Satra and its relation to art forms of Assam: A case study on Badala Satra in Lakhimpur district

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Abstract

Satra is one of the special types of ethnic institutes in Assam. It owes its origin to Mahapurash Sankardev, the Vaishanava saint of Assam. The Mahapurash Established Satra institution to fulfil the social needs of society. Satras have contributed a lot to the spread of education, art and culture among general masses in Assam. The Satras are not only known for the monasteries but are also centres of traditional art forms of Assam. Implication of the Satra institution is undoubtedly immeasurable and conscientious not only in implementation of the ideology of Vaisnavism as well as to establish and reform the aspect of social and cultural life since centuries. This institution enormously elevated the paradigms of society, education, ethics, literature, art and culture of Assam. In this context the present paper attempts to analysis the satra institution and relation to art forms of Assam. The study based on both primary and secondary data. It is seen that Satra institution exist a positive relation between different art forms and Art education in Assam.

Keywords: *Satra, Art education, culture, ethics.*

Introduction :-

The **Satra**, or Vaisnavite Monastery, is an institution which was established by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. Over the centuries, it has become intimately connected with the Assamese life, art forms of society and culture. From Majuli to Koch Bihar, the Satra dominates the social landscape of Assam and the entire state is integrated into one religious whole by this network of Satras. Today, the number of Satras in Assam is well over five hundred with numerous Vaisnava householders affiliated to one or the other Satra. A satra has been defined as Ekanta Vaisnavayot nibasa karai jibako saran diyak Satra Kai.(where the single minded Vaisnavs reside, where they offer sarana shelter) to the souls, that place is called a Satra. The name satra originates in the Bhagavata Purana in Sanskrit (*sattra*), and is used in the sense of an assembly of devotees.

The Geneses of the Satra*:-*

The origin of the Satra institution can be traced to the time when the Neo Vaisnavite Movement initiated by Srimanta Sankaradeva was still at a nascent stage. Sankaradeva is said to have established his first Satra at Bardowa, his birth place, and then at different centers, during the course of his long and extensive travels across the length and breadth of Assam. He founded prayer - houses (Hari - Grihas) at almost all the places he preached the new religion. These institutions, which gradually expanded to also become centres of cultural activity, were known at the beginning, as **Thān** (Sanskrit *Sthāna*). During the Mahapurusha's lifetime, many *Thāns* were

established all over Assam. Deva Griha, Hari Griha, Kirtana Ghar ,Prasangar Ghar Satra Griha are different name of satras prayer hall.

Aministration and Organisation in a Satra :-

The administrative and organizational aspect of the Satra is dominated by the **Satradhika**r (Chief Officer of satra). He is a mentor of satra. Under his guidance all religious and spiritual activities like **Saran, Bhajan** are accompanied. Next to the **Young men** (***Deka-Adhikar).*** Absent of Satradhikar the Deka Adhikar accomplishes the duties of the Saradhikar. The **devotees (bhakats) are** the care taker of Satra campus. They also trainer of all devotees of satra. Such unmarried devotees are called kevaliya bhakats and the **disciples (sishya)**

Art forms: Generally the art is categorized in two types: visual art and performing art. The visual art have also different types i.e. drawing, Painting, Sculpture, and Design. Further, design have different types: Jewellery, Pottery, Weaving, fabrics and applied design such as commercial graphics, home furnishing and contemporary topics include computer art, film, video, Photography etc. The performing art also has different types: music, dance, theatre and puppetry. Art would have to play an essential part of our education all along. For all round development of learners art education is important. Art education is promoting both art forms and cultural awareness, and transmitted from one generation to the next. Art education helps in personality development, gaining holistic knowledge, making the life aesthetical, cognitive simulation, academic achievement, conveying message to the society and providing varied options of professions. Indian education has always absorbed the importance of art education. It seeks to spread art education through formal and non-formal education.

Rational of the study :-

The researcher feels that it is essential to study the present system of Satra of Assam and its relation to different art forms of Assam. To preserve and promoting the culture of Assam Satra and Art education is most important. Assam state is very rich in terms of cultural diversity and art is an integral part of culture. Art is deeply rooted in the society of Assam and progressing through formal and informal education system. It is evident from facts that Satra, Cultural societies, Namghar are the place of learning of art and festivals are occasion of its rigorous practice. After Independence, the Government of India realizes the importance of Art Education and has launched many new schemes and reform policies regarding Art Education.

There are few research studies including this like, **Duarah (2020)**, found that Satra has contributed a great deal to the realm of literature, art and culture of Assamese society. **Goswami (2019)**, found that the Satras were the head institution of Assam to represent the Assamese society to spreading the Sankari culture. **Nath (2020)**, found that Satras and Namghar which has played important role to preserve and promoting the indigenous culture of the Assam.. Namghar is one of the centers of playing the multi-faceted role of Cultural Centre of Assamese society. Namghar and satras are also as a center of Panchayat, where different decisions are taken in favorer of society. **Sarmah (2018)**, was found that Satra institution has immense importance in growth and development of the greater Assamese society and culture. The Satra institutions are regarded as the mirror of Assamese society.

Satra have significant role in the improvement of quality of the Assamese society and culture. From the above discussion, it is clear that there are many researchers such as Duarah (2020), Goswami (2019), reveals the importance of satra and culture of Aassamese society. The researchers there by eager to conduct a survey study of Satra and its relation to art forms of Assam.

Research Question:-

1. What are the system and administrative set up of Badalasatra?
2. What are the relations to Satra in different art forms of Assam?
3. What are the problems of Badala Satra?

Objectives of the study:-

1. To study the system and administrative set up of Badala satra.
2. To study the Satra's education and its relation to different art forms of Assam.
3. To study the challenges of satra.

Methodology:-

This study is based on primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through survey carried in Badala Satra of Lakhimpur district of Assam. The researcher direct visited the satra and using interview schedule for the Satradhikar and the Bor-baion (trainer). The researcher also used content analysis method while studying. Secondary sources of data were used wherever necessary**.**

Area of the study:-

The researcher has selected Badala satra of Narayanpur in Lakhimpur district as the area of study because the importance of satra is remarkable in the conservation and transformation of culture and society building. The satra play a significant institution in Assamese culture & society, the value of satra institutions as the center of recreation, art and culture, vocational training, social organization, library and platform for unity between different tribes and castes. One of the main art form of satra is satriya nitrya (dance). It is a unique dance form of satra, which is practiced and performed in every Assamese society. Satriya nitrya (dance) form got the recognition as one of the classical dance forms of India. Satriya dance is a dance form accompanied by music, songs, dramatic elements and narrations. Even today many of these art forms are performed and practiced in the society as an important part of Assamese culture.

Result and Discussion:-

As per the objectives of the study, the researcher visited to Badala Satra and interacted with the Satradhikar and the Bor-baion (trainer) who teaches of different art forms. The data were analyzed and interpreted in sequences of the objective.

Narayanpur is famous as the birthplace of Mahapurush Madhavdev. Badala Padma Ataa who was a great follower of Mahapurush Madhabdev, in 1636 AD this satra was established in Narayanpur. This satra is also known as Badala Padma Ataa Satra.

Description of BadalaSatra

The structure of this Satra:

Batchora (Main Gate), The Batchora is main entrance of Satra, is also known as Karapat.



Batchor (Under Construction)

Kirtanghar or Namghar (Prayer Hall).Kirtanghar or Namghar is a prayer hall in morning and evening time. This place of religious activities but is regarded as important traditions where various activities like namprasang, different nitrya (dance) form and different natak, bhaoana, xhole, tal are teached and performed.



BadalaSatraNamghar

Monikut (house of jewels). In Manikut and thapana is the actual shrine where the sacred scriptures or idol of the god is kept. Manikut (literally "the jewel hut") is an independent room located towards the eastern end of an Ekasarana Hindu prayer house (*namghar*). It is the place

that represents the worshipful god, or a *guru asana* (the guru's seat). The ***Guru Āsana*****,** literally the Seat of the Guru, is the place of sacred scripture. It is a seven-tiered, triangular, wooden throne adorned with tortoise-elephant-lion motifs and other decorative woodwork.

Hati/Boha(it's a kind of hostel for Bhakats and followers). Hati is rears of houses where all members of satra reside. Hati is constructed surrounding of Satra campus. Boha is a sitting place of guest in this satra. Satraadhikar does not stay in Hati/Boha, there is a separate place for him.



Boha (This house is newly constructed under Madhabdev kalakhetra, by Govt. of Assam)

Badala Ata griha: This is the main house (griha) of this satra. This house also known as subarnavaral. In this **Griha** some memories and belongings of Padma Ata are being preserved.

System and administrative set up

In this Satra holds the institutional parties-

(i) **Satradhikar:**(pravuiswar) Satradhikar is a distinguished personality who performs the duties of a head of the Satra. The management of Satra is run under his guidance. He is the religious and spiritual guide. Deka satradhikar is only one person.

(ii) **Bhuabhakat:** After satradhikar bhuabhakat management the Satra. He also the religious and spiritual guide.

(iii) **Bhakat:** The very name Bhakata or Bhakat means the devotees. In this Satrar esearcher found that two types of Bhakata - one is Grihasthi (These Bhakats live outside the Satra), where the satradhikar and the clerical devotees lead life of a celibate. Such unmarried devotees are called kevaliya bhakats. There are total 15 Kevaliya Bhakats in this satra.

Management and finance of Badalasatra:

This satra has its own management committee. Satradhikar plays the main role here. Bhakats are the member of the satra committee. The villagers are also considered as a part of this committee. Satra has its own land area. In recent time 42 bigha (10.53 hector) of land that belonged to satra has been donated by the satra committee to Madhabdev Kalakhetra. Now Madhabdev kalakhetra is a part of this satra. The land area of satra has been divided among each

devotee and satradhikar. This land is always non-commercial; no one can sell or buy these lands. They are able to support themselves by cultivating these lands. They also support their expenses from donations. In recent Assam government has given some donations to satra for being associated with the newly under construction Madhabdev kalakhetra. In present the Satra is going through renovation and some of new buildings are under construction.

Satra education and its relation to different art forms of Assam

The education in the form of different art is called Satriya Sanskriti. The satra mainly teaches different satriya sanskriti to the dovotees under this satra. In month of August (Assamese month Vadamah) this satra celebrates **Guru kirtan.** Different programs like **saoulvujoni** held in the morning session, **jhumuranach** is held in the evening time and after this programmes like **nadubhangi nach**, **Boha nach, Sali nach** are also held as everyday schedule. But same nitrya (dance) are not played every day. Every month have a special nitrya like in Bohag mah (month of April) this satra play boha nach, Salinach. And vada mah (Month of Agust) they played like nadubhangi nach and also famous satriya nitrya. This satra basically teaches only to their sisya who are part of this satra. The one who teaches all the above activities is called Bor-Bayon. Different type **of xole tal gayan, bayan** are also taught in this satra. The 'Prasangas' (prayer sessions) and the Namkirtan is held in every morning and evening at a specific time. Occasional observances like **Raslila**, Ras festival or Raslila is a cultural festival of Assam where the life of Lord Krishna and His many wonders are performed on stage or namghar in various forms of play and acts. Ras lila mainly held at month of October. **Bhaona** .The Bhaona was developed by Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva as a part of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement to describe the religious stories and the contents of **Srimad Bhagwat Gita** and the **Ramayana** to the devotees. Bhaona was mainly performed at namghars. In ancicent time bhaona act was only performed by boys (bhakats). In recent times out of namghar both male and female act bhaona and other festivals are also organised by this Satras, in which inmates and villagers, including women, children, from different stratum and age group, though illiterate, recites and sings passages from the Guna-mala, Naam-ghosha and other religious texts. The mode of prayer in the Satras always involves singing and playing musical instruments. The Bhaona, One-act plays and other festivals organized regularly by Satra and village community, gave plenty of scope to the indigenous arts and crafts like costumes, painting, masks-making, wood carvings, decorations, dramatics and other talents of the common people. Ankia naat or ankia bhaona is one of the major cultural performances of satra. Bhaona is organized during the birth and death anniversary of dharmaguru like sankar janmotsav (birth day of Sankardeva), Madhavdevar tithi (death anniversary of Madhabdeva), janmastami (birthday of lord Krishna), the sworn in ceremony of stradhikar, holi etc. The bhakat and sishyas play roles in bhaona.

Some pictures are given below



Raslila performed only women.(outside of Namghar)



Dancers of Nadubhangi (boys)



Pictures of ready to performing bhaona some devotees,bayan and sutradhar

Some of the challenges of Satra:

After conducting survey and personal interview the researcher found that there is a serious problem of insufficient of fund. The satras are neither a government institute nor a private institute; therefore there is no constant flow of income or funds. The members of satra mainly depend on the donation by the devotee. The bhakats and sishyas face many problems in case of medical emergency or other calamities.

The researcher with the help of various secondary data found that there was a culture of donating a child to satra. But at present time there are different schemes like two child, free and compulsory education, parents does not prefer to donate their child to satra. This is a serious threat to satra because this will lead to zero sishyas in near future. Thus it will be impossible to promote the culture without sishyas. Western culture is also another major threat to the culture of satra.

This Satra works both as the center for religious learning and a residential school. This satra help the spreading of moral and spiritual education and cultural heritage in entire state. Apart from this Satra also has a library.

So this study is suggests that art forms of Satra has to be reformed on different levels of techniques, themes, materials and their application according to contemporary trends. Satras must be rejuvenated as the education center of various arts and crafts like pottery, music, costume designing, performance, painting, sculpture, which could nurture the skills of the artist and to uplift the level of art to meet the sustainable credentials and dealt with the present cause of society so the art and artists could get the appropriate recompense in every aspects.

Conclusion:-

Satra is the special institution of Assam. Satra can be refried as a rare cultural and different art form institution of Assam. The Satriya life means a nice, obedient and screed. The Satriya life is controlled by the norms of moral values and tradition of Assamese society. Today the Satras are the fountainheads of Assamese culture and heritage. The history and the legacy of Assamese culture and art forms are being preserved and transmitted by the Satras. Satrahave relentlessly encouraged the different art of society, like dance, drama, music, and the making of decorative objects for the beautification of the Satra interiors- the Satriya sanskriti. The present study has found that satriya sanskriti which is a relation to dance, drama, music and cultural heritage of Assamese society and it also influence on Art education in education system of Assam. Education of the satra has an important place in the life of people of the region. Some of the practices of the satra can be relevant to schools and educational institutions of this region.

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