

**PATBAUSHI SATTRA: A STUDY IN CONTINUITY
AND CHANGE**

A THESIS

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CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters of this study have attempted to describe about the emergence and salient features of Vaishnavite religion, *Bhakti* Movement in Assam and the *Sattras* established by the great saints of this religion viz. Saint Shrimanta Sankardeva, his chief spiritual successor Madhabdeva and other saints across the ancient Assam, division of *Samhatis*. The present study is undertaken on the Patbaushi Sattras (Sankardeva's *Thaan*). In this study, the main subjects are covered like advent of Sankardeva to Barpeta, establishment of Patbaushi Sattras and other *Sattras* Institutions established by the *Gurujana* and his followers near by Patbaushi, his valuable literary works created in the *Sattras*, daily activities and annual festivals observed in the *Sattras*, status of women in the *Sattras*, change occurs in the *Sattras* both physical and religious aspects.

The origin of Vaishnavite religion is in vogue, more or less, in India, from the Rig Vedic era. The famous spiritual guides of Vaishnavite religion like Ramanujacharya, Madhavacharya, Nimbarka and others propagated this religion from the last part of 8th Century AD to the end of 12th Century AD. Later on, in the 14th and 15th Century AD, this Vaishnavite religion propagated under the guidance of Ramananda, Kabir, Vallavacharya, Gyaneswar, Namdeva, Tukaram, Narshi Mehta, Mirabai, Jayadeva, Chaitnyadeva through entire India. In the later part of 15th century, the great spiritual leaders (guides) like *Jagatguru* Sankardeva, Madhabdeva,

Damodardeva, Harideva, Bhattadeva and others flourished in Assam in the North East of India and propagated the Vaishnavism during that period.

Saint Sankardeva was born in 1449 AD at Alipukhuri of Bardowa, Nagaon, Assam. In 1462 AD (1383 *Saka*), his grandmother admitted him to a village *tol* (a pan Indian educational institution) of Mahendra Kandali. Sankar studied attentively and captured easily the subjects and in a few days he became better than other students. Sankardeva wrote the book *Haricharan Upakhayan* on the basis of four elements of *Bhakti* viz. *Naam, Deva, Guru* and *Bhakat*. Sankardeva was a saint-scholar, poet, playwright, social- religious reformer and a figure of importance in the cultural and religious history of Assam. After the death of Sankardeva, Damodardeva separated from the *Mahapurusiya* sect and started a new sub sect called “*Damodariya Pantha*”. Later three more sub –sects emerged from the original one. These four divisions are known as *Samhati (Brahma, Purush, Kala and Nika)*. The Patbaushi Sattras is functioning under the *Purush Samhati*.

Barpeta, particularly Barpeta town is known as *Sattras Nagari* (Capital of *Sattras* Institution) as majority of the ancient *Sattras* established by the great saints and their followers in and around Barpeta. Among those *Sattras*, Barpeta and Patbaushi Sattras are the prominent one. Topography of Barpeta district is variant, highland towards the north plains at the middle and marshy low land towards the south. The international boundary of Barpeta district is with Bhutan. The district is inhabited by both the caste and tribe people. The prominent castes are Kalita, Koch, Kaibarta, Saud, Hira, Bania, Sutar, Suri, Jogi, Kumar, Kamar and Tanti.

Barpeta became prominent as a site of Vaishnavite religion at the middle part of 16th century AD with the presence of Saint Sankardeva (1449-1568) and his disciple Saint Madhabdeva. These two scholars had lived at Patbaushi for a long period and transformed it into a most sacred, spiritual and elite place. They created a universal religion (*Eka Saran Nama Dharma*), music, dance, *Bargeet* (devotional song), *Aankiyanaat* or *bhaona* (theatrical performance), open stage (Rangamancha), fine art, literature, sculpture, architecture and above all a well knit democratic social- spiritual institution of *Sattra*, through which they propagated Neo- Vaishnavite ideals.

According to a survey conducted by Axom Sattra Mahasabha, there are altogether 922 numbers of *Sattras* in Assam and Coochbehar of West Bengal and in Assam, alone there are 914 numbers of *Sattras*. Saint Sankardeva, Madhabdeva, Damodardeva, Harideva and their disciples established altogether 84 *Sattras* at Barpeta District. These *Sattras* plays an important role in proceeding social aspect, religious aspect, and cultural aspect of Assamese community in Assam. Among this *Sattras* 24 are extinct due to natural calamity - like heavy flood, land slide and earthquake.

Shrimanta Sankardeva along with his disciple came from upper Assam (Dhuwahata Belguri) through the river route and entered in Kamrup. After crossing Chenga (Bhari Dhuwa Ghat), he entered Barpeta through Galiya *jaan* and reached at Chinpora where he settled for six months. Thereafter, he went to Kumarkuchi where he lived one year and finally settled at Patbaushi.

The ancient name of Patbaushi is known as Baushi. In the book *Guru Charit*, Baushi is known as Baushi Paragana. In 16th century when *Saint* Sankardeva, Madhabdeva, Damodardeva, Hari Deva, Narayana Das Thakur Ata and other saints

established the *Bedi* of Vaishnavite religion then the place is considered as path (a big centre of learning) and as such it is known as Patbaushi.

Patbaushi is considered as a place of *Sattras*. Patbaushi is a revenue village under No. 11 Patbaushi Gaon Panchayat, under Barpeta District. Patbaushi is situated approx 100 km in West site from Guwahati city and almost 5 km. from Barpeta town. At present there are three *Sattras* namely Kumarkuchi and Patbaushi Sattra (Sankardeva's *Thaan*) are founded by *Gurujana* and Damodardeva Sattra, founded by Saint Damodardeva.

Shrimanta Sankardeva established the Patbaushi Sattra in 1549 (1468). Patbaushi Sattra played vital role for spread Vaishnavite faith in Assam. He lived 18 years and 6 months in this *Sattra*. From this *Sattra* he spread his faith, literature, music, art to his fullest form. Among his literary works he completed his rendering of the “Bhagawata Puran” and wrote other independent works. He continued composing the “Kirttan Ghosa” and wrote four drama viz –Parijat Haran, Rukmini Haran, Keligopal. Another drama written at Patbaushi Sattra “Kangsh Badha” is lost. At Patbaushi Sattra, he had lent his *Bargeets* numbering 240 to Kamala Bayan. But unfortunately his house was set fire and most of the *Bargeets* were lost only 35 are remaining today. While at Patbaushi, Sankardeva wove the *Brindabani Bastra* at the request of Koch king Naranarayana. It was designated here that from the birth of Shri Krishna to killing of Kangsha that means the *Leela* of Mathura as well as of Brindaban.

Some traditional customs such as use of foot dust, use of *kath*, cymbal, *khol*, Rangiyal flowers and leafs as *nirmali*, beating *Doba* before and after perform the *Naam Prasanga* has been continuing till today since the time of Saint Sankardeva.

Saint Sankardeva had respect for every religion. He gave initiation to all the people irrespective of community and religion to propagate his *Eka Saran Nama Dharma*. Through propagating his religion, he broke the barriers of separation that the people living in the land of Assam had suffered and thus united. Saint Sankardeva told “*Kukura* (Dog) *Srigala* (Fox) *Garddabharo* (donkey) *Atma* (soul) *Rama* (God) *Janiya* (knowing) *Sabako* (everybody) *Kariba* (Do) *Pranama* (pray)” According to Sankardeva, every human being is equal.

Saint Sankardeva gave initiation to his chief disciple Madhabdeva at Dhuwahata and their union is known as *Manikanchan Sanyog*. He gave initiation to many followers during his time in and around Patbaushi viz. Narayan Das Thakur Ata, Damodardeva, Harideva, Gobinda Atoi, Chandsai, Paramananda, Jotiram, three sons of Khira Morol viz. Madhab, Gopal and Mukunda; Balaram, Gakulchand, Udar Gobinda, Nao Bhanga Gobinda, Sape Khoa Gobinda, Brahmananda, Murari Borkoch, Buradoloi, Padmanav, Rajkhowa Gobinda, Narayan Laskar and Raghupati Dhoba.

A beautiful cultural environment was there during the time spent by Saint Sankardeva at Patbaushi. During that time cultural rainbow was formed by song, drama, *Naam Prasanga*, discussion on manuscript. But after the demise of *Gurujana*, the devotees settled here and there and even Saint Madhabdeva shifted to Sundaridia. Due to that the beautiful cultural environment came to an end. After few years of the death of Sankardeva, the grandsons of the Saint viz Purushottam Thakur and Chaturbhuj Thakur also shifted to Jania and Bishnupur respectively. As per the instruction of Madhabdeva, Mathuradas Burah Ata occasionally organized those cultural activities at Patbaushi. As the *Sattras* came under *Purush Samhati*, generally those practices almost

become extinct. At present Patbaushi *Sattra* remains only as *Gurujana's* site of propagating Vaishnavism.

In this *Sattra*, some change is observed in case of physical structure. The *Sattra* is marked by the existence of *Manikut*, *Naamghar*, *Math*, *Doul ghar*, *Patkuwa* and Bed of Kalindi Aai, *Padashila* of Sankardeva, Music school, a museum, a tourist house. About 95 years ago the local people built the roof of the main *Kirttanghar* with GI sheet. In 1962, *Math* was built from the donation of local people. In 1987 the then State Govt. of Assam and in 1990 DRDA had provided donation for the main gate, *Manikut*, *Gosaighar* of Kalindi Aai and stage. At present the *Sattra* campus covered with 5 Bigha and 2 Lechas land. A tourist rest house was constructed by the Assam Tourism Development Cooperation in the year 2013.

In the museum there are more valuable articles associated with him such as masks which were used in drama, Rabon's head (10 numbers), two doors of copper (donated by Lakshmi Singha, 1694 *Saka*), *Sarai* (4 numbers), wooden *Ural* , a stone used for broken rice, the valuable literature on Sanchipaata like *Gunamala* (32), *Kirttan Ghosa* (32), *Adi Dasham* (97), *Nimi- Nava- Sidha Sanbad* (16), *Kalia Daman drama* (6), *Rukmini Haran* (14), *Parijat Haran* (12), *Patni Prasad* (11), *Ras Keli Gopal* (19) and *Ram Vijoy* (9). Recently the existing museum building is under renovation as State Govt. provided fund to the Management Committee. The artefacts of the museum are also preserved by the Sankardeva Kalaskhetra Samity of Guwahati few years back.

Generally, *Satradhikar* has the highest authority and power on the *Sattra*. He is considered as the religious and spiritual guide. After the death of Sankardeva the *Sattra* was managed by the local people. At present, Debananda Dev Goswami who is a

Sattradhikar of Bardowa Sattrra is also the *Adhikar* of Patbaushi Sattrra. The post of *Sattradhikar* is inheritable. As the *Sattradhikar* of the *Sattrra* is an in charge *Sattradhikar*, so the Management Committee is the all in all regarding the entire matters related to the *Sattrra*. Patbaushi Sattrra has a full fledged Management Committee composed with 13 numbers of members; the duration of the Committee is for 5 years. This committee is responsible for growth and development and provides funds to celebrate the religious programmes.

The economy of the *Sattrra* depends on some income sources like *Pranami*, public donation, government fund, *Sidha Bhojni*, lease of paddy field. *Pranami* becomes an important source of income for the *Sattrra*. In the time of festivals, thousand of devotees and tourists visit to the *Sattrra* and they offer money to the *Sattrra*. It is seen that a large number of tourists visit to *Sattrra* in the month of January. From the head of *Pranami*, permanent staffs are paid per month.

Patbaushi Sattrra as one of the chief religious centre of Assam has maintained its religious impact on the local people and set of traditional functions. There are various festivals like *Bihu*, birth and death anniversary of Saint Sankardeva and Saint Madhabdeva, Shri Krishna *Janmastami*, *Deul* festival, *Paal Naam*. Among these festivals, *Kirttan* or *Tirovab Tithi* of *Gurujana* is the famous among the devotees due to its share of *Bhog Thogi*. Madhabdeva started the system of *Bhog Thogi* after the completion of one month of the death of Sankardeva and since that time it is going on.

Bhakats play an important role to keep the *Sankariya* tradition in *Sattrra*. They are associated with day to day programme viz. maintenance of the cleanliness, performs daily *Naam Prasanga*, receiving tourists, preparation and distribution of *Nirmali* and

Prasad. They play vital role during the annual festivals observed in the *Sattra*. Though these activities have been continuing from the time of *Gurujana*, yet some changes have occurred due to course of time. At present daily *Prasanga* for two times with nine items instead of fourteen items are being performed by the *Bhakats*. This is a fear that if such a trend continues, *Naam Prasanga* of the *Sattra* Institution may become extinct one day. Some notable observations in connection with the festivals celebrated in the *Sattra* are like the involvement of local people in the activities is gradually decreasing and the boat race on Nakhanda River is extinct.

Another notable change observed in Patbaushi *Sattra* is the rule related to the entry of women inside the *Kirttanghar*. In the *Sattra*, women are permitted to enter inside the *Krittanghar* except during the time of performing *Naam Prasanga* by male *Bhakats*. At that time they should be pure from all sides. Females are offered chance to perform prayer in front of *Guru Asan*. But they are not allowed to cross the *Guru Asan* and to enter into *Manikut*. But this rule is not applicable to the some other *Sattras* of Barpeta. There till today the women folks are not permitted to enter into the main *Kirttanghar* of the *Sattra*.

Another change occurs in case of initiation Saint Sankardeva gave initiation to all classes and communities. Sankardeva gave initiation to Chandsai who belonged to Islam religion. But due to course of time, the people from the Islam religion are not permitted to enter into the *Sattra* premises.

From the above discussion it is clear that Patbaushi *Sattra* played a vital role to spread the Vaisnavite religion in Assam and also in the Koch kingdom. Lots of valuable religious scriptures were written by Sankardeva at Patbaushi *Sattra* of which some are

preserved in the *Sattra* at present. The famous *Brindabani Bastra* was also woven during that time which is preserved in different museums of India and across India like the British Museum. This *Sattra* is enriched with many notable activities which are the essential elements to bind the whole Assamese society under an umbrella.

Recommendation

1. Lack of publicity and easy transportation, this *Sattra* is not developed like the other major *Sattra* Institutions and unknown to many people of Assam. Transport department should introduce transportation from Guwahati and other places to Patbaushi.
2. As the new generation youth are not interested in the traditional folk arts introduced by Saint Sankardeva, by applying modern technologies like social media or else, that valuable cultural traits should be re-introduced among the society.
3. As Patbaushi *Sattra* is the most important among the other *Sattras* of Assam where Saint Sankardeva stayed and created the notable literary and cultural aspects of Assamese culture, so, Cultural Department of Government of Assam or *Sattra* Mahasabha may construct a statue of Saint Sankardeva at Patbaushi.
4. Some competition can be arranged annually by *Sattra Mahasabha* on hymns, drama of literary works among the *Sattras* of Assam by offering a valuable award to preserve and keep this culture alive in future.