

CHAPTER VI

THE SATTRAS AND THE COMMUNITY

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6.1 Inter- community relationship of Sundaridia Sattrā

Sri Sri Madhavadeva and his nephew Ramcharan Thakur Ata organized the society of Sundaridia Sattrā. They rendered their services to Sattrā irrespective of social divisions among the samuha bhakatas. The Sattrā was managed by the elected representatives. Thus it has been maintained following the same rules and regulations since four centuries. The managing committee plays a vital and significant role in influencing the Sattrā community.

In Sundaridia Sattrā different inter-community relations are found. These are-

6.1. a. Caste Groups

Different caste groups are interrelated to Sundaridia Sattrā. Castes like *Brahmins*, Kalita, Kayastha, Keot, Koch, Hira and some professional caste groups etc. are also living together. The post of *Sattradhikar* or *Medhi* is only inherited through the lineage of Ramcharan Thakur Ata. Each and every caste and community has a great contribution to the religious society.

From the early period till today there have been a number of ancestries (Lineages) attached to the Sattrā with their traditional activities which are known as '*Bansara*'. The samuha bhakatas (devotees) are the vast groups who can guide the entire activities of the Sattrā.

The social terms and relations of different caste groups may be noted mainly in two categories- religious and secular. Various groups reflect their activities at the time of festivals and management process. The services of different groups including professional caste groups at the time of festivals are very important.

At the time of daily prayer all the celibate devotees and the most people of different lineages participate. The managing committee maintains the secular affairs of the



Researcher with Sattradhikar (Photographs taken by Gunjan Das)



Researcher with Bhakatas (Photographs taken by Gunjan Das)

Sattrā without self interest. That is why there is no question of any conflict and dispute arising among the caste groups. The devotees without consideration of any caste are to offer annual fees like rice and money to the Sattrā. It is a way of participation and it is known as *Guru-kar* or *Guru-tax*. These religious dues are paid during festivals. The devotees participate in different religious festivals actively. All devotees sit together on the floor inside the *Kirtanghar* and also take prasada from the same vessel.

During the *Deul* festival the participation of different caste groups are noticeable. The Hiras, who make pots of earth with hand, supply different shape and size earthen pots along with cooking vessels with *sidhas* (uncooked eatable supplies to a sattrā by disciples on ceremonial occasions or things supplied to guest or *Bhakata* for the purpose of cooking) to the Sattrā which are served among the guests. The *kayasthas*, *Keot* and *Koches* also co-operate to perform the *deul* festival sincerely. But most of the people of today's generation give up their traditional work and accept other professions.

6.1. a.i. Occupations related to Sattrā

A. Mrit Silpa (Pottery)

Pottery is one of the oldest craft of the Hira people of Sundaridā Sattrā. They are categorized as a schedule caste of Assam. There are two types of potter caste- one is Hira (handmade potters) and the other is *Kumar* (Wheel made potters). The Hiras are potters, who make pots by hands. They are to supply earthen pots to the Sattrā which are distributed among the guest as cooking vessels together with *sidhas*.

There are about hundred and thirty five Hira families at Sundaridā Sattrā. The Hira families are to manage their livelihood with the meager income of this craft. Their economic condition is not so good. That is why now a day the new generations are interested to alter this kind of profession and wish to be engaged in other living standard of occupation. Hira castes have to collect raw materials and fuel, dried cowdung, reeds etc. They pile the pots in an open space with the fuels in two layers. The finish products are sold in the market. In ancient time there was a barter system. In this system the traders collected rice and other vegetables exchange of vessels. The main items of Hiras are

kalash (pitcher), pailla (curd vessels), charu (cooking vessels), mola (offering plate) and so on. The system of making of different types of earthen pots and using them in the Sattrra rituals is still continuing in Sundaridia.

The following case of continuing the making of Hira pottery is example of continuing this above mentioned practice.

Case 6.1

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Name of the Informant: | Sri Gopi Das |
| 2. Sex: | Male |
| 3. Age: | Male |
| 4. Occupation: | Potter |
| 5. Marital Status: | Married |
| 6. Education: | Class V |

According to Gopi Das, he loves making the pots and supplies it to the sattrra. He was doing the job to help his father from the age of 15 and still running this family business. He studied up to class V. He expressed his view that it is easy to make different types of pottery for the purpose of selling these in the market and supplying the required pots in the Sattrra. Though the income is limited he could survive with that profession, but he expressed that his two sons who passed H.S.L.C. are not interested in his traditional occupation and they are not practicing it. Instead they are engaged in other works.

B. Kamar (Blacksmith)

A Kamar (Blacksmith) is a metal smith who creates objects from wrought iron or steel by forging the metal using tools to hammer. From the ancient time of Sundaridia Sattrra the contribution of blacksmith is very remarkable and praiseworthy. The *saki* (lamp) inside the *Manikuta* is also the contribution of blacksmith. In Sundaridia Sattrra iron made lamps decorated with the design of flowers and snakes is used which is known as sahasra banti (Several lamps). More over lots of day today utensils like knife, hoe and so on used by the community peoples is another remarkable contribution of blacksmith.

The following case was recorded during the field work time.

Case 6.2

1. Name of Informant: Mukunda Saikia
2. Sex: Male
3. Age: 65 years
4. Occupation: Blacksmith
5. Marital Status: Married
6. Education: Illiterate

According to Mukunda Saikia, he has been doing this job for last forty years. He said that he learned it from his father from his childhood. He knows to prepare iron implements like gasa (lamp stand), knife, hoe, spade etc. which are used by the Sattras as well as by the other community people. Therefore he could earn his livelihood through his occupation.

C. Kutir Silpa (Carpentry)

From the beginning of Sundaridia Sattras the role of Mistry (Carpenters) is also remarkable. They designed various models of pictures with their artistic works. The carpenters of Sundaridia Sattras could be able to show their skills and talent through their wooden works. The *Guru Asanas* of the pedestals of the Gurus, various animals and birds figuring in mythology are aesthetically designed and made by the carpenters. Among the various articles preserved in the Sattras, the decorative items made out of wood reflect the skilful artistry of the carpenters.

There are three *Guru Asanas* in Sundaridia Sattras. The middle one has seven steps and the others two are of five steps. The engraving creepers surrounding the four sides of *Guru Asanas* with engraved figures of *Kaso* (Tortoise), *Hati* (Elephant), *Singha* (Lion) and flying *Garura* (A kind of bird) show the glorious example of wood craft. The names of the artists who decorated *Guru Asanas* are Late Kalikanta Das, Late Kamalakanta Gayan and Late Rashik Patowary is remarkable.

Case 6.3

1. Name of Informant: Aswini Das
2. Sex: Male
3. Age: 55 years
4. Occupation: Carpenter
5. Marital Status: Married
6. Education: Class VIII

Aswini Das expressed his view that the carpentry work requires lot of training and skill which he learnt from his father at an early age. He knows to prepare Guru Asana, various figures of animals and birds which are depicted on the walls and doors of the Kirtanghar. He prepares various furniture of selling in the market. Sometimes, if necessary he also helps to repair the Sattras' furniture and other wooden works. His sons are not interested in his business but interested in Government jobs or any other private jobs.

6.1. a.ii. Religious Style of living

The standard of living style of the people is purely religious. They assemble in a religious manner and treat each other in a devoted way. Because, they are the Sisyas (Disciples) of the same Guru they are expected to address each other as Guru Bhai (Brothers) and co-operate in all activities at any time of the year, listen to the Bhagabata or singing together at the nam-prasanga, helping in the activities of the Sattras from morning till night, even sometimes they continue to wake up whole night performing duties assigned by the Sattras.

6.1. b. i. Hati (Row of Residential House)

Most of the people of *Sundaridia* reside in the houses of the hatis with their families. The houses are constructed two sides of the roads. Generally an area consisting of narrow streets and houses is called 'Hati'. Hati is the similar Assamese words *para*, *tola*, *chuk* etc. which are similar with hamlets. Lines of cloisters inside the main enclosure of a sattras are known as hatis or bhakatas hatis. After all hati means a row of houses

attached to a religious institution or the residence of bhakatas (Disciples) in a Sattrra in Assam.

The residences are known to be the four sides of several Sattras and it is referred as '*Chari-Hati*'. Sarma (1999, p.105) writes regarding the hati system "Probably Sankaradeva's Satra consisted of a prayer hall and a few huts for devotees who preferred to remain in close proximity to him". They lived in rows of huts built on four sides of the prayer hall. In Sundaridia Sattra these chari-hatis or four rows of huts are not found. In Sundaridia Sattra compound there are only two rows of huts which are known as the *keuliya hati*, the residence of celibate monks. The eminent Anthropologist E.T. Dalton (1851, p.455) observed two such rows on the northern sides of the prayer hall in 1851 of the Sattra. He opines, "Long sheds, substantially built and enclosed with front *varanda* (corridor) by one double door to each. In these apartments the monks live, sometimes two together, sometimes one alone. They exercise considerable ingenuity in making their cells commodious..... . The cloisters and every place connected with the Sattra are kept scrupulously neat and clean". (Dalton, E.T. "*Mahapurasiyas*, as sect of *Vaisnavas* of Assam" in Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol.VI. p.455).

Sri Sri Madhavadeva was the first creator of the hati system of residence of Sundaridia Sattra. He planned the hati system of residence for the householder devotees. All the hatis participate on different festivals like *Nam Kirtan*, on the last day of *Bohag Bihu*, paying *Kar-Var* during the time of Kirtan festivals and on the *ghat-seva* at *Kalaya kirtan ghat*. The names of the hatis of Sundaridia village on the basis of topography of the place, direction and the functions of the inhabitants are described below.

Name of the Hatis and basis of the Hatis name

- i. *Pub-Hati* is named as it is situated at the eastern side of the Sattra.
- ii. *Pachim-Hati* is named as it is located at the western side of the Sattra.
- iii. *Uttar-Hati* is named as it is situated at the northern side of the Sattra.
- v. *Dakshin-Hati* is named as it is located at the southern side of the Sattra.

- v. *Kalaya-Hati* is situated near the bank of the Kalaya Ganga pond. So, it is named as kalaya-hati.

The old names of the hati remain the same. The hatis are not based on caste system. In these hatis people of different caste and creed live together. These hatis are organized on the basis of division of labour; each and every hati has their own share of works which they have to perform with the relation of Sattrā.

Every hati has its own organization including social, political and economic aspects. The relation of each and every hati with the Sattrā is similar to that of each State with the Parliament. Each hati is a symbol of State and the Sattrā is like the Parliament.

There is a community hall in each hati known as '*Haitarghar*'. Occasionally the members of the hati meet here together.

Generally the haitarghar is completely open and it is built in the pattern of Assam type building without side walls but with wooden railings. But, in Sundaridia the haitarghar is a completely full wall house. In case of disputes, conflicts etc. among the inhabitants of hati, the elderly person of this house try to solve the problems by trial. In *Pub-hati* and *Kalaya-hati*, chanting and recitation of holy books are performed in the evening. The elderly devotees gather there in order to listen to this and take part in this programme.

6.1. b.ii. Economic sides of the Hati

The various economic organizations of the hati were planned about four centuries ago. The people of Sundaridia Sattrā are highly benefitted of these organizations till today. There is a system of *bhag* (share) among the members of the hati with a definite fees of the share depends upon the decision of the committee. The amount of fees varies every year. At present the sum of share money is thirty rupees only per house. When a share holder of a hati dies all his shares automatically transferred or inherited by paying sum of money to the fund. In case of several sons of the dead share holder, his share can be inherited to his eldest son. The rest ones can take share in the Sattrā separately by paying minimum sum of money to the fund. In Sundaridia Sattrā there is no provision of loan

system from the fund unlike some other Sattras.

In Sundaridia Sattrra there is a system in the hatis that in time of marriage of a girl, the groom's family have to offer betel nut to the people of the *haitarghar*. The share of the betel nut is distributed to each and every house in the hati. The offering betel nut is a kind of tradition for invitation in case of marriage. This custom is also called '*Jenga-mara*' in local area.

In every hati there is a separate fund which is named after the name of the particular hati. For example- the fund of Kalaya hati is known as Kalaya hati fund. In this fund there is a provision of loan to the members of the particular hati. The responsibility and the handling capacity of the fund will be put upto one person of the hati who is known as '*Mazumdar*'. The procedure of loan giving system is to sanction at the rate of (5% per anum) as interest. No one can repay the loan within one year.

The people of Sundaridia Sattrra are highly profited from its fund. This fund renders a great contribution to the people during the time of natural calamities or disaster like- earthquake, epidemic, storm, flood, famine and so on. At the time of occasion's like- marriage ceremonies, death anniversaries etc. people are satisfied by the contribution of the fund. More over the poor students are also provided by books and necessary study materials and proper treatment in time of disease.

Regarding loan, an outsider may also be allowed loan through a proper link of local guarantor on the basis of mortgage like gold ornaments, plot of land etc. In the first week of Assamese New Year i.e. Bohag month (April-May) a general meeting is held in the haitarghar. Here all the interest and the amount of loan are to be shown by the Mazumdar to the committee. In the meeting the committee will decide accordingly over the payment of interest and loans.

6.1. b.iii. Residential pattern of the Hati

Generally in a hati the roofs of one house touch the other ones forming a row. Two families are separated by one single wall. The wide space between two rows of the houses uses as a court-yard. As a result sometimes noisy situation like quarrel and disputes creates

among the co-inhabitants. According to the census report in 1901 it was reported “a largenumber of persons persists in living huddled together, in dalliance of all the laws of sanitation, and resist with surprising pertinacity all efforts to improve their condition. They are a peculiarly bigoted people and are strongly opposed to vaccination”. (District Gazetteer, Kamrup, 1905). Unlike the some hatis of Barpeta Sattrā, the hatis of Sundaridia Sattrā are quite exceptional. The residences of Sundaridia Sattrā are not compact or joined together.

Earlier most of the houses of the common people were built with thatched roof. But now a day the houses are built with modern design and equipments like Assam a type and R.C.C. buildings etc. Today’s people are accustomed to live comfortably according to their new living style and taste. They prefer a nuclear family to joint family and also prefer town rather than village for different purposes.

6.1. c. Residential pattern of celibate devotees in the Sattrā

The English word celibacy derives from the Latin word *caelibatus*, ‘state of being unmarried’. A person who refrains from being sexually active is celibate. They remain unmarried as for religious reasons. The celibate devotees have to live their devoted lives within the four walls of the Sattrā. These devotees are called *Kevaliya bhakatas* (keval meaning alone). They are totally indifferent to material wealth and attraction. That is why they are called *Udashin Bhakata*.

But Srimanta Sankaradeva was not in favour of such type of bachelor life of devotion. Srimanta Sankaradeva also led a married life with his family. Even he advised Madhavadeva in order to lead a married life. But saint Madhavadeva did not agree to this proposal. In this regard Sri Sri Madhavadeva presented some sarcastic arguments near Sankaradeva (Hazarika, 2014, p.70).

In spite of being lifelong celibate, Sri Sri Madhavadeva forbade his disciples to take him as their model. Most of the celibate bhakatas followed the paths of both Sri Sri Madhavadeva and later on Sri Sri Damodaradeva also. They had to practice their spiritual

lives inside the four walls of the Sattrā. The residential parts of the celibate bhakatas are called bahas. At present there is only one celibate devotee in Sundaridia Sattrā. He narrate his experiences as follows-

Case 6.4

1. Name of Informant: Prabhat atoi (A venerable person; A celibate devotee attached to a Sattrā)
2. Sex: Male
3. Age: 78 years
4. Occupation: Sattrā Bhakat
5. Marital status: Unmarried
6. Education: Primary Level

Prabhat Atoi was born in the Pachim hati of Sundaridia village. He lived with his parents up to the age of 18. He told this researcher that at the age of 18, he was suffering from an unknown disease. Then his parents prayed to God that if he cured by the grace of God, then they would offer him to the Sattrā. After that he was cured and his parents took him to the Sattrā and allowed him to live in the keulīar bāhā (unmarried male hostel) permanently. From that time, he is living in the Sattrā as a celibate devotee. And he had no connection with his parents and any other family members. According to him, he is devoted disciple of the sattrā and never committed any mistake. According to the rules of the Sattrā, he kept long hair like other keulīa Bhakatas. Though there were a few keulīa Bhakat in that bāhā in earlier time, but at present he is the only keulīa in that bāhā. He always performs the duties like pouring of oil in the Akshay Banti (eternal lamp) and other rituals assigned to him by the Sattrā. Apart from religious activities, he has to perform his own daily activities like cooking, cleaning, washing clothes etc. as he has no any aldhara (a personal attendant) at present. He receives respect from the all Sattrā community members.

6.1. d Different Ancestors related to Sattrā

There are different ancestors relating to the Sundaridia Sattrā. The post of Sattrādhikar is occupied through the family lineage of Ramcharan Takur Ata. On the other

hand the professionals of various lineages like potters, blacksmiths, and carpenters and so on are related to the Sundaridia Sattraa and they are performing their duties as these were done by their forefathers.

6.1. e. Community of Bhakatas (devotees)

There is vast community of *samuha bhakatas* in Sundaridia sattr. Since the early periods of Sundaridia Sattr the bhakatas have been in terms with religion and great devotion prevails among them till now. At the time of occasions like Deul, Kirtan etc. all the bhakatas take part happily and actively. They abide by the Sattr's systems with sincerity and punctuality is maintained throughout all indoor and outdoor activities.

6.2 Relationship between Sattr and Sisyas (Disciples)

Each and every *sisya* (disciple) is attached to the Sattr to a great extent. The Sattr institution plays a very important role in the life of the sisyas. Sisyas or disciples are the people living outside the Sattr campus. They live in different places or regions and attach with Sattr in a bond of religion. Traditionally each and every Assamese young man of the *Vaishnava* families is to be taken to the place of Guru before his marriage. But those who are not initiated into the religion are not permitted to take part in religious ceremonies. But now a day a little relaxation is observed regarding this process. There are more than 1500-5000 sisyas (disciples) and 500 bhakatas in Sundaridia Sattr.

The sisyas are of two categories *saraniya* and *bhajaniya*. One who gets initiated before his marriage is called *saraniya sisyas* (initiated disciples). And after marriage this particular *saraniya sisya* is given *bhajana* establishing with his wife. Because without *sarana*, *bhajan* processes is impossible.

Case 6.5

The life of the people of Sundaridia closely connected with the Sattr. They can not think of any other activity that is not connected to Sattr. For example- Two persons from the village have expressed their views regarding their connection with the Sattr. These are given below-

1. Name of Informant: Sri Sanjib Das
2. Sex: Male
3. Age: 28 years
4. Occupation: Government Job
5. Marital Status: Unmarried
6. Education: Graduate

The researcher met Sri Sanjib Das, aged 28 years of Kalayahati, Sundaridia village. He is unmarried and a Govt. employee in the department of Fishery. He informed that on every special occasion like his birth day or even he purchases a vehicle, he come to the Sattrra and offered a Sarai full of prasada, fruits, flowers, betel nuts etc. in the Kirtanghar. He takes the blessings of the Sattradhikar and the bhakatas and also offered them rice, curd, fruits etc.

Case 6.6

1. Name of Informant: Sri Bhagaban Das
2. Sex: Male
3. Age: 63 years
4. Occupation: Retired Government Employee
5. Marital Status: Married
6. Education: H.S. Passed

Sri Bhagaban Das, aged 63 years of Pachim-hati, Sundaridia village was interviewed by the researcher on one of his visit to the Sattrra. He is a retired person and he has one son and one daughter. He told that when the marriage of his son and daughter was fixed, at first he informed the Sattradhikar and offered prasada, a little cash and betel nuts in the Kirtanghar and sought the blessings of the Sattradhikar and the bhakatas. Next day he presented betel nuts, a little cash of Rs. 55 to the haitarghar of his hati to inform and invite the community people. Every year he pay Guru-tax to the Sattrra and in some special occasion he offered prasada to the Sattrra and also offered rice, curd, molasses, new clothes, betel nuts etc to the bhakatas.

6.3 Satradhikar and his Duties

The *Satradhikar* of *Sundaridia Sattr* has to perform some duties-

- A. The Satradhikar always participate in the daily *Naam-parasangas*.
- B. He always observes the *Guru Tithis* and festivals related to Sattr (birth and death anniversaries of the Gurus, *Janmastami*, *Doul* festival etc.).
- C. He initiates the *bhakatas* (devotees) and *sisyas* (disciples).
- D. He is the custodian of the *Sattr*.

6.4 Relationship between Satradhikar and the Bhakatas with Sisyas

There is a smooth relationship between Satradhikar and the bhakatas with sisyas. There is a threefold relationship among them.

a. Guru-Sisya (Teacher-Student)

The relationship between *Guru-sisya* is like that of teacher-student. All the bhakatas and sisyas obey the advice of Guru.

b. Pita-Putra (Father-Son)

The relationship between the Satradhikar with bhakatas and sisyas is like *Pita-putra* or father-son. In case of female sisyas the relationship with Satradhikar is also like *Pita-putri* or father-daughter.

c. Jestha-Kanistha (Senior-Junior)

The relationship between the Satradhikar with bhakatas and sisyas is like *Jestha-kanistha* or senior-junior. The Satradhikar preaches with the bhakatas and sisyas in a simple way. The junior also accept his preaching quietly.

6.5 Position of women in Sattr

Generally the women are not allowed to enter inside the *Kirtanghar*. But at the time of sarana (take religion) they are permitted to enter the second part of the Kirtanghar.

According to *Guru-charita* such type of rules are not mentioned. The *Aiyatis* (female devotees) perform nam-prasanga on the first day of Assamese *Magh* (January-February) month inside the *Kalaya Namghar* every year. Sri Sri Madhavadeva performed a famous naam-prasanga accompanied by Thakur Ata, Gopal Ata, Burha Ata for seven days and nights. Remembering this *Ayatis* also perform *naam-prasanga* like other *Bapus* (Male Devotees).

The women in Sundaridia Sattrā have high position and social status. Madhavadeva addressed the women of Sattrā as ‘*Ai-Matri*’ (Mother Devotee). The *Ai-Matris* in the Sundaridia Sattrā are respected most today also. They have a special duty and obligation to perform the Sattrā rules and regulations sincerely. Each and every *hati* of Sundaridia Sattrā’s *Ai-matris* has their own unit. It has been a custom to select *Deuri* (Clergy Women), *Pathakani* (Women Reciter) out of wise and good mannered *Ai-matri*.

The *Ayatis* perform morning naam-prasangas before the performance of *Bapus* (male devotees). On that particular day the other *Matris* (Women) also can enter and listen to the preaching of *saran* religion. In Sundaridia Sattrā the *Ai-matris* can participate equally with the *Bapus* (Male bhakata or devotees) in religious occasions every time. As the system to become bhakata of Sattrā by male members after *sarana* and *bhajana* process so also there is a provision for the female i.e. *Ai-matris* to take *saran* and *sarilowa* or *sariboha* (to sit in row).

At the time of field work, the researcher met one experienced lady called *pathakani* (initiator of women Nam-Prasanga) and recorded her experiences as given below-

Case 6.7

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|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Name of Informant: | Mrs. Karabi Deuri |
| 2. Sex: | Female |
| 3. Age: | 54 years |
| 4. Occupation: | House Wife |
| 5. Marital Status: | Married |
| 6. Education: | H.S.L.C. Passed |

According to her she was appointed as *Pathakani*, leader of women Nam-Prasanga

of the Sundaridia Sattrā. She used to come at 7 a.m. every day to attend her duties at the Kirtanghar. At first she performs the Kulup Ghosa of Madhavadeva and performs Nam-Prasangas with other women devotees. They have to perform Nam-Prasanga at the southern varanda of the Kirtanghar. According to her, she has been doing it for the last ten years and still will continue to do so.

6.6 Changing Aspects of Sundaridia Sattrā

6.6. a. Physical Structure

The Sundaridia Sattrā was established 400 years ago and during this long period it has undergone many changes in respect of its physical structure. When Sri Sri Madhavadeva established it, the Kirtanghar (Prayer Hall) was a thatched house built with thatches and bamboos in the traditional Assamese pattern. It underwent changes for the first time in its history during the regime of the Ahom king Pramatta Singha in 1771 Saka. At present it is found in a slightly modified form with a pucca floor and walls with C.I. sheets on the roof. The main Idol of Bangshi Gopal is placed inside the Santam Sactorium which is called the Manikuta or the Bhajghar. There have been a number of changes in its structure from time to time under the supervision of the Sattrā Managing Committee. The recent work of renovation was done in 2013-14.

Among the new infrastructures erected within the compound of the Sattrā, there is a Kalaya Kirtanghar constructed on the bank of Kalaya Ganga where the bhakatas or the devotees start the performance of Charit-path every year during the month of Magh (January-February) which is then shifted to the main Kirtanghar to last till the month of Bohag (April-May). Among the newly constructed buildings there are the Community Hall, the Guest House, the open stage etc. which have been built with the aid of the Government of Assam and the donations and contributions of the devotees and the well-wishers. The Guest house was built in 1991 while the community hall was built in 2012. The open stage was built in 2013-14. The Douh Ghar has also been reconstructed in modern style. The Koloshi (pitcher) on the Matha (Dom) has been replaced after the invasion of the Manns, i.e. the Burmese. The present koloshi is made of brass with layers with gold water on the surface as the original one was taken away by the Mann soldiers.

These newly constructed buildings have contributed a lot towards smooth functioning of the Sattras as it can now accommodate the visitors in its guest house and performances of Bhaonas can be done on the open stage without any constraint which the artistes had to face earlier. The original Matha which was lofty one that could attract the attention of the people from a distance because of its great height was affected to a great extent during the great earthquake of 1890 Saka as a part of it measuring about ten feet went underground for which only a part of it is now visible over ground for which it looks a bit less tall and only the upper half's of Idols was visible above the surface. No attempt of renovation has so far been done to raise it further and all the religious performances are done in continuity with the traditional rituals unaffected.

Provision of water has been made with the digging of a pond covering an area of 16 bighas of land outside the Sattras compound. Along with it there is also a house and a water supply tank newly constructed with the modern facilities of sanitations, bathrooms etc. for the use of the tourists and devotees. Supply of electricity has also been provided there.

6.6. b. Change in Organization and Management

Ramcharan Thakur Ata succeeded Sri Sri Madhavadeva as the Sattradhikar of Sundaridia Sattras. Since then the Sattradhikar of the Sundaridia Sattras has been a hereditary one, i.e. the post of Sattradhikar is occupied through the lineage of Ramcharan Thakur Ata. During the life time of Sri Sri Madhavadeva many an eminent devotees like Mathura Das Burha Ata, Bar Vishnu Ata, Vishnu Ata, Ram Ata etc. approached Madhavadeva for initiation to the Vaishnavite cult and Madhavadeva, a great scholar and saint could not but take them into confidence after some kind of tests and trials which he did by asking them all to write down the name of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva on the ground and then wipe it away with their feet. While the others did so without any second thought, Mathura Das Burha Ata did not do so and apologized that it was next to impossible for him to disrespect the great Guru. Sri Sri Madhavadeva was highly satisfied with him and initiated him as his disciple while the others realized their mistake, apologized to Madhavadeva and pleaded him to initiate them too which the Guru did only gradually in course of time. It is during this time itself that a tradition grows up to form

Baro-Burha or twelve bhakatas as the principal bhakatas among the devotees and disciples on the basis of experience. They were then advised to disperse to different places for establishment of new Sattras in different parts of the region. This system of forming the Baro-Burha has now undergone a change and they are now selected from the local bhakatas by the Sattradhikar and the Sattra Managing Committee. Formerly there was a tradition of drama performance by some particular families of the hatis but now this performance is done by the families of each and every hati interested in it. But there is still the dearth of the talented artistes in the Sattra because of the generation gap and reluctance of the new generation to adjust them with the Sattriya tradition.

There has been a change in public psychology regarding their belief for the Keulias or Kevalias. Earlier people had immense respect for the Kevalias or the celibate bhakatas and whenever any son fell ill the parents prayed for his recovery and expressed their wishes to engage the son as a celibate bhakata of the Sattra. This attitude has now undergone a complete change in the present day context.

There has been a great fall in the number of the celibate devotees in the Sattra resulting in a big problem in the performance of Nam-Prasangas and other rituals. Earlier there were four bahas or residencial houses for the celibate devotees, but it has got reduced to only two and the number of such celibate devotee is only one at present. The other two bahas are found in a completely dilapidated condition requiring renovation.

6.6. C. Impact of the Sattra on Society

The system of Dharma Danda or religious punishment has also lost its public response and confidence as a result of their preference for justice at the law court. This is a noticeable change in respect of public psychology.

Response to the evening prayer and Bhagavata path (reading) etc. has also suffered a public apathy as the attendance at the same is found on the decrease day by day. It has adversely affected the society particularly the new generation among which a state of chaos is on the rise. Enthusiasm among the new generation is not as encouraging as it use

to be in respect of the festivals like Deul, Kirtan etc. This is clearly noticeable in their lack of interest in learning the Sattriya traditional music and musical instruments like Bargit, Khol, Tal (cymbal) etc. This may be due to the lack of proper initiating to create a congenial atmosphere for attracting the young generation to such aspects of the Sattriya culture. Lack of proper education in this field has affected the society as a whole, not to speak of the Sundaridia Sattri in particular.

The same kind of apathy is noticeable in case of the traditional Nao Khel (boat racing) with the number of participating groups going down gradually. This is again due to proper education about the Sattriya tradition as well as the spirit of such entertaining performances whereas such entertainments have not only been preserved in other parts of the country, may across the world, but also encouraged for creating an atmosphere of enjoyment and adventurous spirit. The huge gathering on the banks of the Moranadi River on the occasion of the boat races performed there by batches of participating groups and the loud cheers of the gathering are a heart-rending reminiscence for the elder generation at the present moment. This has resulted in disintegration in the society to some extent which nobody can deny.

6.6. d. Changes on Account of Modernization and Westernization

Dynamism is a law of nature which nobody can deny. Time has its own impact on everything under the sun. It is the same with Sundaridia Sattri which has experienced the impact of modernization and westernization in various fields of its activities.

The dress code has experienced the influence of modernization as people are found now preferring long pants, shirts, shoes etc. in place of dhuti and kamij in the by gone days. The bhakatas were found moving bare footed inside the campus as well as outside the campus, but now a days they remain bare footed inside the campus but wear footwear's outside it. In case of the females also it is found that the young generation prefer suridar, sari etc. instead of mekhela chadar which only the elderly women use both inside and outside the Sattri campus.

The sanctity and whole hearted devotion have become almost a matter of the past with the new generations in respect of the observance of some traditional practices like

fasting on some occasions. The result is a kind of apathy towards the Sattrā traditional practices which has affected the Sattriya tradition to a great extent. Dearth of devout bhakatas is steeply on the decrease.

The present system of education has also affected the Sattrā life and its tradition as most of the well-to-do and middle class families prefer to get their children educated in English medium schools instead of the vernacular ones for which the knowledge of Assamese and Sanskrit has suffered a great set back. While even the illiterate devotees and disciples can spontaneously recite the scriptures of Srimanta Sankaradeva and Sri Sri Madhavadeva because of their deep faith and devotion, the representatives of the new generations cannot even name the great works of the two Gurus, not to speak of reading them and acquiring knowledge about their invaluable contribution towards the whole of the society.

Some small scale industries which were run in the past like pottery, carpentry have now become totally extinct due to the rise of modern industry as well as the lack of raw materials and supply of essential equipments for them.

People are now found attracted more and more towards towns and cities instead of residing in villages for a number of obvious reasons like job facilities, medical treatments, sports, education and other facilities. The result is a vast gap between the Sattrā and the so called modern generations who consider it needless to keep any sort of contact with the Sattrā. Only on the occasions of some of the main festivals of the Sattrā they feel it their duty to visit the Sattrā only for a day or two in a year.

The deul festival of Sundaridia Sattrā happened to be a very dear one for the people of Sundaridia who participated in it without any discrimination and exception. It is a great occasion when even the people of the locality residing outside Sundaridia for various reasons like professional, commercial engagement etc. considered it their duty to come to the Sattrā and make the festival a colourful one- a practice which the people boasted of so much in the past. But there has been a change in the attitude of the people who remain almost away from participating in the festival on some plea which is best known to them alone. This has an adverse effect on the Sattrā life as well as on the very

sense of duty and responsibility of the people concerned to the Sattrra, particularly in respect of the future generations.

While this researcher met the Sattradhikar and the senior devotees of the Sattrra to know the reasons of the changes now taking place and their reactions to the changing situations of the society related to the Sattrra, Sri Jagannath Adhikari, the honourable Sattradhikar of the Sundaridia Sattrra at present, aged about 62 years, made a comment on the problems like sharp decline in the number of celibate devotees at the Sattrra and the difficulties arising out of it etc. He also made certain comments on the present scarcity of the essential commodities. He also commented on the practice of the bye gone days when most of the things of daily necessity for the Sattrra were offered by the local people who use to send a share of their vegetables, rice and other essential goods to the bhakatas as a part of their duty to the Sattrra. It is because of the days of plenty and surplus has gone and the days of scarcity have come because of the high growth of population and impact of modernization and westernization. It is an undeniable fact that increasing population and the process of globalisation are the major factors of changes in the society in general and the Sattrra life in particular, which is also applicable in Sundaridia Sattrra.

6.7 The various valuable items preserved in the Sundaridia Sattrra:

The hand written books on sanchi paat, the materials used in ancient times etc. are preserved. The books of sanchi paat preserved in Sundaridia Sattrra are-

1. Guru-bhatima
2. Gunamala
3. Bargeet
4. Tritiya skandha Bhagavata
5. Bitrasur badh
6. Uttarakanda Ramayana
7. Naam-malika

8. Significant books (works of Madhavadeva)
9. Adikanda Ramayan
10. Bangsawali (geneology of Ramcharan Thakur Dev)
11. Totoy
12. Raj-sui kabya
13. Aranya kanda
14. Sanskrit dadwas skanda Bhagavata (edition of twelve part of Bhagavata)
15. Sanskrit Bhakti-Ratnawali (Bishnupuri monk)
16. 46 and 48 no. page of Naamghosa
17. Bhakti Ratnawali
18. Bhakti Ratnakar (in Assamese)
19. Adikanda Ramayan
20. Sundarakanda
21. Sundarakanda (Madhab Kandali)
22. Drama of killing Bali
23. Sundarakanda of Ramayana
24. Kurukshetra
25. Rukminiharan kabya (verse)
26. Kirtanghosa and Naamghosa
27. Bhakti Ratnawali (Madhavadeva)
28. Dasham skandha (tenth chepter) of Bhagavata

29. Harishchandra upakhyan
30. Astham skandha (eight chapters) of Bhagavatas amrit manthan
31. Amrit manthan-2
32. Balisalana
33. Ekadash skandha (eleventh chapter) of Bhagavata
34. Sastha scandha (sixth chepter) of Ojamil upakhyan
35. Ditiwa scandha (second chapter) of Bhagavata
36. Lankakanda of Ramayana
37. Sishulila of Kirtan

The copper plate given by the Ahom king Pramatta Singha to Sundaridia Sattrā is being still preserved where there are lot of descriptions about land and properties. Moreover, in Sundaridia Sattrā the paji-bota pira (seat of spinning wheel), one piece of keru (ear ornament), boha-pira (half burnt wooden seat) and few hair of Kalindri Aai (wife of Sankaradeva) with some cotton threads are being still preserved. The step stone of Sri Sri Madhavadeva and ancient books of sanchi paat are used as an item of religious service. These antiques are displayed among the religious public at the time of special occasions and festivals.



Copper Plate (Donated by Ahom King Siva Singha)



Scriptures on Sanchipat



Materials used by Kalindri Ai