

## **CHAPTER VII**

### ***SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION***

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In this thesis an attempt has been made to study all the aspects of the Sundaridia Sattras of Assam and its continuity and change. The institution of Sattras is inseparable from the Assamese social and cultural life. In fact the Sattras have established a permanent base of the formation of great Assamese community. The summary and conclusion of the thesis has been given in the following paragraphs.

In the Chapter I which is an introductory one an attempt has been made to draw an outline of the growth and development of the Bhakti movement in India as a background of the Neo-vaishnavite movement in Assam in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries initiated by Srimanta Sankaradeva. The Bhakti movement in India is found to have developed on the concept of the worshipping of Lord Vishnu first practiced in the southern part of India, and gradually spreading to the other parts of the country with particular reference to the eastern India including West Bengal and then with special focus on its growth and development in Assam which was then known as Kamrupa. The socio-political background has been taken into account in order to trace the origin and march of the movement under stress and strain because of the prevalence of Saivism and Saktism even under royal patronage. Attempt has also been made to find out how Sankaradeva, the great vaishnavite saint got inspired to think of *Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma* by his pilgrimages to the various shrines in the country and developed the concept of Eka-sarana-nama-dharma on the basis of the principles of the *Sri Mad-Bhagavata-Gita*, *Mad-Bhagavata-Purana* and *Padma-Purana*. A short account of the great saints contribution towards social organization by establishing *Namghars* and then followed by the establishment of the sattras institution has been given with a view to finding out the link between the initiation and propagation of *Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma* and the practical measures for paving the way for propagation among the masses. In doing so Srimanta Sankaradeva did away with the traditional taboos based on the system to draw an attention of the people belonging to various tribes in this part of the country which is the habitat of a number of castes and tribes which have a great importance in the study of the various aspects of culture and

processes of acculturation.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter (Chapter II) the background of Neo-vaishnavite movement in Assam has been brought under discussion against the background of the national picture as initiated in the southern part of the country starting with the contributions of the Alvars with gradual spread to the other parts, particularly in the eastern part. The historical and socio-political and cultural perspectives of ancient Kamrupa has been taken into account with a view to finding out the factors responsible for the growth and development of Vaisnavism, which is better known in Assam as Neo-vaishnavism. The study has brought to light the multipherius practices of various religious faiths like Tantrism, Saivism and Saktism to the total disagreement with the principles of vaishnavism as enunciated in the *Mad-Bhagavata-Gita* and the *Mad-Bhagavata-Purana*. The study of the establishment of the *Namghar*, the initial form of later sattras institutions has been focused along with the importance of the socio-religious functions it rendered towards the organization and unification of the Assamese society with a sense of devotion to Lord Krishna. The establishment of the sattras was considered a great challenge by the Brahmin priests to their cult of worship related to Tantrism and Saktism which resulted in their opposition and even attempts to disfigure the sanctity and reputation of Sankaradeva's *Eka-sarana-nama-dharma*. The history of the development of the sattras institution even in the face of so much of opposition by the Brahmin priests became the cause of the fury that compelled Sankaradeva to quit and take shelter in Koch Bihar under the protection of prince Cilaray. The development taking place after the demise of Srīmantha Sankaradeva and his principal disciple Sri Sri Madhavadeva show a kind of disintegration, which may actually be called the development of differences in the practice of the rituals, in the form of the groupings of the sattras into four Samhatis-Kala samhati, Brahma samhati, Purusa samhati and Nika samhati. A study has also been made of the contribution of Sri Sri Madhavadeva and Sri Sri Damodaradeva with special reference to the establishment of sattras and their religious writings. Mention has been made of the composition of Madhavadeva's magnum opus "Namghosa" which has come down through the generations as the "Swan Song" of the great saint. His contributions in the establishment of sattras at the direction of Srīmantha Sankaradeva are found in his great efforts in the establishment of Sundaridā Sattras,

cultural centre's where in addition to the performance of the day to day rituals, bhaonas, pal-nams and the celebration of various festivals related to the vaisnavite faith were organized and the study of these aspects has brought to light how they worked as the cementing force of the Assamese society. The social integration, inspiration for handicrafts like weaving and the ingenious weaving of the Vrindavani bastra are brought to light for an in depth study of the immense contribution of Sankaradeva through the inspirations like Namghars and Sattras.

Chapter III deals with the origin, history and development of Sundaridia Sattrā that was established by Sri Sri Madhavadeva, the principal disciple of Srimanta Sankaradeva in 1570 A.D. in pursuance of Kalindri Ai Gosani, the wife of Mahapurusa Srimanta Sankaradeva. Sri Sri Madhavadeva came from Patbausi to Sundaridia, an adjoining village of Barpeta and famous for its natural beauty, crystal clear water, beautiful environment and stayed there for a long period of fourteen years and a half during which he established the sattrā and gave a shape to it is one of the principal sattras of Assam. It is in this sattrā that a galaxy of sixty Atas got initiated at the inspiration of Madhavadeva and a good number of them have become a part and parcel of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement including Mathura Das of Tatikuchi, Gopal Ata of Bhabanipur, Narayan Das Thakur Ata, Bar Vishnu Ata, Jabana Jayhari of Muslim community and Ramcharan Thakur Ata (The nephew of Sri Sri Madhavadeva). The study reveals the beginning of the kevalia sampradaya that is the cult of the bachelors following the celibacy practiced by Madhavadeva, the beginning of thio-nam and pal-nam which are indispensable features of Neo-Vaishnavism and the sattras of Assam.

The Sundaridia Sattrā was established at a village namely Sundaridia which was covered a large area to the north-east corner of Barpeta town, now developed into a township. The compound of the sattrā covers an area of fourteen bighas and twelve lechas of land surrounded by a brick wall six feet high. The main entrance which is on the western boundary of the compound is one of the four gates of the sattrā, the three being on the other three sides of the compound. The sattrā is now found comprising concrete houses the entrances to which are beautified by are gateways, the eastern gate of which is decorated with lion motives on its either sides.

And on the spot study shows the internal plane of the sattrā with its substantial Kirtanghar, standing in the middle of the compound with the other additional structures on the north, south and east of it. The Bhajghar (Arched house) or Manikuta (Sanctum Sanetora) which is equal to the breadth of the kirtanghar stands perpendicular to sit beside which there the concrete structure is called Matha. One peculiarity of the sattrā is its Kevalia Hati or Keular baha. The western side houses the Jogmohan Ghar or Sabhaghār while there is a pat-kuwa or an earthen well on the southern side explored by Madhavadeva himself. Madhavadeva used to live at the Adi-vithi, about five meters away from the kirtanghar. The kirtanghar is a substantially well built building that offers a majestic look with its modern techniques in the making of its plinth and concrete pillars. Even at the time of its renovation, the traditional style has been retained without any kind of alteration. The interior of the kirtanghar houses the Asanas or Simhasanas or Guru Asanas rose on decorated platforms. Holy Scriptures like the Bhagavata-Purana, Sri Mad-Bhagavata-Gita or Ratnawali are placed on the three asanas dedicated in the names of Srimanta Sankaradeva, Sri Sri Madhavadeva and Badala Padma Ata.

The Chapter IV, on the organization and management of Sundaridia Sattrā focuses on its management exploring its heritage from the time of its great founder Sri Sri Madhavadeva. The Sattrā managing committee consisting of 17 members includes a Secretary an Internal Auditor, a Treasurer and 14 other general members while the Sattradhikar works as the ex-officio President. Since the time of Ramcharan Thakur Ata, the Sattradhikar has been from the dynasty of Ramcharan Thakur Ata, the nephew of Madhavadeva. There is a peculiar procedure of selecting the members from the managing committee- from each Hati of Sundaridia village Pub-hati, Pachim-hati, Uttar-hati, Dakshin-hati and Kalaya-hati. The number of members from these hatis varies from hati to hati. Five members from Pub-hati, four members each from Pachim-hati and Uttar-hati while two each from Dakshin-hati known as Hira bhakat, and Kalaya-hati. The Hira bhakatas are chosen from the Hira community belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC).

The Sattradhikar does not enjoy his voting power except on special occasions when the necessity arises due to the absence of any member of the committee or when the number of votes is equal. In case later one the Sattradhikar's vote is the decisive one.

The managing committee is the supreme authority to conduct the management of the Sattrā including the sources of its income and expenditure along with the management of the compound with the construction works of any nature, its repair, beautification, improvement and the like.

Chapter V deals with the activities of Sundaridā Sattrā under three sub-heads of daily rituals, annual rituals and occasional rituals. Daily rituals include Bigraha puja (idol worship), Puwar prasanga (Morning Prayer), Biyalir prasanga (Afternoon prayer), and Godhulir prasanga (Evening prayer), that cover a total of fourteen prasangas known as Chaidhya-prasanga. Normal activities of the day start with the beating of the drum early in the morning by the paladhara followed by the cleansing the two verandas of the kirtanghar along with its floor. The day's prayer starts with the singing of a Bargeet, Bhatima and Kulup-ghosa by the Pathak, usually five units of prayers in the morning. It is followed by replacing of the wick of the oil burner known as the Akshay Banti or Guru Banti (The lamp eternal) by the Burha bhakat, who is a kevalia bhakat (celibate devotee). After replacing the wick with a new one the burha bhakat pours oil into the burner and other bantis (lamps) are lighted along with it. Flower wreaths are placed on the Sarai followed by the placing of the Bhagavata-purana on a wooden tray in front of the Asana.

At about 7 a.m. in the morning prayers are started after the opening of the lock of the door enclosing Krishna Gosai by a Brahmin pujari. The ceremonial bath of the deity is performed with devotion after which begins the worship. In the meantime women devotees assemble for morning prayers which are done at the stipulated places on the southern veranda of the Kirtanghar. The afternoon prasanga starts around 3 p.m. and consists of reading of one section each from a number of selected works one another. The final item of the daily rituals is the evening prayer which starts around 6 p.m. by reciting and reading of a few chapter of Bhagavata along with some chapters from Kirtan-ghosa. The end of the prasangas is signified with the beating of the Daba (drum) by the paladharia around 8 p.m. Annual activities of the Sattrā include the celebrations of Bahag Domahi, Janmotsava of Madhavadeva, Pal-nam, Thio-nam or Vir-nam, Kati Bihu, Mohoho festival, Magh Domahi, Charit-path, Ghat-seva, Deul Utsava, Janmastami of Sri Krishna, Nandotsava, Pasoti, kirtan or Tithi Utsava, Ai Gosanir Tithi, Kar-var and

Janmotsava of Sri Sri Sankaradeva etc. Amongst them the Deul festival, the Tithi Utsava of Srimanta Sankaradeva, Sri Sri Madhavadeva and Mathura Das Burha Ata are celebrated with complete devotion, pomp and grandeur. The unique feature of the Ghat Seva utsava celebrated during Magh Domahi is to be found no where except at Sundaridia Sattrra. Among the occasional activities of the Sattrra mention may be made of Bhat Khati and Hal Khoti, System of Sarana and Bhajana process, Mala Pradan, Bhakat Mata, Birth day ceremonies of devotees, celebration of purchasing of vehicles, and the like.

Chapter VI discusses the inter community relationship of Sundaridia Sattrra focusing the composite nature of the society including various caste groups and occupational or professional groups that has been a great cementing force of the society as a whole. It also discusses the changing aspects of the Sattrra covering its physical structure, organization and management, impact of the Sattrra on the society and impact of modernization and westernization of the Sattrra. They all live together; work together as they perform their duties to the Sattrra with a spirit of integration. The caste groups include Kalita, Brahmin, Kayastha, Keot, Koch, Hira while the occupational groups cover the people related to the professions of pottery making, Blacksmithy, Carpentry and the like. This relationship claims a long legacy even from the time of its establishment by Sri Sri Madhavadeva. A unique feature of Sundaridia Sattrra and Barpeta Sattrra is that their devotees are distributed among different rows known as Hati which is not found in any other Sattras in Assam. Each Hati has its own Haitarghar or what may be called in modern terms community Hall which is the meeting place of all the devotees of a hati concern. Separate fund is also managed in order to run various social works for the hati. Each and every hati is entrusted with the responsibility of contributing Kar-Var or Guru-Tax for different Kirtan festivals including Guru Festivals. All these are performed with all sanctity and respect which create a spiritual atmosphere in the entire Sattrra area. The study also shows some minute differences about the formation and functioning of the Hatis of Sundaridia and Barpeta. While the residential method of the hati at Barpeta is completely a compact one with the houses adjoined to one another, residences of the devotees at Sundaridia are spread with spaces in between, although in rows. The celibate devotees known as Kevalias put up together at Kevaliar or Keular baha within the campus of the

Kirtanghar. Relation between the Sattrā and its disciples in an ideal one based on mutual responses to their duties as the same is also maintained between the Sattrādhikar and the disciples. The prevalence of the system of Dharmadanda, i.e. punishment on religious principles, for committing any sort of crime works as a powerful controlling force in the society of the devotees and the disciples of the Sattrā. It is honoured with a deep sense of respect to the Sattrā. The vary manner of performing the prasangas with preference to the prasanga of the women is symbolic of the honour and respect specially reserved for women in the Sattrā. The performance of the prasanga by the Bapu, i.e. the male devotees is done only after the prasanga of the Aais, i.e. the prasanga by the women.

The first noticeable change is the vary construction of the building of the Sattrā which was at first made of wooden posts, thatched roof and earthen floor- typical of a traditional Assamese house. But in course of time the construction underwent complete renovation replaced by a concrete one with concrete posts, C.I. sheet roofs and pucca floor. No thatched hut is to be found within the campus of the Sattrā. Initially the compound was enclosed with bamboo fencing which was removed in course of time with concrete walls all around. All the four gates including the main one are now concrete ones decorated, the main one being decorated to offer a grand look. There are also noticeable change in the organization and management of the Sattrā. Initially it was managed by committee comprising of more than 14 members elected traditionally by raising hands- A tradition prevalent in the Assamese society in the past. In course of time it underwent changes as the committee was selected with elderly members from amongst the devotees under the active role of Dr. Surendra Nath Das, the then public representative at the Assam State Legislative Assembly in 1328 Saka. But later this process also was replaced with a new one by forming the managing committee within the 17 members elected from amongst the representatives send from various hatis on selection basis. The committee comprises of the President, who is none other than the Sattrādhikar of the Sattrā, a Secretary, a Treasurer, an Internal Auditor and fourteen General members. It is to be noticed that the management committee itself manage and runs all the activities of the Sattrā without any sub-committees under it. It is the sole authority in all matters relating to the Sattrā while in respect of spiritual influence of the devotees performing their duties



with complete devotion to the Sattrā, in matters of Dharmadanda some changes have taken place in that the devotees or the disciples prefer to move the court for justice although the honourable court generally upholds the decision of the Sattrā management. Changes have also taken place as a result of the impact of modernization and westernization in the society. The process of urbanization has brought about a change in the vary life style of men in general, and so its impact on the Sattrā is only a part of the whole. The result is the participation of the young generation with a dress code which was not formerly approve of by the Sattrā within its campus. The young devotees are found putting on western dresses in place of the traditional Assamese dhuti and kamiz (Panjabi) on the part of the males and mekhela-chadar in case of the females. Attendance in the evening prayers is now gradually getting thin in place of a huge congregation in the yester years. Decorations in the modern line have brought about an attractive look on the entire Sattrā and it looks attractive with its grand look which none can deny.

In the preceding chapters it has been shown that all the objectives of the study are fulfilled in the course of study. The first objective of the study wanted to examine history and development of Sundaridia Sattrā. Accordingly the origin and history of the Sattrā has been depicted in the second chapter also included historical background and development of the Sattrā.

The third objective, organization and management of the Sundaridia Sattrā, has been shown in the fourth chapter. It has been clear that this is the only Sattrā where the hereditary Sattradhikar presides over all the sattrā activities. A seventeen member Sattrā Managing Committee is there to run all the activities and organizational works along with the Sattradhikar.

In the fourth objective the researcher wanted to show daily, annual and occasional rituals of the Sattrā which are explained in the fifth chapter of the thesis. This chapter also included the socio-cultural activities of the Sattrā which is included in fifth objective.

The cordial relation of whole community and the devotees with the Sattrā and changing aspects i.e. the vi and vii objectives of the study are included in the sixth chapter.

Though all the earlier Sattras were established by the two great Sinats Srimanta Sankaradeva and Sri Sri Madhavadeva at the beginning, in the later period their disciples

like Bar Bishnu Ata, Narayan Das Ata, Mathura Das Burha Ata, Ram Charan Das Ata, Bhabanipuria Gopal Ata, Lakshmikanta Ata etc. became instrumental in spreading the religious faith (Vaishnavism) and creating many more Sattras in later period. Madhavadeva went to Sundaridia at the instruction of Srimanta Sankaradeva's wife Kalindri Aai where he lived for fourteen and half years. He spent the most fruitful years of his life in the Sundaridia and made this place the centre of spreading Mahapurusha dharma. While Madhavadeva was away from that Sattra, Kalindri Aai came to live in Sundaridia and she looked after all the sattra activities. She even looked after all the Akshay Banti so that it goes on throughout day and night continuously which is continuing till today. She died at Sundaridia Sattra at the age of 140 years (Talukdar, 1996, p. 104). The house within the Sattra where Kalindri Aai lived and some of her belongings are still preserved in this Sattra. From the respect shown to the material remains and living house of Kalindri Aai within the Sattra compound it is evident that women are also shown great respect in the Sundaridia area. It is the only Sattra where women were allowed to stay within Sattra and allowed to look after the Akshay Banti (eternal light) of the Shrine.

Though Barpeta Sattra and Sundaridia Sattra are two separate Sattras of Barpeta district within two miles, these are more or less similar in all respects yet there are some differences also. It may be mentioned in few lines that both the Sattras follow their distinctive rules for the selection of Sattra Adhikaries (Medhi). In Barpeta, Sattradhikar is elected through democratic way i.e. by voting through ballot paper. There are two Sattradhikar- One is Burha (old or aged) and the other is Dekha (young) Sattradhikar. On the other hand in the Sundaridia the Head of the Sattra is not elected but it is hereditary.

Generally the eldest son of the Sattradhikar inherits his father's post. There is only one Sattradhikar in Sundaridia.

In the Barpeta Sattra "Akshay Banti" is placed facing towards the western side whereas in Sundaridia Sattra it is lighted facing eastern side.

The idol of Kalia Gosai or Bangshi Gopal is taken out on different occasions in both the Sattras. The Barpeta Sattra people take out the idol on the last day of doul (Holi) and turn around the Sattra which is known as "Sueri". But the idol of Bangshi Gopal is taken out in Sundaridia Sattra on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of Bohag i.e. the first month in Assamese

calendar. Another speciality of the Sundaridia Sattrā is seen in observing Kalayabeel Kirtanghar Pal-nam. This festival is observed in the month of Bohag.

From the study it has been clearly seen that the Sattrā of Sundaridia is deeply influencing the life of the people of this area. It was also patronized by the Ahom Kings, Douh Ghar was constructed and land was granted to the Sattrā through Copper Plate. Koch King Naranarayana of Cooch Behar also was a disciple of Sundaridia Sattrā. It has therefore shown a glorious past history. The Sattrā is very much proud of the “Adi Vithi” and the belonging of the Kalindri Aai Gosani which are preserved there with utmost care. Though there were few upheavals like earthquake, damage by fire and invasion by Maan (Burmese), yet the people of Sundaridia lived up to the mark with pride. Though there were a large number of keulias in the Sattrā, now there is only one such keulia Bhakat, who is above 78 years. But all the cultural activities are continuing regularly and the Sattradhikar exercise considerable influence over the villagers. It may be quoted from Sarma (1999, p. 264) “The importance of the Institution does not lie alone on its religious activities. It has contributed much to the cultural development of the Assamese people. It gave a rich religious literature, revived and popularized the art of classical music and dance, introduced dramatic performance, encouraged handicrafts and introduced the art of manuscript painting. The elevation of socially backward people by presenting before them a monotheistic religions to all alike irrespective of caste and sex, the loosening of the spiritual level, the spread of learning through Assamese versions of Sanskrit scriptures, the popularization of ethical virtues like kindness, non-violence, obedience etc. among villagers, and above all the fostering of a spirit of fellow-felling or a bond of unity amongst persons of different parts of the country, are the some of the notable social contributions of the Vaishnava movement and the Sattrā institution”. From these lines we can understand the contribution of a Sattrā in the life of Assamese community.

In conclusion it can be said that Sundaridia Sattrā is a uniting force of that area and it exerts great influence on many spheres of life of the community as a whole. In this Sattrā family members of Ram Charan Thakur Ata are known as Medhi who recites scriptures (Pathaka) and at the same time training disciples to do ritualistic activities and solving problems of the people.

Another feature of Sundaridia Sattrā is that from the very beginning Keulia Bhakata's Bahas (houses) were constructed. They remained unmarried and completely devoted to God. In fact Guru Madhavadeva himself was the first devotee of this system. It is also interesting to note that there are a number of castes and lineages attached to the Sattrā with other traditional activities. The services of the different professional caste groups are very important at the time of festivals. Secularity is maintained by the Managing Committee of the Sattrā. In the Sattrā people must live in a religious atmosphere including the Bhakatas, Keulias and the Sattradhikar. Sattradhikar trains the virtues and ethical norms to the people. He himself teach Krishna dance, Rasa, Sutradhar dance etc. All the Bhaonas and Khol-Tal, drum beating, classical Satriya dance etc. are taught in the Sattrā premises. Even handicraft, writing of manuscripts, painting of religious figures, characters from the epics, writing religious manuscripts etc. are taught in the Sattrā. People participate in regular nam-prasanga and all the festivals observed in the Sattrā and thereby develop a sense of fellow feeling and a bond of unity in the village.

It is also said that a tradition of "Thio-nam", singing of "Kulup-ghosa", "Pal-nam" etc. started by Sri Sri Madhavadeva in Sundaridia Sattrā. After the death of Guru Sankaradeva, it was introduced by Madhavadeva that the Bhakatas should be sitting in lines. Till this day the same rule is observed in the Kirtanghar. Madhavadeva also categorized the four pillars of Neo-Vaishnavism as Guru (Preacher), Dev (God), Nam (Chanting of prayer) and Bhakata (Devotee) in place of three.

In Sundaridia the system of "Dharmadanda" prevails i.e. if anybody breaks the social system he/she can be punished by the Sattradhikar and payment should be made in terms of money which is still a controlling force over the whole village community. Women also take active part in all the activities of the Sattrā except that they are not allowed to sit inside the Kirtanghar. Here the women take lead in the morning prayer by singing "Kulup Ghosa", after they finish their singing, the Sattradhikar can start inside the Kirtanghar. After considering all the activities of the Sattrā it can be clearly commented that Sattrā of Sundaridia exerts great influence upon the community as a living institution. Though certain changes have occurred in the society with the time and influence westernization, industrialization and modernization, the Sattradhikar will be able to continue his leadership with some progressive outlook.

## PHOTO PLATES



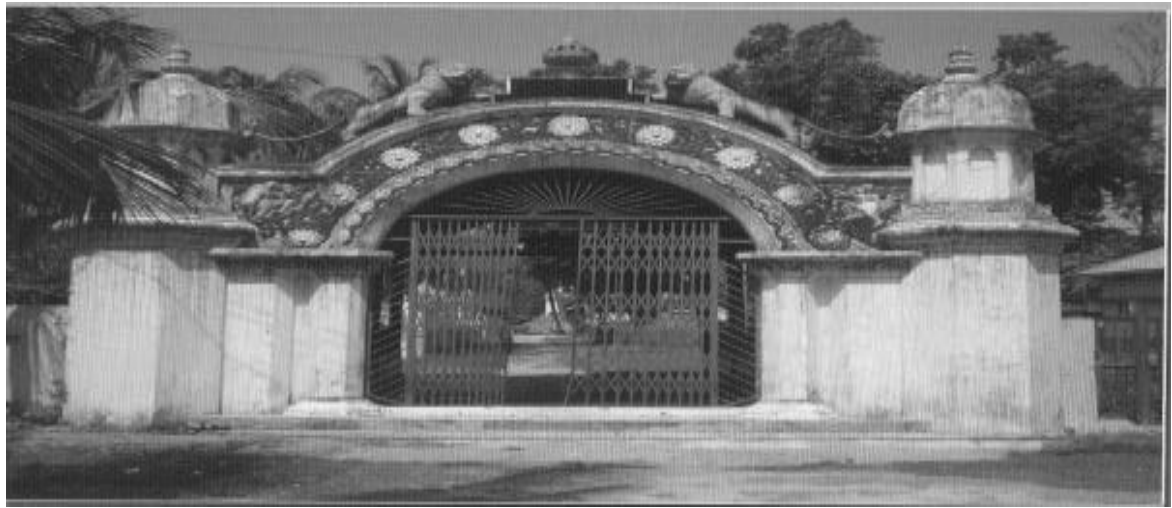
**Photos of Performing Holi Geet (Source: Internet)**



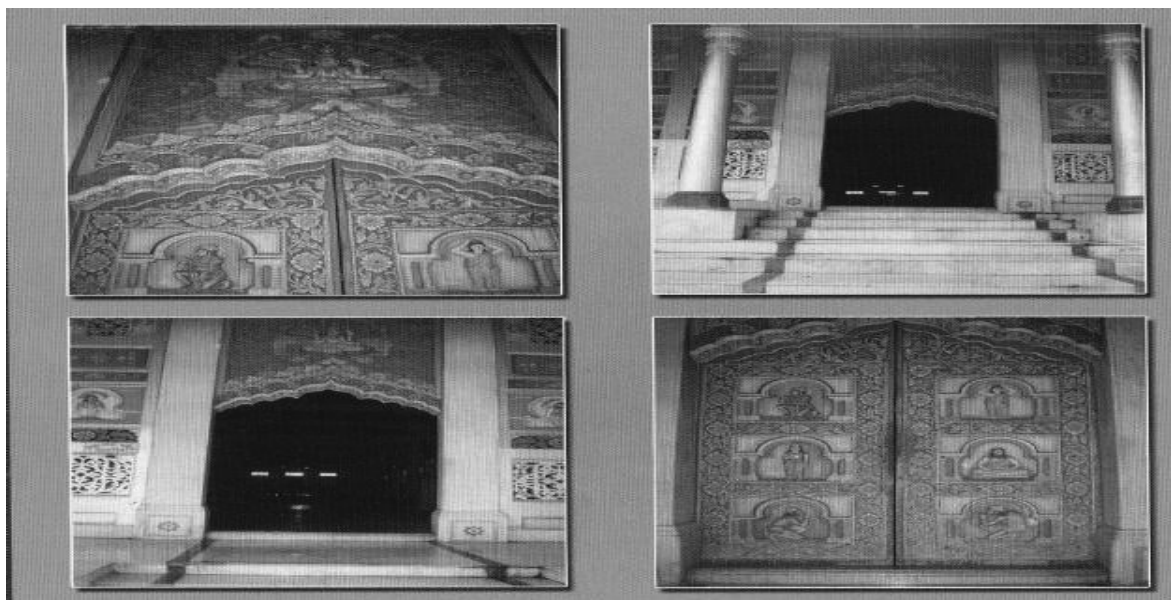
**Upper part of the main door of the Kirtanghar**



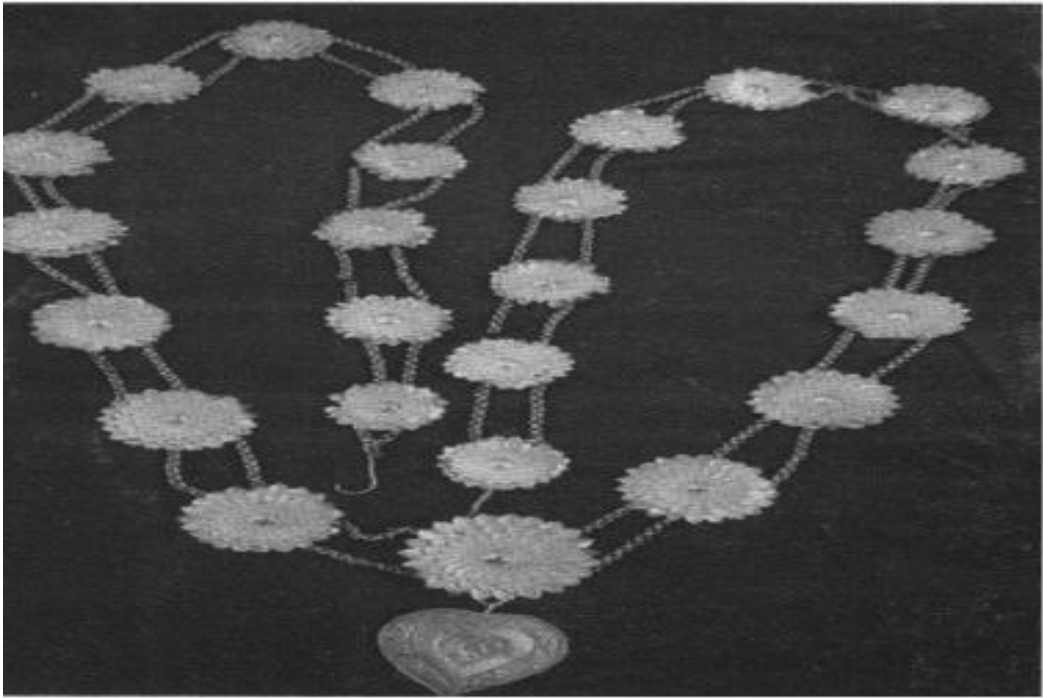
**Various figures on the wall of the Kirtanghar**



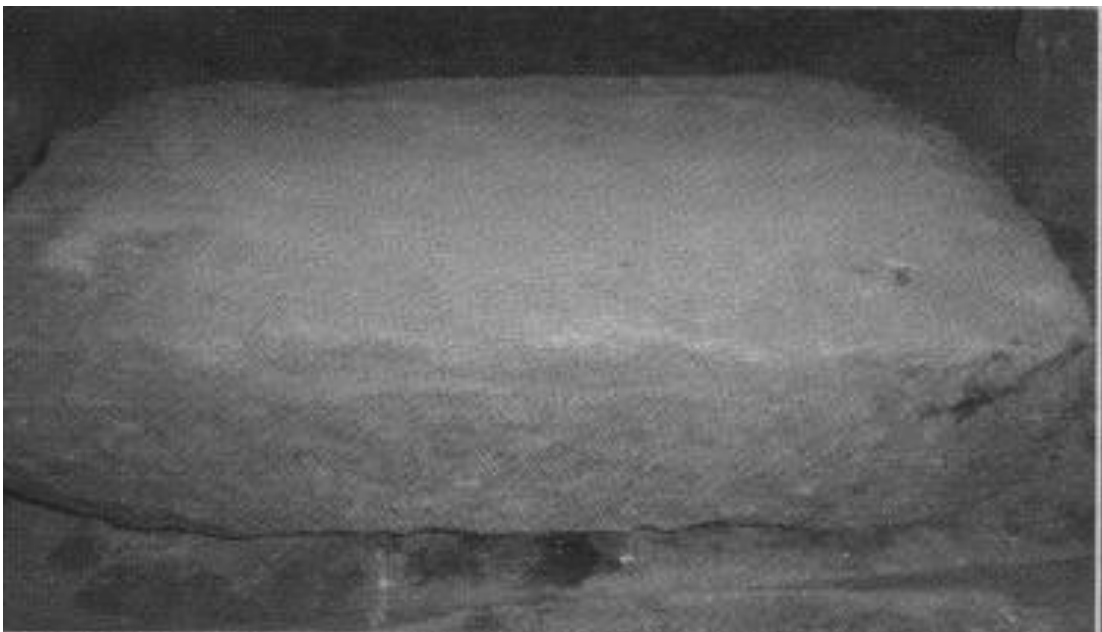
**Singha dwar (Gateway)**



**Main door of the Kirtanghar**



**Kanthahar (Necklace of silver)**



**Padasila (The stone used by Madhavadeva for keeping his feet)**