



## **Title: Expanding Popularity of *Khanikar Puthi*: A Historical Study.**

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**Abstract:** *Khanikar Puthi* is a holy religious book which content Nam-Ghosha and Kirtana which was written and performed by Vaishnava saint of Assam in medieval Assam. As of this sanchi puthi is 250 years old as the people belief this puthi preserved by from medieval time. During recent time this particular puthi became very popular in upper Assam among the Hindus. The increasing popularity is a process of gradual making; it may be spontaneous or planed. The process of its development as a cult became very important because the same other puthi is not get such focused. The construction of this cult has been a process of some tactics or method adopted by the bhaktas of this cult. The increasing popularity of this puthi is the major aim to study in theoretical boundaries. The historical aspect of this puthi is also a part of this paper.

**Keywords:** Khanikar puthi, Tradition, Golaghat, Nam-Ghosha

**Literature review:** Bornali Nath Dowerahs, article Srimanta Sankardeva's Role in Language, Literature and Culture of Assam: A Critical Perspective introduced a literary development during the mediaeval Assam specially who were related with the Neo-Vaishnava movement. Another article namely "The Tradition of Manuscript Writing and the Development of Libraries in Pre-Colonial Assam" by Kishor Goswami etc... all comprehensively discussed about the manuscript tradition of medieval Assam. The tools writing process, preservation is a part of this article. Another book is Golaghatr Gulap Phul by Ajit Boruah shortly discussed about the Khanikar puthi tradition in Golaghat. Deboprasad Gogoi and Biplob Gogoi in their article namely Khanikar Puthi of Assam and

its Relevance in Recent Days: A Historical Study broadly discussed about the history of the Khanikar puthi, its materials culture, traditions etc. they basically depended on oral sources.

**Methodology:** Both primary and secondary sources are used in this paper. Books, articles are used. Some pictures are used to better understand, several interviews are taken to understand the increasing popularity of khanikar puthi tradition. Historical and analytical methods are used to discussed in this research paper.

**Aim:** This paper have basically two aim first is to briefly introduced history of Khanikar puthi and second is to understand the increasing popularity process during from last three decades.

**Introduction:** From the Ancient Assam the manuscript writing has an importance as a communication of medium and source of gathering knowledge with the coming of Ahoms the manuscript tradition became more popular in this region. During the Neo-Vaishnava movement of Assam, the manuscript tradition became very popular and integral part of this movement.<sup>1</sup>

From medieval Assam's 16<sup>th</sup> century to the time present, the Neo-Vaishnavism founded by Shakardeva and Madhavdeva as well as their disciples has been laying more or less impact on Assamese society. They started to write the religious texts and the biographies of their gurus on *sanchi paat* and other such tools. The process of writing texts on *sachi paat* had gained momentum in medieval Assam.<sup>2</sup> *Khanikar puthi* is also such a religious text written on *sanchi paat*. At present Khanikar puthi denotes the Kirtan and the Ghosa. Sankardeva's saying 'to find him in kirtana after his demise' can be realized. Ghosa was propagated by Madhavdev. In this article, a brief introduction about Kirtana, Ghosa and its massive adoration will be discussed.

Khanikar puthi is more popular in upper Assam. The kirtana and Ghosa, being conserved in Khanikar gaon under Missamara mouza of Khumtai Legislative Constituency, Golaghat district, is known as the Khanikar puthi. These two religious texts have been written on *sanchi paat* in ancient Assamese script. The history of this text is almost 250 years old. There is no written evidence about the reach of this sacred text in the Khanikar village but there are

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<sup>1</sup> Kishor Goswami, Raktim Ranjan Saikia), Monjit Gogoi, The Tradition of Manuscript Writing and development of Libraries in Pre-Colonial Assam, Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal),2021, p 2.

<sup>2</sup> Bornali Nath Dowerah, Srimanta Sankardeva's Role in Language, Literature and Culture of Assam: A Critical Perspective. Academia, 2022, pp2. <https://www.academia.edu/96375580/>

dialects that at the time of Burmese invasion in around 1817-1821, most people left off to the forests. After getting the news of Burmese coming towards the Missamara area many people had left that place. Only person named Moniram Boruah of Khanikar village could not leave due to his old age. Burmese militaries looted every possible household with their properties. According to some, Burmese left a sag on the pond side of Moniram Boruah. According to others Burmese gave these books to Moniram Boruah who could not leave due to old age. But there is no evidence to know where those books came from, why did Burmese give them to Moniram Boruah, why didn't they do any harm to those books. Later Moniram Boruah discovered Kirtana, Dasama, Naamghosa and Bhakti-Ratnavali from the sag and he gifted Dasama to the nearby naamghar of Halowa village and kept kirtana and Ghosa with him. To conserve these texts, then a local artist Lilaram Boruah made two wooden boxes. In later times it is known to gift the boxes by other people also. After Moniram Boruah, his son and his wife used to keep the texts in a corner of their kitchen and worshipped them. Later it was known to fulfill one's desire and gain peace and prosperity by worshipping them. This way people's faith on these texts started to increase tremendously. After the death of Moniram Boruah, responsibilities were taken by his family members. Sadiram Boruah's son established the books on *thapana* and managed to organize prayers on it. After him his two sons Raseswar Boruah and Kuseswar Boruah took the responsibility. In later times its responsibility was taken by Heremba Boruah and in his patronization these sacred texts had officially got recognition in the form of Khanikar Puthi Naamghar in 20 March, 2000. At present, Sri Bhabesh Boruah is in charge of the Naamghar.<sup>3</sup> Everyday many devotees come to the Naamghar. Many use to offer earthen lamps, Prasad, prayers in the hope of fulfilling their desires. With the same hope some people invite the sacred texts to their household. To bring this text to one's house, they should register their name in advance in disciplined way. Accordingly, the texts are taken to the devotee's household in disciplined manner. Also, the individuals who carry these texts should wear proper traditional dress such as dhoti, chadar, gamosa etc and they carry it on their head or shoulder.<sup>4</sup> Khanikar puthi is written in ancient assamese script. The texts had been written on different time. Both of them are known to be finished in 1768. But there is no mention of any introduction, content page, writer's name or any address. On the cover page the only thing written is 'jatha drishtang, tatha likhitang' meaning whatever is seen is being written. Though the quality of prints

<sup>3</sup> Deboprasad Gogoi and Biplob gogoi. Khanikar puthi of Assam and its relevance in recent days, pp54-57.

<sup>4</sup> Boruah, Bhabesh.interview.conducted by deepsikha keot.date....

has been declined in some pages due to its usage for long 250 years but most of the prints are still in its original quality. Most important thing is that people's devotion to these texts has not been deteriorated till today. Nowadays the belief of these texts is not only confined to Golaghat district only, but it has spread all over Assam.

The kirtana text under Khanikar puthi is composed of 105 pages, of which two are covers. The pages are of length 45 cm and breadth 16 cm. There are total 2209 no.s of padas. At the end of the text is written '5 months, 4 days and 1 tithi ends from 1690 B.C.'. The naam Ghosa is composed of 53 pages. It has only one cover. The pages are 35 cm long and width is 10 cm. There are 1000 numbers of padas. There is a hole to tie and secure the text. At the end is written '2<sup>nd</sup> month and Wednesday of 1690. Ghosa pushtakang sampurnang samapta' means the Ghosa text completely ends. The Kirtana text was completed after 200 years of demise of Sankardeva, in the month of August 1768. The Ghosa was completed in the month of June 1768 AD.<sup>5</sup> According to these dates we can say that these texts have completed 253 years in 2021.

**Discussion:** The growing popularity of the khanikar puthi recitation programs are important because during the post independent time. The popularity of this puthi confined within the small localized area but today it expanded very rapidly to whole upper Assam and also in the regions of Guwahati city.

The growth of this popularity has been starts basically from the 1990 in Golaghat and gradually has been expanded still today. When someone wants to called this puthi to his home firstly he has to booked the puthi.<sup>6</sup> Most of the people belief that puthi itself gives a date. It is a belief which makes the puthi very holistic and powerful. These rumors attracted people to the Khanikar puthi. Another attractive cause is the process of coming to the house. The puthi does not permitted (as people belief) to carry the puthi by any vehicle. The puthi is carried by foot and bare foot.<sup>7</sup> How long of this journey is not matter for them. This especial nature of journey attracted common people and the journey is made via populated area so gradually it became very popular.

People's belief on these texts is so much that every passerby bows their head for a while even on road and also contributes in the name of the texts. The environment of the recipient's house becomes full of spirituality on the

<sup>5</sup> Gogoi debprasad.op.cit.pp 53-58.

<sup>6</sup> Sarma, prasanta. Interviewed by deepsikha keot 28 july,2021.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 1.

coming of Khanikar puthi. They blow lamps from a very long distance to welcome the holy texts to their house and people feel prosper to carry them to their house on their own head. It is believed that the carrier individual gains a supernatural power while carrying these books.

Another aspect of this puthi which make it very miracle or having a supernatural power is that any person who has some wrong attitude to the puthi and faulty mentality in their devotion cannot see the letters as well as the words in the texts.<sup>8</sup> According to other belief, this text cannot be conserved in modern way. If tried also, it becomes failed. These kinds of beliefs make these texts extra ordinary from other kirtana and Ghosa. Interestingly the language is same as modern Assamese and words are same as in the printed Kirtana Ghosa, but the puthi became old and words are becoming not readable without any barrier. The professional readers who are came along with the puthi read it very spontaneously because they have these habits. They also carried a printed kirtana Ghosa.<sup>9</sup> Such rumors and mysteries assumption give it to grow the traditions more and more. Actually, most of the village people are not aware about what is the contain of this Puthi. The basic caused is they are believed in this puthi having supernatural powers.

From the last decades of the 21th century the Khanikar puthi was growth as a popular tradition. For such development media and social media played an important rule.<sup>10</sup>

The positions of recipient house basically belong to a good economically and socially comparatively. The recipient family avoided non-veg from one week and maintain some fasting ritual. The puthi is welcomed by using *uruli*, *khul*, *tal nam*.<sup>11</sup> A huge gathering of people welcomed this holly puthi. People believed the puthi is so extraordinary and imposing superpower on it. At the time of departure, the family and other people started to cry this situation legitimate the supernatural power of this puthi because in other Namghosha reading ritual is not ended like that.<sup>12</sup> During the arrival and departure of the puthi the head of the male family or his son took this puthi on his head from

<sup>8</sup> Kochari dulomoni.interview.conducted by deepsikha keot.25 july 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Observed by deepsikha keot.see appendix 2.

<sup>10</sup> Boruah, Bhabesh.op.cit.

<sup>11</sup> Observed by deepsikha keot.see appendix 3.

<sup>12</sup> Bora Debojit.interview.conducted by deepsikha keot.25 july,2022.

the gate or sometimes from a distance to the house. At that they feel very energetic and they even does not feel pain and tiredness.<sup>13</sup>

Conclusion: The history of Khanikar puthi is of 250 years old. There is not a good amount of writing sources information found. The increasing popularity of this Khanikar puthi tradition is can be theorized in two structures basically with a medium of communication.

First is structured by the process of booking this puthi and giving a date through puthi itself, the extraordinary journey for recipient house, professional and well-versed readers, mysterious stories produced by the bhaktas came with the puthi and alienation of common people to read or touch made it more confined and special.

Other side or structure is the family who welcomed the puthi. They are basically good status in the society, and the khanikar puthi brings more status as the puthi permitted them. Physiologically they became proud and they don't feel pain, tiredness etc. they made some stories and other associate people with this culture carried this story.

Between these two structures the medium of spreading knowledge about this Khanikar puthi is basically media, social media and the peoples who carried different rumors of supernatural Khanikar puthi.

Basically, the belief system of people and these two structured models along with medium the Khanikar putrhi traditions expanding day by day. The belief system basically led to create such development.sometimes they wanted to highlights the supernatural power of this puthi as they belief and sometimes it became necessity to maintain the specialness of this puthi.

Appendix 1. (Journey of puthi)

<sup>13</sup> Sarma nayan.intervied. conducted by Deepsikha keot.



Appendix no 2 (Manuscript)



Appendix no 3 (welcomed process by house owner)



Appendix no 4. (Attainment of huge people)

