

# Structure Technology in the Sattrra of Assam, India

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**ABSTRACT--***The Sattrra establishment of Assam is a product of their Vaisnavite motion started by Sankaradeva (1449-1568) towards the final decade of the fifteenth century. The organization has, since its beginning, been serving since the radiating power of spiritual activities of their Vaisnavites in and about Assam. Sattrras are categorized under four crucial Sanghatis (denominations or even sub-sects) specifically, Purusha Sanghati, Nika Sanghati, Kala Sanghati along with Brahma Sanghati. The structural design of a Sattrra is indicated with the occurrence of a Naamghar, a Manikut, also a Karapat and just two to a four row of Hatis. The very first phase of the development of Sattrra institution started with Sankaradeva at 1469 A.D.. However, the super structure of this Sattrra was increased throughout the centuries. It had been in the right time of both Satanandadeva, Madhavadeva along with Damodaradeva which Sattrra establishment approached the next stage of its growth. The Sattrra establishment took a certain monastic twist in the palms of Banxi-Gopaldeva who introduced several modifications within his KalabariSattrra near the conclusion of the past century. The concluding phase of this development of the Sattrra association came with expansion of imperial patronage to all major Sattrras. The Sattrras main functions would be to disperse Vaisnavism according to monotheistic principle, to commence disciples, to present ethic-devotional rules and codes of behavior to neophytes and to maintain religious festivals on various events. The Secondary purposes of the Sattrra would be to observe that good social relation is preserved among the villagers, to create the soul ofco-operation, to offer sufficient facilities for its dissemination of early learning and also to distribute justice on all spiritual and social controversies. The current earnings of Sattrra is principally derived from 2 sources-a) earnings from lands initially given by the tribes of those Pre-British times and afterwards verified and realized by the British authorities; b) earnings from spiritual to this led by disciples. The Part played with the Sattrra establishment in different spheres, aside from faith, deserves note. Throughout its years of life, the Sattrra has improved Assamese life socially and educationally and has contributed a excellent deal to the kingdom of literature as well as other arts. This paper will Attempt to Go over Structure tech of Sattrra of Assam.*

**Keywords:***Sattrra, Structure, Sankaradeva, Technology, Manikut, Sisy, Madhavadeva, Vaisnavite, Sanghati, Brahma, Naamghar.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Etymology of the word Sattrra: The term Sattrra is a Sanskrit word which can be interpreted in two ways; primarily, in the sense of a shelter-house or non-profit institution and secondarily in the sense of a sacrificial gathering held for quite a few days. The secondary sense is accountable in giving the nomenclature to the Vaisnavite institution of Assam. It has been stated in the opening chapter of the *Bhagavata-Purana* that during

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the course of a sacrificial session at the forest of *Nimisa*, *Suta-Ugrasrava* expounded the above *Purana* to the assembly of sages. The fact that a sacrifice called *Sattra* proceeded concurrently with the act of expounding the *Bhagavata* effortlessly led the public to believe that a *Sattra* and an congregation of disciples to the exposition of the *Bhagavata* are indistinguishable. Sankaradeva most likely instigated the *Vaisnavamovement* by reciting and explicating the narratives of the *Bhagavata-purana* to a group of followers who huddled around him to listen to his religious discussions. The role played by Sankaradeva most likely rang a bell to the spectators of the part played by *Suta-Ugrasrava* in the congregation of holy sages. Under the above mistaken notion devotees began to term an assemblage of devotees where the *Bhagavata* used to be read and discussed as a *Sastra*, although the word in reality meant a form of sacrifice. The root wise meaning of the word *Sattra* which means a sitting or a session (~sad=to sit-tra) or an instrument which liberates the good (~sat=good,~tra=to liberate) must have supplied supplementary reason for forming the afore cited impression. Thus, the Sanskrit word *Sattra*, as expected unsurprisingly became *Sattra* in the Assamese language and culture.

The *Sattra* institution of Assam is an invention of the *Vaisnavimovement* started by Sankaradeva towards the concluding decade of the fifteenth century of the Christian era. The institution has, since its commencement, has been serving as the glowing strength of all religious activities of the *Vaisnavitemaths* or *Akharas* of other parts of India. Each *Sattra* consists of three principal parties or categories of persons intimately connected with the wellbeing and supervision of *Sattra*. These parties are -a) *Satradhikar*, b) *Bhakkats*, c) *Sisyas*. The first two parties generally inhabit within the four walls of the *Sattra* premise, while the last one live in dotted villages leading the regular life of a house-holder. The chief of a *Sattra* is popularly known as *Adhikara* or *Satradhikara*. His place is comparable to that of the Mohant of the Matha institution or the abbot of the Christianity. He is the spiritual head and spiritual guide of the disciples under his care. He initiates disciples and conducts all important religious functions. The second party, namely, *Bhakats*, consists of those devotees who either hold religious office under the *Sattra*, or live an deeply devotional life within the four walls of the *Sattra*, observing a celibate life through their existence. In solely monastic *Sattras* where celibacy is firmly observed, the numbers of such *Bhakats* or celibates are more numerous than those of the semi-monastic or non-monastic *Sattras*. Such celibate disciples are generally called *KevaliyaBhakat (unmarried men)*. The word *Kevaliya* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Kevala*, i.e., lone or unattached. These celibates are employed in their adolescence by elderly celibates and under their guidance of them; they remain as trainees for a few years to study the manners, customs in addition to the Religious top secrets of the sect. The ordinary devotees or disciples of a *Sattra* are known as *Sisya*. Every Assamese *Vaisnava* family is habitually associated with one or the other of the numerous of over twelve hundred and above *Sattras* of Assam.

On the basis of ideological leanings, *Sattras* are classified under four key *Sanghatas* (denominations or sub-sects) namely,

- *Purusha Sanghati*,
- *Nika Sanghati*,
- *Kala Sanghati* and
- *Brahma Sanghati*.

The *Purusha Sanghati* was established by PurusottamaThakura, one of the grandsons of Sankaradeva. The next sub-sect, *Nika*, was established by MathuradasBurha-Ata and Badaluwa Padma-Ata. They structured their

*Sattras* following the principles of Madhavadeva, the ablest of direct disciples of Sankaradeva. Etymologically they sect adhered to cleanliness (Nika) and purity. *Sattras* established by Gopaldeva and his descendants shaped the *Kala Sanghati*. The *Sattras*,affiliated to the*Kala -Sanghati* branch of Assamese *Vaisnavism*, notably *Shree ShreeDihingSattrra*, *Shree ShreeChcaSattrra*, *Shree ShreeBudhariSattrra*, *Shree ShreeBareghatSattrra* and *Shree ShreeKatanipaSattrra*, *Shree ShreeKaljarSattrra*etc need specified mentions for their activities with the tribal and backwardpeop

The Brahma Sanghati comprised the sub-sects of Damodardeva (a Contemporary *Vaisnavite* preceptor from Nagaon,Assam ) and Harideva (a *Vaisnavite* preceptor who came after Sankaradeva and who was the founder of *BahariSattrra*).They are known for their orthodox nature and juxtaposing Vedic rites along with *Nama- Kirtana* the *Shree ShreeAuniati* and *Shree ShreeDakshinpatSattras* in Majuli are two major *Sattras* under this *Sanghati*.

## II. STRUCTURE TECHNOLOGY OF SATTRA AS AN INSTITUTION:

The structural prototype of a *Sattra* is manifested by the existence of a *Naamghar*, a *Manikut*, *Batchora* or *Karapat* and two to four rows of *Hatis*.

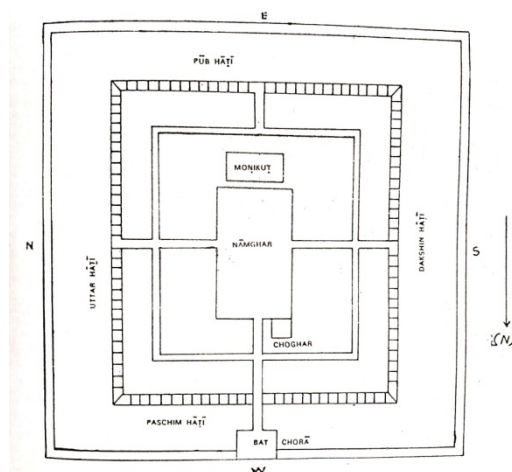


Figure 1: Structure technology of Sattrra of Assam



Figure 2:Naamghar of BarpetaSattrra



**Figure 3:** Karapat or Batchora of Shree ShreeAuniatiSattra



**Figure 4:** The Hati of Sattra

The heart of all religious activities of a *Sattra* is the *Namghar*. It's a long hall with sheet roof and an apsidal façade. It acts as a prayer foyer as well as the seat of all gatherings and deliberations. The real shrine where the representational image of the deity and the sacred scriptures are kept is called *Monikuta*. It is comparatively a minor structure attached to the eastern or southern part of the prayer hall. The prayer hall and the shrine are replicated on the structural pattern of a typical temple which has a *Garbha-Griha* contains the Picture and a Mandapa hall. The *Naamghar* with its apsidal facade and the *Manikut* attached to it closely resemble the important temple of *Kamakhya* with a same apsidal *Mandapa* hall adjoining to the important shrine. On the four sides of the *Sattra* premise stand four lines of huts known as *Hati* where *Bhakats* belonging to different categories dwell. In *Sattras* of monastic type where only celibates are allowed to live, the *Hatis* are completely inhabited by celibate devotees, but where celibacy is not strictly obligatory, one or more sides of the campus are held in reserve for married devotees. In most of the existing *Sattras*, however, the system of constructing *Hatis* is not strictly imposed the doorway leading to the interior of a *Sattra* is typically noticeable by a small open abode known as *Karapat*, a derivative Sanskrit word . Eminent visitors are first welcome at *Karapat* and then, they are accompanied to the core structure of the *Naamghar*..

### III. STAGES OF EVOLUTION OF THE SATTRA AS AN INSTITUTE OF RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE

The initial stage of the growth of *Sattrainstitution* initiated with Sankaradeva. Still during his life time the spiritual association lead by him has never taken the form of a standard institution of an enduring ecology. Sankaradeva no doubt laid the base of the institution, but the superstructure was raised during the succeeding generations. Madhavadeva, who succeeded Sankaradeva as the chief of the vaisnavite cult did not take the chair over any *Sattra* left by Sankaradeva. It was during time of Madhavadeva and Damodaradeva that *Sattra* institution reached the next point of its development. There are definite references in mediaeval (Charit-puthis) biographies of saints into the part performed with Madhavadeva and Damodaradeva at providing a certain view into the structural in addition to organizational face of this *Sattra* institution. Madhavadeva, aside from equipping the Shree Shree Barpeta *Sattra* to a permanent foundation, systematically split the ivory services into 14 units and created necessary arrangement for its even functioning of their *Sattra*. Concurrently, Damodaradeva also controlled the direction of the *Sattra* by devoting particular part to distinct individuals and organized and certainly fixed the process of spiritual service to be performed every day from the *Sattra*. Even the *Sattra* establishment took a certain monastic twist at the hands of Banxi- Gopaldeva who introduced some changes in his *Kalabari Sattra* in eastern Assam towards the end of the seventeenth century. His *Sattra* at Kuruwabahi, established later, provided rooms for five hundred celibate devotees. The last phase of the development of the *Sattra* institution arrived at with extension of regal patronage to all major *Sattra*. The consecutive *Ahom* kings placed at the disposal of different *Sattra* certain number of persons to act as Paik's or persons engaged to render definite service and approved lands free of any charge. This act of regal benefaction placed many *Sattras* on a volume monetary stepping. The king *Ahom* appointed specially an officer known as *Sattriya Barua* to take stock of the affairs of *Sattras* and to keep the court well-informed of situations at different *Sattras*.

### IV. FUNCTIONS OF SATTRAS AS A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION

Functions of this *Sattra* institution might be categorized as two classes, namely, secondary and primary. Their primary functions would be to disperse Vaisnavism predicated on monotheistic principle, to commence disciples, to supply ethic-devotional rules and codes of behavior for recently converted disciples and also to arrange sacred festivals on varied events. *Sattras* happen to be doing less or more as the guards of the religion and integrity by maintaining close watchfulness over their devotees. By keeping habitual agents at several locations and by personal visits that the chief of *Sattras* attempted to lift the religious and ethical criteria of their villagers. The second purposes of the *Sattra* would be to observe that good social relation is preserved amongst the villagers, to enlarge the soul of co-operation, to give adequate facilities to the dissemination of early learning and to distribute justice on all societal and religious arguments. Before the organization of the British method of administering

justice, Sattras tried many instances regarding social issues.



**Figure 5:** The Nama-Kirtana of Sattrra

## V. MANAGEMENT AND INCOME OF THE SATTRAS

### *THE CURRENT REVENUE OF SATTRA IS MAINLY COLLECTED FROM TWO SOURCES*

A) Revenue from lands initially owned by the tribes of those Pre-British times and then verified and Recognized by the British authorities;

B) Revenue from spiritual tithe led by disciples. Apart from both of these occasional contributions and testimonials in the disciples and devotees constitute a small source of revenue.

All the important Sattras possess in different amounts land-grants which range from a few acres to several thousand acres of land, a few of people who are entirely free of earnings charges. The next source returns income based on numerous disciples and followers. Each disciple is anticipated to create a tiny enough donation annually in money or kind for his Sattrra. The need is modest enough and doesn't normally exceed a rupee in money or couple of seers of rice or any attire. Previously, the repayment of Guru-Kar (tithe) has been regarded as crucial because the repayment of government earnings, however there wasn't any legal duty to pay that amount. In the last several decades, but the income in the next source has considerably gone down since people today appear to be less conscious of religious duties to their own Satt: For the efficient maintenance of the *Sattrra* and for spiritual conducting services regularly the head of a *Sattrra*, in consultation with the senior devotees, appoints from among his disciples, functionaries to manage different departments of the *Sattrra*. There are several gradations of such functionaries, who according to Status or rank, exercise control over their respective departments. Contracts between disciples of fur-flung villages and the *Sattrra* are maintained through a set of functionaries selected from the villagers themselves. All the functionaries are usually nominated by the head, but in some *Sattrras* they are selected on the basis of elections. There are three types of ownership:

- Ownership vested on the chief idol of the deity of the *Sattrra*;
- Ownership vested on the community of devotees; and
- Family Ownership

In the first case, the *Sattrra* theoretically belongs to the idol of the deity, to whom the entire property of the *Sattrra* is dedicated. In the second instance the ownership of a *Sattrra* is in some cases collectively vested on the group of worshipers with the nominal head as *Sattriysor Adhikar*. The third type of ownership is prevalent in most of the *Sattrras* where the headship devolves on hereditary principle and the *Sattrra* is managed by a particular family. The head in the first type of ownership is a trustee of the *Sattrra*-property in the name of the image of the

deity. The powers exercised by the head of such a *Sattrra* are mostly determined by long-standing customs and practices. In the second type of ownership, the power of the head is very much limited.

## VI. CONCLUSI

The history of the *Sattrra* institution ever since the commencement of the nineteenth century was marked by a growing spirit of conservatism and tenet in place of catholicity which characterized the early history of the institution. Women and so called socially backward people were excluded from entering the *Naamghar* of the *Sattrra*. Prejudice towards the beliefs of other sects, undue importance paid to tradition and formality, ignorance of learning, widespread superstition, love of luxury and ease, lack of missionary fervor on the part of the heads of the *Sattrras* and their associates and similar trends were also perceptible. The *Sattrra* therefore stopped enjoying the status which it used to do formerly in recent times. However, the Part played with the *Sattrra* establishment in different spheres, aside from faith, deserves note. Throughout its years of life, the *Sattrra* has been improving Assamese life educationally and socially and has given a wonderful deal to the dominion of literature as well as other relevant arts.

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