

MAYAMARA SATRA ORGANISATION



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ABSTRACT

The Bhakti movement was an event of great social significance in the history of India. It influenced every aspect of social life and brought radical changes to the mental outlook of people. It challenged the bondage of the caste system, created conditions in which the Hindus and the Muslims could live together bridges the gulf between the high and the low and preached oneness of God and universal brotherhood . It condemned complex ritualism and false practices and made priesthood open to the non-Brahmins.

Introduction

In Assam the movement seems to have been more profound than in other parts of India. There was no cultural unity amongst the different tribes and communities living in this part of the country. They had their different Gods and goddesses and different modes of worship. These heterogeneous groups were united by Sankardeva through the bonds of the neo-vaishnavite faith. Sankardeva also brought the institutions of the satra which is a unique feature of the Assam Vaishnavism. This institution moulded the cultural and religious life of the people of Assam, which exist till today. Madhavadeva, gopaldeva, and Annirudhadeva following the footsteps of Sankardeva became instrumental in bringing about social change that aimed at establishment of peace and harmony.

From the 16TH century religion reform movement led by Sankardeva (1449-1568) an important institution inherited by the people of Assam is Satra Institution. The Mayamara Satra has occupied an important place for its missional activities and for raising the first popular rebellion against the Ahom Government in 1769. The Mayamara Satra was founded by Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva, the son of a Bhuyan named Gondagiri of Vishnubali Kunchi of the present

Narayanpur Mouja of Lakhimpur District. His mother Ajali Devi was the daughter of Sankardeva's paternal uncle. Aniruddhadeva received religious instructions from Gopaldeva of Kaljhar Satra of bhavanipur for three years.

During the period of service as a missionary from 1523 Saka (1601 A.D) to 1548 Saka (1626 A.D) lasting for 25 years, Aniruddhadeva initiated a large number of people to Neo-Vaishnavism. The democratic outlook of the Satra and its spirit of humanism appealed the tribesman and they immediately accepted him as their religious preceptor. They mainly consisted of kacharis, chutiyas, barahis, ahoms and the briddials(PROFESSIONAL CASTES), who later came to be known as Matak , an appellation used as identical with Mayamara or Maomariya, meaning the disciples of Mayamara Satra.

The Matak are ethno-religious sect and they strictly follow the rules and regulation and the rites sanctioned by their religious constitution. Usually, the religious services and function of the people are performed in front of their sacred scriptures (the Bhagawat or the Bhakti Mangal Sastra) which are installed on the Asana (pedestalled tray). the singing of hymns and song called Nam-Prasanga and the chanting of prayers composed by the mayamara gurus, with the accompany of Sankardeva's musical instrument GayanBayan.

The Mayamara Satras and the Dihing Satras shared the distinctive features of the other Satras of the Kala-Samhati order. Mayamara Satra admitted converts from the so called depressed and the tribal population and placed them on an equal footing with those of the upper castes like the Brahmins, Kayasthas and Kalitas. The satra followed in practice the doctrines of equality and humanism of Neo-Vaisnavism. The Satra is characterised as it never had any Vigraha(image) worship. The fanatical devotion of their gurus and uncommon exclusiveness in some of their religious observances promoted the Mayamara Satra to an exceptional position one time.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the traditional religious system of the community and its decline.
2. To make a historical assessment of the Matak community with respect to their origin and social evaluation.
3. To examine the structure and function of Mayamara satra and its impact on Matak community.
4. To examine how Satra act as authority of cultural and social identity for the community

Methodology

The present study is confined to examining the religious beliefs and practices of Matak community under study. In this connection, to deal with specifically the prevailing religious system, Mayamara Satra organization is selected for study. The study is based on both on historical, anthropological approaches. Besides study and use of historical and related literature, extensive field investigations has done in the selected Satra i.e. Dinjoy Satra of Dibrugarh district. This study is based on the case study method.

ORGANISATIONAL FRAME WORK OF THE MAYAMARA SATRA:

The Mayamara Satra is purely non-monastic line. Gusain or Adhikar and his devotees lead householder's life with their respective famalies. The Mayamara satras were generally established at places away from the humdrum of life. In the structural designs of the buildings

of Mayamara Satra, certain speciality are noticed. Each of the principal Mayamara Satra is marked by the existence of a Batchara(gateway), a Namghar(prayer hall), a Sastragh or Dharmagh or Manikuta , a Gurughar(Satradhikars residence), a Than(cremation ground of religious heads) and a tank where at the time of initiation ritualistic baths are taken. The first four are common to all Satras but the last two are specialties of Mayamara only.

The central institution of a Satra is the Namghar also known as Kirtanghar. The ends of the hall are generally in the north south direction. Namghar is a indispensable part not only of any satra but of each village. Some big villages having two or three of the kind. At the entrance to the Satra there is usually a small open house called Batsora.

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION OF THE MAYAMARA SATRA:

Mayamara Satra consist of two principal section namely:-

- 1** Adhikar or the head, the Deka-adhikar and Padadhikar.
- 2** The other category consist of the sisyas or disciples.the 1st category of disciples who are office-bearers generally reside within the satra campus and the 2nd category i.e. The laity live in villages and towns outside the satra complex here the head cheif is hereditary and he is called satradhikar or simply adhikar or gosain.

INCOME OF THE MAYAMARA SATRA:

The income of the Mayamara Satra is mainly derived from two sources:-

- 1** Land originally held by it and legalised by the british and later by the national government.
- 2** Religious subscription contributed by the disciples.

In different periods different Satradhikars were propagating the mayamara fate to a huge no of disciples .It was asserted that in October 1760.The total strength of the disciples of the Mayamara subsect was more than 8 lacs.During the present investigation it was told by the satradhikar that the strength of the disciple of the present mayamara satra is about 30 lacs. Since the time of Annirudhadeva at different times the number of Mayamara satra were organized at various places by his followers. Many of this satras could not survive for a long time. Nevertheless we find atleast 7 satras in the state. The concentration is relatively more in upper assam particularly in Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur districts. On the basis of numerical strength of the respective satras we find that there are four principle satras namely Dinjoy ,Gorpara, Modarkhat and Tipuk.

To understand the structure and function of a Mayamara satra, a detailed study of Dinjoy satra was undertaken .Dinjoy satra was selected for the purpose because it is located in the neighbourhood of the present field. Moreover, from the historical records of various satras ;it seems that this satra is considered to be the largest one with around 1500000(fifteen lacs) disciples.

Dinjoy satra is a unique religious institution which was established in 1837. It stands North of Chabua town in Dibrugarh. The Satra complex covers an area of one mile in length and two furlong in breadth. Its northern boundary is identified

by Balijan Paniara, The population of which consists of Ahom Matak and Kaibarta Matak and the southern boundary by the Deodhai Kapou village consisting of Ahom Matak people. In the east these are Dinjoy Chapori, Dinjoy tea estate which are inhabited by the Ahom Matak, Kalita Matak, Kaibarta Matak and tea garden labourers and in the west there is Maricha Gaon which is inhabited mainly by Kaibarta Matak and Ahom Matak.

The satra is marked by the existence of a Namghar, a Dharmaghar and than within the satra compound. The Namghar (locally known as Bor Namghar) is located at a central place is made of brick wall and corrugated iron sheet roof. It has a half walled prayer hall attached to it. The namghar is octagonal in shape and stands in the north-south direction. Unlike the other Vaishnavite Namghar , the Mayamara Namghar does not have Manikut. Instead of it a separate house called Dharmaghar is found which is constructed in the east-west direction. In Dharmaghar the religious scriptures are kept. The hall near the Dharmaghar is called Rabhaghar , where the religious congregations are held. The places of cremation of religious heads or satradhikars are called than. The than is situated at the corner of the satra yard and it is considered as a sacred place by the disciples. In the than of the Dinjoy satra eight Adhikaris have been cremated till date.

It has been noted earlier that instead of the image(bigraha) the satra disciples propitiate their religious scriptures and their guru. The devotees consider their guru as living embodiment of god and show highest reference to him. The guru is the head of the satra and he is also called Satradhikar. The name of the present Satradhikar of Dinjoy satra is Sri Jogad ananda Goswami(80 years).

It has been found that the guru is very easily accessible to the disciples. He maintains a cordial relationship with all his followers. Unlike other Vaishnava satras, when the disciples bow their head reverence to their guru, the guru also reciprocates by bowing his head to them in a like manner. Any disciples at any time can directly come to the guru and can discuss all the problems with them.

Only under the authority of the Satradhikar the rites of initiation and Bhajana can take place. The Satradhikar and his family resides in a separate house in the satra campus. Next to the Satradhikar, The Dekadhikar or Deka mahanta is there who is appointed by the Adhikar. The name of the present Dekadhikar is Sri Arupananda Goswami(60 years) who is the Satradhikar's elder brothers son. Usually the dekadhiakar is promoted to the Satradhikar later on . He assists Satradhikar in all the religious activities in the satra. It has been reported by the Satradhikar that if the Dekadhikar is found to be lacking in saintly qualities, he is removed from his office and a new one is selected in his post by the Satradhikar..

Relation between guru and sisyas:

The nature of relation between the guru and his sisyas of the Mayamora satra as well as between the disciples themselves had been somewhat different from other satras. Although Gurubad is a salient feature of the Kala Samhati satras, it is in the Mayamora satra that the principle was strictly followed in practice. The disciple of the satra considerd their guru to be a living embodiment(image) of god and in that sense they Anirudhadeva, the Adyamurtti or primal image. For them the guru never dies; any disciple at any time can directly come to the guru and discuss any problem with him. Community feeling is also very strong among its disciples. After harvest, the disciples used to offer a quota of their production to their guru. This practice still exists. It is also their custom to come to the guru to offer Pranam before or soon after getting married. To develop more intimate relationship with the disciples, the adhikar undertakes tour programme called chahar phura or prabas phura from time to time in this satra, when the sisyas bow their heads to him, he also reciprocates doing namaskar. This practice could never be imagined in other satras.

The Mayamara satras have some codes of conduct which set up a discipline in the socio-religious behaviour in the mayamara society. The violation of any code of conduct is considerd as Aparadha or offence. Among such offences Nam-aparadha is the most serious. After taking ordination, the devotees become Atas or atais and they are to consider each otheras part of the divine soul and also as part of the great community, namely, the human community. Though this concept of universal brotherhood and devotion exist in all vaishanava satras, it is in the mayamara satras that the ideal was practiced in reality. Any harsh word or rude behaviour to any disciple is considered as nam-aparadha. Anyone guilty of this offence can be penalised by the Satradhikar in consultation with community of disciples. Till he is not pardoned, the offender remains ex-communicated from the society. The codes of social behavior are revised from time to time to suit the changed social circumstances and values.

From the above discussion, it is observed that the principles of universal brotherhood, democracy and liberalism formed the key-stone of the Mayamara satra organization, for which it had been very popular. The organizational framework and the management system of the mayamara satras, specially that of the Mayamara Tipuk satra and its branches bear testimony to the progressive outlook of the Mayamara preceptors, which can be followed by other satras.

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