

Relevance of the Satras in 21st Century A.D.

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The Satra institution that was born in the 16th century A.D. have been playing a remarkable and leading role in the religious, social and cultural life of Assam till today. The Satra institution is not only the centre of spreading of the Vaisnava religion, but it is the soulcentre of education, culture and art of Assamese national life. The Satra in one hand fulfils the national unity and on the other hand awakening the artistic temperament of the living consciousness of general people supplies the enlivening power in in the national life.

Judging from the point of historical view it is impossible to evaluate the heritage of the national life of Assam without Satra-culture. But under the perspective of the present social system it is also important to analyse the role of the todays Satras. By supporting the monotheistical opinion Mahapurusha Sankaradeva the seeds which he planted of Assamese culture, the selfishness Dharmagurus of his (Sankaradeva) subsequent successors that made the Vaisnava Dharma in various branches which resulted the greater Assamese nation is in danger even now by the brotherly slaughtering mentality would be denied by anybody. If the Neo-Vaisnavism developed in the Hindu society in support of the “Guru-Deva-Nama-Bhakata” of the “Chari-bastu” (the four main sacred truth) of the devotional truth of Neo-Vaisnavism then that accomplished truth polluting by over scholarly layer is not only a spiritual crime but a social crime also.¹

It is a matter of extremely sorrow that when human nature of practical practice has no in conformity with the oral practice is nothing but only a conduct against morality in the name of religion. At the very present time so many Vaisnava Guru or Satradhikaras say in the words of Mahapurusha Sankaradeva as “Kukura-Srigala-Gardhavar-Atmaram” (i.e. the soul of dog, fox, donkey etc. are the same soul of God). But in practical field they do its opposite. Hence it is assumed as a deceptive one. In this sphere these instructors who want to disregard the genuine Guru is to justify through self-knowledge how much hateful it is. To strengthen the Satra-sided society, those persons who decorate the place of the spiritual instructors instantly hurt the sentiment of their own disciples through untouchable-impure conduct, should be perceived the pleasant relationship between the “Bhakata” and “Bhagavana” through the observation of self-dedication to god. Because it is says in the “Sri Krishnar Baikuntha Prayan” verse no-46 as –

Bhakatase mora hridi Janiba nissai /
bhakatajanara jana amisi hridai //
moi bina bhakate nicinte kichu an /
bhakatate pare moi nedekoho an //

God says it must be known that only devotee is my soul and I am the soul of my devotee. The devotee does not think anything besides me and I too donot know anything except devotee.

It can never be socially accepted which are adopted by some spiritual instructors only to fulfil their individual benefits. As has been stated by Dr. Kesabanandadeva Goswami, “the co-disciple Damodar Bipra who showed unwillingness to join in the ththi festival (death anniversary) of Mahapurusha (Sankaradeva) organized by Madhavadeva” is the creation of ‘Brahima Samhati’ like a dark-spot in the greater Assamese national life. Because in the later part, as Dr. K. Goswami, “the justification of the best has been occurred through the strength of property and wealth rather than spiritual improvement.”² In course of time, the creation of the ‘Purusa Samhati’ by Purusottam Thakur, ‘Nika or Nistha Samhati’ by Mathuradas Burha Ata and ‘Kala Samhati’ by Gopala Ata is intensely significant matter that influence on the social life. In the later part these various divisions of Samhati system turns much difficulties instead of spiritual and social improvement.

It is easily come to view when we turn over the pages of history that just after the death of Mahapurusha Sankaradeva, the social system and unity which grow on the basis of the Satras began to destruct. Through dislike it is true that during the reign of Ahom dynasty the Mowamoria rebels united in the name of religion fighting with arms against the king-court destructed the idealism of the Guru (Sankaradeva). But during the time of Burmese invasion the spiritual instructors could not unite their disciples in the name of religion against the Burmese. The Satras silently arranged their self-protection instead of protect Assam unitedly by breaking the fence of the four ‘Samhatis’. The British came to drive the Burmese. The British imposed the rent upon the Assamese people. The Assamese people who did not pay any rent at any age fell into an exceedingly deplorable condition after having sold their homely utensils. Under such circumstances too the Satradhikaras of the Satras busied in collecting their ‘Gurukar’. There arose the chaos in the society when the Dharmadhikaras engaged in collection their own ‘Guru-kar’ without giving any solution to their own disciples free from the rent of the British. At that time the Baptist Missionaries entered into Assam for spreading the Christian religion. Taking the aim of spreading the Christian religion the Baptist Missionaries became success to attract the various groups of people of Assam by giving the knowledge of cleanliness, health-care etc. Assamese nation is indebted to them in the field of Assamese literature also. But we were unable to keep the social informative idealism of Sankaraguru though we found him at hand.

The number of Satras are increasing even today too. In addition to the Satras there are so many such a kind of religious units like ‘Sangha’, ‘Sanga’, ‘Samaj’ etc. are also in Assam. But it is a matter of grief that it seems to be a separate-one individual units rather than holding social unity. Having accepted the religious idealism of the same Guru they have been practising the religion according to their own constitution. Under a same cause it seems that the host erects different ovens for the devotees. The host also compels to do that- since the ‘Bhakat’ means like a God. The host does not get salvation without satisfying ‘Bhakatas’. Besides, there are differences among the sons of the same father also. Some of them save their hair of head and some don’t do in the death anniversary of father. They perform their death anniversary of father separately due to their Guru is different. Because there are religious coustoms of their religious instructors- “don’t go home, don’t take offerings.”

The term ‘Vyabhisara’ (the conduct against morality) is generally applied in worship, homage, rituals, Guru etc. But corruption, black-market, activities without moralities are kept beyond the boundaries of ‘Vyabhisara’ at least in the field of religion. These are not seemed to be justified. Hence, the base of Assamese society is like a hollow-wood eaten up by the white-ants. Therefore the

foundation of the society is becoming weak. The present religious instinct emphasizes mostly on the external practice and decoration than to educate the people with humanity and morality. That is why it gets suitable environments to grow up the seeds of division also therein.

Again taking the advantage of generosity of Satra and society uncultured music, 'jatra', 'Sankirtan' and non-Vaisnava dance, song etc. that enters into some Satras turn disaster to Assamese socio-cultural life at present days.

It is universally accepted that the society is changeable. In the waves of revolving the change come to society in every sphere of political, social and economic life. The change occurs in the field of pleasantness of people and social worthiness also. The society prevailing at the time of Mahapurush Sankardeva also steps down on the bosom of present time through the changing. Hence keeping ahead the ideology of Sankarguru the Satras of 21st century A.D. should endeavour to take step for building up the society.

Though the spreading of education is increasing at this time the morality almost takes farewell. As a result, the moral character of the nation has been deteriorated. Having fallen all around in the act of pulling of political and economic gaining the today's society has been collapsed in slaughter, looting, rape, kidnapped, corruption etc. Today having failed in the economic problems the young generation is racking the dark-future.

We assume that the Satras have much responsibilities in this regard. At this time the Satras should come forward to solve these problems. The Satras should adopt a mission to turn to the real path of humanity for the young generation through the moral teaching, teaching of religious fact etc. The root-hymn of Ek Sarana Hari Nama Dharma are kindness, forgiveness, benevolence etc. Under these focuses to feel the 'Basudhoibakutumbakam' and to observe the realities of 'Kukura-Srigala-Gardhabaro-Atmaram' should be the main object.

We suppose that young generation can be attracted towards the religion along with the building up a healthy society by showing the path of work-cultural which is suffering in the economic problems. A vast area of land is lying barren in so many Satras. If we are able to make the young generation self-dependent through agriculture on the basis of co-operative society in those waste land the work-culture must grow up with the removal of economic problems. By this the young generation will be attracted towards the Satra-culture and religion also.

The Satra is not only the institution of higher class. The Satra constitutes with the co-operation of the various groups of people from Naga, Miri, Mikir, Abar, Lalung, Garo, Kachari, Rabha and Chandal to Brahmin and Kayastha. Hence, it is the sacred duty for the Satras to save the religion of the Mahapurusha avoiding the caste, colour, high and low etc. As the saints would able to make impure to pure through the power of knowledge, the today's Dharmagurus should go forward keeping the said power in their heart. It is the high time to bring the non-Vaisnava to Vaisnava through the main truth of 'Sarana', 'Bhajana' and 'Bhakti' given by the Guru.

For the unity of various tribes of North-East India that the plan taken by Mahapurush Sankardeva with the idealism of building up a new society, to execute that ideology if the today's Dharmagurus had taken up the endeavour (to execute that ideology), the problems of disorder, slender, divisions etc. would not have grown up at the present days. There is no other alternative without having had the ideology of Sankardeva for the survival of Satra-culture and building up a peaceful society.

Culture is a flowing river. Rectification of culture is needed if and when required. It is desirable to correct the past-errors and remaining defect. Let the leading Dharmacharya to analyse the past orthodoxy livititious without any affection. Let them to self-analyse. We should know that religion can be able to set up in the soul of mankind, not to make feel through external custom-practice, orthodoxy etc.

At the very present time though the criticism arises regarding the role of Satras, it must be admitted by all that the impact of both the Ahom administration and the Neo-Vaisnavite movement, in the firm social bindings of Assamese society are very clear. But the influence of the Neo-Vaisnavite movement in the national culture of Assam is more and great. By the dint of wealthy cultural and firm social bindings that given by the medieval period to Assam, the Assamese culture and society through various historical disasters and intrigue also able to maintain own existence.

It should be the prime duty for the Satras to think and prescribe about the social system and culture given by the Neo-Vaisnavite movement so that it would be grow up with more strength and development adjusting with the present modern age. We should be conscious about that matter at any moment that would not be harmful to this social system and culture through our any words and activities. Analysing through intense scrutiny with organizing aspects, when it is done for the welfare of the mankind, the Satra-culture of Assam territory would be established in the court of world and then the social responsibilities are also would be well-executed.

Foot notes :

1. Parag Ch. Bairagi- Satra Sanskriti aru Samajik Dyabadhata, (Article), Satra Sourav. P-72
2. Dr. K.D. Goswami- Satra Sanskritir Ruprekha. P-1-2