CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the preceding Chapters, the researcher has attempted to present a short history of the medieval Bhakti movement in South Asia, and subsequently to Assam under the guidance of Shrimanta Sankaradeva and his concept of Neo-Vaishnavism, growth of Sattra institution in general, establishment of Auniati Sattra and its contribution to the Assamese society.

In Chapter I, description has been given about the religious scenario in Assam in 15th Century AD. At that time, people followed diverse religious faiths in Assam, chief among them were the followers of Siva and Sakti cult. The background of Neo-Vaishnavite movement was characterized by cultural heterogeneity, tendency for dominance and political instability prevalent in the country in that period. Amidst these diverse religions and worshipping of different deities with or without oblation, the Neo-Vaishnavite movement was propagated and introduced by Shrimanta Sankaradeva and his followers. He emphasized on the worshipping of a single God i.e. Vishnu or Lord Krishna only. Shrimanta Sankaradeva was not only a social reformer but also the initiator of the new faith called Ekasarana-nama-dharma. He established a number of religious institutions known as
Sattras and Namghar. The pillars of Neo-Vaishnavite movement were thus laid, on faith and devotion.

Chapter II gives an account of Majuli, one of the World’s biggest river Island. It is a marshy zone with innumerable ponds, swamps, rivers, jungles, forests, aquatic and varieties of wild animals. The prominent tribes present in Majuli are Mishing, Deuri, Matakts and Kacharis. It is one of the foremost places of the Vaishnavite culture as Saint Sankaradeva and Saint Madhavadeva had met here for the first time at a place called Dhuwahat Beloguri in Majuli. There are numerous Sattras in the Island and Auniati Sattra is one of the most outstanding among them.

Chapter III gives an idea about the Bhakti movement which upheld a path to salvation through a personal relationship of love; devotion and absolute surrender to Almighty God- the Lord Krishna. This movement provided an equal platform for the common people as it tried to remove the caste discriminations and promoted a wide range of literary and creative activities. The Bhakti movement spread through the length and breadth of the country under different forms of reforms. This wave of Vaishnava renaissance touched Assam also, under the strong leadership of Saint Sankaradeva (1448-1568 A.D.) and was ably carried forward by his disciples, prominent among them being Saint Madhavadeva, Saint Damodaradeva and Saint Harideva. This movement not only laid emphasis on religious aspects but also contributed much to the social unit, reform of social situations associated with cultural development amongst the people of Assam. The principal and foremost aim of establishing the Sattras by Shri Shri Sankaradeva, Shri Shri Madhabadeva, Shri Shri Damodaradeva and Shri Shri Harideva was to strengthen the unity among the diverse tribal and non-tribal communities of then Assam by eliminating the caste distinction and recognizing the equality of all human souls.

In Chapter IV, detailed account has been given about the Auniati Sattra, situated in western Majuli, which was established by Ahom King Jayadhwaja Singha. The first Sattradhikar of Auniati Sattra was Shri Shri Niranjandeva. The Sattra received the favour of then Ahom ruler who gifted the Sattra 81,650 bighas of land along with a large number
of resident devotees from different Sattras. Auniati Sattra has been identified as one of the chief and oldest monastic Sattras of Assam. In the existing literature on Sattras, Auniati has been given the first position in the theory of *Chari Sattras of Assam*. For the last three and half Centuries, the Sattra has been playing a significant role in spreading the *Vaishnavite* faith and traditions amongst the people of Assam. The economic status of the Sattra, the problems faced by the Sattra inmates, the impact of modernization on Auniati Sattra has been discussed here in detail. Description has also been given about the different wings of Auniati Sattra, the residential devotees (*bhakats*) of the Sattra and their lives in the Sattra campus.

Chapter V contains the discussion on Sattra administration which has undergone many changes over the years and is the result of gradual progression. The Sattra organization is based on a well structured hierarchical order; there are four classes of people attached to the Sattra- *Satradhikar* and *Deka Satradhikar*, *bhakats*, *sisyas* and *paiks*. The *Adhikar* appoints, from among the devotees, several functionaries to hold religious and administrative responsibilities. *Gurukar* (tax for the disciples), *Biyadamiya* (on the occasion of marriage), *Bara* (part of the sacrifices offered to the dead), *Pranami* (offering made while paying obeisance), *Sevajanani* (offering at the time of any function at home), *Dana* (donation) are some of the sources of income of the Sattra. Simultaneously a report is also given about the different streams of expenditure. The daily and annual activities of the *bhakats* as well as the festivals connected with the Sattra have been portrayed in this Chapter. Being primarily a religious institution, prayers have occupied the foremost position among the list of observable duties of the resident devotees, around which all other activities are arranged. Fourteen different units of prayer services (*Chaidhya Prasanga*) constitute the complete round of activities of the Sattra in a day. Various religious festivals like *Palnam*, *Raas* are also held in the Sattra. One of the most striking feature of the Sattra is idol worship to one of the forms of Lord Krishna (in the present case, it is *Govinda*) which is carried out parallel with the *nitya chadhya prasanga* (Fourteen prayer sessions), the facets of which has been discussed in the preceding Chapters. The Sattra also performs certain social functions, the aim of which is to keep the society clean and disciplined. These
aspects are covered in detail in Chapter VI. The cultural contribution of the Sattra in the
field of literature (writing of manuscripts of prose, poetry and other literary works), dramas
and plays, paintings and handicrafts, dance and music is presented in this Chapter. This
royal Sattra has been making a prolific contribution in all the fields of Assamese culture and
this tradition has been ably preserved and carried forward by the younger generations.
The Sattra inmates are trying their best to continue this great heritage culture. In this Chapter
is incorporated details pertaining to the relationship of Sattra, the Sattradhikar and inmates
with the society. Sattradhikar’s and Rajmedhi’s visit to the Chahars to initiate new disciples,
the role and contribution of the branches (sakha), collection from their own khat pama
(land and other properties), expansion of Sattra culture, imitation of culture consciousness
and spiritual upliftment are the main points that have been discussed here. The steps taken
by Sattradhikar Shri Shri Dr. Pitambar Dev Goswami, to instill the spirit of Vaishnavite
ethos and culture amongst the people have been delineated here.

To conclude the present study, it is clearly understood that the Sattra institution is
a very important part of Assamese society. It is not only a religious institution but also a
socio-cultural organization. Auniati Sattra has been functioning as an instrument of social,
cultural and religious cohesiveness among all the people of Majuli as well as Assam vis-à-
vis Northeast India. The study reveals that the religious control over the community declines
with economic and technological development. The religious organization itself tends to
decline owing to an impact of urbanization and modernization. Even then, the symbolic
value of a religious organization remains persistent; it may itself disintegrate over the course
of time in future.

Auniati Sattra is known worldwide for its Sattriya dance form, Sattriya dramatic
forms, Sattriya music and arts forms, spiritualism, folklore, folk songs, traditional festivals,
rituals, traditional beliefs and museum items. In bhaonas (traditional/classical form of
Assamese drama), songs and dances on the glory of goodness over the evil is shown and
encourages the people to follow the righteous path. Sattra’s spiritual ideals are the living
tradition for the people of Assam. As a socio-religious institution, the Sattra acts as an
agency of social control. Auniati Sattra uses its character as the building influence on the
local people, and its preview extends to other places as well. A few traditional crafts are also found in Auniati Sattra. Various audio visual art forms have also emerged centering round the Sattra circle.

Various changes have taken place in Auniati Sattra during the long course of its existence. Such changes are noticeable in the structure, organization, management style and so forth. However the Sattra is maintaining its tradition like performance and practices in its religious activities. Modernization has both positive and negative aspects. It may appropriately mention that the Sattra should embrace all the positive aspects only and use them in furthering the greater benevolent benefit to the society. However the Sattradikar is vital in this regard.

The Sattras are no less than a university in itself considering the diverse cultural activities associated with it. It is a matter of concern that most of the Sattras are ageing or is in the process of decadence. Practical ways need to be found out and implemented in action to save this institution before it is too late. The most heart-touching appeal is to inherit the old cultural treasure trove even at this crucial period of the history, where science has affected all spheres of life. The actual wealth of India is still in fact in the hands of these Sattriya monks, Gurus, Sattradhikar, bhakats and burhabhakats.