CHAPTER V

SATTRAS ADMINISTRATION AND ACTIVITIES

5.1 History of Administration in the Sattras

There is a long history of Sattras administration which has undergone many changes. The present system of administration is the result of gradual evolution. For a proper analysis we may divide Sattras administration into early and modern period.

(a) Early administration and its office bearers: In the formative stages of the Sattras institution, the biographers were silent regarding the office of the Sattradhikar. Perhaps in those days, the numbers of disciples were few and the business to be transacted was very simple. Therefore, the Sattras functionaries were very much limited in those days. It is seen that the Sattradhikar monopolised his authority in all kinds of Sattras’ matters.

(b) Modern set up of Administration: In the strict sense of the term, the concept of modern form of administration was sown by Shri Shri Hemchandra Dev Goswami (14th Sattradhikar) and the present scheme of administration of Sattras came in force with effect from the year 1950.
5.2 Present Administrative System of the Sattra

The organizational structure of Sattra is run in terms of hierarchy. There are four classes of people attached to the Auniati Sattra.

(i) Sattradhikar and Deka Sattradhikar
(ii) Bhakats
(iii) Sisyas
(iv) Paiks

(i) Sattradhikar: - The head of the Sattra is called Sattradhikar or Adhikara. The position of Adhikara lies in the apex of the hierarchy followed by the Deka Sattradhikar. The Sattradhikar is the spiritual-cum-executive head of the Sattra.

As a trustee of Lord Govinda in Auniati Sattra, the Sattradhikar enjoys full right in every dimension of Sattra administration.

Next to the Sattradhikar, in power and prestige, is the Deka-Adhikara who usually becomes the head after the demise of the Sattradhikar. When the Sattradhikar is not present in the Sattra, the Deka Adhikara performs the duties of the Sattradhikar. It is universal to have the status of the Sattradhikar in two different form and tier: Burha (Senior or aged) and Deka (the Junior). In case of Auniati Sattra, the Sattradhikar is never called the Burha Sattradhikar of Burha Sattra.

Next to Deka Sattradhikar is the position of the Govindapuriya. Generally the Govindapuriya is a multitalented young good natured boy or a young bhakat who is groomed to become the Deka Sattradhikar in course of time. He is also identified after a search, and usually brought from another Sattra. As of now there is no Govindapuriya in Auniati Sattra and the management is looking for a suitable boy for the same.

(ii) Bhakat: - The bhakats represent the second category of Sattra inmates in the Sattra organization. They enjoy their position next to the Adhikara and Deka Adhikara. In the Sattra it is found that bhakats are responsible for helping the Sattradhikar in the administrative as well as cultural activities of the Sattra. As bhakats, all the resident devotees
belong to one category. But among the functionaries there is difference among them in terms of status and privilege. In Auniati Sattra, the traditionally famous seven member groups (Satmanbhogia) have been occupying the highest position in the gradation of bhakats.

**Position of the inmates in hierarchical order:**

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Sattradhikar
  ↓
Deka Adhikara
  ↓
Satmanbhogiya, Govindapuriya
  ↓
Rajmedhi
  ↓
Pachoni
  ↓
Bhakat
  ↓
Bar-medhi
  ↓
Medhi
  ↓
Pakhi-medhi
  ↓
Sisyas
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(iii) **Sisyas** : The third category of people attached to the Sattra is the sisyas. Sisyas consist of those persons who lead family life in the adjacent localities of Sattra and in rural areas as well. The sisyas in the main capital of the Sattra, whose position in
the organizational hierarchy is next to the bhakats. The approximate number of disciples belonging to Auniati Sattra in 2010, in terms of household, according to oral version of the Sattradhirkar, would be more than 3 lakhs residing mainly in 1226 different villages of Assam. In almost all district of Brahmaputra valleys, there are the sisyas of Auniati Sattra.

(iv) **Paiks**: The system of paik was introduced by Ahom King especially for the Sattras of Assam. According to Sarma (1999:203), “The paik system of Ahom administration was introduced in few satras. The principal satras in Majuli were favoured by their patron king with several villages consisting of a few hundred paiks were to serve their respective satras with manual labour and to supply the satra with necessary things”.

*Paiks* were the men who worked in the Sattra land and they are real occupants of the revenue free Sattra land. The village developed on the basis of Sattra paik is generally known as *Paikan* village. According to (Goswami: 2002: 57) the following are the different types of *paiks* who work for the Sattra.

(a) **Kumar paik**: Supplier of earthen wares to the Sattra

(b) **Kari paik**: They accompanied the Sattradhirkar when he visited different places by boat.

(c) **Bilati paik**: they collected aquatic food from wetlands, ponds.

(d) **Maldongiya paik**: Officials who presided in village administration.

5.2. a **Sattra Sangrakhyani Sabha**

There is a advisory council of the Sattra is known as Sattra Sangrakhyani Sabha and a representative body of the Sattra. The executive body of the council consists of 14 elected members and some additional members from different functionaries of the Sattra. The Sattradhirkar is the ex-officio President of the council and other members are elected by the bhakats for three years. All the matters of religious, administrative and judicial
origin are discussed in this council and they have taken unanimous decision for the Sattradhikar. The introduction of democratic procedure in the election of advisory council in the Sattra is a landmark in the Sattriya history.

5.3 Administration and Management of Various Departments

The pattern of administration and management of Sattra in general has been changing since the time of its establishment. For management of the Sattra in both religious and administrative affairs the Adhikara appoints from among his devotees several functionaries to hold responsibilities of the different departments. The management of this monastic Sattra is run by the following units.

1. Manikut Management
2. Namghar Management
3. Dhan Bhoral (treasury)
4. Chawl Bhoral (granary)
5. Chahar Management
6. Khats and Mouza Management
7. Financial Management which is entrusted with the following matters related to
   i. Gurukar
   ii. Bara
   iii. Pranami
   iv. Sevajanani
   v. Dana (donation)
8. Cultural Management

5.4 Power and Function of Managing Committee

Powers of the Managing Committee

(i) The committee shall have the power to appoint, dismiss or punish the functionaries, if charges of delinquency are established against them.
(ii) It has the right to keep the seal of the Sattra to be used on all papers and documents used on behalf of the Sattra.

(iii) The committee has the power to fix minimum amount of tax (kar), admission fees of the devotees relating to share of rice bhag in the Sattra.

(iv) The committee has the power to take all necessary and proper steps for recovering and protecting Sattra properties.

Over and above, the managing committee shall have the power to frame rules.

**Functions of the Managing Committee**

The Committee shall make arrangement for the management and administration of all the affairs of the Sattra which are secular in nature. The following are the primary functions of the Managing Committee.

(i) The committee provides necessary funds for management of the religious functions along with ceremonies and festivals.

(ii) The committee makes necessary arrangement for collecting fund for Sattra.

(iii) The committee shall make every arrangement for the fulfilment of the aims and objects of the Sattra and receiving fund from both state and central government.

(iv) The committee shall keep accounts of incomes and investment fund in any of the scheduled banks affiliated to the Reserve Bank of India in postal cash certificates.

(v) The Management shall be responsible for mismanagement and misappropriation of the Sattra funds individually and collectively.

(vi) The committee at the end of it is term of office shall make necessary arrangement for election of the new committee and holding by –election in case a vacancy arises in the managing committee.
5.5 Sources of Income and Expenditure

5.5. a *Agama* (Income)

Auniati Sattra was established by *Sargadeu* Jayadhvja Simgha, who gave a firm economic footing to the Sattra by donating thousands of acres of land, large numbers of buffaloes, cows and many other movable and immovable properties. In the later periods also, the Sattra continued to receive vast tracts of the land and other properties from the royal family. In this regard mention can be made of the donations of Chandrakanta Simgha. These donations of land and other properties continued even during the British rule to relocate the Sattra. These properties are the main source of income of the Sattra, in the form of rent or share of crop produced in those lands.

(i) *Gurukar* (tax for the monk) is the second source of income of the Sattra. The followers of the Sattra have to pay yearly offerings called *gurukar* (tax for the monk) to the Sattra, but the amount is very small. The *rajmedhi* and *pakanis* collect these taxes and deposit them to the Sattra fund.

At the time of initiation, the followers, as per their financial status, offer some amount of money and other related items to the *Adhikara* of Auniati Sattra. According to the established rules, the income thus generated is divided into several parts, a part of which is deposited in the Sattra’s fund.

In the Auniati Sattra other sources of income are also noticed like *biyadaniya*, (due on the occasion of marriage), *bara* (part of the donation sacrifices offered for the dead), *sevajanani* (offerings made to the Sattra at the time or after of any function celebrated in their home), the *pranami* (offering made while paying obeisance) and *dana* (donation).

(ii) *Biyadaniya* (due on the occasion of marriage): According to the financial status, the family of the bride offers some donations to the house of the *Sattradhikar* and the priests. There is no definite limit to this offering. As per observations made, the grooms are free from it.

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(iii) *Bara* (part of the sacrifices offered for the dead): One of the 18 offerings of the *barutsarga*, sacrifices made for the dead during the *adyasardha* (we pray to the almighty for the eternal peace of the departed soul) ceremony of the deceased.

(iv) *Pranami* (offering made while paying obeisance): The offerings made by the followers of the Sattra to the Lord Govinda during their salutation is called as *pranami*.

(v) *Sevajanani* (offering at the time of any function at home): During the time of any religious function at home, the followers make some offerings which are collected and later sent to the Sattra or sometime the followers themselves visit the *Adhikara* and hand over the same.

(vi) *Dana* (*Donation*): The followers, who are economically sound, frequently send donation to the Sattra. Since early times, the practice has been continuing and it still continues today. In the biographies of the *Adhikaras*, it is observed that there are references about the donation made by many people (past to present day). People are allowed to make their donation through Demand Draft/or A/c payee Cheque to Auniati Sattra Account (Account No. 10638570530, State Bank of India, Jorhat Branch. Branch Code No. 104)

Donations made to Sri Sri Auniati Sattra, Majuli, Assam is exempted from Income Tax as per the Notification No. 324/2001 dated 17.10.2001 of the Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India published in Part-II Section 3(ii) of the Gazette of India wherein Sri Sri Auniati Sattra, Majuli, Jorhat, Assam is placed as public worship of renown for the purpose of exercise of powers conferred by the clause (b) of sub-section (2) of Section 80G of Income-Tax Act, 1961 (43 of 1961).
(vii) Revenue collected from Tourists

Table 4: The table below shows the number of domestic tourist visits (DTV) and foreign tourist visits (FTV) to Auniati Sattra and the revenue collected from them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Visitors to Museum in Auniati Sattra</th>
<th>Collection from visitors (in Rs)</th>
<th>General visitors to Auniati Sattra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DTVs</td>
<td>FTVs</td>
<td>DTVs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>7,320</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>36,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>8,275</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>41,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 (till Nov)</td>
<td>9,140</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>45,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** During *Palnam*, the number of tourists visiting Majuli exceeds one Lakh.

A sum amounting to 50% of the revenue collected from the tourists (vide entry fees of the museum) is used for the welfare activities of the Sattra. Of the remaining 50%, 35% is used to pay the salary of 5 staff members employed in the museum, and the balance 15% towards general maintenance of the Sattra.

The Sattra Museum has a rich collection of antique items which are as follows- *Hastibidyarnava, Srihastamuktawali, Veru, Kali* (Musical Instrument), an ivory plated chair, an ivory plated table, one ivory mat, one ivory stick, silver plated big *Sarai* (a tray having artistically), fan made of cane, wooden *sarai*, copper plate, brass and copper big dish, silver dish, silver *maihang* (a dish with a foot used by the Ahom of rank), silver *bhogjora* (water vessel), wooden *maihang*, two numbers of sward (*Hang-dang*) used during the reign of Ahom Kings in Assam, a king of swords or dagger used by the British, brass made basket, golden vessel and saucer, dish, saucer and mounted bowl used by King Gadadhar Simgha, silver mounted saucer, ivory sandal, one pair of big cymbal and one *bordoba* (a kind of drum), wooden corker, time machine, ivory chess board, silver and brass mixture big *sarai*, ivory made casket, wooden big sandal, *borjapi* (a wicker hat used as an umbrella or sunshade), conch, mask, silver bracelet, bamboo mat, brass water vessel, silver spice box, copper water vessel with silver plating, silver tray, cannon (*Bortop*), ivory and
bamboo made casket, bugle, Nataraj statue made of copper, handmade umbrella, 
maan sarai, fan made of pine wood, silver and copper coins, boat used in Palnam 
festival, round mat, brass made Bell, vessel made of bell metal, decorative safura 
(a tray for betel-nut with a cover) made of bell metal, sliver pot, dola (palanquine), 
bamboo milk pot, light stand, wooden vessel, brass made little box, statue of Krishna, 
‘Doul bota’ (a kind of tray for keeping betel-nuts or offerings to a God) made of 
brass, A bota with ornamental design, One water conch, silver and copper 
multipurpose little casket, statue of Ganesh made of Stone, Small water pot, ink 
pot, goda (an iron mace), mukut (crown).

The Sattra inmates also make beautiful hand fans and each hand fan is sold at a 
price of around Rs 600/- each. Each person makes about 40 fans in a year and the 
entire Sattra sells about 3000 hand fans. Hence the revenue income of each person is Rs 
24000/- and the Sattra’s annual revenue income is Rs 18 lakhs. But this amount is not 
the profit alone as there are expenses also incurred during the fabrication like cost of 
raw material. Thus it is seen that these hand fans, as a handicraft, has become an important 
source of income for the bhakats of the Sattra and more than 70% of the bhakats are 
engaged in this activity.

5.5. b Individual Income: it is noticed that 24 inmates earn their living by making 
handicrafts, 16 are in government job-holders, another 6 are engaged in various business. 
Shri Jadumani Hazarika, an inmate of the Sattra works as a tourist guide and Shri Nitul 
Dutta, another bhakat is a successful Life Insurance agent.

(i) A case study of self employment:

Kusha Ram Bhuyan, aged about 48 years is a bhakat of Auniati Sattra. He came 
to the Sattra in the year 1970 from his hometown of Bihpuria in Lakhimpur district. He 
started his studies here and passed Higher Secondary as a bhakat of the Sattra. With 
education as a helping hand, he started a shop within the premises of the Sattra where all 
the paraphernalia of a bhaona including dress material is available. This venture was started
in the year 2000 under the guidance and inspiration of the then Vice Principal of Majuli College, Shri Manik Neog. Neog was deeply addicted to the *bhaonas* culture and even supported Kusha Ram financially with five thousand rupees (Rs. 5000/-) at the time of starting his venture.

Shri Madhav Barbayan, who is like an elder brother to Kusha Ram, is a teacher in the Auniai M.V School. From the savings account of the school teachers, he gave a loan of sixteen thousand rupees to Shri Kusha Ram to help him in the starting of his shop. Another *bhakat* of the Sattra Shri Bhaben Tamuli also contributed a sum of seven thousand rupees (Rs. 7000/-). However the biggest inspiration was Shri Manik Neog. Shri Manik Neog along with Shri Kusha Ram, Bhaben Tamuli and Putu Saikia went to Jorhat to understand and have a feel of how the dresses are made. In fact Shri Manik Neog also did a survey on the different types of dresses available there and at the time of returning from Jorhat they brought a complete set of *bhaona’s dress*. That was the beginning.

At Majuli, during the bhaonas, they started giving the dress on rent. Shri Bhaben Tamuli’s sister also arranged a hand sewing machine for Shri Kusha Ram. Initially two *bhakats* of Natun Kamalabari Sattra helped in operating the machine but later Shri Kusha Ram employed a local boy named Shri Gobinda Das from outside the Sattra. Slowly with rising income, Shri Kusha Ram repaid the entire loan he had taken from different people.

Currently his shop has stock of material worth over three Lakhs rupees and he charges rent for his dresses, which vary from two thousand rupees to twelve thousand rupees. He makes a yearly profit of around seventy thousand rupees which he uses to buy raw materials to make new items. However, being a *bhakat* of the Auniai Sattra, he charges only a lumpsum amount from the Sattra for the dresses which he gives for the performance of *bhaonas* held at Auniai Sattra. It has also been observed that other Sattras also regularly take the items from his shops on rent for different functions like *bhaonas*, *Raas* and so on.
The researcher has observed that the quality of the dress material and other items available in the shop is very good. Similar shop was not found in any of the other Satras in Majuli. This clearly reflects the association and respect he has for the bhaona culture.

5.6. c Nirgama (expenditure):

(1) Physical establishment: Establishment, repairing and maintenance of Namghar, Manikut, Chora, Bhoral, Sanskrit Chatuspathi, Guest house, Batchora, Road, Pond, Garden and others.

(2) Expenditure on Musical instruments: Singhasan, Musical instrument, Vehicle and so on.

(3) Daily expenditure: Expenses on regular puja, bhog and arati.

(4) Regular expenditure on other rituals: Expenses on utsav- bhaona, birth and death anniversary of Mahapurusas, solemnization of new Adhikaras, Janmastami, Raas, Palnam, Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu and Kati Bihu.

(5) Expenses on guests, Bairagi.

(6) Bhakats, paiks, chamuas working at Sattra receives daily incentives instead of remuneration. Deka Adhikara, raj medhi, pachanis receives a share of income of the Sattras.

(7) About 200-250 bhakats engaged in different works for the Sattra get their share of cultivated rice as per their status.

(8) Other expenditures are- donation to poor and needy, fire and flood affected people and also for Sradha ceremony of inmates, community works, establishing and providing financial aid to schools, colleges, Chatuspathi, hospital and so on. At least 150 Institutions have received grant as land and cash from the present Sattradhikar. Although the income of Sattra is decreasing day by day, but the number
of people seeking donation is increasing. Despite that the Sattra has never refused help to anyone in need.

(9) There is expenditure on collection also. *rajmedhi, bor-medhi, pakhimedhis* are engaged to collect *gurukar*, rice and others. In return they get a share of the collected rice and money. These officials look after agricultural land and produce. They also get remuneration. There is separate expenditure for transportation and travelling of *bhakats* for collecting rice from the villages.

There is expenditure on preservation of the Sattra and its properties. Sometime the Sattra has to fight legal battles at court.

*Chawl bharali, dhan bharali* and *gosaighoria majindar* are three persons looking after the accounts of the Sattra. *Adhikara* examines the accounts and he is responsible to give sanction on any expenditure, but for regular expenditures like expenditure on offerings made to visiting *sadhu sainyashis* (religious preachers), the office bearers need not take approval from the *Adhikata*. The *Adhikara* has to take approval from the *bhakats* for expenditures like demand and donation for special cause. In the past this was strictly followed and whenever deviation of these norms was observed, the result was not good. The *Adhikara* always says that the *bhakats* as the backbone of the Sattra are the trustees of the vast properties of great Lord Govinda and *Adhikara* is only the administrative head. But in case of financial crisis, the responsibility lies in the hands of the *Adhikara* to find a solution.

The system of book keeping of Sattra is related to the system of accounts maintenance of ancient Ahom Kings. One can study the present system of book keeping of the Sattra to get an idea about how the ancient Ahom Kings maintained accounts. This system is based on ancient Indian system and there are no similarities with present day modern system of book keeping.

These system were not developed overnight instead it took years of experience and new rules were introduced during the tenure of each *Adhikara*. Due to these strict
rules and disciplines the Sattra is not only able to withstand the test of time but also to retain its glory during the time of ups and downs, natural calamities, invasion, uprising, cessation of royalty and so on. The River Brahmaputra has so far 8 times engulfed the Sattra. The Sattra has also withstood fire and internal problems. Each time the bhakats have saved all the idols, the Bhagavata, Sanchipat manuscripts, and all other valuables and antique items. They believe that they could do so only due to their faith on the Lord Govinda.

(i) A. Case Study

The researcher here would like to cite the example of Bhaben Tamuli Majinder, aged about 55 years. He came to the Sattra at the tender age of 7 and since then has been part and parcel of the Sattra. He is in-charge of the rice granary of the Sattra for the last 8 years and also a designated majindar for tax collection of 2 no Lakheraj (Gormura). He has given a detail report on the income and expenditure of the Sattra which is as follows.

The different sources of earning of the Sattra are –


Brief descriptions of each of these earning sources are given below.

1. Donation: These are given by the devotees and well-wishers of the Sattra at different times.

2. Contribution: This is the tax paid by the pupils and followers of the Sattra. This can be given in terms of cash or kind like rice and so on.

3. Guru Tax: The followers of the Sattra, whenever they do any religious functions like puja, shraddha etc. keep aside some monetary offerings, utensils, clothes and later on donate these to the Sattra.
4. **Khat**: In order to make the Sattra economically self reliant the Ahom Kings had donated huge amounts of land to the Sattra. These were divided into a number of smaller areas known as *khats*. The residents of these *khats* do cultivation in these areas and donate one-third of the produce to the Sattra. To run the *khat* the *Sattradhikar* appoints one member of the Sattra as *majindar*.

5. **Mouza**: A bigger version of a *khat* is known as *mouza*. There is a rule prevailing regarding depositing of three times the Government land revenue tax to the Sattra by the users of the Sattra land. However considering the precarious economic situation of the people residing there, the Sattra collects only a partial amount of the due tax. The *majindar* collects the tax from each *mouza* and deposits at the Sattra.

6. **Chahar**: A *chahar* is demarcated considering the residing areas of the followers of the Sattra. One *chahar* generally consists of about twenty to fifty villages. These *chahars* are one of the biggest sources of income of the Sattra. Each *Chahar* has a designated *rajmedhi* to manage it and assisting him by a *pachoni*. The *rajmedhi* and *pachoni* visit these towns each year and collects food grains, clothes, utensils, cash donations and so on. A part of this collection is deposited to the Sattra while a majority of this goes to the *baha* of the *rajmedhi* which serve as a source of livelihood for them.

7. **Daily offerings**: This comprises of the offerings made at the *Namghar, Manikut* and while paying obeisance to the *Sattradhikar* by the devotees. The revenue of the *Manikut* is used in the upkeep activities of the *Manikut* itself while the collection in the *Namghar* is kept as a separate savings for the *bhakats* residing in the different *hatis*. The *bhakats* use these savings to give donations for the various festivals of the Sattra. They can also take loan without any interest rate for one year from this savings.

The main savings of the Sattra is maintained in a proper bank account. Money from that is used in the governance of the Sattra, meeting various expenses of the *Sattradhikar*, various public programmes of the Sattra and in giving donations at various places. During the festival of *Bohag Bihu*, one liter of mustard oil is given to each *bhakat* of the Sattra.
5.6 Activities of the Bhakats

5.6. a Daily Activities

Besides the daily puja (worship and propitiate) of Lord Govinda and others, as mentioned in the previous chapter, special worships are performed on other occasions as well. These are during the Kati Bihu, Janmastami, the three auspicious ekadashi (eleventh day of moon) Sayana, Ulthayan, Parshwaparivartana, the feasts on the occasion of navanna (cooking new rice for food). Offering of lights, aratis (offering of a light to an idol in the evening), are carried out after the offerings of bhog (rice cooked in milk). It is the duty of the Adhikara to make this bhog. Special worships are performed in the Bohag Bihu (spring festival on the occasion of the Assamese New Year) and the offerings of paramanna, pitha (rice cake), laru, (sweet laddo) and other items are given. Out of all, the offerings of navanna and the mithoi (sweets) on Janmastami are considered rare delicacies of the Sattra.

The bor-deori is the chief attendant of the Manikuta. Bor-deori performs the worship of the Lord Govinda and is assisted by four pujaris (person performing rituals) and three deuris (distributes prasad). The pujaris also perform the worship of the idols placed around the idol of Lord Govinda. One of these four pujaris is called duvaliya pujari (assistant priest) and this duvaliya-pujari performs the worship of Lord Govinda in absence of the bor-deori. The other three deuris prepares paste of sandal wood, lighting the lamps and other supporting activities necessary for the worship. They are appointed, to recite 'Vishnu Sahasranam' (reciting the thousand names of Lord Vishnu) in the month of Kati or Karttika uninterrupted or without a break.

Maliya is another person, who prepares the garlands for the Lord. This garland is given only to Adhikara after the worshipping is over. A special official of the Sattra, called maliya bora remains in-charge of the supply of the flower garlands for use in the daily worship. Barsravani, Shri Binanda Sharma Barpujari aged 75, informed that in the earlier days, there were a number of villages called Maliya Gaon. The Brahmmins of these villages supply the garlands of damana tulasi or black basil (ocymum sanctum)
to the Sattra every day. Village bearing this name still survive without the past activities. For their service they were allowed to enjoy the Sattra lands on payment of 50% of revenue or entirely free.

At present, there are two maliyas in the Sattra- bar maliya and anga maliya. Along with these persons, two other persons are also there to clean and wash the floor of the Namghar and the Manikut every day.

Inside the Namghar, there are regular performances of nam-kirttana, gayana-bayana, oja-pali and palnam are carried out.

5.6.b Nitya-Chaidhya Prasanga (Fourteen Prayer Sessions)

In Auniati Sattra, the term nitya prasanga usually means the services carried out inside the Namghar only because the name itself is ‘Krishna personified’ and it is also called choidhya prasanga. These fourteen sessions are having its heritage significance since the days of the Gurujona Shri Shri Sankaradeva.

The choidhya prasanga in the Auniati Sattra comprises:

(i) Bairagi name: In this session, songs related to waking up the Lord; Vrindavan Yatra and Vrindavana Lila are recited and is followed by a Kirttana. No hand clapping is performed in this session. Hand clapping is done during Kirttana sessions. In the Sattra, during the time of Janmastami, ekadashi, sankranti (cusp of every month), anniversaries of the former Adhikaras generally two Kirttana are included. These Kirttanas are generally taken either from the compositions of the earlier Adhikaras of Auniati Sattra or from the compositions of Srimanta Sankaradeva.

(ii) Budha-nama: This session is carried out with deep concentration without hand clapping.

(iii) Baranama: This session consists of four segments. Four ghosas are recited and supported by hand clapping and beating of large cymbals. The last ghosa is called baraghosa and it takes generally half an hour to complete on Janmastami and the
anniversaries of the former Adhikaras, another ghosa is added to this session. This ghosa is called budhaghosa. When the budhaghosa is recited, the Adhikara arrives on the picture to pay obeisance to the Lord Govinda. The Adhikara at first pays obeisance to the Lord and then he enters the Manikut, prostrates before the Lord and offers salutation. At that time the door of Manikut is closed and nobody is allowed to either stay in or enter into. After coming out of the Manikut, the Adhikara turns to the west and again takes turn to the east then pays obeisance to the bhakats. After that he takes his seat in the Namghar. At the end of baranam, the Adhikara, the Deka Adhikaar, the bhakats and the people at large are showered with ashirvadas by the ashirvadiyas, Shri Haren Sarma Ashirbadiya.

(iv) Bhagavata Patha: The bagish recites out some parts of the Bhagavata in Sanskrit and carries out the interpretation of those verses.

(v) Pada Patha (reading the Assamese version of the Shrimad Bhagavata): The Assamese version of the Bhagavata and sometimes the Puranas and the verses of the Carita puthis are also read out by the barpathaka in the morning session. Other five pathaks read out their assigned parts in the afternoon session. It is also observed that 24 (twenty-four) sravanis are specially appointed to listen to these readings of the Assamese version of Shrimad Bhagavata.

(vi) Gayana bayana (singers and musicians): There are 7 gayanas and 7 bayans in the Sattra. Every day one gayana and one bayana perform in turn. Along with the main pair of gayana and bayana there are supporting hands called dohariyas (repeaters) and sikaru (apprentice) also. With this, the barnam comes to an end.

There is another session which is carried out just at the closing of the midday session and as such termed as palnam. With it the forenoon session comes to an end. This session is in excess of the fourteen earlier sessions. The afternoon session begins at 3 pm and continues till 6.00 pm. Here the following segments are taken up:
(vii) *Nam Prasanga*: Recitation is supported with playing of cymbals.

(viii) *Pada Path*: Presentation of rendering of the Assamese version of the *Shrimad Bhagavata*.

(ix) *Shrimad Bhagavat Path*: Reading the Sanskrit *Bhagavata* with its interpretations.

(x) *Bairagi nam*: Narrating the activities at Vrindavana. Clapping of hand is associated.

(xi) *Budha Nama*: No hand clapping, deep concentration carried out.

(xii) *Bara nam*: Ghosas are recited supported by hand clapping and playing of large cymbals.

(xiii) *Pada Path*: Reading of Assamese version of *Bhagavata*.

(xiv) *Oja gova* (performance by the expert singer of the Sattra): This is also known as *vihara oja*. The songs of the *oja* are generally composed on the basis of the *Bhagavata* and *Puranas*. When the *oja* performs, three persons support him by playing cymbals and they are called *palis* (assistant). In the evening, after the *arati* of the Lord, with the drum beating, conch and other musical instruments, the *bhakats* aged (0-14) years do their *Samkirtanas* (training), but all these are not counted within *nitya-choidhya prasanga*.

### 5.7 Festivals of the Auniati Sattra

Festivals form an important aspect of all cultures of the world and most of the societies either primitive or folk or elite have their own festivals and they are celebrated from time immemorial.

Hindu festivals have social significance. They also provide opportunities for individuals to release themselves from tension and anxieties through prayers and different modes of worship. All the Hindu festivals are also characterized by programmes of devotions.
The festivals held in Auniati Sattra offer scope for the people to come together crossing the caste barrier. This community participation helps to create a feeling of oneness among various categories of people of the society. Thus the festivals show the ground of studying the cohesive influence of the Sattra on the community.

Table: 5 Festivals Observed in the Auniati Sattra according to the Assamese Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the months</th>
<th>Name of the Festival/Ceremonies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bohag (April-May)</strong></td>
<td>1. Bohag Bihu (3 days) 2. Shri Shri Damodaradev’s Tithi (Sukla Pratipada)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jeth (May-June)</strong></td>
<td>1. Tithi of 14th Adhikara Shri Shri Hemchandra Dev Goswami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aahar (June-July)</strong></td>
<td>1. Tithi of 13th Adhikara Shri Shri Lilakanta Dev Goswami 2. Sayan ekadashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sawan (July-August)</strong></td>
<td>1. Tithi of 15th Adhikara Shri Shri Bishnuchandra Dev Goswami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bhadra (August-September)</strong></td>
<td>1. Tithi of Saint Shri Shri Sankaradeva on the 2nd day of the bright fortnight 2. Tithi of Saint Shri Shri Madhavadeva, on 5th day of dark fortnight 3. Janmastami on the 8th day of the dark fortnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ahin (September-October)</strong></td>
<td>1. Pashaporibartan ekadashi (last year it was 26th of September) 2. Mahalaya (aajamali)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aghon (November-December)</strong></td>
<td>1. Uttayan ekadashi 2. Raas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Magh (January-February)</strong></td>
<td>1. Magh Bihu (3 days)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.7. a Annual festivals

Besides celebrating the birth and death anniversary of former Adhikaras, the anniversaries of the founder of the religious cult are also celebrated. Again Magh or Bhogali Bihu, Bohag or Rongali Bihu, and Kati or Kongali Bihu with a three day long schedule is celebrated.

**Bohag Bihu** celebrations start with Garu Bihu. The Garu Bihu or cattle worship rites are observed on the last day of the Assamese calendar (sankranti). The cattle are washed, smeared with ground turmeric (haldhi) and other pastes, struck with springs of dighalati and makhiyanti (a kind of tree leaf) and blessed to be healthy and productive (lao kha, bengana kha, bosore bosore barhi ja/ maar soru, baper soru, toi habi bor garu- eat gourd, eat brinjal, grow from year to year/ your mother is small, your father is small, but you be a large one). At the evening when cattle are back from field to the Sattra campus, the bhakats throw away the old ropes and new ropes are tied around their neck. The same day sabah is also held and it continues for three days. Besides the fourteen prayer sessions, at 2 pm bhakats performs hiya nam, diha nam, and the ashirvadiyas gives ashirbada after it and afterwards khol prasanga, dhulak nritya and ojapali is performed. For another two days the same process continues. On the second day, in the place of khol prasanga the bhakats perform natuwa nritiya. On the day of Bihu, which is called in Assamese language as Manuh Bihu, the New Year starts for all. Early in the morning all the bhakats plays buka khel (playing with mud). They believe that it brings them a closer to nature and it is a kind of enjoyment too. Ground turmeric paste is supplied from the bharal to all the bhakats. After it, they all wears new clothes and goes to Adhikar’s residence. Adhikara gives nirnali (flower and leaves of tulsī used inside the Manikut in worshipping Lord Govinda) to all.

In the month of Kati, traditional lamp lighting ceremony is observed in the Auniati Sattra. Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Dev Goswami, informed that this ceremony is traditionally performed and it has been continuing since the establishment of the Sattra.
in 1653 Saka. The tradition was started by Niranjandeva, the first Adhikara of Auniati Sattra. The bhakats light the earthen lamp (Aakash Bonti) for peace, happiness and prosperity to prevail upon the Islanders and the people of former Assam. As per his version “we seek the Almighty’s blessings by lighting lamps on the eve of the auspicious month of Kati”.

The disciples light as many as 21 pairs of earthen lamps (Aakash Bonti or lamp in the sky) every year. More than 400 disciples, along with the Deka Adhikara, naamlaguwa, burhabhakat, and all other dignitaries of the Sattra start the lighting tradition with a Vedic puja followed by a Sanskrit sloka recitation before Govinda Mahaprabhu. Diha-nam, gayana-bayana and hiya-nam is performed before lighting the lamp.

At the time of Magh Bihu, in addition to the daily rituals Agni puja (Fire worship) is performed according to Vedic rules.

In the afternoon the bhakats performs hiya-nam, diha-nam, gayan-bayan, natuwa nach, and oja pali. The sayana parsvarparivatana and the utthana ekadasis are celebrated with additional sessions of nama-kirtana.

On Janmastami, the bhakats perform a day long fast. After the forenoon sessions and the completion of the scheduled rituals, in the evening a special puja is performed in the Manikut. Assamese Shrimad Bhagavata is recited on that day which contains verses relating to the birth of Lord Krishna. On this day no prasad is offered in the midday session, and only tulsi and sandal wood paste are offered. At night, prasad consisting of but (gram), magu (mong pulse), and coconut cut into small pieces with mithai (sweets) are distributed.

During Raas festival, special puja is performed in a mandapa erected inside the Namghar instead of the Manikut. In this mandapa the twin idol of Radha-Krishna is installed and worshipped. It is also one of the idols regularly worshiped inside the Manikut. Shri Tileshwar Deb Sarma, 54 years-old (former bar-al-dhara of Adhikar) informed that
earlier a wooden platform was used to place the idol. Prabhu Shri Shri Hemchandra Deva (former Adhikara) replaced the same with a silver one as the seat of the Lord should equally match the dignity and the grandeur of the celebration performed in a public place. This platform weights more than a mound (40 Kgs). Nam Kirttan session, banyan, natuwa and oja pali are performed on that day. And special rituals are observed in Vedic rites. Bhaona is performed at night. According to pujari, Shri Pusha Sharma, aged 50 years, earlier only the main part of the rasa was depicted in the bhaonas but now a day’s many other items are also added to it.

During the time of Raas utsav, the researcher observed that inmates were getting the last brushstrokes of makeup. As has already been mentioned, Auniati Sattra is an udasin Sattra, where Sattradhikar (head) and the bhakats remains celibate. Since women were not allowed in the Sattra premises, men enact female roles. Here researcher observed two young boys dressed up as women performing for the Apsara nritya. Gayana-bayana, a graceful dance by beating ensemble was an inspiring experience. But it was Shri Khagenranath Lekharu’s solo performance of the Dashavatar nritya that was the highlight. He is an expert in Sattriya dance. At the age of 67, he seamlessly leaped, danced and whirled for showing the ten avatars of Vishnu. Here the researcher would like to mention that it was possible to see the dance after receiving special permission from the Sattradhikar as women are not allowed inside the Sattra campus at night.

The Palnam of Auniati Sattra is famous in Assam. It is an annual event. The festival is performed with 5-day long, from 25-29th day of the month of Kati. Thousands of people come to the Sattra at that time. A mela (fair) is held in the area between the outer and inner entrance of the Sattra. Many useful articles are displayed on sale in the mela. It is observed that salt packets (weighing half or one Kg.) are kept in the donas (plates made out of banana plant). There is a belief prevailing in the society that the "lona dona" (gift of salt) equals to that of "sona dona" (gift of gold). All the visitors/devotees offer salt to the Lord in this special occasion.
Shri Bonshi Saikia, aged 65 years, *palnamiya* (pashim hati) informed that *palnam* is the recitation sessions performed in shifts. Each of the *hati* has to take part in the *Palnam* and it is mandatory. Each *hati* has their schedule timing in these five days. Without disturbing the regular session, groups of devotees from each of the four *hatis* carry out their *nam* sessions according to the schedule between 10 am to 5 pm every day without a break. Immediately after conclusion of one group from one *hati*, another group from another *hati* starts their performance and in the same way the four *hati*’s takes active part in each of these five days. People visit in huge numbers and because of the huge rush people find difficult to enter the *Namghar* to make their offerings.

It is also observed by the researcher that on the first day of *Palnam*, five devotees have to take *barana* (sanction) from Adhikara to perform this annual festival. After taking *barana* they go to the Manikut, considering it to be the Vaikuntha (heaven) and they bring down the Lord from there. In the middle of the *Namghar* a beautifully decorated small boat is placed in east and west manner. Shri Tarun Kakati, aged 65 years, *pal-namiya*, informed the boat is considered as symbol, where the boat is the vehicle of *Hari-nam* (attributes of the Lord). He also recited a message of Shrimad Bhagavata like –

“*Para kara Raghnunatha sansara sagare*” (O Lord carry me to the other side of this earthly/wordly ocean). After the installation and placement of the boat inside the *Namghar*, the *bhakats* sit in two rows one on each side of the boat and after taking their seats carry out their prayer in groups according to the schedule. Clapping of hands, playing of cymbals, are not observed. The *bhakats* simply recite the prayers.

This continues for four days, and on the last day i.e. on 29th day of *Kati*, the *nam* session is continuously held till 3 am on the next day. At that time, the Adhikara, Deka Adhikara is accompanied by seven *manabhagiyas* (principal office bearers of the Sattra) and they enter the Manikut and pay obeisance to the Lord. After this, the Adhikara comes out of the Manikut carrying the idol of Laksminarayana i.e.
Salagrama along with karani (copper spade) and the Bhagavata on his head followed by Deka Adhikara. After this a procession is taken out with the dunari (decorated vessel with lamps burning inside) keeping it in the front, followed by the manikutiyas (persons responsible for the different activities of the Manikut) with bells, cymbals in their hands. They are followed by the bor-deori and the bagish and then the Adhikara is followed by the seven manabhagiyas and rest of the devotees takes their position in the procession as tail enders. After that Adhikara, enters the Namghar with Salagrama and the Shrimad Bhagavata on his head. Then the Adhikara and the Deka Adhikara both prostrate on the floor before the bhakats singing nam and offer salutations. At that time ashirvadiya offers blessings to all. At the end of this, the musical instruments are played and the Adhikara offers his obeisance. This ashirvada session is very valuable in Auniati Sattra. In the blessing session a few words are said for betterment of each of these entities like the river, hills, seas, birds, etc. land and sky too.

During Guru Tithis (Tithis of Saint Shri Shri Sankaradeva, Saint Shri Shri Madhavadeva, Saint Shri Shri Damodardeva and former Sattradhikars) they perform Nam Kirttan, natuwa nach, hiya nam, diha nam, gayan bayan and kirttaniya oja during day time and at night bhaona is performed. Guests visiting the Sattra, paiks, samoa, are given anna-dan (victuals). Apart from these, on the Tithi of Saint Shri Shri Damodardeva, hajowali—a special kind of musical instrument is used. During the death anniversaries of former Sattradhikars, shraddha ceremony is performed which is followed by pinda-dan (presentation of the funeral cake to the manes). Shraddha ceremony and bairagi nam is held simultaneously. The shraddha ceremony is performed by the priest and he is assisted by bor-deori, bagish, Bhagavati, deuri and maliya. After the shraddha rituals are over the Adhikara gives nirmali to all present in the ceremony. The maliya gives nirmali to the bhakats performing the bairagi nam. On the eve of the gurutithi, oja pali and gayana bayana is performed.
During the ekadashi, in addition to the daily prasangas, hiya-nam is held in the afternoon session followed by diha-nam, gayana-bayan, oja-pali. The namlaguwa initiates the nam-prasanga and all the inmates follow him. The playing of cymbals is a must in all the performances. After hiya-nam and diha-nam the bhakats are blessed by the ashirvadiya and the pujari gives nirmali (a basil leaf dipped in sandal paste).

On the occasion of Mahalaya, (the day of new moon in the month of Ahin), the Sattradhikara and the bhakats of the Sattra perform the shraddha ceremony for the salvation of the souls of the deceased.

Dipannita or the festival of lights (the day of amavasya in the ahin or kati) is celebrated with enthusiasm by the bhakats by lighting earthen lamps. They believe that this festival of illumination drives away all evil forces and brings peace and harmony.
Fig. 16. SKETCH OF THE MUSEUM IN AUNIATI SATTRA

Fig. 17. SKETCH OF THE STRUCTURE WHERE EARTHEN LAMPS ARE PUT

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BHAKAT DISEMBARKING FROM THE FERRY

PL.44. PAIKS ENGAGED IN CLEANING OF RICE GRAINS
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A DEVOTEE OFFERING BARA TO THE SATTRADHIKAR

PL.46.
ANCIENT ARTICLES AND MANUSCRIPT PRESERVATION CENTRE

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AT THE AUNIATI SATTRA MUSEUM

(i) BHRINGAR

(ii) RUPOR BANZHAI

(iii) GUWA BOTA

(iv) COPPER PLATE

(v) BHERU (MUSICAL INSTRUMENT)

(vi) IVORY PLATED CHAIR
PL.48 (B) : ANCIENT ARTICLES PRESERVED
AT THE AUNIATI SATTRA MUSEUM

(vii) IVORY MAT                   (viii) IVORY SANDAL

(ix) SANCHI PATOR PUTHI           (x) IVORY CHESS BOARD

(xi) JOY GHANTA                  (xii) PITALAR GORUR
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PL.50. BHAKATS ACCEPTING THE DAILY SACRAMENT (PRASAD)
PL.51.
THE DAILY SACRAMENT (PRASAD)

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PL.52(B): COW BEING PROVIDED WITH NEW COLLARS (POGHA) ON THE OCCASION OF GARU BIHU, PART OF BOHAG BIHU
PL.53.
PREPARATION OF
AKASH BANTI

PL.54.
AKASH BANTI

PL.55.
A BHAKAT BUSY
IN LIGHTING
THE AKASH
BANTI
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PROPITIATION OF 'RADHA KRISHNA'
IN RASS FESTIVAL

PL.57. HIS HOLINESS SATTRADHIKAR AND HIS HOLINESS DEKA SATTRADHIKAR WITH OTHER BHAKATS IN THE PALNAM

PL.58.
DEVOTEES WITH THE SACRED BOAT INSIDE THE NAMGHRAR AT PAL NAM