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A Research Book on
Social Sciences
and Humanities

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ABSTRACT:

Bhakti movement is one of the most remarkable features of Indian Hindu Society in the medieval history. During that period Hindu saints started deeply emphasizing Bhakti as a means to attain salvation and that resulted in the Bhakti movement which touched different parts of India including Assam. A number of saints gave their message to the different times and different places of India. One, among them was Sankaradeva, who spearheaded the movement in the North Eastern India Sankaradeva's modified form of Vishnavism specially known as Neo-Vishnavism in the North Eastern region was one of the basic contribution forces that shaped the composite Assamese culture. The doctrine taught by Sankaradeva emphasized equality and practice community prayers. For this purpose he established Satras withed its projecting brance called Nanghar. Sankaradeva and his followers succeeded in their mission. Now what we call the Assamese culture can be regarded as the result of the efforts of the Satras institution. So, far as economic side in concerned, small scale industry like pottery, blacksmith, bamboo cane to large scale industry like tourist industry may be attributed to the institution of satra. But

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE SATRAS INSTITUTIONS OF ASSAM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MAJULI SATRAS

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significant role in the spread of Vaishnavite culture.

During the post-Sankaradeva period though the cult of Sankaradeva slipped in to several sections under his successor, yet they, never made by fundamental change in the original cult. The changes they had introduced were the demand of time because they had to walk in conformity with the changing attitude. Few changes had to be made in order to receive patronage from the Ahom royalty.

The Satras institution is the most striking feature of New Vaishnavism monastery established by Sri Mania Sankaradeva as a means to spread Vashnavism. The Satras may be called as Vaishnavite monastery established by Sri Mania Sankaradeva as a means to spread Vashnavism. But the Satras established during his period did not attain full-fledged development as it appears today. The term Satras implies two meanings (1). Charity or Alms' house (2). Religious congregation for a long period of time. In the Bhagavat puran, the word Satras meant long sacrificial session headed by Rishi Suta where Suta recite and explain Bhagavat Puran to his devotees. Like, Suta Sankaradeva set up Satras to recite and explain Bhagavat Puran. But he was the pioneer of Satra institution which attain full fledged development during the tenure of his disciples Madhavadeva, Damudarddev, Hridaya, Malahra Aia, Padma Aia, Gopaldeva and so on.

The physical structure of a Satras include a Namghar, a monikur, a batchora and hattis placed on a thapona and all valuable ornaments residential place of the Bhakats, constructed around the church. Thus a Satras is not akin to a Christian, a Buddhist monastery or a Hindu Temple. The ecclesiastical order of a Satras consists of a Satradhikar, Bhakats and Sisyas. Satradhikars are head of the Satras he is called Mahanta or Gosian and who reside within the Hattis and arrange congregational prayer and discuss religious texts. Dert is the distributor of recitation of religious texts. Gayan is the singer. Bagan is the player of musical instrument etc. are some other functionaries of the Satras.

The Satra institution and its vastness covered the all Assam scene and Majuli is one of the premier place of the Vaishnavite culture, which also called as the Vatican City of Vaishnavism culture. Majuli

at present several social-economic problems have been working behind in minimizing the importance of sutra day to day. In this research study is based on Socio-economic problems of the Satras institutions of Assam with special reference to Majuli Satras. The study is based on the direct and indirect methods also.

KEY WORDS: Bhakt, Vaishnavism, Namghar, Satras.

INTRODUCTION:

Bhakti movement is one of the most remarkable features of Indian Hindu Society in the medieval history. The movement remained influence for centuries and has left a deep impact on modern life and society. During that period Hindu saints started deeply emphasizing Bhakti as a means to attain salvations and that resulted in the bhakti movement which touched different parts of India including Assam. A number of saints gave their message to the different times and different places of India. One, among them was Sankaradeva, who spearheaded the movement in the North Eastern India. Sankaradeva's modified form of Vaishnavism specially known as Neo-Vaishnavism in the North Eastern region was one of the basic contribution forces that shaped the composite Assamese culture. The doctrine taught by Sankaradeva emphasized equality and practice community prayers. For this purpose he established Satras with its projecting branch called Namghar. The first Satra was established by Sankaradeva near his ancient village at Barpeta and thence his followers discussed the religious matters and held congregational prayers But the institution of Satras did not attain fully fledged condition during his time as it appears today.

After, death of Sankaradeva in 1569 A.D and nomination of Madhavadeva as his successor have created the dissatisfaction among the Brahmin followers of Sankaradeva. This dissatisfaction ultimately led to the foundation of four Samhitas of Vaishnavism in Assam each of them having their own specialties though govt was ultimately the same. Later on a number of Satras have been established under the four Samhitas viz.1. Brahma Samhitas, 2. K. Samhitas, 3. Puranda Samhitas and 4. Nitya or Nitya Samhitas. These Satras has played

the world's biggest river island is located in the heart of the river Brahmaputra and the Subansiri River. It was here that Sankardeva and Madhavdeva had met for the first time at Duwahat. During the post Sankardeva period Vamsigopaldeva had a famous proselytize of Brahma Samity sect established a permanent satra at Kuruwabari with a huge prayer hall in about 1634 A.D. Ahom king joydhavaj Singha (1648-1663) was instrumental in establishing three great Brahmiical Satras in Majuli namely Aunniati satra, Garmur satra, Jakhalabandaha satra and Dakinpat satra. Later a good number Satras have been established in Majuli. Even today a good number satra have been found scattered in different places of Majuli, the total number of which is difficult to say as many of them are found running in the name alone yet. Kamalabari, Garamur, Aunniati, Dakinpat, Bhugpur Samuguri Satras area still standing with glamour reflecting the Sankari culture.

The very purpose of a desire by Sankardeva and his disciples was to bring the people of all castes, creeds and races under a common roof for congregation's prayer and their socio-cultural and economic up-liftment. Sankardeva and his followers succeeded in their mission. Now what we call the Assamese culture can be regarded as the result of the efforts of the Satras institution. So, far as economic side is concerned, small scale industry like pottery, blacksmith, bamboo cane to large scale industry like tourist industry may be attributed to the institution of satra. But at present several social-economic problems have been working behind in minimizing the importance of satra day to day.

METHODOLOGY:

This paper is utilized both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are collected from Satras institutions, and the secondary sources are finding out by some books, journals, Research articles, materials and other relevant source like the internet which will be consulted for the same.

PROBLEMS OF SATRAS:

Although, several works have already been completed on the Neo-Vaisnavism and Satra institution of Majuli, yet a very

little has been done regarding a number of social and economic problems faced by satra. Some crucial problems can be enumerated as follows:

Social problems:

- Gradual declination of number of sisyas is the main social problems of the satras.
- Spread of Christianity especially among the tribal population is another social problem faced by the Satras of Majuli.
- Defacement is another social problem faced by the Satras.

Economic problems:

Since the last few decades the Satras of Majuli have been facing economic crisis due to the several reasons. Some of them are (a) Flood problem (b) Defacement (c) Lack of government assistance (d) Deplorable communication (e) Decreasing amount of revenue (religious tax) from the Sisyas.

The ecclesiastical order of the Satras is instrument for the development of feudal elements in the society where the principle of equality fails to work properly. It is for this reason that the people of lower social order refuse to be the sisyas of a Satra. Besides the tax, to be paid by sisyas is not bearable for the economically backward people and in that situation while Christianity offers them economic assistance, they naturally show inclination to accept Christianity.

So, far as the economic problems are concerned flood and erosion, stands in first, in the economic development of the Satras of Majuli. Due to devastating and recurrent flood and erosion the area of Satras has been gradually reducing and sometimes Satras have been over flooded. Government assistance is also miserably poor so as to make the Satras economically sound. Moreover, poor communication system, deplorable condition of roads and transports of Majuli Island are instrumental in the economic degradation of the Satras of Majuli. Several Satras have been running in name alone and a few have been shifted to other places.

Some suggestion to save the Satras of Majuli from the Socio-economic degradation:

1. The Satradhikars and Bhakats should follow liberal policy so as to attract the backward classes of the society.
2. Govt. should be take step to save the Satras, the backbone of Assamese culture from Socio-economic degradation.
3. Some sort of measures must be taken to reduce the spread of Christianity.
4. The dissolved Satras should be reinstalled.
5. Step should be taken for the spread of Satriya culture all over India and abroad.
6. Flood problems and soil erosion should be tried to be minimized.

CONCLUSION:

Under these circumstances it may be concluded that Satras institution stand as a key factor in bridging the gulf between men, men and women, to come together, to think together and to work together and create a society of peace and prosperity. So, if the Satras of Majuli are revived or socio-economic problems are solved and highlighted, they would naturally be great source of attraction from the tourism point of view too.

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