CHAPTER VI

AUNIATI SATTRA’S CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS VAISHNAVITE CULTURE AND PEOPLE OF ASSAM

Sri Sri Auniati Sattra has a glorious past during which this Neo-Vaishnavite religious institution immensely contributed to Assamese culture, literature, music and art. Its history of existence covers a long life of more than five and a half Centuries from the time of its survival after it was established in 1654 AD at the instance of Ahom King Jayadhvja Simgha who gave 100% royal patronization to Shri Shri Niranjandeva who successfully established this royal Sattra with a handful of only seven devotees whom he brought from Kuruwabahi Sattra with him. All sorts of Vaishnavite and other cultural contributions put forward by the predecessors have been preserved and carried forward by the younger generation, and they are outlined below:

6.1. a Literature

The bhakats of Auniati Sattra know the art of preserving the old Sanskrit as well as the Assameses scriptures and books. They composed dramas, charitaputhis, songs, prayers, brief lyrics, stories, prose and poetry in both Sanskrit as well as the Assamese
vernacular language. The practice of copying and preserving of books in the Sattra library started during the tenure of guru Vamshigopaldev and is still being done with equal eagerness even today. The *Shrimad Bhagavata* is read and interpreted in the regular fourteen prayers sessions performed in the Auniati Sattra. There are several hands written copies of *Shrimad Bhagavata* and the *Gita*.

“Since the days of Niranjanadeva, there have always been three writers under the *dhan bharali*, in the *Auniati Sattra*. The writer is a very special designation in the Sattra. *Prabhu* Shri Shri Harideva appointed a few more writers, besides these three, and got copied the *Bhagavata, Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata*, other works, *vyakarana* (grammar) and a number of other books and encouraged the inmates of the Sattra with necessary arrangements to study them” (Sarma, 2004:280).

Not only the religious scriptures were copied down and preserved in the Sattra, other books like poetic lyrics, dictionaries, grammars, literature on ayurvedas, parables, moral and ethical stories and other *laukika sastras* (popular literature based on oral tradition) are also stored in the Sattra. The Auniati Sattra library has preserved the grand work titled *Srihastamuktavali* (on the various poses of the hands or *hastamudra* of a dancer), and another very important work on political science, written in Sanskrit, titled *Nilitatankura* (art of welfare and politics).

The composition of *Vrttamanjari*, a beautiful lyrical work by Mahamahopadhyaya Dhiresvaracharya was possible because of the active support of the then *Adhikara* of the Auniati Sattra, Prabhu Shri Shri Dattadeva. Prabhu Shri Shri Dattadeva himself composed several works in Sanskrit like prayers, songs and other poems. *Srikrishnalilamrta* is one such beautiful and light poetical work which contains description of the day-long activities of Krishna.

“The practice of composing songs in Sanskrit was in vogue since the days of Niranjanadeva. There were many books and songs and stories written in manuscript (*bakala*) of Auniati Sattra. A few of these *bakalas* are still there in Auniati Sattra library. One of the songs of this book was published by one Tarakesvara Bhattacharya in the
monthly newspaper *Pravasi*, in the *Saka* era 1851, a brief description of which was published by Savesvar Katak in the 4th issue of the third year of the magazine *Avahana*, for the Assamese readers in the *Saka* era 1853. There were many types of songs in this book from the poets of other language such as Brajvali and Hindi. *Prabhu* composed many of those songs in the Sattra itself. A song in Sanskrit is also found in this book, which was probably sung as a commendation to the king Rudra Simha on the Bihu festival’ (Sarma, 2004:285).

6.1.b *Charitaputhis (Biographies of the Gurus)*

“The Charitaputhis are a very valuable part of the Assamese literature. Separate historical biographies for each of Adhikaras are available in the Auniati Sattra. Traditionally, these were written after the demise of Adhikaras, by an inmate of the Sattra who enjoyed the privilege of observing the Adhikara closely. Thus, all this information is nothing but facts. Often, there are two separate Charitaputhis, in some cases written by separate and independent observers. It is however surprising that there is no Charitaputhis of Niranjandev, the first Adhikara of the Sattra. A thorough search may be required to locate the same. Even then, we do know many details about Niranjandeva from the biographies of Vamshigopaldev, Kesaddev and Haridev. All these charitaputhis are full of detailed descriptions of the contemporary social and political events. There are many references to the events from the lives of Kings and the royal officials which are not available in other sources. The readers are already familiar with many such events along with the deliberations of the earlier Adhikaras’” (Sarma, 2004:300-306).

The following *charitaputhis* are preserved in the library of Auniati Sattra

(i) Vamshigopal Charit: Written by Ramanand dvija, this work was published under the leadership of Dr. Maheshor Neog. It covers all the accounts of Vamshigopaldev along with his family tree down to Niranjandeva.

(ii) Kesabdev Charit: This charit contains a lot many verses. Ambarisa simply made the verses lucid and enhanced their beauty. Ambarisa was also a member
of the troupe which went for immersion of the ashes of Sattradhikar Kesavdev in the tirthas. The period of this work is around the Saka 1657-58.

(iii) Haridev Charita: Sattradhikar: Haridev expired in the Saka 1682 and this work was written sometime after the Saka 1683. The work contains praises about King Siva Simgha along with the detailed descriptions of the memorable events encountered by the King during one of his hunting missions. The author Narayana was a sravani of Sattradhikar Shri Shri Harideva.

(iv) Pranaharidev Charita: Balora Dalai was the biographer of Pranaharidev. The time of writing of this work was Saka era 1713. This book was written at the Auniati Sattra during the uprising of the Movamariyas when Sattradhikar Shri Shri Lakshiminathdev lived there for some time.

(v) Lakshiminathdev Charita: Maniram das was the author of this work and the time of writing was Saka 1787. The descriptions given by Maniram Das are nothing but hard facts about Sattradhikar Shri Shri Lakshiminathdev.

(vi) Padmapanidev Charita: The author was Prananath Das Pathak and the date of completion was sometime in the Saka 1748. He served Shri Shri Lakshiminathdev as well. The book covers the descriptions of the erosion of the Sattra, the Sattra floating on the flood waters, reconstruction of the Sattra within a few days and such other events.

(vii) Lakshmiramdev Charita: Prananath Das was the biographer of Lakshmiramdev and this work is also an interesting one.

(i) Kushadev Charita: Narayan Das was the author of this work. The biography of Kushadev contains description of the administration of the Burmese general Mingimasa Tilova, the first part of the British administration, discussions between the Chief Commissioner and others and Sattradhikar Shri Shri Kushadev and many other events, written in a very attractive manner.
(ii) Duttadev Charita (I)

Sridhar Baruah Oja was the author of this work. This works covers the entire life and the works of Sattadhikar Shri Shri Duttadev and takes the character of a modern day biography to some extent.

Duttadev Charita (II) is another biography of him. It was written by Purnanda Dhan Bharali.

(i) Kamaldev Charita: It is a full description of the events in the Sattra during the internal feuds without any bias and the character of Sattradhikar Shri Shri Kamaldev is also depicted beautifully.

Sattradhikar Shri Shri Duttadev composed Govinda Gunamala, which may be considered to be a Gunamala (Garland of attributes) of the edited version of Govinda Charita (personality of Govinda). It gives the description starting from the origin of the Idol of Lord Govinda, its journey to Kuruwabahi and up to the consecration of the idol in the Sattra after shifting to Auniati Sattra.

6.1. c Sanskrit Education in Auniati Sattra

Auniati Sattra has been playing a significant role in proliferating Sanskrit education and literature in addition to spreading and propagating Bhagavati Vaishnave religion since the days of yore. Mahamahopadhyaya Dhireswar Acharya, the 7th Acharya of Assam set up a Sanskrit tol at Auniati Sattra during the Adhikarship of Shri Shri Duttadev Goswami with the intention of spreading Sanskrit education. The famous printing machine named Dharma Prakash Yantra brought from Kolkata by the Sattradhikar produced such classics as Hari Sang Kirtan, Sri Sri Krishna Lila and Britta Manjari. That is indeed a historic feat achieved by Shri Shri Duttadev Goswami in disseminating Sanskrit education. In order to immortalise the name of his predecessor, Shri Shri Kamalddev Goswami (12th Sattradhikar) he founded a trust named Auniati Dattadev Trust Fund in the subsequent times and made arrangements for awarding Dattadev Gold Medal procured from the interests of the fund to the top scorer in Sanskrit in Matriculation examination.
In view of the absence of any Sanskrit school in North Guwahati on the north 
bank of the River Brahmaputra, Shri Shri Hemchandradev Goswami, the 14th Sattradhikar 
donated a building of the Sattra for a school named Auniati Lilakanta Sanskrit School and 
tried his might to bring it under government provincialisation. The same Sattradhikar also 
was successful in getting Auniati Kamaldev Sanskrit School listed under government 
provincialisation.

The present Sattradhikar of the Sattra, Dr. Shri Shri Pitamberdev Goswami has 
also been awarding Govinda Gold medal from the treasury of the Sattra to the top scorer 
in Sanskrit in HSLC examination.

During the tenure of Prabhu Shri Shri Dattadeva, Sridhar Baruah, the oja of the 
Sattra composed a book of songs named Harisangitam. Although its composition was 
completed in 1821, it was printed and published by Sivananda Bhattachharya in 1824. Prabhu Shri Shri Kamalchandradev composed a few beautiful prayers in Sanskrit 
and Prabhu Shri Shri Hemchandra dev also composed a few songs in Sanskrit.

6.1.d. Manuscripts in Auniati Sattra

The practice of writing manuscripts is an age old tradition. They bear the testimony 
of the culture, heritage, intellect and the creativity of the ancient people. In earlier times 
knowledge was spread through manuscripts only. There are various materials used for 
writing manuscripts like Sanchipat (leaves of aquilaria agallocha), Tulapat (made by 
pressing cotton), Muga cloth (Muga silk), wood and ivory. Various manuscripts have 
been preserved across the state in various Sattras of Majuli. Auniati Sattra’s contribution 
in this regard is worth mentioning.

Total number of manuscripts preserved in Auniati Sattra is around 310. Some 
important manuscripts are as follows –

(i) Sachitra Hasti Vidyarnava (1722), (ii) Srihastamuktawali (iii) Gopadevar 
Charita, (iv) Banaparva Ramayana, (v) Ghunusa Kirtan, (vi) Sanskrit Bhagavata, (vi) 
Ram Kirtan, (viii) Dasham (1693 Saka).

126
Shri Budhindranath Barpathak’s contribution is very remarkable in the case of Auniati Sattra. He was born in the year 1930 in Kakodunga village of Golaghat district. He came to the Sattra at the age of ten years and resided in the quarter (baha) of Bholanath Bargayan. He was unable to continue his education after seventh class as Bholanath Bargayan fell seriously ill and he had to be taken care of. After that he continued his life involving in a business of cutting trees with Madan Ojha. After that, under supervision of Mohan Pathak he learnt the art of pathak (recitation). It has to be mentioned that, earlier his ancestral title was Medhi. His father was Shri Jogyaram Medhi and mother, Shrimati Khudu Medhi. With the passage of time he became a Barpathak in the Auniati Sattra and retired from the same post. Sometime in 1950’s, under supervision of Bogai Pathak he learnt to prepare Sanchipat and also write manuscripts on it. He wrote more than ten manuscripts in Sanchipat out of which the remarkable ones are Lilamala, Gunamala and Shyamantak Haron. Even though he is old and ill, still he narrated to the researcher how he collected the Sanchi leaves from his hometown, made ink from cow’s urine, juice of xilikha (Terminalia citriroe), amlokh (a kind of fruit-Phyllanthus emblica) and, keheraj (a kind of herb: Ver besina Prostrata or Eelipta alba). He participated in a number of workshops as a resource person to impart training on the skill of Sanchipat writing, organized by National Mission for Manuscript, Delhi, Vivekananda Kendra Institute of Culture, Guwahati and many other organizations. Besides this he is an expert in making Rangoli Xorai, Xinghakhan with the help of hengul haital (red or yellow, the traditional colours used as paint). The heritage of manuscript writing started by Shrimanta Sankaradeva has been aptly continued by Budhindranath Barpathak and his leadership skills in this direction is well recognized by the Vaishnavites of the Sattra. Despite his contribution and possession of this rare skill, he has not received any funds from the Government or other literary organizations. He is almost bedridden and Durna Pathak is taking care of him. It has been observed by the researcher that the baha is now economically weak. The other members of the baha are very young- Udhav Kalita of 14 years, Pappu Bora of 12 years and Biki Bora of 6 years. This baha does not have a stable income.
There is none who can take the responsibility of continuing this tradition. It would be a great loss if this tradition fails to be continued.

6.1. e Prose and Poetry of the Sattra

Large numbers of books were composed in the Auniati Sattra in poetic lyrics too. The biographer of Vamshigopaldev was a bhakat of the Auniati Sattra. Out of the poems composed in the Auniati Sattra, Prthur Utpatti and Rajyabhiseka of Scricandradeva, Govinda Charita of Dvija Amabarisa, Rasalila, Vrtrasura Badha, Rudragita Varnana, Daksayajna, Vedastuti, Dhruva Charita and Govinda Gunamala were published. Even a second edition of Dhruva Charita and Govinda Gunamala were reprinted under the editorship of Sattradhikar Shri Shri Bishu Chandra Deva. Sattradhikar Shri Shri Datta Dev(19th Century) was an expert hand in Sanskrit, Assamese and Bengali language especially in the field of poetry.

Sattradhikar Shri Shri Kamalchandra Dev composed, printed and published a small booklet Krishnalila in the year 1831. Sahityaratna (Literary Jewel) Chandradhar Baruah published this work along with short introduction. Sattradhikar Shri Shri Hemcandra Dev was also an excellent writer of poetical compositions. His literary contribution includes Sri Krishna Kirttan, Subhadra Harana, Parijat Haran and Abhimanyu Badh which are still in manuscript form.

Auniati Sattra has made a special contribution towards the Assamese literature, especially in the field of prose. The Assamese society is well versed with the early Assamese proses of Sattras, particularly of Bhattadev. Composition of Sanskrit works like Natilatankur on the warfare and its majestic Assamese transcription like Hastamuktabali was carried out in the Auniati Sattra itself.

Prose writing by Sattradhikar Shri Shri Dattadeva is already quoted in his life sketch and the specimen is available in details in the Itihasamala, authored by himself. In the work of Sridhar Baruah, a contemporary of Sattradhikar Gopaldev Charita and the large number of articles published in the then newspapers, hints at the prose styles being followed during the last part of nineteenth century.
The speeches as well as the booklets written on the social problems by Sattradhikar Shri Shri Hemchandra Dev present us with a new kind of prose style. Auniati Sattra has made a special contribution towards the Assamese literature, especially in the field of prose.

6.2. Dramas and Plays

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva introduced an artificial language called Brajvali in his Ankiya-nats which attracted the masses towards his dramatic performances. He used almost all the forms of fine arts—dance, music, drama, poetry and painting in order to take his Bhakti Movement closer to the masses. Recognised as a handy tool in spreading and propagating the saint’s Neo-Vaishnavite Movement, this art form found a consolidated shape in various Sattras spread across the entire state in the subsequent times. Different Sattradhikars and the inmates of the Sattras are still carrying forward the legacy of dramatic compositions.

With the passage of time, the ankiya nats failed to uphold and sustain the interest of the masses. As a result the Vaishnava Gurus started looking for an alternative. The Brajvali language also turned out to be unintelligible to the lay people. Besides, the advent of British Administration in Assam paved the way for the Bengali language to be used extensively across the entire state and brought the Bengali Yatra (dramatic tradition) to the stages which gained tremendous popularity among the common people. The popularity of such dramatic performances inspired the Assamese playwrights to attempt similar ventures in Assamese. A tradition of dramatic compositions based on the Ankiya-nats and written in a mixed language between Brajvali and Bengali set in and it became very popular. Seeing such popularity, Shri Shri Dattadev Goswami, the 11th Sattradhikar of Auniati Sattra started thinking of writing plays in Assamese. This heralded a new tradition in the Sattras, of plays written in Assamese which came to be known as Matribhasar bhaona i.e. vernacular dramatic tradition. The Sattradhikar himself led the way by composing such plays as Kaliya Daman, Kangsa Badh, Janaki Harana, Draupadir Bastra Harana, and Indrajit Badh etc. It was an attempt at protecting the
impeccable ankiya dramatic tradition from the clutches of the Bengali language in tune with his attempt at checking the aggression of Christianity by publishing a newspaper named Asam Bilasinee which went a long way in counterbalancing the misdirected influence of Arunudoi, the first ever newspaper in Assamese published by the Christian missionaries. In this way, one sees a similarity between Mahapurusha Sankaradeva and Shri Shri Dattadev Goswami in that the former used the Brajavali language in lieu of Sanskrit in order to narrow down the differences between his dramatic compositions and the masses, while the latter ushered in the tradition of writing plays in the easily intelligible mother tongue thereby keeping the flow of Bhakti Movement moving smoothly among the masses.

The tradition set by Shri Shri Dattadev Goswami took a firm grounding at Auniati Sattra as its own dramatic tradition during the tenures of the succeeding Sattradhikars. From the viewpoint of performance and stagecraft, there are not many differences between vernacular plays and ankiya-nats, except for some minor differences in language, raga, taal, gayana-bayana, role of the Sutradhara, and the beginning and concluding songs. Since then it has been a mandatory obligation of each new Sattradhikar of the Sattra to compose a play and get it enacted before the inmates and other devotees of the Sattra. As a result, all Sattradhikars of the Sattra since Shri Shri Dattadev Goswami have been composing plays while some of the inmates of the Sattra have also boosted this output with their unique dramatic compositions. Thus the number of such plays that have been composed in the Sattra till now stands at more than ninety.

"First Adhikara of this Sattra got a Sanskrit play Prabodhacandrodody translated into the Assamese language, titled Mahamoh and staged it. Since then, the Adhikaras and the ojas of the Sattra have written several plays but, due to the changes made in those plays from time to time, the identity of the original play writer is now lost. The urge to move ahead in steps with the changing times is noticed in the Auniati Sattra since its inception. The artists of the Sattra also tried to match the tastes of modern times by bringing in changes in the bhaonas (plays) from time to time. Most of the plays available at present were written during the tenure of Prabhu Shri Shri Dattadev and the subsequent
periods only. *Prabhu* Shri Shri Dattadev was an erudite play writer and authored eleven plays in total. These are: *Kalidamana, Kanshabadha, Janakiharana, Draupadira Vastraharana, Pandavar Banagamana, Bharatagamana, Akruragamana, Bhismaparva, Udyogparva, Indrajitbadha* and *Rasalila*. This *Prabhu* was a very studious person and studied the Bengali and Sanskrit plays, the influences of which are seen in his plays. It may be said that the plays that were written after those composed by the Mahapurusas had little originality of the play writers. In some cases even the verses of the scriptures like Dasama or the Puranas were converted to prose and used as dialogues in the *bhaonas*. *Prabhu* Shri Shri Dattadeva did not practice this and composed his plays with sweet sentiments and with originality while retaining the storyline. *Prabhu* Shri Shri Kamalchandradev too followed his predecessor in this regard and added originality to his works. The play *Yugala Milana* is one of the best plays authored by him. This *bhaona* was stage in the Sattra, and on the repeated requests of the residents of Sivasagar, it was again performed at Sivasagar as well. *Prabhu* got this play printed and published on the demands of the people in the *Saka* era 1832” (Sarma, 2004:300-301).

*Prabhu* Shri Shri Dattadev, Shri Shri Kamalchandradeva, Shri Shri Hemchandradev, Shri Shri Bishnuchandadev had used and even the present *Adhikar* Shri Shri Pitambarder uses modern day Assamese language in their plays.

*Satradhikar* Shri Shri Hemchandradev authored a total of 21 which are as follows: *Dandipar, Lakshyabeda, Abhimanyabhadha, Pandabara Ajnatavasa, Parthparajaya, Kuvalasva, Subhadra Harana, Karnajuna, Pravir Patana, Srikrishnara Janma Lila, Daityendra Taraka, Rajasuya Yajna, Teipurar Gayagati Labha, Usa Kumara Parinaya, Daksayajna, Sitaharana, Raslila, Naukvilasa, Kalankabhanjana, Raja Haricandra and Trisankur Svargalabha.*

*Satradhikar* Shri Bishnuchandra authored a few plays and got the *bhaonas* performed on them. Out of them, *Duta Srikrishna or Udyoga Parva* is a successful play.
6.2.a Ankiya-nat and Bhaona at Auniati Sattr (Assamese theatre form)

Ankiya-nat is a religious theatre form created by Shri Shri Sankaradeva in order to spread the message of Vaishnavism. The history of Assamese drama begins with the plays of Srimanta Sankaradeva written in the early sixteenth century. These plays are traditionally known as ankiya-nats and their performance is known as bhaona. “Ankiya” means one act and “Nat” means drama. The theme of ankiya-nat should be related to Krishna. Only after Lord Krishna has appeared on stage and danced across to the shrine the play begins. The events are those of Lord Krishna’s life and the actors who play Krishna and Balaram (Krishna’s elder brother) are believed to be temporarily possessed by the gods. The participants perform this art form by wearing large masks of gods, goddesses, demons and animals. The masks used for plays are huge in size, sometimes reaching up to the waist of the performer.

Shri Shri Sankaradeva has to his credit six plays written between 1518 and 1568. They are Patni Prasad, Kali Daman, Keli Gopal, Rukmini Haran, Parijat Haran and Ram Bijoy. The inspiration for the plays was drawn mainly from the Bhagavata except for the last play, Ram Bijoy the theme of which is drawn from the Ramayana. Ankiya-nat or bhaona, the Neo-Vaishnava Assamese theatre form, is intimately connected with the distinctive genre of vernacular drama created by Shri Shri Sankaradeva in the sixteenth century, which had originally been variously called Yatra (processional), nat (play), and anka (a single act). Later this came to be designated as Ankiya-nat. Bhaona represents the applied aspect of plays written on the ankiya-nat model.

In Auniati Sattr during religious occasions like Janamastami, Raas, tithis of last three Sattradhikars and basarik sabha, ankiya-nat is performed. Each hati performs one bhaona each. Childless couples and people with ill-health vow to give financial assistance to stage a drama In Auniati Sattr, in order to be appointed as a Sattradhikar or Deka Sattradikar, they are required to write one drama minimum.
6.2.b Dramas written by the Sattradhikars of Auniati Sattra

(i) Shri Shri Dutta dev Goswami: Gada parba, Bishma parba, Baratagaman, Indrajitbadh Saktisel, Rass jyatra, Meghnath Badh, Udyog parba, Durpadir Bastra haran, Pandap nirbasan, Dhuba Saritra, Saidhab Sansar or Joydhyt badh, Bhaktabir devbrat.

(ii) Shri Shri Kamal Chandra Dev Goswami: Nisinha Jyatra, Birat Parba, Guru Dakhina,

(iii) Shri Shri Lila Kanta Dev Goswami: Tripur taran

(iv) Shri Shri Hem Chandra Dev Goswami: Dandi Parba, Drupadir Sayambar, Arjunar Lakhya bhed, Partha parajoy, Kurbalashya, Rasila, Janmasthami, Sita haran, Sri krinar Naouka bilash, Tripur aru gayar gati labh, Raja Hari Chandrar Dan, Agathas, Shrikrishnar Janmalila, Kalanka bhanjan, Kumar haran, Arjuni Sanghar, Daityendra Tarakasur bhad, Dakhya jagya, Trisanku Sargaruhan, Dandi parba or Astrabarja Milan, Urbashi Udhar or Pandab Gaurab, Subhadra haran,


(vi) a. Shri Shri Pitambar dev Goswami(present Sattradhikar): Mahamuh upakhyan, Ajamlar-gatilav, Ditir Darpasurna, Atanur Jibanmukti, Bisamitrav Brahma sakti labh, Rukamaggadar Dharma Parikha.

(vi) b. Shri Shri Devananda Dev Goswami(Present Deka Sattradhikar): Ekalabyar Guru Dakhina.
6.2.c Dramas Written by Inmates of Auniati Sattra

(i) Shri Dhar Baruah Oja: *Rajsuya Jagya, Karnabadh*,

(ii) Dharikanath Barnamlaguya: *Tarini Taran, Tarinisen Badh, Tripur*,

(iii) Purnanda Bhuya: *Kirat parba and Nibat Kabach Badh, Sankar Bijoy or Daitandra*,

(iv) Sunaram Bora: *Prabir Patan*,

(v) Gopal Sharma: *Bhaktabir Swatajurn, Tamradhaj Krishna-Darsan*,

(vi) Sagar Chandra Majindar: *Sundhurajurn, Agur – Daitya Badh*,

(vii) Bhadreshow Devsharma Barpujari: *Ananta Mahima*,

(viii) Ghanakanta Saikia Oja: *Urbashir Sap Muchan*.

6.3 News Papers

The remarkable journey of Assamese newspapers which started in the mid of the 19th century, has crossed 150 glorious years by now. The newspapers and magazines published from that time till today has been the treasure house of Assamese language, literature and the society at large. In this journey of 150 years, Majuli holds a special space with respect to the newspapers. It was from Majuli that the first Assamese newspaper published by an Assamese person saw the light of the day.

In 1846, the first newspaper of Assam named *Arunodoi* was published by the American Baptist Missionaries, who were also instrumental in setting up the first printing press in Assam. In the first edition of this newspaper, its self introduction was given as *Arunodoi*, a monthly paper devoted to religion, science and general intelligence – the word religion used in this context, as per the scholars, referred to Christianity in general. Due to the spread of Christianity by the *Arunodoi* a lot of Assamese people of that time were attracted to it and they adopted the religion. This gradual popularity, evolution and
extension of Christianity caused a state of concern for the staunch Hindu clerics, especially the Sattriya people.

Concerned at the growing popularity of Christianity through the Arunodoi, the eleventh Satradhikar of Auniati Sattra, Shri Shri Dutta Dev Goswami accepted the use of the press and newspaper to spread Hinduism as opposed to Christianity. To this effect, he brought a printing press from Kolkata and installed it in Aunitati Sattra and named it the Dharma prakash yantra. The name of the press greatly corroborated the purpose of setting it up and was also the first press to be set up in Assam by its indigenous people (in 1852 Sri Anandaram Dhekial Phukan set up a printing press in then Kolkata by the name of “Calcutta New Press”). It was through this Dharma prakash yantra and the untiring efforts of Sattradhikar Shri Shri Dutta Dev Goswami that, in 1871 - Asam Bilasinee, the second Assamese newspaper and the first by an indigenous person of Assam, was published. In publishing the newspaper, the contribution of Shri Dhar Barua Ojha, a descendant of the renowned Kandari Baruah’s family and a Vaishnav of the Auniati Sattra, was exemplary. In this activity he was like a right hand to the Sattradhikar. The setting up of a printing press in the backward state of Assam in the nineteenth Century and that too in a place like Majuli where the communication and transport facility is not too conducive, and successfully publishing a newspaper from there, in itself is a marvel. By doing so, the Sattradhikar made a mark for himself in the annals of Assamese newspaper publication history. It is also worth mentioning that from this Dharma prakash yantra, in 1876 and in 1888, two magazines named Asam Dipak and Asam Tara respectively were published along with a host of other books.

As opposed to Arunodoi’s spreading of Christianity, Asam Bilasinee began to spread the ideals of Hinduism through its 8-paged content, each page measured 11x8 inches. Even though the primary articles of the newspaper were related to religious activities, there were other write-ups also relating to science, general knowledge and various other news and topics. Renowned scholars like Bholanath Das and Lambodar Borah also published their writings regularly on Asam Bilasinee. However it is deplorable that there
are no copies of this newspaper is preserved at the Sattra or in any places of Assam. Only one edition has been kept preserved in the British Museum in London. The Dharma prakash yantra is kept in the museum of the branch of Auniati Sattra in Teok, Kaliyapani of Jorhat district.

The construction and combination of the words used in Asam Bilasinee differed widely from Arunodoi. Asam Bilasinee played a major role in establishing the usage of a refined Assamese language and also contributed in the progressive development of the Assamese society by developing a public opinion against the abominable rituals prevalent in the Assamese society at that time. Finally after twelve years of dedicated service to the Assamese society, Asam Bilasinee's publication was stopped for ever in 1883 when Auniati Sattra had to be relocated to another place due to soil erosion of the River Brahmaputra.

Even though the publication of the Asam Bilasinee stopped, it permanently brought awareness amongst the Assamese people and their Society towards the sinister design of the Baptist missionaries in spreading the Christianity and that of the Bengalees as well to introduce the Bengalee language in Assam. It brought courage to the Assamese people to counter these two designs that posed to malign the heritage, religion and the language of the Assamese people. The courage, developmental attitude and nationalism which the Sattradhikar displayed, by setting up a printing press in the backward area of Majuli in 1871 including bringing out another periodical, Asam Tara under the editorship of Sridhara Oja. It is also mentioned that from this Dharma prakash yantra, in 1876 and in 1888, two magazines named Asam Dipak and already mentioned- Asam Tara respectively were published along with a host of other books. Publication of a newspaper is the most outstanding literary work of the Auniati Sattra. All these publications of Auniati Sattra mark a golden era in the history of journalism in Assam. As a part of news item at Asam Bilasinee, it is also found that the name and fame of the Sattra attracted the then Chief Commissioner of Assam who visited the Sattra, on 22 March, 1876 and spent a night over there and received blessings from the then Sattradhikar.
6.3.a Sattradhikar Shri Shri Dutta Dev Goswami’s Role on Journalism

“Journalism should be positive and have spiritual sense. At present time there are some negative cases in journalism. These should be eliminated immediately.” This was a part of his statement while Dr Shri Shri Pitamber Deva Goswami, the Sattradhikar of Auniati Sattra told in his speech at the meeting at Majuli in 2012 when he was conferred the first ‘Dutta Deva Goswami Rural Journalism Award’ on a Sunday at Sattra’s Chora. Highlighting the role of journalists, he cited the example who tried to bring out the best in a person by eliminating his evil doings. In this case he gave the example of Valmiki, who was transformed by Maharshi Narad from a rogue into a sage. So the Sattradhikar urged the journalists to take the role of Narad so that they can transform the society into a good one. He also explained the life and activities of Dutta Deva Goswami, the 11th Sattradhikar of the Sattra. He said that Dutta Deva Goswami was the first Assamese religious leader to publish a newspaper 137 years ago. He brought printing machine from Calcutta and published ‘Asam Bilasinee’, ‘Asam Dipika’ and ‘Asam Tara’ from his press called “Dharma Prakash yantra”. To recognise the contribution of this great person, the Auniati Sattra has introduced the “Dutta Deva Goswami Rural Journalism Award” which has created the landmark of Sattra’s contribution in the field of journalism. For the first time the award carried a gold medal, a citation and a packet of books. The following is the present publication by the Sattra- Sanskriti Pallav (in Assamese and English as a bilingual magazine. It is a quarterly magazine published by Sri Sri Auniati Sattra, Majuli and printed at Dharma Prakash yantra of Auniati Sattra, Majuli. Edited by Badan Dolakashhariya under the Patronage of Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Dev Goswami since 1999 regularly after a long gap of printing at Auniati Sattra in 1872).

6.4 Paintings and Handicrafts

6.4.a. Paintings

With the rise of the Neo-Vaisnavism under Shri Shri Sankaradeva, from 16th century onwards, we get a host of concrete examples that can be called painting in its real sense that flourished until the last part of the 19th century. These polychrome paintings,
popularly known as manuscript painting, done on sanchipat or tulapat, were the illustrations of the stories of the Shrimad Bhagavata, the Puranas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata which contained written descriptions along with these paintings. At least one hundred manuscripts, each containing an average forty such paintings, have been discovered so far.

"Paintings were made with great sincerity in the Satras of Assam. These works of art used to adorn the pages of the Sanchipata, along with the religious matters. These were required to add colour and life to the written text. There are many such works in the Auniati Satra. Along with the depiction of the text in paintings, even the pages itself were decorated with drawings of flowers and plants. Had these works been published in the original colours, they would have helped the scholars to make a complete study of the Assamese paintings.

Nowadays, Hastivydyarnava or the book on the elephants is well-known to the educated people of Assam and abroad. This book was probably the property of the royal household and even then it was preserved in the Auniati Sattra. At present the original is preserved in the Auniati Sattra museum at Majuli and it was originally preserved by Shri Shri Hemachandra Goswami. Pandit Goswami showed this work to Mahatma Gandhi along with many other works, during Gandhi’s visit to the state in 1921, despite warnings by the Britishers (Sarma, 2004:316)

Besides the Hastivydyarnava, a few more books like Bhaktiratnavali by Madhava Carana Bhandari Baruva, a devotee of the Auniati Sattra, with painting works are also being preserved in the Auniati Sattra. The bhakats of the Sattra carved artistic works on the wooden trusses and the doors and such carved trusses are still there in the Sattra.

Besides these paintings, some artistic artifacts are also preserved in the Sattra. Among these include one pati (mat) made of ivory, gold kosa-argha (equipment used in rituals), wooden idols, simhasana (altar of the Lord), sarai (stand), colourful fans made of the cane and others. All these items are displayed for the visitors in the Sattra’s museum. At present; there is no one in the Sattra who is skilled in the art of ivory carving. But there are some skilled bhakats who can carve on wood and other who can make fans and such
other works. Beautiful fans with kinkhap decorations made of cane in the Auniati Satra are esteemed possessions of each household of Assam. Even then, because of their intrinsic beauty people continue to purchase them to hang them or to display in their drawing rooms.

6.2. b Handicrafts

Currently the following handicraft articles are also being made and they are the hand fans, wooden sorai, throne (thapana), gosa (lamp stand), kundana (container for pounding betel nut), and Tulsi mala (garland of Ocimum tenuiflorum) and so on. Earlier the Sattra used to have the expertise in making boats also but now this is practically non-existent.

Fabrication of a beautiful hand fan relies heavily on the selection of good quality cane. After bringing the cane from the woods it is left in the sunlight to dry. The cane is then cut and again dried in sunlight. When its moisture has reduced, it is sliced into small pieces and the final process of drying starts. These small slices are beautifully weaved and a hand fan is made. The spaces between the cane slides are blocked by rubbing with the seeds of Ghila (a kind of wild creeper (entada scandens). To bring the shine and for cleaning, it is rubbed by lemon slices. The handle of the hand fan is made from the stalk of a betel nut plant. After giving it a proper shape it is coloured by a natural mineral called hengul (vermilion) and haital (Yellow arsenic) are crushed into a soft powder and mixed with sealing wax and applied on the handle of the fan. The polishing of this coating is done by rubbing it with the leaves of Keteki plant (screw pine).

The entire steps of the fabrication process like cutting of the cane, weaving of the fan, making the handle and fixing to the fan, decorating with velvet is divided among different people. Hence the labour and income associated with it is also different as per the nature of the job done by each individual. Though the exact year of starting of this art is not known, it has been continuing for a long period of time and it has passed down the ages as a traditional heritage.
The above facts and figures have been collected from a bhakat of Auniati Sattra named Shri Drona Pathak. He came to the Sattra at a tender age of 7 years, from his hometown Lakhimpur; this skilled hand fan fabricator is now 47 years old. With such a huge experience it is expected of him to teach this to the young bhakats of the Sattra, so that this tradition persists.

Shri Pushpa Sharma is a veteran Sattrite of the Auniati Sattra having spent around 38 long years in the Sattra. Currently aged 50 years, he came here, when he was just 11 years old, from his native place of Narayanpur near North Lakhimpur. When a bhakat from the Sattra went to his native place looking for young people, he willingly comes here. During his stay here he learnt bhaona, natua, gopi nach and apsara nach. Besides these drama and dance forms, he also learnt the art of making hand fan from Shri Bhola Ram Gyan and Shri Bhola Ram Pathak. This learning went on to make a large impact on his life. Turning into an entrepreneur he took a loan of Rs 3000 /- from one Shri Dinesh Sarma at an interest of 10% for purchasing a small motor. This was repaid on his behalf by Sri Tileswar Sharma who was not in favour of taking a loan. The motorized unit’s operation was started in 1992. He again took a loan of Rs 12000 /- in 1994 from the State Govt in a subsidy scheme for purchase of raw materials which he repaid in a small period of 9 months only. His exquisite hand and machine crafted products earned him a lot of reputation and he exhibited his creations in Mysore, Guwahati, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Digboi and other places. His creations include bisoni (hand fan), ban-batti (a cup with a stand), sarai (a platter or tray mounted on a stand), ghot (a water pot), fullani (flower vase), wooden coconut, owl and so on.

6.5 Dance and Music

Assam is a land which thrives in music and dance tradition. It has three distinct traditional dance forms with- the Ojapali (basically a folk form that depicts stories of Puranas and Hindu epics), the Devadari and the Sattriya. Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449-1568) developed the Sattriya dance as a part dramatic performance. After a long period
of time the Sattriya dance of Assam was recognized as a classical dance form of India on the 14th of November of 2001 by Sangeet Natak Akademi.

Sattriya dance means the dance performed in Satras, it is related with the devotion of God. Saint Sankaradeva introduced the dance tradition in the 16th century by incorporating different folk or tribal elements scattered in different places of North-east India as well as he took rudiment elements from Natyasastra, the scientific dance treatise of India, Abhinay darpana and other text. The Sattra styled dance is basically Krishna centric, because Krishna is the main hero of the Neo-Vaisnavite movement”.

“The Sattriya dance is evolved from ankiya bhaona, the Assamese vaisnava dramatic tradition established by Sankaradeva. It forms the major component part in the plays of ankiya bhaona. The ankiya bhaona is a kind of audio-visual device for the propagation of bhakti as well as highly stylized form which at the sametime combined nritya, natya and sangita. For any movement of each chapter in bhaona, there is a special kind of dance. The entrance and exit of characters including their movement to a different scenes or contexts are carried through dance and there are specific names such dance i.e. Sutradhari nac, Pravesar nac, calanar nac, yuddar nac and so on. Even the elaborate preliminaries, called gayan-bayan are also dance pieces in group performances” (Goswami, 1984: 94-104).

6.5. a Sattriya dance perfomed in Auniati Sattra

Born in the year 1979, Shri Prasanna Bhuyan received his training in Sattriya dance under Shri Madhab Bora Bayan, Shri Nabin Bora Bayan of Auniati Sattra and Shri Jugen Dutta Bayan of Kamalabari Sattra of Majuli at the age of 10 yrs. In midst of sober and serene atmosphere of the Sattra and warm affection of his godfather Madhab Bora Bayan, Shri Prasanna Bhuyan’s attachment with the Sattra grew gradually and he merged himself with the vast field of Sattriya culture. This devoted artist is also taking this rich culture of Assam to other corners of India.
The present researcher had the great privilege of attending an eye catching function of Sattriya dance, performed by a group of 18 members from Auniati Sattra, led and guided by Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Deva Goswami. The dance was performed on 2nd of March, 2012 at Nandi Temple, in Bull Temple Road, Busavagudi, Bengaluru. The dance started at 7.45 p.m. and continued till 9.15 P.M. The performance included gayan bayan, Iswar bandana, bhortal nritya, chali nach, gosha dhemali, mati aakhara; apsara nach. The dance was highly appreciated and loved by the audience. Other ethnic and cultural groups were also invited to perform in the festival. Among all the performances, the audience admired the Sattriya dance most.

The researcher, while attending the festival, conducted an unstructured interview of a localite Mr. Krishna Doddaballapur Shivashankar, Ph.D. research scholar, University of Mysore. On questioning, he said that he enjoyed the function and loved the Sattriya performance. He had previously attended a function where a Bihu dance was performed. He loved and appreciated the performance, and he looked forward to see another Assamese dance. When he came to know that a Sattriya performance was going to be performed at Nandi temple, he came with enthusiasm to enjoy the dance. According to him, Sattriya dance is a good exercise too, and due to this the physical features of the dancers are beautifull and attractive. He greatly enjoyed the show and wished to see more dances from Assam in future. He expressed his desire to visit Majuli and know more about the Sattriya culture. He also expressed his experience to his fellow friends. He mentioned that Sattriya dance schools should be established in the rest of the country as it is a beautiful and graceful dance form and it is beneficial to maintain one’s physical built.

Sattradhikar Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Deva Goswami has been contributing immensely in the research and development of Sattriya dances of Assam. Shri Madhab C. Barbayan, aged 75 years, said that the following types of Sattriya dance are taught and practiced in the Sattra.
(i) **Mati-Aakhora:**

*Mati-aakhora* means exercise done on the ground. The *Sattriya* dance training begins with these *mati-aakhoras.* After completion of all the *mati-aakhoras,* the dancer can be taught the individual dance numbers of *Sattriya.* *Mati-aakhoras* are foundation for the learners to make a healthy physical, mental and spiritual set-up which is very necessary for a classical dancer. It is worth mentioning that some of these *mati-aakhoras* are similar with some yogic postures or asana (based on yoga Shashtra), which help the learners to maintain a physical and mental discipline. For example - *chakrasan* of yoga is similar with the *thiyolon* of *mati-akhora,* which helps to make the back strong and the body light, which is essential for the dancer. Again *dhanurasan* is similar with the *juk kamitona* of *mati-aakhora,* which makes the body active, strengthens the thighs and helps to remove extra fats from belly areas.

According to Shri Barbayan the *mati-aakhoras* are broadly categorized into two parts — one part is (a) pure exercises and the other (b) basic dance units. Pure exercises are based on some acrobatic poses. For example— *thiyo lon,* *athu lon,* *tamal musura,* *morai Pani Khowa* and so on. These exercises are generally not used in dance, though there are some exceptions. For instance — we can refer to the *natuwa* dance of Auniati Sattra, where in these exercises or acrobatic poses are extensively used. On the other hand most of the *mati aakhoras* belong to the basic dance units.

As has already been mentioned that the *mati aakhoras* are grammatical forms for Sattriya dance, and at the same time they are the exercise as well as the structural basis of this dance form. That is why, almost the entire body postures are covered by the *mati-aakhoras* and they are a. *utha* (rising), b. *boha* (squatting), c. *thiyo* (standing position), d. *calana* (gati or gait), e. *pak* (turns and spins), f. *jap* (jump), g. *ulaha* (undulating or wavy movements), h. *citika* (springing), i. *bura or duba* (porpoising) as so on. On the other hand, the *mati-aakhoras* are categorised under eight different broad units, such as - *ora,* *chota,* *jalak,* *jap,* *muruka,* *khar,* *pak* and *lon.* These are categorised on the basis of different characters and application patterns. Under these broad units, there are many
sub-units. Like there are four types of ora - purush ora, prakriti or stri ora, phul ora, and lahi ora. Like that there are at least six types of chota- ora chota, kati chota, udha chota.

Mati-aakhara is divided into two kinds - (1) tandava and (2) lasya. Tandava style of dance represents the masculine and vigorous expression or movements. On the other hand lasya style of dance represents the smooth, delicate, graceful, gentle expression or movements. This division of tandava and lasya is observed in mati-aakhoras. It is worth mentioning that Sattriya dance is basically a lasya based dance form. So, though the division of tandava and lasya exists in this dance form, yet in the Satra do not have extreme vigorous expression in tandava part of Sattriya dance. Basically it is divided on the basis of general nature or temperament of man and woman. Anyway - this division is strictly followed in the mati-aakhora. For example - ora (the basic stance or position of Sattriya) is divided into purush ora and prakriti ora which represent the male and female elements. On the other hand, one of the bhramaris is also divided on the basis of male and female elements, that is purush pak and prakriti pak. It is worth mentioning that the dance numbers of Sattriya are also divided into two types—a) purusha bhangir nach (male style of dancing) or tandava style dance numbers and prakriti or stri bhangir nach (female style of dancing) or lasya style dance numbers so on.

After the completion of mati-aakhora, when the learner’s physique becomes soft and pliable, then, he is generally taught nadubhangi nach, a Sattriya dance number.

Some important mati-aakhoras practiced at the Sattra are mentioned below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF THE MATI-AAKHORAS</th>
<th>WHERE TO APPLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Kaso-bandh</td>
<td>As exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dhenu-bhonga</td>
<td>As exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Boithaki athu-bhari sunga</td>
<td>As exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Har-mosora</td>
<td>As exercise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Saloni-saraka As exercise
6. Moira-pani-khowa As exercise
7. Angatha-saraka As exercise
8. Kesumuriya As exercise
9. Dui hate angatha-saraka As exercise
10. Telupi As exercise
11. Bagh-jap In dance
12. Dui bharir boithaki lan As exercise
13. Ehate diya athu-lan Presently used in Dance
14. Dui hator thiyo-lan Presently used in Dance
15. Ehate diya thiyo-lan As exercise
16. Dui hat saboti dhara thiyo-lan As exercise
17. Oporoloi theng kori dui-hate khoj karhi jowa urdha-lan As exercise
18. Sit-khar As exercise
19. Olta-khar As exercise
20. Kati-khar in dance
21. Dui hatere bhumi-lan As exercise
22. Soman ora As exercise
23. Duifale kati-ora As exercise
24. Beng-jap As exercise
25. Dui hator maje bhoi ni sarakowa As exercise
26. Prithivi-ghran lan As exercise
27. Uthal jap As exercise
28. *Tukura jap*  
As exercise

29. *Hanuman-lan*  
As exercise

30. *Saliki-sip*  
As exercise

31. *Juti*  
In dance

32. *Tewai*  
In dance

33. *Soman-sota*  
In dance

34. *Kati-sota*  
In dance

35. *Jola-pak*  
In dance

36. *Tukura-pak*  
In dance

37. *Hator samak*  
In dance

38. *Hat-kapani*  
In dance

39. *Soman hator ora*  
In dance

40. *Hator ful-ora*  
In dance

41. *Kar-pak*  
In dance

42. *Hat-pokowa*  
In dance

*Ura-pak, Ugha-pak now a day is used in dance.*

(ii) *Gayan-bayan* is a group performance accompanied by *khol* [*khol* also called *Mridanga* is a folk drum of North East India. It is made of clay with different diameter sizes of heads on either side. The right side head (with a diameter of approximately 4 inches) is smaller and has a larger head on the left size (with a diameter of approximately 10 inches)] and *tal* (Cymbals). There are different types of *tals* in use like *bhortal, khutital, karatal* and *mandira.* *Bhortal,* the largest pair of cymbals is used by the *Vaishnavas.* The smallest, *khutital* is played by *Oja-pali* performers. The man who plays different *bols* (beats) in his *khol* is called *bayan* and he, who usually leads in the singing in the performance, is called *gayan* and the name is derived from the leader. The costume of
gayan-bayan consists of a white dhoti, a white seleng and a white head-gear. The performance of gayan-bayan is of two types- in daily or occasional prayer services and in ankiya bhaona. Gayan-bayan consists of different dhemalis or preliminary performances. The numbers of the dhemalies in the Sattra are twelve and two types of sahinis (types of position) are there with each of the dhemalis. The two types of sahinis are thiya sahini and boha sahini and number of thiya sahini is 2 and boha-sahini is 25. The sahinis are played just before the dhemalis begin. The dance is mainly based on nritta and it is a dance of purus-bhangi. The whole performance is divided into two parts-ramdani and colokar nach.

(iii) Gosai-pravesar nach:

The dance of Krishna or Rama Chandra is combinely called Gosai-pravesar nach i.e. the dance of the God Krishna. This dance is known in some quarters as Krishna bhangi or manjura-bhangi. The costume of Krishna covers a yellow-coloured dhoti, a small black coat with quarter sleeves (bukucola), cross-bands and waist bands of broad silvery laces and a cove for the back (prista-dhara). Besides these, a head gear (mukut) with a peacock feather, a garland of flower (angamala) and brass nupur (a jingling anklet) are added. The costume of Rama Chandra is similar with Krishna, but the prista dhara and peacock feather on the mukut is empty.

At the time of performance of ankiya bhaona, sutradhara announces the entrance of the God. The curtain is held by two elderly men. The arch of torches is also presented. The daba and kaliya are played by the accompanists. The orchestra plays the pravesar gita according to the text of the play and the Lord enters the stage under the curtain. All people of the assembly make obeisance to him by striking their heads against the ground. After that the God begins to dance.

There are different types of dances of Krishna according to the plays written by Srimanta Madhavadeva. These are the lavanu churi nritya (when Krishna stole cream from the houses of milkmaids), the rasar nritya (Krishna dance with milkmaids in Vrindavana), the kaliya-daman nritya (dance on the hoods of the snake Kali) and the like. Regarding the
Rama Chandra, there are dances like the dances of Rama in his fight against demons: the dance at the time of fixing the string in the bow at the Sita’s Sayambara and the like.

(iv) Sutradhari Nach:

The Sutradhara is the principal role in the ankiya bhaona. He is assumed like a thread because from the beginning to the end he has to play the leading role in the bhaona. The costume of sutradhara consists of a white skirt (ghori), a long sleeved jama, waist bend and a white- head gear. For ornaments, he puts on silver bangles (gamkharu), a lash with a drum like golden bead in the middle (mata moni), ear ornament of gold (unti) and brass anklets (nupur).

He enters the stage after the dhemalis are over. He enters under the cover of a curtain held by two men and an arch of torches which is called angnigarh. When the screen or curtain is taken off, the sutradhara is seen in a kneeling position with his head and hands upto the elbows touching the ground. He then slowly rises to a standing position and salutes the God, assembly and the ritual heads wishing to get blessing from them to continue the whole performance without any obstacle in the way. Then he starts to dance in a slow rhythm and then recites the ‘nandi sloka’, benedictory singing from Veda. When the Sutradhara recites the initial bhatima, he exhibits different hand gestures to signify the subject matter of the verse.

Sutradhari is danced as a solo performance in Sattriya, but it is a bit different from that of ankiya bhaona. Gits and sloks of bhaona are not performed here. In such occasion, the dance is mainly based on the nritya.

The dance is basically based on nritya and abhinaya as well as tandava, or purus-bhangi. In Sattriya dance, there is no division of tandava and lashya rather they call it purus-bhangi and prakriti bhangi.

The whole performances of Sutradhari dance is divided into many sequences. They are- arambhani, ragarnach, slokarnach and gatarnach are worth mentioning. Abhinaya is performed only in the slokar nach. Others are the pieces of pure dance and nritya.
The hastas (hand postures) used in sutradhari dance are mainly patak, alapadma, kartarimukha and sandamsa.

(v) Chali Nach:

Chali nach is a significant characteristic form of sattriya dance. The dancers wear the blue short sleeved blouse, loose skirt (ghuri), a special decorated wrapper (riha), a waist band (tangali), a thin veil over the hair and ornaments like galpata, madali, jonbiri, dugdugi in neck, gamkharu for hands and nupur are used. The word chali probably echos a natya term for a kind of foot work (pada) known as pada-charika or chari, which is defined by Bharata in Natyasasstra as the movement of legs, thighs and hips. On the otherhand, the chali nach represents chali or spreading out of tail of a peacock or similar bird. It is mentioned in the Haramohan chapter of Kirttana like the following:

“pindhi sari khonte jali
Jen moira dhare cali”.

(This means the dancer looks like a peacock spreading its wings).

The chali nach is basically based on nritya and abhinaya and it is a dance of prakriti bhangi. There are three parts of the dance ramdani, gitar nach and mela nach. On the otherhand the chali nach has two types – i) Suddhya chali and ii) Rajagharia chali. There are 8 numbers of ramdani in Suddhya chali and 4 in rajagharia chali. Again in rajagharia chali the ramdanis are divided into 4 groups- saru (minor), bar (major), kalakatiya and hajowaliya.

There is abhinaya in gitar nach and the remaining pieces are of pure dance. The hasta used in the dance are mainly patak, alapadma, kartarimukha, and sandamsa.

(vi) Nadubangi Nach:

In Auniati tradition as well as in other Sattras nadubangi is the first dance taught to the learners. It is a dance of three pairs of gopas and gopis performing to the tune of
one of the five songs of the Rasa-jumura of Saint Madhavadeva. It is a dance of Krishna with gopa-gopi in Vrindavana. The costumes of the three pairs are different. One pair wears a costume of Krishna (prishadhara are peacock feature not used), the other two pairs wear the costume of jhumura nach & chali nach.

The dance is basically based on nritya and abhinaya. There are two parts of the dance ramdani and gitar nach. There is an abhinaya in gitar nach. Ramdani is a pure dance or nritya. It is dance of Purus bhangi. The hastas used in the dance are mainly patak alapadma, kartarimukha, and sandamsa and mrigasirsasa hasta.

(vii) Gopi pravesar Nach:

The incoming dance performance of the gopis of Vraja is the gopi-pravesar nach. It is also peformed in other situation out of the bhaona. It is a female dance form. Besides the dance of gopis of Vraja, it consists of Yasoda, Daivaki and other female characters. The dancers wear a skirt (ghuri), wrapper and an upper wrapper (mekhela and riha or celeng), a black blouse and a thin veil over the hair.

The dance is basically based on nritya and it is prakriti bhangi. There are two parts of the dance bajnar nach and slokar nach. Both are pure dance. The hastas used in the dance are patak, alapadma, kartavimuka, and sandamsa.

(viii) Jhumura Nach:

Madhavadeva was the founder of jhumura nach. The dance is taken from his plays Raas jhumura and Cor dhara jhumura. The dancers of jhumura nach are usually small boys of the Sattra. The dancers wear a loose skirt (ghuri), embroidered waist coat (buka-cola), man like pagri i.e. head gear and nupur. Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Dev Goswami, Sattradhikar of Auniati Sattra tried to explain the meaning of jhumura in his book by tracing some clues from other jhumura dances of different places. He says that the dance in circle with group is called jhumura. When Krishana disappeared from the Vrindavana at the time of raas nritya, the gopis act as Krishna by saying as moi Krishna moi Krishna (meaning I am Krishna, I am Krishna). Hence the feeling of
gosip of that moment is depicted in the dance. Besides the songs from Madhavadeva’s plays, bargits of Sankaradeva’s plays are also taken for this dance form.

The dance is basically based on nritya and abhinaya and it is a dance of Purus bhangi. The whole performance is divided into three parts— ramdani, gitar nach and mela nach. In gitar nach there is abhinaya and remaining two are pure dance or nritya. The hastas used in the dance are mainly patak, alapadma, kartarimukha, sandamsa and mrigasirsa.

(ix) Oja Pali:

Oja Pali is actually the groups of chorus singers and dancers, with oja as the leader and palis as his assistants. A total of three or four palis may be required for the dance and the principal one among them is called the daina pali. Apart from dancing, they also sing and play small cymbals, relating stories from the Epics and the Puranas. The songs sung by these people are basically in the Sanskrit language and are of two types: malaci or malanci geets and jagar. There is a typical pattern of dressing for the ojas as well. He has to wear a pyjama or a skirt (ghuri) along with bangles, ear-ring and nupur and also has to tie a tangali.

(x) Dashavatara: The Dashavatara dance described the 10 incarnations (avatars) of the Hindu god Vishnu, the incarnations are 1st Matsy (Fish), 2nd Kurma (the Tortoise), 3rd Varaha (The Boar), 4th Narasimha (the man-Lion), 5th Varmana (Dwarf), 6th Parashurama, 7th Lord Rama, 8th Balarame, 9th Lord Krishna, 10th Kalki. Dashavatara dance are actually the Assamese way of depicting the stories from the Bhagavata regarding the ten main incarnations of God. Gayan and hayan present these mudras. These were completely new innovations, devised by Srimanta Sankaradeva. It deserves mention here that the book Srihastmuktawali illustrates 71 types of mudras against 67 types mentioned in Natya-shastra.24. If these mudras were depicted in any sculpture in Deoghar or for that matter in any other place, it must have been the depiction of Sankari and Sattriya dance form only, done at the behest of some Assamese king.
Shri Khagendra Nath Lekharu, *a majimdar* of the Sattra born in 1943 in a small hamlet called Pomua gaon of Majuli was brought to Auniati Sattra at a tender age. There he started his formal education by staying with Purna Kanta Pathak of the Sattra. But he cut short his academic career at Ninth Standard to devote himself fully to the *Sattriya* Education System. He soon acquired mastery over a number of Sattriya dance forms like *natuwa, mati aakhara, chali, Sutradhar, jhumura* and *apsara*. He earned a special artistry in the dance form *Dashavatara* so much that he even at his late 60’s, is one of the outstanding *Sattriya* dance performers. He is one of the pioneers of performing *Dashavatara Nitriya* on the basis of Jaidev’s ‘*Geeta Govinda*’. Shri Lekharu performed innumerable stage shows in both and outside the state and earned great laurels. Besides being a dance mastero, Shri Lekharu also has a flare for writing and occasionally contributing to newspapers and magazines. He also wrote several books on *Sattriya* culture. Some of his published works include the titles like *Sattra Aru Samaj* and *Guru Vani*. At one time he came to be recognised as the Principal *gayan* of the Sattra. Some of the *Bhakti Geeti* (religious song) sung by Shri Khagen Lekharu repeatedly broadcast through the All India Radio Station of both Dibrugarh and Guwahati respectively. Side by side Shri Lekharu has been a successful actor and played his roles very perfectly in several stage drama and bhaona for which he was awarded with silver and gold medals.

He performed *Dashavatara Nitriya* in the auditorium of National Museum, Delhi during November, 2004, *Sattriya Dances at the Sankardev Kala Khestra, Guwahati, Assam, Sattriya Dances at the Rabindra Bhavan, and Lakh Ram Baruah Sadan, Guwahati, Assam, Satriya Dances at the Inaugural function of Unnayan Bhavan, Jorhat where Hon’ble Chief Minister of Assam was present. He also performed in many functions in and around the state.

He has been awarded Gold and Silver Medals for best performances of *Dashavatara Nitriya and Sutradhar Nitriya* at a function held at the Guwahati Branch of Auniati Sattra.(North Guwahati), Silver Medals for best performing the role of *Harichandra* in the drama *Raja Harichandrar Dan*. This drama was written by *Sattradhikar* Shri Shri Hemchandra Goswami of Auniati Sattra.
For publicizing the *Sattriya* dance a committee was formed in the year 1998 as *Sattriya Sangit Sikha Parisad*, under the leadership of Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Deva Goswami, *Satradhikar*, Auniati Sattra. Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Deva Goswami is the President and Shri Dilip Changkakoti is the Secretary of the Committee. This *Parisad* prepared a syllabus. On the basis of the syllabus, a number of institutions grew up. This *Parisad* is known as *Sattriya Sanskriti Vidhya Parisad*. Under this *Parisad*, the various *Sangit* institutions are established in various places which are mentioned below:

**Maran-na-khat**: Auniati Sanskriti Kalakendra

*Prasikhak* (trainer): Shri Bipin Saikia

**Naharkatiya**: Sattriya Sangeet Vidyalaya

*Prasikhak* (trainer): Shri Chandrasekhar Saikia

**Dibrugarh**: Khuyang Naharoni Sri Sri Gobinrda

---

Sanskritic Kendra

**Tinsukia**: Sattriya Kala Kristi Kendra

*Prasikhak* (trainer): Shri Gajen Bhuyan

**Majuli, Jagraimukh**: Sattriya Sangeet Vidyalaya

**Da- Gaon**: Da- Gaon Sangeet Vidyalaya

*Prasikhak* (trainer): Shri Bipin Saikia

**Tengakhat**: Sattriya sanskritic Kala Niketan

*Prasikhak* (trainer): Shri Subhash Chetiya

**Pashim Dhakuakhana**: Sattriya Sangeet Vidyalaya

*Prasikhak* (trainer): Shri Niron Kakoti

**North Guwahati**: Uttar Guwahati Auniati Sakha Satra

*Prasikhak* (trainer): Shri Badan Bhuyan and Shri Girish Pathak
6.5. b Music

Music and Sattra are two sides of the same coin. In a sense, the Sattras may be termed as music schools as well. Some of the Sattras in Assam are busy preserving the old traditional systems right in their original forms while some are making changes as well as new additions to them. Auniati Sattra is maintaining the tunes of the old songs through the Oja tradition, and along with this the Adhikaras have been encouraging new compositions from time to time. There is a speciality in the tunes of the bairagi nam recited in the nam sessions in the Sattra and these tunes have spread to the villages too. There are a few rare or nonconventional talas found in this Sattra. The beats of those talas are quite different from the common ones and are used as beats in the playing of the khola (mridanga like drum) itself.

Auniati Sattra did not remain satisfied with the translation of the work Srihastamuktavali. All these hand poses are practiced by the natuwas (dances) and the Ojas of the Sattra at the same time.

Both the biographers of Vamshigopaldeva and Ramadeva, the author of the book Mahamoha have said about Niranjandeva that he was a poet par excellence. There are many songs in Assamese, Bengali, and Hindi and Maithili languages in the books of the Auniati Sattra.

The Bhakti movement in India during the 14th to 16th Century gave birth to a new type of religious songs. The same effect was also seen in Assam in the Neovaishnavite movement spearheaded by Srimanta Sankaradeva. He and his disciple, Shri Madhavadeva, composed a lot of devotional songs which came to be known as Borgeet. The principles of Vaishnavism and also the life of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama are depicted in a very simple manner in these Borgeets. The songs are fully devoted to the religious and spiritual aspects of God’s life. Apart from the simple, spiritual lyrics, the Borgeets are found to be very melodious in nature. This classical music bears a close resemblance to the Hindustani Classical music, but at the same time has its own identity as well. Borgeet follows various Ragas like any other Hindu classical music but there is
generally no mention of any tala (beats) except for a few, by the two Saints. The use of musical instruments are not necessary for Borgeet but usage of instrument like ‘Khol’ ‘Taal’ and ‘Flute’ are generally observed and its adds a charm to the songs. The great litterateur Dr. Banikanta Kakoti has named Borgeet as ‘Noble Numbers’. Similarly literate Kaliram Medhi called them ‘Great songs’ or ‘Songs Celestial’. Historian Devendranath Bezbaruah mentioned them as ‘Holy Songs’.

Srimanta Sankaradeva probably started writing Borgeets in his mid age around 1515 A.D. The first known Borgeet written by him was ‘Mon Meri Ram Saranehi Laagu’ during his pilgrimage to Badrikashrama. From historical records, it has come to light that he wrote around two hundred and forty Borgeets. Shrimanta Sankaradeva’s disciple Srimanta Madhavadeva later took the trend of Borgeet forward and wrote around 157 Borgeets. He added thirty four Borgeets of Srimanta Sankaradeva along with his composition and put them together in a new book of Borgeet. These songs are still sung in the present Assamese society, in the Sattras of Assam and village Namghar too.

Almost all the Borgeets were written in the Brajavali language. Both the Saints accepted this language as the base of their Bhakti movement. As per living litterateurs, Borgeet has completed a journey of more than 500 years and still brings freshness in the hearts of an Assamese.

In Auniati Sattra, the practice of Borgeet is a daily routine where the Bhakats are given lessons on Borgeet. If a visitor walks by the hatis of the Sattra, he generally hears the melodious notes of Borgeet being sung by the bhakats. The researcher on one of her visit, heard one such melodious song and entered a baha and found a boy named Jitu Saikia singing a Borgeet ‘Gopale ki Goti Koile, Govinde Ki Mati Dile’ (what state did God bring me in and what advice did he give). The boy was aged just ten years and he was practicing with a Khol. The piece of music was such that it left an everlasting impression on the mind of the researcher.
6.6 Sattra and the Society

The celibate bhakats are the attracted section of devotees to our society and are needed in the various spheres of religious and cultural life of the society. They are sought at the time of distress, illness in the family, at the event of death of someone and similarly at the time of happy moments also.

The celibates are invited to the individual families to perform certain functions which are religious in nature in the form of reading or recitation of some holy books. On certain cases congregational chanting are also arranged in which elderly persons who generally attend nritya-prasanga i.e. prayers offered daily in the Sattra are also invited. Celibate devotees are regarded as special invitees on these occasions. They generally initiate and lead the congregational chanting. The purpose of organizing such rites are varied, such as well being of the family, recovery from illness or any other misfortune, marriage, birth and death anniversaries or inauguration of a new house and so on. Such rites with the association of these holy persons are believed to have the effect of averting any misfortune and the power of making a happy beginning. The celibates invited for such purposes are offered new cloth (one handloom towel), a little cash and some eatables (rice, dal, potato, salt, mustard oil and egg plant) which are together termed as sidha. As the celibate bhakats do not eat anything cooked in other’s house and so softened rice, curd, sugar or jaggery are given to them.

Other than these household religious services, celibates are also required for some other purposes. Some of them also know the art of calculating the fortune by reading the horoscope and some again give holy water by uttering spells for curing certain diseases. In this context the researcher would like to mention about Shri Binanda Chandra Sharma Pujari of uttar hati of the Sattra. He is an astrologer.

The nama-Kirttana, i.e. congregational chanting of the names of Lord Krishna are held publicly in various places of Majuli on different context. Such congregational chanting is held without break for a definite period and it is called Palnam. The celibate devotees take leading part in this context as initiators or leaders of the singing group.
6.7 The Relation of the Sattra with the Followers

Auniati Sattra’s dedicated followers spread over entire Assam. Without the followers the existence of the Sattra would be meaningless. The Sattra generally keep regular touch with the followers. Due to these the poorest of the followers living in the far remote areas of the state, could remain aware of their relationship with the Sattra and avail opportunity to learn about the Bhagavati Dharma. *Rajmedhis* visit the *Sakha* Sattras, (branches), *Ajnàoara* Sattra (affiliated) and *chahar* (an ecclesiastical area; a diocese) and keep regular touch with the followers. By grouping up the neighbouring villagers of the followers of Auniati Sattra together under a single unit, it is seen that the entire state is divided into separate administrative units. The office bearer of the Sattra in charge of such a *chahar* is called *rajmedhi*. *Pasonis* are considered as assistant of *rajmedhi*. 
For each *chahar*, the *Adhikara* appoints the *baramedhis* and *pakhimedhis*. They are under the *rajmedhi*. These *rajmedhi* are allowed to give initiation (bhajan) to new followers with the sanction of the *Adhikara*. During the *chahar* visits of the *Adhikara*, it is the duty to the *rajmedhi* to introduce the followers to the *Adhikara* and in his absence the *pasoni* do the same on behalf of the *rajmedhi*. The responsibility of collecting the *guru kar* from the followers lie on the *rajmedhi* or the *Pasoni*. When the *Adhikara* is on his visit to *chahra*, the *rajmedhi* and the *pakanis* arrange for the accommodation for *Adhikara* and for that they inform the followers to make the necessary arrangements. On the invitation of the followers, the *rajmedhi* can visit the *chahars* with the permission of the *Adhikara*. But without the permission of the *Adhikaar* or the invitation of the followers they are not allowed to visit *chaharas* on their own. *rajmedhi* are also assigned with some other works of the Sattra. For that, they cannot move out the Sattra all the time. Shri Ranjan Saikia aged 35 years, a *pasoni* of Auniati Sattra informed that *Pasonis* generally visit their respective villages for the annual collections, and in this way the relation between the Sattra and the followers are continued slickly. Shri Pushpa Sharma, aged 50 years informed that there are total 160 numbers of *rajmedhi* in Auniati Sattra against 160 numbers of *chahars*. 

157
Table No: 6 The table below shows the names of the *chahars* and the initiated disciples of each *chahars*

*Chahar* means an ecclesiastical area; a diocese. Several village constitute one *chahar*, which is under the supervision of one *rajmedhi* of Auniati Sattra.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL.No.</th>
<th>Chahars</th>
<th>Sisyas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Sadiya : Opar Sadiya, Tengakhat Sadiya, Dibru Sadiya, Khowang Sadiya, Uttar sadiya (Dhemaji), Uttar Sadiyal (Lakhimpur-Majuli), Na-patoni Uttar Sadiya Jonai)</td>
<td>1,07,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Rahiyal (Earlier at Dibrugarh, after 1950 earthquake it is now at Tinsukia)</td>
<td>3,491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Na-Patoni Maithang (Tinsukia)</td>
<td>2,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Tipam (Dibrugarh), Tipam Disangnola Abhoypur</td>
<td>8,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Abhoypur (Maran): Mahmora Abhoypur, Bor Abhoypur, Golaghat Abhoypur, Dihing Abhoypur Na-Patoni, Dikhou Abhoypur</td>
<td>15,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Disiyal (Near Dikhou River): Disang-Dikhou Disiyal, Dihing Disiyal</td>
<td>10,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Lakhtaka (Both side of Dikhou River): Namti-Namdang Lakhtakiya, Dikhou Lakhtaka, Disang Lakhtaka, jaji Lakhtaka</td>
<td>7,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Langkakiya (Sivsagar)</td>
<td>3,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Silpani (Sivsagar)</td>
<td>3,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Bocha (Aamguri)</td>
<td>2,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Charing (Sivsagar)</td>
<td>4,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Jaji Nara (Jamuguri)</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Toratoli (Near Dikhou River)</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Holongapar (Jorhat)</td>
<td>3,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Pirakata (Jorhat)</td>
<td>3,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Jaji Disiyan</td>
<td>4200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Saraibahi (Jorhat)</td>
<td>7,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL No.</td>
<td>Chahars</td>
<td>Siryas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Puroni Dichoi (Jorhat Dist. and near by areas)</td>
<td>2,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Manaimaj (Jorhat)</td>
<td>1,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Marangi (Golaghat), Marangi Thengal,</td>
<td>5,661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marangi Thengal Barchahar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Doyang Thengal (Golaghat), Bar Thengal,</td>
<td>14,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uttar Thengal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Namsaniya (Golaghat)</td>
<td>2,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Naharani (Jorhat), Uttar Naharani</td>
<td>9,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Dergaon (Jorhat)</td>
<td>1,829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Nangaltup Bosa (Near Doyang River)</td>
<td>4,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Gayan Gaon (Jorhat)</td>
<td>1,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Pakhimoriya (Jorhat)</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Doyang Chahar</td>
<td>2,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Parbatiya (Golaghat) : No.1, 2 &amp; 3 Parbatiya</td>
<td>15,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Kalabari (Sonitpur), Uttar Kalabari</td>
<td>3,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Kalangpur (Sonitpur)</td>
<td>1,749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Kadampur (Uttar Lakhimpur) : Uttar Kadam rohiyal,</td>
<td>13,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uttar Kadam Na-Patoni, Uttar Kadam Disiyal,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dihing Kadampur, Dikhau Kadampur,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disang Kadampur, Jaji Kadampur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Lakhimpur, Uttar No. 1 Na-Patoni, No. 2 Na-Patani, Uttar Ujon Na-Patani, Lakhimpur Na-Patani</td>
<td>12,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Baskata</td>
<td>1,517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Jalbani</td>
<td>5,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Bardihing Bardalani (Demaji)</td>
<td>4,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Dhal Demaji/Bar Dihing</td>
<td>12,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Gamtou (Near Tuni River)</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Salmara (Majuli)</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Majuli</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Majuli Mishing</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Ghalbadi</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Tezpur (Sonitpur)</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Nagaon, Marigaon</td>
<td>3250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Mayong (Marigaon)</td>
<td>1,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Guwahati (Uttar Guwahati)</td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,57,077</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.8 *Sakha Sattras* (Branch Sattras)

Following are the branches of Auniati Satra:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Name of the branch</th>
<th>Idol if any</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dibrugarh (Sadiya)</td>
<td>Baragi matha</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>North Guwahati Satra</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaon</td>
<td>Dhing Sattra</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Edaliya bara Satra</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barabari Sattra</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samaguri Sattra</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jagi Sattra</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raha-nangata Sattra</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Krsnaik khat Sattra</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lakhimpur</td>
<td>Baliya Guru Satra</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Govindapura</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sivasagar</td>
<td>Bhuynahata</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All these Sattras have their own *khat pama* (land and other properties). With the help of these properties, they manage their livelihood. The office bearers of these Sattra are entitled to use the landed properties of Sattra, either paying full rent or half. Among these branches, administrative system of North Guwahati *Sakha Sattra* is altogether different. Former *Adhikara*, Shri Shri Hemachandradeva Goswami reconstructed this Sattra under the scheme of Sattra reformation and this Sattra can be considered to be an independent one.

Auniati Sattra keeps contact with the followers through the branch Sattras. Shri Khargeswor Bharali, aged 80 years informed that earlier, when there was poor transportation system, the *Adhikara* had to camp at a single place for quite a long time, particularly in places where there was a large concentration of the followers. In the later period the temporary places become permanent ones and were established as branches of the main Sattra. Initially in the days of former *Adhikara* Niranjanadeva, there was only
one such campus called ‘Kadigaon’. This could be considered as a branch Sattra. Later many others were added to the list. Earlier these Sattras were called as the *pakhi* (wings) Sattra.

### 6.9 Ajnapara Sattras (affiliated Sattra)

To spread *Vaishnavism*, *Sattradhikars* of Auniati Sattra, established a few independent Sattras with a share of landed and other properties of the Sattra and gave the charge to a senior *Bhakat*. Shri Khargeswor Bharali, aged 80 years also informed that a few of these Sattras are still running as independent units and yet they are maintaining very pleasant relationship with the main Sattra even today. Example of affiliated Sattras are Kaliyabora Sattra, Bihaguri Sattra in Nagaon, Kamadiyal Sattra at Kalabari.

### 6.10 Auniati Sattra’s contribution to the society

Religious consciousness, expansion, propagation, social reform, expansion of Sattra culture, imitation of culture consciousness and spiritual upliftment are the main purposes of the Sattra. It is also noticed that besides the above mentioned purposes, the Sattra pays attention to the expansion of education. It can be said to be like a residential education institute. For moral and spiritual education there are different dignitaries like *bhagavati*, *pathak*, *bagish*, and *rajmedhi*. When invited, *Sattradhikar* participate in seminars, symposiums, discussions and also delivers religious speech for expansion of religious sentiment and spiritual ideals. *Sattradhikar* have also made economic contribution and donated land to different schools and colleges. Relationship between the Sattra and the society has continued incessantly. For perpetuation of social discipline, different organizations have been fully or partially funded by the Auniati Sattra. Among these contributions, hospitals, *Namghar*, social functions and flood relief are notable. The names of the *Sattradhikar* starting from Shri Shri Dutta Dev Goswami to Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Dev Goswami will always shine in the golden annals of Auniati Sattra’s history.
6.11 Financial assistance given by the Sattra

Shri Shri Duttad Dev Goswami: (1760 to 1826 AD)

- 1819 AD donation to famine relief fund of India.
- Monthly scholarship to the priest of Jagannath Puri.
- Construct a concrete well at Jagannath kshetra.
- Donation for digging a pond at Golaghat district.

Shri Shri Kamal C. Dev Goswami: (1826 to 1844 AD)

- 1840 AD donation to the Kamaldev Institution at North Guwahati.
- Establishment of Sanskrit Tol (school) at North Guwahati

Shri Shri Hem Chandra Dev Goswami: (1848 to 1905 AD)

- Sri Sri Hem Chandra Dev Goswami College, Nitai pukhuri (fully funded by Auniati Satra)
- Donation to Sri Sri Hem Chandra Dev Goswami Hall at Majuli College.
- 1850 AD, 5 Ahin (23rd Sept 1929) donation to famine affected Lepai village.
- 1851 AD, 30 Ahar (15th July 1930) donation to flood affected areas of Nagaon.
- 1852 AD, 16 Sawan (2nd Aug 1931) donation to Jorhat Arya School.
- 1853 AD, 10 Jeth (25th March 1932) donation to flood affected Majuli.
- 1853 AD, 5 Phagun (18th Feb 1932) donation to Purani Godown High School.
- 1854 AD, 1 Aghon (18th Nov 1933) donation to North Guwahati Hospital.
- 1855 AD, 7 & 24 Bohag (21 Apr & 8 May 1934) financial aids for Brahmaputra embankment.
- 1855 AD, 1 Aghon (18 Nov 1934) donation to Guwahati Natya Samittee.
- 1855 AD, 12 phagun (28 Feb 1934) donation to Earthquake affected Bihar & Orissa.
- 1856 AD, 12 Ahar (27 Jun 1935) donation to flood affected Nagaon.
• 1858 AD, 27 Bohag (11 May 1937) donation to construction of Patbaushi Sattra.
• 1860 AD, 17 Sawan (3 Aug 1939) donation to DC relief fund for flood affected Majuli.
• 1860 AD, 2 Puh (18 Dec 1939) fund to Majuli National Conference.
• 1861 AD, 6 Ahin (24 Sep 1940) fund to Khowang High School.
• 1862 AD, 4 Puh (20 Dec 1941) donation to Assam Sahitya Sabha.
• 1864 AD, 21 Agun (5 March 1943) donation to Red Cross Society, Shilong.
• 1865 AD, 30 Kati (17 Nov 1944) fund to Bangladesh famine through DC.
• 1866 AD, 27 Bhadra (14 Sep 1945) fund to Assam Sahitya Sabha.
• 1866 AD, 8 Ahin (26 Sept 1945) fund for Kasturba.
• 1867 AD, 23 Ahar (21 Jun 1946) aid to Jatiya Siksha Puji.
• 1867 AD, 16 Aghon (3 Dec 1946) aid for expansion of Jatiya Siksha.
• 1868 AD, 19 Bohag (3 May 1947) donation to Bokota Nimuguri High School.
• 1868 AD, 12 Ahar (17 June 1947) donation to Tipling High School.
• 1868 AD, 12 Ahar (17 June 1947) donation to Disang Dhai Ali Minor School.
• 1868 AD, 2 Sawon (19 Jul 1947) donation to Namoti High School.
• 1868 AD, 16 Sawon (2 Aug 1947) donation to Sodou Kachari Sanmilan.
• 1868 AD, 16 Bhadra (3 Sept 1947) donation to Mohkina villagers.
• 1868 AD, 3 Kati (21 Oct 1947) donation to Jorhat Technical High School.
• 1868 AD, 6 Puh (22 Dec 1947) donation to Ratanpur Kachari Natya Mandir.
• 1869 AD, 22 Bohag (6 May 1948) donation to Burha Kalita Girls High School.
• 1869 AD, 1 Jeth (16 May 1948) donation to Charing Hospital.
• 1869 AD, 18 Ahar (3 Jun 1948) donation to Sivsagar College.
• 1869 AD, 18 Ahar (3 Jun 1948) donation to Najira Girls High School.
• 1869 AD, 21 Ahar (6 Jun 1948) donation to Korotipar Chalanta Hospital.
• 1874 AD, 17 Phagun (1 March 1953) donation to Kankurika Girls MVS.
• 1875 AD, 26 Ahar (11 Jun 1954) donation to Jaljuri Naam Ghar.
• 1875 AD, 3 Sawon (28 Jul 1954) donation to Sankar Mission.
• 1875 AD, 7 Bhadra (25 Aug 1954) donation to Shillong Sankar Dev Smriti Kendra.
• 1875 AD, 17 Kati (4 Nov 1954) donation to Assam Singing competition.
• 1875 AD, 29 Phagun (13 March 1954) donation to Namoti High School.
• 1878 AD, 12 Puh (28 Dec 1957) donation to Jorhat Sangeet Academy.
• 1879 AD, 30 Kati (17 Nov 1958) donation to Koliabar Sanskrit Tol (School).
• 1881 AD, 6 Phagun (19 Feb 1960) donation to Dhemaji ME School.
• 1882 AD, 22 Sawon (8 Aug 1961) donation to Bindhakota ME School.
• 1882 AD, 14 Sawon (31 Jul 1961) donation to Dighalibil ME School.
• 1882 AD, 14 Puh (30 Dec 1961) donation to Assam Tribal Sangha School.
• 1882 AD, 13 Magh (24 Jan 1961) donation to Katunigaon Youth Library.
• 1883 AD, 8 Bohag (22 April 1962) donation to dhundasam M.E.School.
• 1883 AD, 14 Bohag (28 April 1962) donation to Uttar Kamalabari Satra.
• 1883 AD, 6 Jeth (21 March 1962) donation to Majuli SatraSanmiloni.
• 1883 AD, 10 Bhada (28 August 1962) donation to Bamuneebil ME School.
• 1883 AD, 30 Bhada (17 September 1962) donation to Jamuguri Sankar Utsav.
• 1884 AD, 8 Phagun (21 Feb 1963) donation to Ouphaliya High School.
• 1884 AD, 11 Bhada (29 August 1963) donation to flood affected areas of Assam.
• 1885 AD, 15 Aahar (30 June 1964) donation to Aathkheliya Highschool.
• 1885 AD, 10 Phagun (23 Feb 1964) donation to Majuli Siksak Sanmilon.
• 1886 AD, 5 Jeth (20 May 1965) donation to Indira Gandhi Highschool.
• 1886 AD, 7 Sawan (24 July 1965) donation to Mureihga Bahpati High School.
• 1886 AD, 18 Bhada (5th September 1965) donation to Srimanta Hari Mandir.
• 1886 AD, 9 Puh (25 December 1965) donation to Urimpura Namgarh.
• 1886 AD, 10 Phagun (23 February 1965) donation to Sanskrit Samabartan-Majuli.
• 1887 AD, 14 Jeth (29 May 1966) donation to Kuwarpur Balika High School.
• 1887 AD, 2 Kati (20 October 1966) donation to Jorhat defence fund.
• 1887 AD, 10 Chait (24 March 1966) donation to Khara High School.
• 1887 AD, 26 Chait (9 April 1966) donation to Barbam Marjaan M.E.School.
• 1888 AD, 26 Bohag (10 May 1966) donation to Daijan Naamghar.
• 1888 AD, 1 Jeth (16 May 1966) donation to Dariyagaon Naamghar.
• 1888 AD, 3 Aaghon (20 November 1966) donation to Karatipar High School.
• 1889 AD, 15 Sawan (1 August 1967) donation to Assam Sadashar Samittee.
• 1889 AD, 27 Magh (11 February 1967) donation to Kathnisuk Village Naamghar.
• 1890 AD, 9 Jeth (24 May 1968) donation to Bhugpur Satra Kirttanghar.
• 1890 AD, 13 Bhada (31 August 1968) donation to Naruya Bali Satra Kittanghar.
• 1890 AD, 12 Aaghun (29 November 1968) donation to Karatipar High School.
• 1890 AD, 19 Magh (3 February 1968) donation to dhemaji Balika High School.
• 1890 AD, 19 Magh (3 February 1968) donation to Runath Brahma High School.
• 1890 AD, 24 Magh (8 February 1968) donation to Silapathar High School.
• 1890 AD, 1 Phagun (14 February 1968) donation to Betoni High School.
• 1890 AD, 29 Phagun (13 March 1968) donation to Dibrugarh Tribal Sangha.
• 1890 AD, 23 Chait (6 April 1968) donation to Barbaruah Balika High School.
• 1890 AD, 27 Aahar (12 July 1968) donation to Dakuyakhana Collage.
• 1890 AD, 1 Sawan (18 July 1968) donation to Bardirak Highschool.
• 1890 AD, 23 Puh (8 January 1968) donation to Naharkatiya Girls High School.
• 1890 AD, 9 Magh (24 January 1968) donation to Kamalabari Girls High School.
• 1890 AD, 10 Magh (25 January 1968) donation to Harimadir, Kerelagaon.
• 1892 AD, 9 Bohag (23 April 1970) donation to Sadau Majuli Assamese Teachers Sanmilonii.
• 1892 AD, 10 Bohag (24 April 1970) donation for development of Garmur Saru Sattra.
• 1892 AD, 10 Bohag (24 April 1970) donation to Balisapari Namgarh.
• 1892 AD, 26 Puh (11 January 1979) donation to Majuli Sattra Sangha.
• 1892 AD, 5 Phagun (18 February 1979) donation to Jorhat Maina prijat.
• 1892 AD, 11 Bohag (25 April 1979) donation to Namuya Namgarh.
• 1892 AD, 19 Bohag (3 May 1979) donation to Bihpuriya blind School.
• 1892 AD, 19 Bohag (3 May 1979) donation to Majuli Milan Gangha.
Shri Shri Bishnu Chandra Dev Goswami: (1905 to 1919 AD)

- Donation to Sri Sri Bishnu Dev Janajati College, Aamguri
- Donation to Sri Sri Bishnu Dev M.E.School, Aamguri
- Donation to Dudhpra Highschool, Tingkhang
- Donation to Dichiyal M.E.School
- 10,000 to Golaghat Collage
- Donation to Madan Gopal Library, Kuruyabahi Satra-Nagaon
- Donation to Devkanti Devi Library, Brahmachari Satra-Nagaon
- Donation to Library of Uriyamghat Branch Satra–Golaghat
- Donation to Bishnudev Library, Muhanghat – Dibrugarh
- Donation to Chasoni Na-Khatiya Sunuwal Village Library – Naharkatiya
- Donation to a Library at Kuyang – Nagaon
- Donation to Sanskrit tol of Auniati Satra
- Donation to Sri Sri Hemchandra Tribal M.E.School, Jorhat
- Donation to Sri Sri Bishnu dev Goswami Highschool, Majuli
- Donation to Sri Sri Bishnu dev M.E.School, Malapindha, Bar Mukali, Majuli
- Donation to Sri Sri Bishnu dev Highschool, Dudang Sapari, Majuli
- Donation to Science Laboratory at Kujupathar Highschool, Sadiya

Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Dev Goswami: (1919 AD till today)

- Donation to Barthegal Namghar
- Donation to Karaghakhat Namghar
- Donation to Sumoimari erosion effected areas
- donation to flood affected areas of Majuli
6.12 Cultural complex at Jengraimukh, Majuli

Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Dev Goswami, Sattradhikar, of Auniati Sattra has informed that to showcase the ethnic culture of the Mishing community, Auniati Sattra has taken up an ambitious project to set up a cultural complex at Jengraimukh, a Mishing village at Majuli. A tribal museum, which is designed to preserve the distinguishing features of the Mishing tribe which is a part of the project, will be the first of its kind in Assam. The cultural complex would include a museum, a conference hall, and a Guest house at par the typical architecture of the Mishing community and would also house the traditional attire, the utensils and other traditional commodities of the Mishings. The project would be completed at Jengraimukh covering an area of 4 bighas of land donated by a Mishing gentleman for the complex. Tea baron Hemendra Prasad Baruah is supporting the cultural complex financially.

According to the present Sattradhikar, “The Mising people who were once connected with the Sattra culture of Assam are today drifting apart from the mainstream society. The museum is a part of an effort to reconnect the Mishing community to re-establish the missing link of them with the Sattriya culture of Majuli.”

6.13 Sattra Culture and Sonowal Kacharis

From the investigation it has come to light that the Sonowal Kacharis of the Dainijan Village, Dibrugarh, Assam (8 km south west of the township of Dibrugarh in eastern Assam) are disciples of Auniati Sattra. The etymological term Sonowal is derived from ‘SON’ meaning gold in Assamese language. But according to Saikia (1986:6-11) “the Kacharis who embraced Vaishnavism in 1603 Saka (1681 AD) by offering gold (suun) to the Gosaidangaria (Pontiff) of Auniati Sattra. Since then these Vaishnavite people have come to be known as Sonowal. They embraced Vaishnavism abandoned their traditional animistic religion. These followers are known as hinduari”. To know their day to day life and practices when researcher reached the destination, it was observed that they have a community prayer house (Namghar) in their village. At the time of rituals pertaining to the ekasarana dharma and other regional festivals like Rongali Bihu, Kongali Bihu and Bhogali Bihu etc the Namghar becomes the hobnob of activities. Janmastami (birth-day of Lord
Krishna), Saint Sankaradeva’s *tithi* (birth–day of Sankaradeva), *Fakuwa* (Holi festival) are observed in the *Namghar* by chanting *nam-prasanga* in front of the *Bhagavat* kept on a *thapana* (altar). They usually try to keep away some of their traditional religious activities, from the village *Namghar* but there are certain traditional rituals which are connected with this *Vaishnava* prayer house. In the case of Sonowal Kacharis there are two broad religious divisions namely ‘*Sarania*’ and ‘*Bhajanias*’. The Sonowal Kacharis belong to dual religious system, e.g. ‘*Kirattadharma*’ and ‘*Neo-Vaisnavism*’.

### 6.14 Bornil Sanskritic Samaroh 2012 at Auniati Sattral, North Guwahati

In view of the recent spate of violence engulfing Assam, Auniati Sattral arranged a colourful and spiritual *Satriya* festival in order to instill the spirit of *Vaishnavite* ethos and culture amongst people. The three-day long colourful cultural event (*Bornil Sanskritic Samaroh*) was hosted by Auniati Sattral from December 28-30, 2012 at ‘*Kamaldev Khetra*’

Auniati Sattral aimed to create awareness about the different aspects and traits of *Vaishnavite* culture amongst the young generation especially in the context of the growing changes in the moral, social, religious, political and economic outlook of the people. The Programs highlighted the different forms of *nam* (hymns), *bhaona* (a dramatic art form) and other spiritual and cultural songs and dances from the other states of Northeast region. The festival was planned to lead in a spirit of unification amongst the various people of the state.

“In view of the recent spate of violence in the state, there is a need for the propagation of Sankaradeva’s teachings and philosophies. Culture and tradition can contribute towards the removal of social malaise and ills in the society. The new generation should take cues from *Vaishnavite* and *satriya* cultural ethos. Now-a-days, it is being seen that many opposite things to Satriya and Vaishnavite aspects have been gaining ground, and through the festival an attempt will be made to bring about a change,” said Shri Shri Pitambar Dev Goswami, *Satradhikar* of Auniati Sattral.
In this great cultural assemblage tinged with religious fervor, altogether 32 Sattradhikars and several religious personalities from both within and outside the country participated. The formal inaugural meeting was presided by a spectacular performance (samuhia nam paribeshon) with 1,000 cymbals players.

Meanwhile, various Government departments, especially, the PWD Roads and Transport have extended much-needed support to the mega cultural event. The main thoroughfares and link roads have been given a facelift, thereby making convenient for the vehicular traffic and pedestrians in general. The unique meet held for the first time was participated by thousands of people professing Vaishnavite culture and religion and hailing from various places of State, and even outside.

This was followed by an attractive boat race and singing competition in the River Brahmaputra where altogether seven groups hailing from various areas of the district took part. Among the participating groups, Satpakhili Dol, Kukurmara Srimanta Sankardev Kala Kristi Sangha, Chaygaon and Vaishnava group of Auniati Sattra (Majuli) bagged the first, second and third prizes respectively. After the boat race, nam, viz diha nam and nagara nam were presented to the delight of the audience.

The concluding session was presided over by Satradhikar Shri Shri Dr. Pitambar Deva Goswami. Several distinguished guests graced the function. The highlights of the cultural extravaganza included playing of a single flute by six artistes which was directed by Dwijen Gogoi. The presentation of 55 indigenous musical instruments and playing of 52 drums by artistes of Duliajan Club was simply mind blowing.

In his speech, Satradhikar, who is well versed in spiritual pursuits observed how the great congregation would encourage the Sattra to build a mini Kalakhetra (cultural center) in the very place where the dining hall was constructed. He also opined that the Sattra would be encouraged to complete the hitherto half-constructed auditorium built at the Sattra’s land a few years ago. When completed, the auditorium would be made a cultural research centre for the benefit of the upcoming generations.
6.15 Sattradhikar and Society

The Neo-Vaishnavite movement led by Saint Sankaradeva preached the ideal of caste equality. Caste was, and still is, an aspect of consideration in the organizational structure of the Satras. In all the monastic Satras, inmates are recruited from the families of certain castes only which enjoy higher positions in the caste hierarchy. During an investigation carried on in the year 2010 in the Satras of Majuli, it was found that inmates were recruited from among the Brahmins, Kayasthas, Kalitas, Keots and to a lesser degree from among the Koches only; and the rest of the communities have no place in the celibate system. It is because of this that the Sattras are often criticized as preserver of the caste distinctions, and therefore cannot stand as the uniting force of Assamese nationality. Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Deva Goswami after coming to the headship of his Sattra has considered this aspect sincerely and seriously. This is reflected at least in his reception of the visiting guests from different social standing and his own sense of assimilation with the tribal and ethnic communities of the region. When asked at his residence at Majuli about the composition of the inmates in his Sattra Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Deva Goswami said that if any one comes on his own to enroll himself as an inmate of his Sattra, he will have no reservation to enroll him simply because of his caste or tribe affiliation. Defending the present status of his Sattra, he writes that since the head of a baha normally selects a boy of his choice to bring him to his baha and bestows on him the responsibility of performing his mortuary rights after his death, he normally selects a relation of his; and this fact leads to concentration of bhakats in the Sattra of certain castes only. Thus, according to him, concentration of inmates from limited numbers of castes is more a tradition than a policy of the Sattra; and he does not believe that his Sattra belongs to certain sections only. At least Auniati Sattra has disciples from all sections of the society.

Dr. Shri Shri Pitambardeva Goswami donned the robes of a Sattradhikar in 1998. He was very much concerned about the problem of erosion in the Island. The Island at one point of time had 65 Sattras, but at present only 22 survives. The Auniati Sattra had to be shifted five times in Majuli. Displacement of such a large number of Vaishnavite monasteries or the centers of religious practices and edifices of the state’s art and culture has indeed been a great blow.
Satradhikar Shri Shri Pitambardeav Goswami relates “I pleaded for the cause of protecting Majuli at the 10th UNESCO Seminar held in China from October 8-17, 2001. I even chalked out and ambitious programme which would draw tourists from both inside and outside the state to the island and the revenue generated thus could be used both for protection of Island and preservation of Sattras but his was a long voice and nobody was listening”.

At Majuli the Sattradhikars of the Island mobilized by Shri Shri Pitambardeva Goswami have threatened the Government again and again to go on hunger strikes if the State government did not do anything to contain erosion. Though the government has implemented temporary relief measures from time to time, this has not sufficed and the problem is growing bigger by the day and Majuli’s landmass is decreasing. Shri Shri Pitambardeva Goswami and few other Sattradhikars even met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, seeking more permanent measures and inviting him to see for himself, the magnitude of the problem a couple of years ago. In spite of his acceptance of the invitation, the Prime Minister has not yet visited the Island.

As the religious head and spiritual guide of devotees under his care, it is up to him to spread the precepts of Vaishnavism not only in the state but outside as well. Sattradhikar Shri Shri Pitambardeav Goswami’s first destination outside the state has been to Nagaland. He narrates “It was in the 16th Century that the great Saint Sankaradeva propagated Vaishnavism in the Northeast. He was one of the few who had dared to venture trip to the Naga head–hunters residing in Naga Hills to spread the philosophy of Vaishnavism, peace and brotherhood among the people there. From among them Naga Narottam was one who was deeply influenced by the Saintly preacher and embraced Vaishnavism”.

Four Centuries later with political demarcation firmly in place and Christianity holding sway in the Naga State separated from Assam, Dr. Pitambardeva Goswami sought to revive ties by setting up a training center for Sattriya dance and music in Kohima in March 2003. He says, “This was just the beginning and we hope to open up more such centers in the region”. Chandrakanta Bora, a trainer was sent to teach the students among whom four Naga students too had enrolled.
The Christian Missionaries who attract the ignorant and poor with cash or kind is considered to be the biggest threat in the Island. Shri Shri Pitambardeva Goswami realized that if he had to keep people from converting to other faith, he has to move from the cloistered confines of the Sattras and reach among the masses. These move of his, paid dividends in Jengraimukh in Majuli in 2002, where he brought 30 families back to the fold after they had been converted to Christianity. He also says “taking advantage of their poverty Christian Missionaries had lured about 30 families in to converting to Christianity”. Sattradhikar said that, “In fact I was criticized by some other Sattradhikars for moving about freely with the Mishings, who took lao pani (local wine) and pork as part of their daily dietary intake. But one should know that if we keep a distance from the people who recline their faith in us, we alienate them further. We could regain their confidence by treating them as our own”. The outcome was that out of the seven Churches that were established, six were closed soon after.

He also raised his voice against alcoholism which peaked during the reign of the AGP-led Government in the late nineties. Liquor shop licenses were given to all and sundry. The Sattradhikar even met the then Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and asked him to take immediate steps to close these shops. In the year 2004, Pitambardeva Goswami was called on to organize one of the greatest events in the Sattra history—the grand celebration of the 350th anniversary of Auniati Sattra which was held from March 26 to 28. More than 10 Lakh people attended the gathering. In this occasion five books were published beside the souvenir. The books included the history of 600 Sattras of Assam, a history of the colonies where the Sattra culture prevailed and a history of Auniati Sattra.

At present he is busy chalkling out the syllabus of a Sanskrit institute to be opened at the Kaliyapani Branch of the Sattra and writing a dictionary of Sattriya words by the name “Sattriya Sabda Kush”, which will have around 2000 words and its meanings. Sattradhikar’s views on certain relevant matters are given below:

6.15.a Sattra and Women

The outlook of the Vaishnava Saints towards women was one of disagreement. On one hand they condemned women as sources of fantasy and evil, but they also could not
do without their participation. Thus, there were women disciples among whom a few could even participate in the organization and working of the Sattra as their head. In the monastic system no women is allowed to enter the life of a monk. This exclusion went to such an extent that no women is allowed to enter the Manikut of any Namghar, and in the Barpeta Sattra, even the Kirtanghar is not opened for women on ground of their being polluted. That inability spread far and wide so that no women are allowed to enter the sanctum-sanctorum (Manikut) even in a village Namghar. Interestingly, in the beginning Saint Madhavadeva himself allowed women to enjoy bhaona inside the Kirtanghar of the Barpeta Sattra. It is not known when the women disqualified for that entry which they had enjoyed in the beginning. As a result Barpeta Sattra’s Kirtanghar became reserved for men, and till recent years Auniati Sattra too did not allow women to visit the Sattra and stay there. But such rigidity in that Sattra has now been largely relaxed under the guidance of Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Deva Goswami. Willing women are now not only initiated by the Sattradhikar and allowed entry to the Sattra Namghar; they can also stay there in times defined as need. The researcher herself had seen the Ho’ble Sattradhikar initiating women of the Sonowal Kachari tribe in his personal prayer hall. Auniati Sattra’s outlook towards women has been significantly changed at the hand of this modern Sattradhikar.

### 6.15. b Sattra and Political Affairs

Auniati Sattra in the beginning did not have any political role. Saint Sankaradeva did not himself initiate the Kings. But the Ahom Kings by establishing a few Sattras and by patronizing some others, they themselves brought the Sattras under the power of political affairs. To this may be added the force of influence of the Sattras over the common people. The Kings in order to exploit this aspect of the Sattras and to bring the people under their control induced the Sattadhikars to participate in the State polity. There is therefore historical record of intimate relationship between the State and the Sattras since the Ahom days. The Moamariya Rebellion (1769-1805) was the result of this kind of relationship between the Sattras and the State. Recent researches show that the emergence of religious communities and the ethnic assertion in Assam dates back to Moamariya Rebellion. The British too retained the lands granted by the Ahom rulers.
Auniati Sattra under Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Deva Goswami has been a reckoning force to the political persons of the country. The significant aspect in this regard is that the Sattradhikar is well-acquainted with both the political and religious forces having different objectives and responsibilities.

6.15.c Sattra Literature and Education

In earlier times, Sattras worked as the centers of education, learning and literary creations. Most Sattras maintained tols (school) for Sanskrit learning for Brahmin and the Kayastha pupils coming mainly, the inmates. Thus Auniati Sattra has its own tol. Although primarily meant for Sanskrit learning, the tol trains persons for translation work and for manuscript writing too. Thus the Sattra has became the center of literary creation and manuscript writing. In Auniati Sattra there are more than 100 manuscripts either prepared in the Sattra itself or collected from outside. This Sattra has a great tradition of writing drama and performing them in the Namghars/Kirtanghars. It has been a custom among the preceptors to compose drama and perform them under their guidance immediately after their assumption of the headship. There was once also the custom of writing biographies (Charitputhis) of the preachers since the post Saint Sankaradeva times. Writing biographies of the pontiffs has been an established culture with the Sattra since inception. They form the most valuable source for the social history of medieval Assam. Thus within its own interest and traditions Sattras have contributed towards the development of Assamese literature and learning. Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Deva Goswami too is equally interested in the creation and cultivation of literature and learning. Himself a creative writer, Dr. Shri Shri Pritambar Deva Goswami has opened the door of the Sattra tol to all other students coming from the neighboring and distant villages. As a result, Sanskrit learning which was once confined to the Brahmin and Kayastha pupils alone, has now become popular among all classes of learners coming from in and around his Sattra. He has planned some education policies on his own. One among those is to start a ‘College of Spirituality’ in the branch Sattra at Teok, Kaliapani in Jorhat. He has allowed all the young inmates to go for modern system of education. In addition, he also advises his sisyas to practice Sattriya culture. The inmates of the Sattra are school and college goers and some others are teachers of classical dance and music. The Sattradhikar is trying to
evolve ways and means for a new system of preaching and popularizing *Vaishnavism* among the masses.

### 6.15.d Sattra’s Internal changes

Sattras have undergone significant changes within themselves during the post independence period. It is of course understandable that the Sattras in Assam today are competitive among themselves to obtain more power and publicity and more specifically to exercise more political influence than exercising their impact on the Sanskritisation. The entire Sattra system has remained stagnant and confined to their old and orthodox horizon while the public in general are going far ahead in education and learning and in attaining sophistication and modernity. In fact, inmates of the Sattras are lagging far behind than their counterparts in the villages. Once parents offered their sons to the Sattras thinking it as a religious gift, but nowadays parents are unwilling to send their kids to the Sattra. Now literate parents have one offspring or two, so they give more importance to their sons having modern education then learning traditional arts at the Sattras. Performing arts are not only taught in a Sattra but also can be cultivated in professional schools. All these have diminished the popularity of the Sattras even among those who were once its devoted supporters. Worst economic condition of the parents was in the past one of the most considered causes for sending sons to the Sattras to become celibate inmates. Man’s growing scientific temper too has a significant role to play in this regard; very few parents today attribute the reasons for the early death of their children or for their remaining childless to any divine cause or curse. Most parents in early times suffered from this superstition, and wanted to rid themselves of this misfortune by dedicating the first born son, or one of the sons to the Sattra. Parents today go to the doctor, than to the *Sattradhikar* for amelioration. This has opened new views for the *Sattradhikars* to discover—to allow modern education to the inmates, to practice arts outside the Sattras and more importantly, to mix up with open society. This is a turning point in the long history of the Sattra system. The aspiration of Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Deva Goswami for a Ph.D Degree and his attendance and participation in various national and international seminars, mixing up with varieties of people, having a computerized press and a T.V set indicate a significant historical change in the system. When contacted the *Sattradhikar* replied that he was in
favour of taking a doctorate degree as it was necessary to attract those class of disciples who have higher educational degree. While this is certainly one significant aspect of his personality and thought, history tells a different story about change and development where religion and secular education had conflicting roles to play. After all, renaissance came out of interaction between the two forces of tradition and modernity.

Till recent years, the Sattra did not look at modern education for the bhakats liberally. Maintenance of Sanskrit tols inside the Sattra for education for Brahmin inmates was the normal way of maintaining a system. Establishment of schools and colleges near some of the Sattra in the post independence period, however, brought the bhakats nearer to the modern education system. It is interesting that almost all bhakats of the younger generation of Auniati Sattra are now school, college or university goers. As per the data collected (April 2012), it shows that out of a total 294 bhakats, more than 50 percent are educated in modern system. The Sattradhikar is M.A., Ph.D. This fact of growth of modern education among the bhakats and the pontiff has introduced them to the modern amenities of life. It is perhaps early to comment on this aspect of reform and change. A survey conducted by the researcher at Auniati Sattra has shown that as many as hundred disciples of that Sattra after having modern education had left the Sattra for marriage and later became householder. This has affected the age-old tradition, Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Deva Goswami says that modernity is always welcomed but one should respect and preserve the traditional cultures. In fact the old ideals would not be able to stand against open and liberal civilization. He hoped that the Sattra institution will receive modernization and progress for all sorts of social development and social cohesion.

6.15. e Sattradhikar’s visit to China

According to Auniati Sattra’s Sattradhikar Dr. Shri Shri Pitambar Dev Goswami, after the visit of Dr. Richard Engelhardt, UNESCO Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific, Regional Office at Bangkok, to Majuli and other places of Assam and Meghalaya, the latter invited the former to attend a UNESCO Conference/Workshop on ‘Culture Heritage Management and Tourism: Models for Co-operation among Stakeholders at Lijiang, People’s
Republic of China, Oct 8-18, 2001’. Professor Dilip K. Medhi headed a team of 9 persons from Majuli and other places of Assam in the name of ‘Majuli Team’ and His Holiness Shri Shri Dr. Pitambar Deva Goswami, Sattradhikar of Auniati Sattra was included. It was a maiden visit of a Sattradhikar of a Sattra of Assam to a foreign country.

During the China trip, Dr. Goswami spoke on the great Saint His Holiness Shi Shri Sankardeva and His Holiness Shri Shri Madhavdeva in a bid to highlight the Neo-Vaishnavite Culture of former Assam and the position of Majuli in it.

6.15.f Dr. Pitambardeva Goswami’s cultural expedition to Singapore, 2009

A cultural expedition for geographical protection of Majuli with a view to preserving its multi-coloured culture launched by Dr. Shri Shri Pitambardev Goswami, Sattradhikar of Auniati Sattra has transcended the confines of the nation. His dance drama entitled Kristir Barghar Majuli, illuminating the multi-faceted cultural heritage of the Island has been enacted at various places of the country and its CD form is available even abroad also. He along with Shri Shri Devanandadev Goswami, the Deka Sattradhikar visited Singapore at the invitation of the Singapore-based Assamese people, where he was successful in moulding a strong public opinion for his expedition by getting his own play and another ankiya-nat entitled Rukmini Harana enacted. Participating in a public meeting attended by the Singapore-based Assamese held at the city of Sungrove he said that extinction of Majuli will deprive the world community of witnessing a priceless medley of culture as Majuli, by virtue of being an abode of diverse ethnic communities, is worth imitating and emulating by one and all. It possesses a rich and multi-faceted culture encompassing such resources as mask, dance, drama, song and so on. This is the place that witnessed the first meeting of Mahapurush Sankaradeva and Mahapurush Madhavadeva and the former set up a Sattra here for the first time. In an e-mail message, Sourav Saikia, a Singapore-based Assamese who anchored the entire programme, said that the prolonged speech by the Sattradhikar acquainted the gathering with numerous aspects of Majuli’s cultural richness. They were greatly enthralled by the performances of the plays.
PL.59. MANUSCRIPT (SANCHIPAT) AT AUNIATI SATTRA

PL.60. SHRI BUDHINDRA NATH BARPATHAK, A RENOWNED SCRIPT WRITER ON SANCHI LEAF
PL.61. A:
PLAYING
Lakshmanar
Sakti Shel- Story
from Ramayana
BHAONA AT
AUNIATI SATTRA

PL.61. B:
PLAYING
Lakshmanar
Sakti Shel- Story
from Ramayana
BHAONA AT
AUNIATI SATTRA

PL.62:
SHOP IN
FRONT OF
AUNIATI SATTRA
WHERE BHAONA
PARAPHERNALIA
ARE AVAILABLE
PL.63. 11TH
SATRADHIKAR
OF AUNIATI
SATTRA SHRI
SHRI DUTTA DEV
GOSWAMI

PL.64.
‘DHARMAPRAKASH
YANTRA’
PRESERVED AT
AUNIATI
SATTRA,
TEOK, USED IN
PRINTING ASAM
BILASINEE
PL.65. RARE COPY OF ASAM BILASINEE
PL. 68: CANE BEING COLLECTED FOR HAND FAN

PL. 69: STEM OF BETEL NUT TREE FOR HAND FAN

PL. 70: BHAKATS BUSY IN MAKING HAND FANS

PL. 71: HENGUL HAITAL USED IN THE HANDLE OF THE HAND FAN
PL.72.
BHAKATS BUSY
IN MAKING
HAND FANS

PL.73. A
BHAKAT
MAKING
WOODEN
ARTICLES

PL.74. BEADS
MADE FROM
SANDAL WOOD
TREE
PL. 75. RESEARCHER MINUTELY OBSERVING THE ARTICLES MADE BY THE BHAKATS

PL. 76. SRIHASTA - MUKTAWALI UNDER DISPLAY AT THE SATTRA MUSEUM

PL. 77. A. SATTRIYA DANCE PERFORMED AT NANDI TEMPLE, BENGALuru
PL. 77. B.
SATTRiya DANCE
PERFORMED AT
NANDI TEMPLE,
BENGALURU

PL. 77. C:
SATTRiya
DANCE
PERFORMED AT
NANDI TEMPLE,
BENGALURU

PL. 78. MATI
AKHORA AT
AUNIATI
SATTRA
PL. 81. DASHAVATAR
BY A BHAKAT
OF AUNIATI SATTR

PL. 82. AUNIATI SATTRYA SANGIT MAHAVIDYALAYA
PL. 83. A YOUNG BHAKAT SINGING BORGEET

PL. 84. AUNIATI SATTRA – NORTH GUWAHATI

PL. 85. Sattradhikar’s visit to a chahar in khel-nao (pleasure speed boat) with bhakats (Source: Old photo clips preserved at Auniati Sattra)
PL. 86. AUNIATI
SATTRA - TEOK

PL. 87. A.
CULTURAL
COMPLEX AT
JENGRAIMUKH,
MAJULI

PL. 87. B.
CULTURAL
COMPLEX AT
JENGRAIMUKH,
MAJULI
PL. 88. (A–C). BORNIL SANSKRITIC SAMAROH AT AUNIATI SATTRA 2012 AT NORTH GUWAHATI
PL. 89. BOAT RACE ORGANIZED BY AUNIATI SATTRA IN THE RIVER BRAHMAPUTRA

PL. 90. HIS HOLINESS SATTRADHIKAR OF AUNIATI SATTRA WITH OTHER SATTRADHIKARS

PL. 91. SATTRADHIKAR GIVING RELIEF TO FLOOD AFFECTED PEOPLE
PL. 92.
SATTRADHIKAR VISITED THE FLOOD AFFECTED AREAS OF MAJULI

PL. 93.
DISTRIBUTION OF AWARD BY THE SATTRADHIKAR TO FEW BRIGHT STUDENTS

PL. 94.
INAUGURATION MEETING OF RARE ARTICLES AND MANUSCRIPT PRESERVATION CENTRE, AT AUNIATI SATTRA
PL.95 : NOTICE BOARD DISPLAYING THE GUIDELINES TO BE FOLLOWED WHILE ENTERING THE SATTRA

PL. 96. SANSKRIT TOL AT AUNIATI SATTRA
PL. 97. A:
MAJULI TEAM AT LIJIANG, PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (2001)

PL. 97. B :
MAJULI TEAM AT LIJIANG, PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (2001)

PL. 98. B.
SATTRADHIKAR AT SINGAPORE