Hayagriva Madhava temple in Hajo was rebuilt by Raghu Deb of Koch Hajo, again a number of human beings were sacrificed. It was not just in Kamarupa that the practice was in vogue. The system thrived equally under the tutelage of the Hindu Brahmins, Chutiya Deoris and among many tribes. Against this social backdrop, Sri Sankardeva was born in Ali Pukhuri near Bardowa

in Nagaon district in 1449 in the well-known Baro-Bhuyan family. His father, Siromoni Kusumbar Bhuyan was the great grandson of Pandit Sandibar who was among the seven Kayastha scholars brought from Kanauj by Raja Durlav Narayan of Kamatapur with the help of Raja of Gour, Dharmanarayan and his mother was Satyasandha.

At the age of twelve, Sri Sankardeva started schooling under the renowned scholar of the time, Mahendra Kandali and after finishing the school, he went to Bardowa where he constructed a *Hari Griha* in which he installed an idol of Lord Vishnu carved by himself from a large piece of wood found in a river. It was meant to be a fine piece of art and sculpture and not meant for worship since Sri Sankardeva did not believe in idolatry. That he was uniquely gifted can be seen from the fact that he produced the Dance Drama, *Chinha Yatra* while he was only in early twenties. In this, he acted, he was the main bayan, he composed the music, he created the musical instrument, Khol and much more. It was here in Bardowa that he started writing religious books. Sri Sankardeva married his first wife Suryabati in 1470. Suryabati died soon after a girl named Manu was born in 1474. He married away his daughter, Manu to Hari, son of Ramchandra Kayastha when she was only nine years old. He then bequeathed all his property to Hari, handed over Siromaniship to his grand uncle and at the age of 32 began a religious pilgrimage that took him to many religious places in India. It was a time of rise of Bhakti movement in India. Therefore, it can be surmised that he was greatly influenced by the basic tenets of the Bhakti Religion.

On return from his pilgrimage that took twelve years, Sri Sankardev settled in Bardowa and he declined his family responsibility as a Bhuyan. Instead, he devoted himself to *Hari Bhakti*. His *Eka Sarania Nama Dharma* was a form of theist monism enshrined in Vedanta philosophy that

believes in one supreme *Brahman* that radiates through all creatures.

At the insistence of his relatives, Sri Sankardeva got married for the second time to Kalindi in 1498. His rise as a preacher of *Bhakti Dharma* angered the Brahmins and plotted to vilify him in the eyes of the powerful kings. They went to the court of Naranarayan who ruled Kamatapur as well as Ahom king Suhungmung at different times with the complaint that Sri Sankardev was not following religion and corrupting the people. Not a single Brahmin Pandit, however, could win any religious argument with him in any debate. He started writing the *Kirtan Gosha* at Bardowa. He moved to Dhuwahat (Majuli) after staying in Gangmau for 5 years. Then he continued to move from place to place mainly for security reason and finally arrived in Patbausi near Barpeta. In Patbausi, he constructed a Kirtan Ghar. While at Patbausi, at the request of King Naranarayan, the *Vrindabani Bastra* depicting the *Baikuntha* in all details was produced under his supervision with the help of the weavers of Tatikuchi. At this time, King Naranarayan essentially gave him the chief executive power over the Tatikuchi area. He composed scores of devotional Bargeets. He also

wrote numerous books and translated several *skandhas* of Bhagabat. He was also the creator of *Pal Nam* which he made his disciples to sing in the Kirtan Hall of Dhuwahat. He established the *Satras* as the focal points for spread of his religion. Sri Sankardeva was a master strategist and thought out very well as to how to get popular acceptance of his religion among common people who did not know Sanskrit. He presented the scriptures by composing verses in easily understandable language. In terms of modern outlook, it can be seen as a marketing strategy that worked very well. He was also a master of persuasive advertisement that the Madison Avenue establishment will marvel at. That he invented Yatra, Bhaona, Satriya Nritya etc was an example of how Sri Sankardeva wanted to popularise the *Bhakti Dharma* by creating an entertainment media all by himself. He was also a nutritionist per excellence as will be clear if one examines the contents of *Prasad* given in a Naam Ghar.

Shortly before he was scheduled to initiate King Naranarayan into his faith, Sri Sankardeva breathed his last in Kakotkuta in 1568 at the age of 119 years.

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## RECENT AND UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

### Naam-proxonga

There were two events where naam-proxonga activities were performed:

- 1) **September 20, 2020:** a naam-proxonga was remotely performed in honor of the untimely demise of Basanta Thakuria (Bhaiti), brother of NJ-based Assamese community member Jayanta Thakuria.

- 2) **September 26, 2020:** the Sankardeva Tithi was commemorated through naam-proxonga (remotely); event courtesy NEIACO (North-East Indian American Cultural Organization) and NAAM.

### Upcoming activities

Srimanta Sankardeva's Janma Tithi  
Celebration Function, November 21, 2020,  
from 2.00-3.30 pm EST (details on p.2).



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## Q&A

### **Q: What is NAAM?**

**A:** Naamghar Association of America, Inc. (NAAM) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit spiritual and cultural organization formed to construct and manage a Naamghar for the Assamese diaspora to celebrate and perform the spiritual traditions and philosophical teachings of Srimanta Sankardeva. With strong ties with all the *Satras* of Assam, NAAM seek to provide a forum for learned spiritual leaders and traditional artistes to share their knowledge and talent with the current and future generations of the Assamese diaspora.

### **Q: What are the immediate goals of NAAM?**

**A:** Some of the immediate goals of NAAM include spreading awareness on NAAM initiatives, build a digital media platform, plan for fund raising, and participate regularly in

Naam-proxongo. NAAM seeks volunteers from the large Assamese diaspora across the United States to achieve these goals. Please join us (details at the bottom of this newsletter). In our planning activity, the first priority is to identify what is needed to establish a temporary *Naamghar*. This will make the *Guru Axon*, consecrated by the Sri Sri Auniati Satra Satradhikar, more easily accessible to the public, while we work on the longer-term project of building a permanent *Naamghar*.

### **Q: Does NAAM collaborate with other organizations?**

**A:** NAAM is actively seeking to collaborate with all community organizations which are willing to help achieve NAAM's mission. NAAM plans to have meaningful discussion with all organizations in our community; please contact us if you would like to be a part of this conversation (contact details at the bottom).

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## HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH NAAM?

### **JOIN THE NAAM WORKING GROUP**

**(WG):** We need your help in achieving the dream of building a Naamghar in the United States. Therefore, NAAM is open to everyone who is interested in building the Naamghar.

If you are interested in getting involved actively in NAAM's mission, please join the NAAM by sending an email to: [Naaminfo@Naamghar.org](mailto:Naaminfo@Naamghar.org).

The Working Group meets regularly via teleconference/video conference to discuss various issues that are related to NAAM and its mission and goals.

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## NAAM TEAM MEMBERS

Following individuals comprise the current NAAM team. ***We invite all individuals who are sincerely interested in the Mission and Goals of NAAM to join the NAAM team.*** Current members are:

- Niraj Barbara, PA
- Dr. Rajen Barua, TX
- Dr. Sanjib Bhuyan, NJ
- Pranab Bora, WI
- Lolit Bora, PA
- Dr. Babul Borah, OH
- Utpal Borah, VA
- Dr. Binoy Bordoloi, NJ  
(*Bor-medhi*)
- Manoranjan Bordoloi, NJ
- Monidipa Bordoloi, CA
- Susanto Bordoloi, CT
- Malabika Brahma, NJ
- Debojit Chowdhury, CA
- Niren Choudhury, NJ
- Dr. Pradip Das, MO
- Shyam DevChoudhury, PA  
(Secretary)
- Dr. Saswati Datta, OH
- Hemanga Dutta, NJ
- Panchali Dutta, NJ
- Sawmick Dutta, CA
- Prandeep Gogoi, NJ
- Kamalakshi Hazarika, NJ
- Suranjoy Hazarika, NJ
- Dr. Jukti Kalita, NJ
- Rashmi Kalita, CA
- Nilanjona Mahanta, CA
- Rachna Nath, AZ
- Shakhyar Neog, NJ
- Anu Perlmutter, VA
- Gayatree Prasad, CA
- Dr. Purandar Sarmah, NJ  
(Treasurer)
- Vavani Sarmah, CA

## Contact Us

**Email:** [Naaminfo@Naamghar.org](mailto:Naaminfo@Naamghar.org)

**Website:** [www.naamghar.org](http://www.naamghar.org)

**Facebook:** Naamghar Association of America – NAAM

