

Gharmora satra and its archive:

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Introduction:

Among the satras of Assam Gharmora satra occupies a significant position. By studying the history of Gharmora satra we can understand that Gharmora satra is a combination of the ancient satra called *Puratoniya satra* of Assam and the satras established by Sankardeva. During the reign of Chutiya King at Sadiya on the bank of the river Gharmora, Gharmora satra of Brahmin Sankarisan was established at the end of thirteenth century. The history of the Gharmora satra can be divided into three periods. In the year 1523 after the annexation of Chutiya Empire by the Ahoms, this satra was shifted to Gharmora of Makhowa sub-division. Therefore the time period from thirteenth century to early sixteenth century can be called as ancient period. On the other hand, till 1826 Gharmora was at Dhenukhana near Ghilamora. The time period from 1523 to 1826 can be called as Sundarakanda or medieval period or Ahom period and after the decline of Ahom period i.e. during the British period in the year 1829 this satra was again shifted to Lakhimpur town. This time period can be called as *Uttara kanda* or Modern period. The earliest satradhikar of this satra was- Sankarisana and his eighth successor Bishnudev shifted this satra to Dhenukhona Gharmora and in the year 1588 he gave the responsibility of satradhikar to Jadumoni's son Jagatananda as he did not have any child. Later, this satra immediately became a satra of *Nava-vaishnav* from its primitive form.

Objectives:

- 1) To know about the origin of Gharmora satra.
- 2) To study about the various archival materials of this satra.
- 3) To examine the articles offered by the Ahom rulers to Gharmora satra.

Methodology:

For this study both primary and secondary sources are followed. Regarding primary sources the letters of satradhikar of Gharmora satra to the Ahom swargadeo, to the Chief Commissioner of Assam etc. were examined. Moreover some other primary sources are the archival articles that are still preserved in the satra. Regarding secondary sources books and articles are followed. This study is an attempt to highlight the importance Gharmora satra with special reference to its archival materials and also to put light on the contribution of Ahom rulers towards this satra.

Background:

Gharmora Satra of Lakhimpur is one of the most remarkable satras among the antique satras of Assam. During the 13th century two princes of Chutiya dynasty took education at Navadweep University of Bengal. There they met a Brahmin named Sankarshan of Kannauj (Kanyakubja). After completion of their studies they came back to Sadiya and at the same time, the Chutiya king i.e. their father get retired. Thus the eldest prince succeeded him. He brought Sankaarisan and some other families belonged to different professions to Sadiya in order to establish a satra on the bank of a river and granted lands and people and offered a statue of lord Vishnu. This pre-Sankarit satra (before the time of Sankardeva) was established after the design of the residential satra of Jogihati of 1232 A.D. and it is mentioned in the stone inscription of Samudrapala, discovered at Ambari, Guwahati. The old Chutiya king also visited this satra till his death. After his death this satra is renamed as Ghaimora (Ghai- principal, chief or original, Mora- dead, deceased) and later it became Ghaimara. The river is presently called as Ghaimura. The river with its transparent water flows beside the temple of Burha-Burhi and meets the greater Lohit in between Sadiyaghat and Kundil river. The successors of Sankarisan stayed at Sadiya up to fifth generation. They spread the cult of Vaishnavism among the plain and hill tribe like- the Chutiyas, Deuris, Abors, Miris and others residing in and around Sadiya. At present satra a bell inscription is preserved and it belonged to 1463 A.D.¹

Archival materials of Gharmora satra:

An important striking feature of this satra was its archive where various old books and antiquarian things, official documents are preserved. The most interesting regarding this satra is that even after the damages caused to the great number of manuscripts by the earthquake of 1950, but still this satra is preserving valuable books, rare manuscripts in its archive.² By observing each and every article stored in this archive we can undoubtedly say that this satra is continuously maintaining a good relationship with its contemporary rulers of all the three time periods. In fact, this satra was an important centre of popularising Hindu religion. It was also an important centre of unity among the various indigenous people of plain and hill areas.

Old books: There are enough old books which are properly stored in the archive of Gharmora satra since long back. Interestingly these books are properly preserved from its past days though there were various natural calamities. There were more *sachipat* (manuscript) than *Tulapat*. Most of these books were either written in Sanskrit or Assamese. But some are also written in Brajawali and some were written in both in Sanskrit and Assamese. But it is to be noted here that though the language of these books is Sanskrit, its script is Assamese. There were more than 250 books. By examining these books we can say that this satra was an important centre of Religion, literature and culture.

The books written in Sanskrit language: Among the books written in Sanskrit – *Bidhi* or *Bidhi sastra* (Hindu scriptures which determine forms of rituals) are most interesting. Here a *bidhi* on Shiva puja written by Krishnaram Nyaybagish or Parbatiya Gosain who was brought by Rudra Singha from *Nadiya*. Besides these various smritis and Dharmasatra or law books of Manu, Yagyabalk etc are also found. Similarly srutis, sruta sastra are also available. In fact, five books of *saptakanda* Ramayan of Valmiki, Two *parbas* of Mahabharat, six books of Bhagawat Puran and one book of

¹ Nityananda Gogoi, Gharmora satra, Prantik, 16th year, 24th issue, 1997, PP: 38

² Ibid, P- 38

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Brahmaboiarta Puran. On the other hand, here we can find books written by Navaratna of King Chandragupta Vikramaditya's court. They are- Bidyudou katha of Bar-rusi is unknown to all and Amar kosha (dictionary) Amar Simha. Bidyudou katha of Bar-rusi is a unique book for all because the most popular book of Bar-rusi is Prakrit Prakash. Therefore we can undoubtedly understand the importance of the archival material of Gharmora satra. Apart from all these books there are some books which are dedicated to god and goddesses but author's name is not mentioned in these books. Another important book among these is a book on calculation of time.³

Books written in Brajawali script with the combination of Assamese and Sanskrit language:

An important book named Ramkandali Mangal was about astronomy and medicine. On the other hand various dramas are also stored written by Sankardeva in Brajawali script were also available.⁴

Books written in Assamese:

Among the books there are some incomplete books. Some of the most important books are like-kirtan written by Sankardeva and Sridhar Kandali, Namghosa written by Madhavdeva etc., some other books written by person like- Raghudev, Gobinda Mishra, Bhattadev, etc. Another important book is- Incantations or *Mantra puthi*. All total there are nineteen books for example- *sarpa* mantra or snake incantation, *Hamdoi* mantra etc. There are also found books written on medicine. It means along with these incantations people also had knowledge on medicines. There are also books on Ayurveda. On the other hand, *nidans* (diagnosis) of various *kaviraji* (Ayurveda) treatments are also available. On the basis of this we can say that Gharmora satra was not only an important religious-educational and cultural centre of Assam, but it was also an important medical college of early Assam. Earlier another book was found written on horse treatise but it's not available now. Moreover, there are also books written on various birds and animals for e.g. traits of chicken (*Kukura-charitra*), traits of elephant (*hasti lakhyan*). Some books are found which were written on plants for e.g. glorification of holy basil and on holy basil. Another interesting book found here was written on the list of utensils. But this book is not in proper condition. Some other articles other than books are like- primitive instruments, official documents written on manuscripts etc. This satra is not only having an archive but also having a museum.⁵

Appliances and other materials:

There are one bell of about 15 k.g. and it is made of an alloy of eight metals, one *kharam* or slipper made of brass and its length is 10.5 c. m. , one *taokin* or *bhogjara* of 26 c. m. made of bell and one *pikdani* (spitting pot) of 26 c. m., a silver coated *sanphura* (tray for betel nut with a cover), one ivory handled knife, an artistic *khatala* (four-cornered palanquin), one *dola* (Assamese litter) dyed with vermilion and varnished with yellow orpiment, two big conches and the brass-made divine statue of Bhuvanmohan or Krishna , the gold and silver coins, the bell made utensils, the copper and brass made appliances used for worshipping etc. are the interesting articles preserved in the archive of present Gharmora satra.⁶

³ Nityananda Gogoi, Gharmora satrar puthipaji aru pura abhilekh, Ritayan, Guwahati, Feb, 2015. PP: 44-45

⁴ Ibid, P- 47

⁵ Ibid, P-48

⁶ Op cit., P- 39

The bell-inscription:

Among the other archaeological sources of Assam, the bell of Gharmora satra occupies a significant position because of its artistic enterprise. On the exterior side of the bell we can see the depictions of shivalingas, Lord Shiva's head with some knots of hair and snake and sketch of fish.

Contribution of Ahom kings towards Gharmora satra:

During the days of the sixth generation of Sankarsan a battle occurred in between the Ahoms and the Chutiyas in the year 1513-1523. In later period, this satra was settled down at present Dhemaji district. During the reign of Chutiya king Bishnudev this satra was again shifted to the south on the bank of a *beel* near Dhenukhana of present Dhakuwakhana district. Since then this satra was renamed as Gharmora. Bishnudev was again succeeded by his son Joykrishna. He got patronage from the Ahom-Kings and thus secured the huge property of this satra. As a result of this he was able to make this satra attractive one. Later, under Jagadananda this satra entered in its second phase. In this phase, the satra was influenced by Vaishnavite religion and culture propagated by Sankardeva. As per the reading of *Keshab Charita* composed by poet Chandravija⁷ before the establishment of *Aoniati satra*, Niranjandev had to spend some days on the bank of Gharmara beel on being afraid of Swargadev Pratap Singha. It can be assumed that he lived in the period of his suppression here at Gharmara satra.

Icon inscription of Rudra Singha's reign:

On the back of the statue of Bhuban mohan following lines are written:

'Bhubanmohan Padashrita Jadumonideva Kulobhava Ramnarayan dvija

Shri Shri Rudrasingha Nripdattwa Bhuvan devata

Pujarthe devottara bhumi 4131 halcha, sake 1618'

If we examine the above lines we can understand that Rudrasingha re-established Gharmora satra, the son of Swargadeo Gadadhar Singha after the devastation that took place during the later 's reign. Interestingly he also offered various articles along with this statue.⁸

Interestingly a manuscript was found mentioned a declaration made by Swargadeo Rudra Singha. He declared that he strengthened Assam by offering lands to the Brahmans and *pandits* of outside for their settlement. He further annexed the Kachari and Jayantiya kingdoms and given lands to the Brahmans and *Pandits* in order to develop Assam in the field of education, literature and culture. He also introduced Assamese language as an official language.

Another letter is preserved in this satra which do not record proper dates. This letter might be written by satradhikar Thaukrishna or his brother Ramkrishna to Ahom swargadeo Jugeswar Singha (1821-1825). This letter gives us information about the anarchical condition of the northern bank of Brahmaputra and eastern part of the river Subansiri during the Burmese attack.

⁷ Tirthananth Sarma, *Aoniati satrar buranji*, P-118

⁸ Op cit. , P- 49

Sanphura (tray for betel nut with a cover) Inscription of Swargadeo Kamaleswar Singha's reign:

On the exterior of the *sanphura* we can observe only five lines of Sanskrit slokas in Assamese script. On the other hand, we can also see the depiction of a rider on a horse and some other beasts and birds. This *sanphura* was manufactured by Gobindasay and it was offered to the then satradhikar – Lakhminarayan or Lakhmidev.

Issue register:

Among the books preserved in archive of Gharmora satra, one interesting book was found written on horse containing 42 *sanchi* leaves or 83-84 pages in Gharmora satra. It is recorded that on 10th *Bohag* (a month) this book was given by a person named Malakhu to a person named Paniphukan of Ahom period. So from this record we can clearly state that during the Ahom period Gharmora satra functioned as an advanced library.⁹

During the reign of the Ahoms this satra flourished on the bank of the Gharmora *beel* (small lake) with its resources and properties. This *beel* was also called as *Mahdhua beel* and was constructed in order to wash the sacred food items of the satra. On the lower part of this *beel* on the western side another *beel* named *Gorudhuwa* was there. Most probably during *Bohag* bihu the cattles of this satra were showered. The local people of this area did fishing in this *beel*.¹⁰ Under the Ahom rulers a *doul* was also constructed by bricks and named as *Fakuwa doul*. This *doul* was also called as Gharmora *doul*. Moreover, there was a forest area named *Padumoni* which was few kilometres away from this satra and there were few low lying areas near this forest area. Most probably these were once *beels* with full of lotus. These lotus flowers were used in the religious rituals of this satra. Due to natural calamities these *beels* were transformed into low lying areas.

Later, Gharmora satra was reconstructed by adding fourteen rooms. In fact several connecting highways towards this satra were also constructed. This satra is also connected with the Ahom capital Rangpur, Ghuguha doul etc. The satradhikar of Gharmora satra also visited Ahom court in order to offer flowers and blessings to him. In the year 1829 this satra was shifted to west bank of the river Dhal, on the east of Lakhimpur district.

Besides all these there are two remarkable contributions of this satra. These are mentioned below:

1) letter of Gharmora satradhikar to the Government of India through the chief commissioner of Assam: (dated 12-02-1903):

During the British rule in Assam, on the northern side of the Lakhimpur district the hill tribes of these areas raided in the plains and therefore British closed all the *duars* (gates) to come across the plains. These hill tribes therefore had to face starvation and therefore two headmen of these people namely-Madho Gam and Tado Gam asked help from the satradhikar of this satra. It is noteworthy to mention here that the hill tribes of these areas became the disciple of this satra since ancient period of Assam and thus they accepted the satradhikar as their religious head. The then satradhikar of this satra wrote a letter to the British government on behalf of these hill tribes. But no further records have been found whether the British government agreed or not.

⁹ Ibid, P- 51

¹⁰ Sarbeswar Jalbhari Phukan, Gharmora doul, Aluk, Guwahati, 2000.

2) On the other hand, during the year 1910, P.R Gordon, Commissioner of Assam Valley wrote a letter to the satradhikar of this satra to take proper action in bringing peace among the Gasi Miris of *Gusam* and *Dulung* areas by withdrawing their internal conflict.¹¹

On the basis of the above mentioned letters, it can be said that this satra had a great impact on the people living on the northern hills of Lakhimpur district. This satra had a great contribution towards maintaining peace and order among the local people of this district. In fact this satra also provided them security.

Conclusion:

The strong, in fragile, generous, great and glorious steps taken so far by Gharmora satra in the direction of retaining the light of religion, art and culture of Sankardev un extinguished among the different hill and plain tribes of north-eastern part of Assam, so to say, eastern Himalayas can only be compared to the significant role played by Bareghar satra of the southern bank of the Brahmaputra in case of the 'Nokte Nagas' of Arunachal Pradesh. This satra welcomed each and every section of the society to become its disciple much before Sankardeva's neo-vaishnavism. By examining the various articles preserved in the archive of Gharmora satra we can state here that this satra became a centre of unity among the Chutiyas, Ahoms, with the British in Assam and even after India's independence it continued. On the other hand, this satra spread Hindu religion, culture, especially neo-vaishnavism among the various communities and tribal people of plain and hill areas of Assam. Gharmora satra is not simply a satra, it is also a museum, library, an archive, a centre of Assamese-Sanskrit literary activities, important centre of education, a craft centre and it was also a popular medical centre. Besides all these, we must acknowledge the valuable articles of this satra which are still preserved in its archive.

The religious enterprise of this ancient satra is presently seen to have been not properly maintained. Therefore it can reasonably be asserted that if this satra is substantially assisted, helped and patronised by the people in general and government of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and India in particular, it can not only fulfil the national interest of India but also can pay impetus to the much-desired integration between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Reference:

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 - b. M. Neog, Prachya Sasanawali, Appendix A
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