CHAPTER–VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It has been mentioned that saint Sankardeva initiated neovaishnavite movement during the later half of 15th century of the Christian era. The satra institution in Assam, was the offspring of this movement. Many scholars have done a good number of research work on the neovaishnavite movement and the satra institution of Assam. Similarly, many eminent writers have also written and published a lot of books, articles on the neovaishnavite movement and the life histories of the vaishnava saints and this kind of practice is still going on in our society. Neovaishnavite movement and its related issues have their large magnitude, which demand a lot of space and time for presentation and discussion. Legends related to the satra institutions are also a major component which provide information in understanding the functioning of this great institution of Assam. A legend also works as an introductory note, an unwritten constitution of the same. Considering all the aspects of legends as a vital issue of discussion; an earnest attempt is made to analyze them in my research work. Chapter wise summary of the work is presented below:

8.1 SUMMARY:

The findings of my entire research work have been presented in eight chapters and these are serialized as Chapter-I, Chapter–II, Chapter-III, Chapter-IV, Chapter–V, Chapter-VI, Chapter-VII and Chapter-VIII. Chapter –I is the introduction of my work while, the other chapters are arranged according to their contents. Except, the
concluding chapter (i.e. Chapter-VIII); the contents of each chapter is discussed in a limited page number between twenty three to fifty. A very brief summary of each chapter is presented below:

In Chapter–I of my dissertation, I have made an introduction of the *satra* institution and its other related issues. The word *satra* is derived from the Sanskrit word *sattra*; mention of this word is found in the great book like the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. At first, this religious institution which was started by great Sankardeva was named as *devagriha* but it became known as *satra* in its later stage of development. The disciplined management of this institution and its associated designations are an important matter of discussion. We know that the *satra* institution is one of the most well managed religious institutions in Assam. It has different branches of management unit which function uniformly for the development of the institution and help in spreading the thought and philosophy of the great vaishnava saints. It offers different designations to the people for the functioning and smooth running of the institution. The designated people of the this institution are highly valued and respected in vaishnava society. Generally, a group of well versed people of neovaishnava cult are designated to such positions. Like the *satra*; the *thān* is also a similar kind of religious institution and a place of worship of Assam. A slight difference between the *thān* and the *satra* have been detected in my research work and I have mentioned these differences in this chapter of my dissertation. Similarly, there are also differences between a *kirtanghara* and a *nāmghara*. A *kirtanghara* is an integral component of the *satra* institution which remains attached to it but a *nāmghara* has its own
identity, it works as a substitute in some places where there is no *satra* institution. Initially, I set four objectives in my dissertation and I tried to establish them through my research work. Details of the objective are included here in this chapter; similarly I have proceeded with three established hypothesis which are also incorporated in it. Every research work is done by following a proper set of methods without which the work remains incomplete. The methodology which I have adopted to complete my work is included in this introductory chapter.

Eminent scholar R. M. Dorson has categorized folklore and folk life into four major sub-divisions; these divisions are-oral literature, material culture, social folk custom and folk performing arts. The legend is an important genre of oral literature, there are also some other genres such as myth and folktale which are equally important and interesting. Since, the legend is the topic of my dissertation, so I have tried to present its various aspects in the Chapter-II of this dissertation. In the very beginning of this chapter, I have presented a brief discussion of the four major sub-divisions of folk lore and folk life. Basically legends, myths and folktales fall under prose narratives; which is an important sub-category of oral literature. Eminent folklorist W.R. Bascom has made a comparative statement to show the differences among myths, legends and folktales. In his statement we find some remarkable differences which make us understand the difference among the three. I have included Bascom’s statement in this chapter of my dissertation. Like Bascom, the other two eminent scholars Malinowski and Frazer have also presented their valuable
opinions on myths, legends and folktales. In this chapter of my dissertation I have analysed some of their comments and tried to examine their relevance in the present context; thus I have tried my best to establish the importance of legends as a subject of research. I have also put forward a definition of Tangherlini which helps to get its a clear concept of legends. Folk legend is different from the other forms of legends. It has specific character, language and setting; since I have tried to analyse legends related to the vaishnavite institution so, it is essential for me to make a study of legends in general and folk legend in particular. In this chapter I have tried establish that the legends related to the vaishnavite institution as an important sub-category of folk legend. The concept of legends has changed in recent times, people can easily trace the difference between folk legend and the legends of our times; hence some basic characteristics of contemporary legend are presented here in this chapter. Legends classification is an important aspect which help in the study of legends. In this chapter, I have mentioned the classifications put forward by folklorist like Bausinger, Von Sydow, Linda Degh and some scholars of recent times. In the concluding part of this Chapter-II, I have presented some significance of the study of satra legend of Assam.

In Chapter-III, I have dealt with the satra institution of lower Assam. Before the advent of neovaishnavism; Saivaism and Saktism were two mention worthy religions which dominated the entire socio-religious history of lower Assam. Kāmrūpa was the land of Goddesses where the books like Kālika-purāṇa and Yogini-tantra were composed. The emergence of neovaishnavism posed as a great
challenge for the mentioned religions. Vaishnava saint Sankardeva arrived in Kāmrūpa at the third phase of his life. In Kāmrūpa, the saint had to face tough challenge from the followers of Saivaism and Saktisim. Sankardeva made his permanent residence at Pātbāusi, he stayed here for a period of eighteen years and six months of his life. Biographers of Sankardeva mention that his stay at Pātbāusi was the most fertile period of his life, because, he has made the most of his valuable contributions to Assamese literature during his stay at Pātbāusi. Since, he arrived here at the mature age of his life, so his literary contributions were also the product of his knowledge and experience. In this chapter, I have tried to make an analysis of some important literary works of Sankardeva. According to Dr. Maheswar Neog, Sankardeva met his tree prominent vaishnava followers in lower Assam; they were Nārāyandās Thākur Ātā, Dāmodardeva and Harideva. These three followers have made a significant contribution to the religious history of neovaishnavism. I have given their brief introduction in this chapter of my dissertation. Saint Mādhavdeva had also arrived in Kāmrūpa with his guru Srimanta Sankardeva. He made his residence at Bārādi and stayed there for couple of years. Like Sankardeva, Mādhavdeva was also able to gather a good number of followers in Kāmrūpa, who helped him to spread the doctrines and philosophy of neovaishnavism. In the later period of his life, Sankardeva handed over the responsibility of neovaishnavism to Mādhavdeva at Ganakkuchi Satra of present Barpetā district and he left for Koch Behār. Mādavdeva took the responsibility of headship and elevated neovaishnavism to a distinguished position. It is already mentioned that, there are more than three hundred
vaishnavite institutions in lower Assam, out of which I could list only one hundred and twenty one in my research work. A tentative list of the *satra* institutions of lower Assam, their founders, locations and *samhatis* are incorporated here in this chapter.

Emergence of *samhati* is an important unfortunate incident in the religious history of neovaishnavisim in Assam. It was a major blow to the unity and integrity of the *satra* institution. Different scholars have put forward different opinions about the emergence of *samhati* of neovaishnavisim. Dwārikānāth Dwij, one of the prominent scholar of neovaishnavisim has mentioned that saint Mādhavdeva had divided the *satra* institution into different subsects and named it as *samhati*, while the scholars like Dr. S.N. Sarmā and Dr. M. Neog have agreed that disappointed Dāmodardeva deviated from the main stream of neovaishnavisim after the selection of Mādhavdeva to position of headship. According to the opinion of Dwij, Mādhavdeva had divided the *satra* institution based on a dream that he had seen at night but the opinions of Dr. Sarmā and Dr. Neog indicate that the selection of headship was an apple of discard which caused the birth of the *samhati* in neovaishnavisim. In Chapter-IV of my dissertation, I have mentioned details about the three scholars views regarding the emergence of *samhati*. Brahma Samhati was the first *samhati* to be emerged in the history of neovaishnavisim, it was followed by Kāla, Purusa and Nikā Samhati. In this chapter, I have also mentioned about some prominent followers and some salient features of each of the four *samhatis* of the *satra* institution. It is worth mentioning that there
are only a few difference among the *samhatis* of the *satra* institution. But it must be admitted that the emergence of *samhati* has affected the unity and integrity of the *satra* institution of Assam.

In Chapter–V of my dissertation, I have included twelve collected legends related to the origin of a few *satra* institutions of lower Assam. The origin stories of the *satra* institutions are very important and interesting, these are also the introductory notes which provide us a detail picture of the contemporary socio-political and religious background of a society. People related to *satra* institutions like to preserve these legends and glorify the past history of their institutions as well as the society. Every origin legend of a *satra* institution is a trustworthy document which works as an unwritten constitution. It is also admitted that a legend provides raw material for the construction of history. During my field visit, I found that most of the places of Assam were renamed either after the establishment of a *satra* institution there or the visit of the great vaishnavite saints. In such situation an origin legend of a *satra* institution also works as a place name legend of that place. Among them I could collect twelve origin legends related to twelve *satras* of lower Assam; some of them were found in different variants, I have tried to analyse and compare them minutely before including them in my dissertation. The origin legend of a *satra* institution is found to be the most living legend at the present period. The local people tell the origin legends and like to glorify the past history of their esteemed institutions.
Lives and the activities of the vaishnava saints are legendary themselves. The incidents related to the life histories of the saints give us an opportunity to know about the thought, philosophy and the other aspects of their lives. I have collected nineteen legends related to the life history of different vaishnava saints and I have included them in Chapter-VI of my dissertation. It is found that, most of the vaishnava saints had to face trouble in lower Assam; which was willingly created by different groups of the society. Specially, a section of orthodox Brāhmins opposed and conspired against the vaishnava saints, sometimes a few saints had to stand in trial as a result of their conspiracy. Even great Sankardeva had to attend at the court of king Narnārāyana as he was accused of leading the young astray. In the similar way the other followers of neovaishnavism had also faced frequent troubles caused by their opponents. The legends related the lives of the vaishnava saints let us know everything that had happened in their lives. During the time of my data collection, I found that few ardent followers of some vaishnava saints either tried to exaggerate the incidents related to the lives of their gurus or added some unbelievable stories in them. This kind of exaggeration hamper in finding out the authentic form of a legend. I have collected all the variants of such legends and compared them minutely. I have put my best effort to present the most authentic form among the variants and these are carefully included in this chapter of my dissertation.

Chapter–VII of my dissertation is a combined chapter of the legends related to the holy items of satra institutions and the place name legend. Most of the satra institutions of lower Assam have their
ancient relics of neovaishnavite period, which announce the past glory of the satras. I have termed these ancient relics as holy items of the satra institutions. These items are either carefully left behind by the vaishnava saints or discovered accidently. During my data collection, I found that these holy items are preserved well in the satra premises. Some holy items have also their interesting legends related to them. I have collected six legends related to the different holy items of different satra institutions and included them in this chapter of my dissertation. The place name legend of the places related to the satra institutions are also one of the major component of satra legend. Some of these legends tell us the history about the origin of a place and its relation to a satra institution. It is already mentioned that most of the places of lower Assam where there is a satra institution are either renamed after the establishment of the satra or the visit of the vaishnava saints. In some cases a legend related to the origin of a satra institution and a place name legend are found to be similar. Even one legend related to the origin of a satra may repeatedly be used as the place name legend of the place where the satra institution is situated. I have tried to avoid such kind of repeated use of one legend. During my field work, I have collected six place name legend and placed them in this chapter. Thus, a total number of twelve legends are included in Chapter-VII of my dissertation.

8.2 CONCLUSION:
Neovaishnavite movement and the satra institution always attract attention of the people of Assam. The satra institution is the lifeline of Assamese culture and society. This esteemed institution enjoyed
its heyday during the time of the great saints and their followers. It was a place of worship, social activities and serious discussion. Almost all the matters of the contemporary society were discussed in a *satra*. A *satra* institution controlled the entire machinery of a society and its culture. A large number of people gathered here regularly.

There are more than three hundred vaishnavite institutions scattered in different parts of lower Assam. I have listed one hundred and twenty one of them in Chapter-III of my dissertation. *Satra* institution is one of the most systematic, democratic religious institution of Assam. Unfortunately, it is seen that this esteemed institution has gradually losing its ancient heritage, even some of them are remaining as a shadow of their past glory. At present, only a few *satras* of lower Assam have been boldly announcing their existence in the modern society. Divisions among the *satras*, role of the religious heads, pathetic economic and geographical condition and the impact of globalization are some of the major causes which have affected the very existence of this esteemed institution. The emergence of *samhati* can be counted as the first major drawback of the *satra* institution of Assam. Apparently, there are not much difference among the *samhati* of the *satra* institution; but a minute observation can bring out the difference among them. Since, the division of *satra* institution first took place in present Barpetā district of lower Assam, so the *satra* of this region are found to be severely affected by it and its result is largely counted. During my field work, I found that all *samhatis* of the *satra* institution have their headquarter in Barpetā; so the difference
among the *samhati* and their principles could be vividly observed here. The inequality between the religious heads and their followers is also a major drawback of some of the *satra* institutions of Assam. Dr. S. N. Sarmā cited an example from *Ramagopāla-charita* to show the difference between the religious heads of the eastern and the western parts of Assam. In his discription, Rāmananda, the head of the Athaguri Satra of eastern part of Assam, said to one of his disciples in the following way “Religious heads can maintain themselves here and are recognized by people if they can make a show of luxury and pomp. Therefore they require soft cushion, big pillow to recline, beautiful trays of brass and fine mattresses having floral design to sit on and costly clothes to put on. But religious heads of Kāmrūpa and Behar are not in need of such things to get recognition as sadhus. They use simple things made of bamboo and wood, put on simple cotton cloths and can perform their prayers sitting on mattresses made of ribs of the plantain leaf. There (Western Assam), the simplicity is considered the characteristics of religious persons” (Sarmā: 1966: 192). The above mentioned lines clearly show the discrimination among the religious heads and their followers. Thus, we can assume that the behavior and the life style of the religious heads have adversely affected the democratic aspect of some of the *satras* of Assam. Pathetic economic condition and geographical situation of some *satra* institutions of lower Assam is also a great cause of concern. Since most of the vaishnavite saints and their followers had established *satras* near rivers and their tributaries so, a few *satras* of lower Assam have either submersed in the nearby mighty rivers or washed away annually by devastating flood. These two factors have also broken down the
economic backbone of some of the satra institutions. For the benefit of my study, I have categorised the satra institutions of lower Assam into three different categories and termed them as Well-known Satra, Known-Satra and Lesser-known Satra. This type of categorization may appear unconventional, but it is felt to be imperative to make a systematic study in the present context. The nature of the three mentioned categories have been discussed in Chapter-II of my dissertation. The Well-known Satras are those which are economically rich and prosperous, the Known Satras are found to be financially not sound in comparison to the Well-known Satras and the Lesser-known Satras are just surviving for the sake of their survival. Practically, when I visited the Well-known Satras then I could easily collect my required information but the same cannot be said in case of the other two categories of the satra institution.

Satra legends are orally transmitted unwritten historical document of the recent past, so it expected that the common people have a tendency to preserve this rich ethnic property of their institutions. A satra legend works as an introductory note for a satra institution and an unwritten constitution for the people related to it. Most of the function and ceremonies of a satra institution are performed according to the guidance of this orally transmitted message. It is obvious that legends are the combination of reality and imagination. Scholars James Frazer has mentioned that the percentage of imagination is more in legends than reality. Sometimes the portion imagination of a legend is found to be widely exaggerated. If this exaggerated portion a legend is detected and deleted carefully then
the authenticity of that legend can be easily established. I have collected, compared and tried to present the most authentic form of every legend in my dissertation. Thus, an earnest attempt has been made to establish the place and role of legends in understanding the past and present glory of the satra institutions of lower Assam.