CHAPTER VIII

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AS MEDIA OF INFORMAL EDUCATION

The mandiras, satras and nāmagharas in the district of Nalbari have been functioning as media of transmitting the informal education to the rural folk of these areas. In this respect, the importance of the Harimandira seems to be far reaching. When there was no institutional education in our societies, at that time such type of mandira, satra and nāmaghara had imparted informal education to the non-elite rural folk. They were educated through these media in various dimensions of their life and society as well as culture. They may be illiterate, nevertheless they were not quite ignorant in the field of various knowledges and ideologies and so forth. That is why it is said that the rural folk may be illiterate but they are not fools. Rightly does observe Altekar: "...... infusion of a spirit of piety and love in the minds of growing generation should be regarded as the first and foremost aim of education."1 In ancient India, different rituals were performed at the beginning of both the literary and professional education, primary as well as higher. The religious observances, which the student had to observe during the period of training, the daily prayers which he offered in morning and evening, the religious festivals and ceremonies that were celebrated with great eclat in the preceptor’s house almost in every month, all these tended to foster piety and discipline in the mind of the young students. This spiritual background is expected to help the student to withstand the temptations of life. The very atmosphere, in which he lived and breathed, impressed upon him the reality of the spiritual world and made him realised that though his body may be the product of nature, his mind,

1. Altekar, A.S.: Education in Ancient India. P. 9
intellect, and soul belongs to the world of the spirit, certain laws
ought to govern his conduct, mould his character and ideals must
determine behaviour in his life. Thus, traditional worldview was taught
to a student through these observances.

Modern education is mainly based on western ideals and
therefore, this system does not give proper emphasis in imparting the
Indian cultural education. In this context, indigenous cultural media
have exclusively been imparting cultural education among the rural
folk. Similarly religious institutions in the district of Nalbari have im-
parted cultural, social, moral and religious education to the non-elite
rural folk. These centres are carrying a long tradition which is en-
riched with the elements of local, regional and sub-continenetal tradi-
tions. Common people derive a model of life from religious teach-
ings. For the common illiterate masses teachings of religion provide
guidance in their life. In daily prayer services, festivals and ceremo-
nies different forms of knowledge are cultivated and imparted to the
masses. Besides, people also learn discipline and develop their per-
sonality and receive leadership training from these practices. Reli-
gion helps in the individual achievement and understanding of social
and moral ideas. The following discussion tries to identify and relate
religious centres with transmission of informal education.

8.1. SOCIAL EDUCATION:

People learn social feelings like co-operation, integration,
cohesion and so forth from various religious activities. Socialisation is
a process in which human being strikes deeper root in society to
which he belongs. It is a process in which he finds the fulfilment of
his life in and through the increase and development of his relations
with his fellows.² Rightly does observe H. Herskovits, "the process by

² Bhatia and Bhatia: Theory and Principles of Education. P. 230
means of which an individual is integrated into his society is called socialisation. 3

Religious centres are the socialising agencies in the individual life. Here individuals learn all socially desirable values like companionship, love, security, inter-personal relationship. Like other channel of transmission of social values, religion is also a powerful medium. Social values are introduced through various forms of religious performances.

During the various activities in the religious centres people learn social education through their participation. In the religious centres religious discussions and seminers are held. Here, different purāṇic episodes are narrated and those act as a model for the people. From the story Kṛṣṇa-Yasodā we learn ideals of mother son love and affection, Beulā-Lakbindāra and Sāvitrī-Satyavāna episodes set ideals for conjugal relationship and the story of Rāmāyaṇa example of father-son relationship. So, these episodes work as direct teaching to the people.

The people of different sections assemble in the religious centers during the various rituals, celebrations, observations and festivals. Performances like nāma-prasaṅga, bbāonā, puppet theatre, dramatic performance, ojāpāli and the performance of drumers troupe may give ample opportunity for transmission social messages to the audiences and listeners. Naturally the performers of different artforms have integrated themselves with the performance as well as the audiences.

In the contexts of various rituals and worships held in the Harimandira of Nalbari, people irrespective of caste, creed, colour and gender offer respects to the principal deity bowing down their heads collectively and the priest gives blessings to all the participants which inhere the co-feeling and the sense of brotherhood in their

hearts. And thus they can feel that the peace of heart may create a congenial atmosphere in a society which is essential for the all round development of society.

In the present day society religious intolerance have been crept in our society which cause harm in the process of socialisation. But such type of religious performance or ritual may help immensely in this context.

*Bihu* festival particularly the *Bahāg-bithu* festival or *Rangālibithu* festival isays associated with different competitions, such as competition of *Bihu-gīt* singing, competition of *Bihu*-dance and *Hucari* dance and so on. Various traditional games are also played by the young boys and girls which may offer a common platform to work together and think together.

In the contexts of various worships and religious assemblies and anniversaries of saints different myths and legends as well as tales found in verse form are sung by the *ojāpāli* artforms which give suitable occasions to the young generation to be acquainted with the cultural heritage of India.

In the activities of the centres different individuals come together and learn to develop collective consciousness. By this way various social disputes are also settled. A training of handling public affairs is naturally imparted. By associating themselves with the activities of the centres younger people gradually learn to play a leading role. Most of the decisions of the community take place in the religious centres. So, these are used as judicial place also. "The mels are usually held in the evening, when people flock at the namghar for relaxation and discussion."^4^
The Gohains of satra help in maintaining discipline in the village by solving all the disputes among the people. Some satras solve the disputes pertaining to religion, sexual incontinence, break of customs etc. till today. When the elders of the village fail to solve any dispute in the nāmagbara of the village, they refer the dispute to the satrādbikār to solve it. This tradition is still in practice in some places inspite of the existence of the courts everywhere. Thus the role of the satras and nāmagharas in imparting scial education is significant.

Besides the Vaiṣṇava saints had converted the people of lower castes and tribes, who had been neglected in the society, to Vaiṣṇavism and paved the way for them for leading a religious life. Such activities contributed to the nourishment of the Hindu society and to the building of the Assamese community. The contribution of the satras in raising the neglected people of low castes and in enlightening them by the light of religion is immense.5 Such activities have helped in imparting social education to the people of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

Nāgārā-nām is conducted in various religious functions. There are several groups for performing nāgārā nām. The pāthak is the man who directs the nāgārā-nām of each group. The womenfolk also perform nāgārā-nām like the menfolk in the district of Nalbari. As a folk-custom nāgārā-nām has assumed a very important role in our social life. "The people of the village are united through the performance of the nāgārā-nām. At the end of the nām various problems of the village, such as construction of the village road, repairing of the school building and of the temple settlement of disputes are discussed. Thus it can be mentioned that the place of nāgārā-nām on an illiterate society is that of a school of epics and purāṇs and that

5. Sarma, S.: Satrar Upatti Itihās āru Avadān. P. 30
of a court. The party with a major offence is asked to beg forgiveness before the other party by offering arecanut and betelnut and thus its punishment is softened. Hence nāgārā-nām is an important institution in promoting sense of unity among the rural people.6

The ojāpāli has also played a very important role in respect of imparting social education. The ojāpāli artform sings and recites stories of ideal men and women to the rural people. The youth in particular "get amusement and on the otherhand unconsciously their mind absorbs the influential elements of tales, which through their fancy become the part and parcel of their personality structure. Songs describing the way to adjust in the society, are the best aid in socialising the people".7 The songs and moral tales associated with various worships and celebrations are sung by the ojāpāli. The people of the village derive the ideal lesson of living unitedly from the ojāpāli. The ojāpāli describes the lives of the ideal personalities from the epics and purāṇas and folk-poetry. The influence of such stories on the children, youth and old of the village is very deep and lasting. The depiction of stories and the portrayal of characters through the performing arts like the ojāpāli are a source of joy to all the people of the society. Hence we get the elements of entertainment and the elements for the development of personality from it.8

The ojāpāli recites the various stories from the Assamese translated versions of Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, purāṇa and so forth. In such stories descriptions of the disastrous consequences of the evil deeds performed by the monsters and demons violating the social codes are narrated. The influence of such stories on the minds of the people is very deep. Hence the people develop a hatred for the deeds not approved by the society and are attracted towards good and noble

Thus the rural people may derive social education from ojāpāli artform.

The dhuliya artform conducted in various religious institutions of the district has assumed a dominant role in imparting social education. The main purpose of dhuliya artform is to produce humour through the use of local dialect by the actors. The actors use masks made of wood for entertainment. They elaborate the social inconveniences in a humorous manner to the people in the local dialect. Sometimes they present the contemporary political affairs in a satirical manner. The social consciousness is expressed through such presentations. They depict the characters of the leaders and the so-called political leaders. The spectators also learn how the society can be degraded by the unscrupulous leaders. Thus the people derive social education from dhuliya artform conducted in the religious institutions.

Generally yātrās, cultural shows and religious gatherings are conducted in the Harimandira. One act plays and full length plays are staged here. Some socially conscious writers write some drama based on the contemporary social problems. 'chang' of Karuna Deka is one such play. The devotion of Mohan Bhaira to the dhuliya culture and his life long struggle for the preservation of dhuliya culture has been depicted in the play. Similarly social and moral education can be derived from religious plays.

The Rāsa-Mahotsava celebrated in the Harimandira has got social significance besides its religious significance. The people join in this festival spontaneously irrespective of their religion, caste and community. They enjoy the various functions without any evil motive. The Harimandira becomes the meeting place for people of different religions, castes and communities. The religious festivals

like the *Rāsa-Mahotsava* have played an important role in strengthening the national unity and harmony through mutual understanding".\(^{10}\)

Though *Rāsa-Mahotsava* is a very great festival of Nalbari area, discipline is the most important characteristic of this festival. Almost all the people of the district are involved with this festival either directly or indirectly. This festival is celebrated in the *Harimandira* with full co-operation of the businessmen, the owner of rikshaws, carts and busses, the institutions like educational institutions, clubs, associations, local administration, police, electricity board, municipality board, red-cross, medical department, Government and non-Government employees and various voluntary organisations. The men and women go in a disciplined manner through different ways. The *yātrās* and plays are staged here in a very disciplined manner. The health department and the police department open their centres here to extend their help to the general people.

Many social activities, such as helping the poor people and the people involved in misfortunes, are conducted in the *Harimandira*. The *Harimandira* also provides shelter to the people affected by severe flood. Similarly it is the centre of the mobile health units and vedic rites. The general people derive social education from such things.

**8.2. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

"Religion is based on faith- a firm belief in something for which there is no evidence".\(^{11}\) On the basis of religion, people acknowledge a way of life in accordance with certain beliefs, moral and spiritual values and conviction in the truth and sanctity of those beliefs and values.

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10. Pathak, H.: *Rāsatatta* P. 1  
Religious education can set up high ideals and attempts to plant seeds of nobility and virtue in the hearts of the people. The religious centres of the district of Nalbari give religious education through some religious performances. Occasionally some religious performances are observed in the religious centres. Villagers of the district of Nalbari join those performances. They learn religious ideas by participating in nāma-kīrtan, recitation of religious scriptures and through participation in festivals and ceremonies. Daily nāma-kīrtan creates profound devotion to the God in the minds of the people and makes performers devotees of God and teaches to pray Almighty sincerely. In the religious centres Bhāgavata and Gītā are recited. Bhāgavata gives spiritual knowledge to the mass people. It contains names and accomplishments of Śrī kṛṣṇa. People believes that such recitation helps them to develop their life in the right path. The Bhāgavat pāṭh creates a spiritualistic mind of individuals. Such mind improves the quality of life and creates a religious person. In the mandira, satra and nāmagharas priest and pāṭbak read religious scriptures and perform daily nāma-prasaṅga at morning and evening. One who reads religious scripture knows spiritual truth of the universe and gets salvation from the worldly trouble. So recitation of religious scriptures on the different festivals of the year with solemn reverence have been prescribed by the saints. The recitation of Bhāgavat, Gītā, Kīrtangbosā, Nāmghosa, Khatāsuravadha, Jamghāsuravadha teach the people that the supreme human power is the God and give different knowledge of various incarnations of Brahma and about the characteristics of real devotees. The stories offering reward to pious and punishing the offender motivate the listeners.

Devotees say that a man is attracted to the spiritual strength of religion which can be acquired from the religion. Those give mental peace and happiness to the mass people. Besides the mass people are familiarised with different religious subject matters during the fes-
tivals and ceremonies which are performed in the religious centres. The religious festivals and ceremonies create faith, truthfulness, love, beauty in the minds of the people. During festivals all people are assembled in the religious centres and discuss different religious matters which help the common people to know the purpose of religion and values they acquire guide them in their day to day life. Thus the village people get religious education by participation in the religious activities and listening to religious scriptures in these centres. The mythological stories which are recited occasionally in the religious centres such as krṣṇa janma, krṣṇa lilā, Rāmcharit draw people to the path of dharma. Besides yātrā performance in festivals and ceremonies inculcate religious ideas in the minds of the people. These help the people to lead a virtuous life. Specially the illiterate village people get scope of learning of different subjects through religious centres. Such knowledge help the village people in their complete development of body, mind and spirit and those knowledge solve their difficult problems spiritually. People also learn about mythological stories. For example, the activities of Janmāstami teach the people birth story of Lord krṣṇa and recitation of the Book X of the Bhāgavata purāṇa gives some detailed knowledge of Lord krṣṇa. Hearing such episodes people become religious minded and pious and profound devotion arouse in their minds through such activities. In the context of Janmāstami festival various competitions are held connected with the child krṣṇa in the mandiras and satras. The children try to dramatise the role of krṣṇa in a perfect manner because of the sense of competition. Consequently the children are able to derive religious education.

The path of devotion can lead to the mukti. Mukti can be attained only through sravana (listening) and kirtan (chanting) of religious scriptures. Through the initiation system (saran-bhajan) people get religious education. During the initiation period, the Satrādbikar and religious devotees teach some lessons to the dis-
ciples. In the initiation, a disciple learns about four divine substances namely Guru, Deva, Nāma and Bhakat. The initiator teaches that Guru is the repleca of God and he can give everything to a devotee who surrenders himself at the feet of Guru. Secondly, God is omnipresent. He is combination of truth, beauty and love. Thirdly, recitation of names of Gods is the only way offering bhakti. Finally, Bhakat is the person who should read Gitā and Bhāgavata as well as Mahābhārata.

The Harimandira has played an important role in the propagation of religious education. The Durgā, Lakshmi and Sarasvati worships observed in the Harimandira make the general people religious minded. The structure and the activities of different worships attract the general people towards the deity and make them religious. The ojāpāli is the associated institution in such worships. The ojā and the Dāināpāli elaborate the religious episodes in a very simplified and dramatic manner. The baithakigān is conducted in the kīrtanghara (nāmagbāra) of the Harimandira every evening. The baithakigān in the district of Nalbari began in the first decade of the 20th century. The song sung by the singers may impress all the devotees. Religious education is imparted through such songs. The Bhāgavati or Pāthak reads the Purāṇas, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata and explains them to the general people. Consequently the illiterate people and the ignorant people gain knowledge about religious scriptures. This may be described as an open school of the society. The doubts of the audience are dispelled by the explanations offered by the Bhāgavati or Pāthak.

The idols and the statues made of clay of krṣṇa and the Gopinās and of the characters of the stories of Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Gitā and Purāṇas are made more alive with the help of technology of the modern times during the Rāsa-Mahotsava in the

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*Harimandira.* The lives from *Bhāgavata* and *Kīrtanghosa* are quoted in front of the rooms in which such statues are kept. Such lines remain in the memory of the people who come to see them. The inquisitiveness of the illiterate people is increased and it becomes easier for them to realise the implication of such statues. In this context such statues assume the role of visual art. The cultural troupes from various parts of Assam stage *Rāsalilā* in the permanent stage of the *Harimandira* during the *Rāsa-Mahotsava.* As the stories related to the *Bhāgavata* are staged here in the form of plays, the general people derive religious education from them.

The *nāma-prasāṅga* of the womenfolk is another function in this *mandira.* Initially the women of Nalbari town participated in the *nāma-prasāṅga* but gradually the womenfolk from all the corners of the district come to participate in this activity. The groups listen to the recitation of religious scriptures by which they may be acquainted with spiritual teaching. The *astaprabhara* is another attractive religious performance in the *Harimandira.* The devotees come to the *Harimandira* and a profoundly religious atmosphere is created in the *mandira.*

The *Gītāsībir* is another religious observance held in the *Harimandira.* The people are attracted to this recitation of *Gītā* and are explained the substance and the inward truth of the *Gītā.* The expertised scholars are requested to explain various *slokas* of the *Gītā* in a lucid language so that the rural folk can understand the essence of the *Gītā.*

Besides these the meetings of various religious groups such as the *Śaṅkara sangha,* the *Panchakanyā* celebration of the Jain community, the celebration of the birth anniversary of sri Anukul Thakur by the devotees of Anukul thakur and so forth are observed in the *Harimandira.* The general people derive religious education both directly and indirectly from such festivals and celebrations.
8.3. ETHICAL AND MORAL EDUCATION:

Ethical and moral education is an important aspect of traditional and modern education as a whole. In a sense without ethical and moral education the curriculum can not be termed complete and perfect. The term 'ethical' emanates from the term ethic. The term ethic may be explained as the system of moral principles and rules of conduct. Without knowing the moral principles or rules of conduct of life and society education cannot be complete and perfect. Secondly, the term 'moral' suggests the sense of the principles of right and wrong.

From the said afore discussion it can easily be said that the scope of the ethical knowledge is wider than the moral education. In a sense, moral education may be accepted as an important branch of the ethical knowledge. Notwithstanding the term ethical knowledge and moral education are used to indicate the meaning of moral principles or rules of conduct and the sense of the principle of right and wrong.

The religious centres work as agencies of education. These centres play a great role in imparting moral education to the common people. People learn certain moral principles and moral behaviours essential for the smooth functioning of life and society from various religious centres. They learn some moral and spiritual values—what is good and what is evil, what is done and what is not done and so forth. People show unquestionable loyalty to these values and follow them in their day today life. Moral education means value oriented education which makes us better human beings.13 The qualities like charity, kindness, service to other, devotion to duty, goodness etc. make us better human beings.

13. Taneja, V. R. : Foundation of Education P. 301
The daily prayer services of these religious and cultural institutions have a great impact upon the moral lives of the devotees. The *tithis* of Vaiśṇava saints are observed in the *satras* and *nāmagharas*. In these *tithis* people join in the religious activities and learn some rules and regulations which are necessary for their life. In *ekādasi*, *amāwaishya* and *purnimā tithis* devotees restrain themselves from doing immoral works. Wearing new and clean dresses and fasting on the *tithis* also generate sense of self restraints. In these *tithis* both the menfolk and the womenfolk perform *nāma-prasaṅga* in the religious centres which help in developing moral ideas.

In the religious centres religious meetings are held during the various festivals and ceremonies. Some religious persons and devotees are invited to deliver lectures on different topics. These lectures may impart some important knowledges to the masses which help them to guide their own life. Such lectures help the common people to build their own character. The common people get opportunity to know theological ideas about moral discipline from various religious discussions and debates.

Performances of *nāma-kīrtana* are integral parts of the religious centres. People learn moral ideas by participating in various religious performances of *nāma-kīrtana* and recitation of religious scriptures.

In the context of *Janmāstami* festival, the tender and teen aged girls observe fasting spontaneously. The recitation of *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and singing of devotional songs in the *Janmāstami* festival may depict a feeling that whenever righteousness is on the decline then the God takes re-birth to reedem the world and to sustain the *dharma*. These ideas strengthen the morals of the devotees. During the festivals and ceremonies the *ojāpāli* sings some *purānic* stories with the help of acting to impress the people. Both the menfolk and
the womenfolk learn some moral ideas through these stories. The womenfolk learn to be sincere, admire to their husbands through the purāṇic story of Sāvitrī-Satyavān, Rāma-Sītā, Beulā-Lakhindār and so forth. They learn to sacrifice their all worldly comforts to serve their own husbands. "The ojapali seems to have been imparting moral education to the masses and hence it has been known as Vivekiparba, i.e., knowledge through conscience."\(^{14}\)

In some festivals people, particularly of the district of Nalbari, observe a strict regimen taking only vegetarian food. Fish, meat and eggs are strictly prohibited. These practices establish a system of morality. In some pūjā and tībi people observe fasting. It generates sense of self restraints. Generally, in religious centres the junior follow the senior people. They maintain their discipline and participate in every religious works spontaneously. Such activities impart moral education to them.

The children and adolescent boys and girls are influenced deeply by the activities and ideals of Lord Kṛṣṇa and other deities. They are naturally interested in the ojāpāli and the dhūliya as well as puppet theatre which are observed in various festivals. The themes of the ojāpāli songs and story of the puppet theatre are generally taken from the epics and the Purāṇas. Such mythological stories impress the children and common people and these are helpful in developing their moral character.

The role of the Harimandira in imparting moral education is noteworthy. The idols shown during the Rāsa festival and the quotations from religious scriptures written near them may impart moral education to the general people. Nearly 350 idols in different rooms are exhibited during the Rāsa festival. Religious and moral

\(^{14}\) Lekharu, U. C.: Kathā-Guru-Carīta. P. 270
sayings are written in front of every room in a neat handwriting. These constitute a very powerful medium for visual education. Let us study some of the idols and the sayings written along with them.

On the main *mandapa* Kṛṣṇa is seen engaged in games with the *Gopinīs*. The river Yamuna, the scenery of the sky, in the full moon night *Sarata* (autumn) session attract the general people towards divine sports of lord kṛṣṇa and his grace shown towards the devotees of Him. The main theme of the *Rāsa* festival is the union of the soul with the Eternal soul. As the *Gopinīs* forget everything and crave for lord kṛṣṇa after listening to His flute, those who attain knowledge of the eternal soul realise that the world is unreal. Kṛṣṇa, the eternal soul is the only reality in this world. Therefore the *Gopinīs* sing

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\begin{align*}
\text{Jagata} & \text{r bandhu ātmā tumī} \\
\text{samasta dbarmar āpuni bhumi} \\
\text{tumī ātmā bena jāni sampriti} \\
\text{tumākehe kare bhakati rati.}^{15}
\end{align*}
\]

The idol of the ten incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu constitutes an interesting aspect of the *Rāsa* festival. Idols of the ten incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu are exhibited. Near every idol of such incarnation is written.

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\begin{align*}
taju nāvi kamalata Brahma vailā jāta \\
yuge yuge avatāra dharā asamkhyāta.^{16}
\end{align*}
\]

The greatness of *Harinām-kīrtan* is shown through the idol of Ajamil. Ajamil gets his salvation by uttering the name of his son, Narayana. People are attracted towards Lord Viṣṇu by seeing the idol of Ajamil and reading the words written there -

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15. Sankaradeva: *Kīrtanghosa, Rāsakīrā*, verse. 24
Similarly the idol of God narrated in prahlad-charitra in Kirtan-Ghosā is exhibited. Prahlad has explained to Hiranyakasipu what happens when one revolts against Hari and that Hari is Omnipresent.

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savāta āsanta jagata swāmi
sphatikar stambhe dekboho āmi.18
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Similarly the idols based on the stories of Kirtan-Ghosā such as Aghāsūr-vadha, Kāliya-damana, Kanṣa-vadha etc. may impart moral education.

The impact of the epics such as the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata on the national life of India is far reaching. The stories of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata are known by all. These stories narrated through visual artforms in the Rāsa festival have helped the general people much in attaining moral education. The idols based on the stories of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata such as Ekalabyar Gurudakbinā, Jarāsandha Vadha, Bhagirathar Gangā Ānayan, Dātā Karna, Bhim Bakāsur Vadha, Rāmāyanar Janma, Andhamunir Abbisāp, Sri Rāmchandrar Pāduka Grahan, Nal-Damayanti and so on bring to the memory of the people the stories of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. The people having knowledge about such stories interpret the themes to the ignorant people. The general people are greatly inspired by such stories.

Besides the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata many other stories from purāṇas such as Śiva-pārvati, Ganesbar mātribbakti and so forth

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17. Ibid, Ajamil Upakhyan, Verse. 15
18. Ibid, Prahlad Charitra, Verse. 181
impart moral education. The statues of historical personalities, political personalities, greatman and scenes of things having bad influence on the society etc. are exhibited during Rāsa festival. Moreover, Chatrapati Sivaji, Lachit Barphukan, Kusul Kunar, Maniram Dewan, Jerengar Sati, Kanaklata, Nabin Chandra Bardoloi, Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Mahavir, Sankardeva, AIDS, family planning, Co-operative, total prohibition and so forth are also exhibited. Such demonstration may impart moral education to the common people.

The scene of giving punishment to Jaymati in the field of Jerenga by the order of king Lararaja is a very pathetic one. This scene makes the audience remember the pathetic story of Jaymati even for a moment. This story of Jaymati inculcates the patriotic feelings in the heart of the audience. She is an ideal martyr who sacrificed her life for the well being of her nation. Lachit Barphukan was also a patriotic commander in the Ahom kingdom. His immortal sayings infuses the listeners to sacrifice their lives for the great cause of our motherland. One of his sayings is given below for specimen.

*Desatkoi momāi dāngar nabat* i.e., the maternal uncle is not greater than my motherland. The reminiscences of such a warrior during the evil period of a nation may awaken the patriotic feelings in the deepest corner of the heart of human beings.

The population explosion is one of the great problems facing by our country. The rapid growth of population has an adverse effect on the social life of India. The Government has given emphasis on family planning schemes. In the Rāsa festival this problem is shown to the audiences with the help of various statues and other documentations. AIDS is a dangerous disease which is facing by the contemporary society. In the Rāsa festival attempts have been made to make the people aware of this disease through the statues and other postering. It has been nicely exhibited how the drunkards lie in the streets in a helpless condition. The drunkards can derive moral education from
such scenes. The statues of the three monkeys teach us not to see evil, not to speak evil and not to listen evil.

The general people derive moral education from the stories of nāma-prasāṅga during the various festivals. Similarly the songs, verses, sayings associated with the ojāpāli artform may impart ethical and moral education. The illiterate people derive moral education such as sin and goodness, heaven and hell, true and untrue, good and bad, peace and harmony, the victory of good and defeat of evil etc. through them. The folk-tales told by the ojāpāli artform especially the fables, help much in imparting ethical and moral education.19 Thus the general people have been able to derive moral education from the idols and statues exhibited during the Rāsa festival.

8.4 CULTURAL EDUCATION:

The religious centres are functioning as important agencies in regard of cultural education. Such centres may disseminate various ideals concerning with all the aspects of traditional culture. People find the occasions for acquaintance with various items of culture from the religious activities. "In maintaining discipline, order and morality of the villagers, the namghar, i.e., the village chapels have been playing a prominent part during the last four hundred years. Existence of a namghar, big or small, is noticed in every assamese village. Sometimes it is very difficult to distinguish between two adjacent villages but for the existence of two namgharas. It is the institution around which all cultural activities of an assamese village move."20 In the educational and cultural spheres the satra institution contributed a lot. There were also private teaching centres called toles and pāṭhsālās attached to certain satras under some reputed scholars.

Sāñkaradeva, Dāmodaradeva and Harideva as well as Mādhavadeva, also received their early education in such centres. They and their disciples also imparted education to their associates. Kaviratna Vaikunthanatha Bhattadeva the Brahmin Satradhikara of Patbausei satra conducted such a tol in the precinct of the satra. 21

The literary, historical and musical aspects of religious observances possess cultural importance. From these activities children learn about their own culture and try for its preservation and promotion, when they become adults. As a result they attain the ability to meet the overgrowing needs of the present society. They come to know about traditional heritage of the community largely through the various activities performed in the religious centres. In the context of different worships, celebrations and festivals held in satra and nāmāgbaras in general and particular in the Harimandira the Assamese males are generally seen putting dhuti, Pānjābi, gāmochā while the females wear mekbelā, chāddar usually made of silk and muga. Both the menfolk and the womenfolk perform nāma-prasānga during these religious occasions. The younger generation is also fully acquainted with the cultural tradition of the society they live.

It is observed that the religious centres play an important role in the dissemination of various ideas of food, cooking and fasting which gain popularity through the practices of the centres. Members of the younger generation learn those ideas from the activities of the centres. Different traditional utensils and materials which may be included by the ambit of the material culture of that society are used in different religious centres including the Harimandira. Such as sarāti (a mounted tray), puspa patra (a big tray), kosā-arghā, kamandalu, bān-bāti, ghat, tau (a round bowl), kalāh (a big water vassel), chariā

(wash bowl) *kharāhi* (round bamboo basket) and so forth and various musical instruments such as *samkha* (conch), *ghantā* (bell) *barkāh* (gong), *tāla* (cymbals), *khol* (a kind of musical instrument), *nāgārā* (kettle drum), *dhol* (drum) *dabdā* (big drum) and so on may play important role in imparting cultural knowledge to the young people. Even they try to play on these musical instruments. Manuscripts of religious books are kept in the custody of the different *satras* and *nāmagharas* and other religious centres from the long past. Manuscripts like *Srihastamuktāvali* a treatise on music, *Hastividyārnava* a book on the treatment of the elephants and soforth have been preserving in the *satras*.

Besides them the performing artforms performed in such religious centres have been playing important roles in imparting cultural education to the audience. The cultural shows organised in temples, *nāmagharas* and *satras* during various festivals entertained the general people to a great extent. The puppet theatre groups of the villages like Chandakuchi and Mahkhali are famous throughout Assam. The puppet theatre has kept the old cultural heritage alive. The *dhuliya* dance is another popular cultural institution of the district of Nalbari. similarly the groups like *khuliya* dance, *ojāpāli, āpiojā* and so forth sing songs along with dance-movements and some kind of *abbinaya* basing on the stories of the epics and *purāṇas* and such performances inspired the people in general and the audience in particular to uphold the cultural norms of India.

Among the ethnic groups of the district of Nalbari have some cultural institutions. The worship of Bāthou (Sīva) has been continuing from the ancient past. They worship Bāthou alongwith kherāi dance. This worship and dance impart cultural education to the future generation.
8.5 ART AND AESTHETIC EDUCATION:

Art Education help the people to produce various artifacts, and on the other hand aesthetic education helps to appreciate the quality of that artifact. "Aesthetic education provides knowledge about what is beautiful and what is ugly in nature and what is beautiful and what is ugly in man made art." Art education and aesthetic education involve performing and enjoying the performance of various kinds of art (pictorial, dancing, singing etc.). Thus there is a close relation between the two.

The architecture and sculpture associated with temples may impart both art and aesthetic education. The *matbas* and *mandıras* of Vilvēsvār, Balilechā and Jaipāl may give a clear indication of the architectural and sculptural taste and design of the people of this area. Besides the art and architecture of the *Harimandira* and of the *Dudhnāth Āshram* of Khārjār may exhibit clear indication to that effect that the people of the area had aesthetic sensibility. The people may have aesthetic education from all such things.

The devotees of *Satras* enhance the beauty and glory of the shrines (manikuts) and *nāmagharas* by their artistic activity during their leisure time. They made various artifacts such as the seats of Gods, the images of Gods and Goddesses and *saraś* made of wood, the robes for *bhāonā*, masks, arms and ammunitions and also utensils of bamboo and cane. The things made of wood in the past simply amaze us. "Thus the art of carving miniature images of deities, thrones and seats (āsana) of ivory, beautifully decorated and painted with various designs, are still in existence, in a few satras of Barpeta and Majuli." The people are trained to make the robes and other accessories for the *bhāonā* in the *Satras*. The masks are prepared with

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wood, bamboo and cane. They are also trained to make choriots and masks of wood and to colour them. The bludgeon, the bow, the javelin, the shield etc., are made of wood, bamboo and cane. The hair is generally made of jute and is coloured according to the necessity. The activities associated with making of bombs for bhāonā are also conducted in the Satras. The Satras had the right to prepare the necessary gunpowder for the making of the bombs by the orders of the king.

The puppets meant for theatrical show and the masks for the dhuliyā dance are still being made by the carpenters of Nalbari. The utensils of bell-metal, brass and clay used in the temples, satras and nāmagharas give the general people the knowledge of art and aestheticism. The gāmochā used in the festivals and ceremonies remind us the art and aesthetic consciousness of the weavers of this locality. The pieces of clothes used for keeping and covering the Bhāgavat and the clothes used by the Satrādbikār as his head dress were also woven by the weavers. Such things impart art and aesthetic education to the general people.

The newly constructed Harimandira, its conference hall and its surrounding garden impart aesthetic education to all who come to visit it. The architecture and sculpture in the arch of the gate and on the walls of the temple create a religious atmosphere in the temple. The newly built Harimandira charmed the people so much that similar temples were built in the villages of Bagurihati and Nadla.

The statues and scenes of Gandhi, of drunkard, AIDS, Bihu dance, drug-addiction etc. tend to serve social obligations. The artistic and architectural aspects of such statues and scenes impart

informal education to the people. The scene of artificial *vrindāvana* is a clear example of the aesthetic sense of the artists. The statues of clay along with some living birds and animals like peacocks and rabbits are placed in a beautiful natural scenery which remind the people of the *vrindāvana* narrated by Śaṅkaradeva in the 'Kīrtan-gosā'. A scene of a *Nāmagbar* of bamboo and straw with two rows of devotees shown during the *Rāsa Mahotsav* arouse aesthetic pleasure in the onlookers.

Thus the religious institutions help to spread education to the non-literate rural population.

**8.6 HYGIENIC EDUCATION:**

People of Nalbari have their cultural conception about health and hygiene. Different religious activities include observance of hygienic relevance. The most common form of hygienic prescription incorporated in this observance is fasting. Fasting is observed in *Janaṣṭami*, *Sivarātri*, *Lakṣmi-pūja* etc. The vegetarian food is also strongly prescribed on the days of *Sarasvati pūja*, death anniversaries of vaisnava *gurus* and annual festivals. Hindu view of health is that if a person clings to vegetarian food, he remains in good health and spirit. Vegetarian food also preserves purity of a person. Strict rules of following food prescription in the day of a festival or in a ceremony emphasize the need of discipline in the eating habit. In *ekādāshi*, *amāvasī* and *pūrṇimā tithi*, restriction in food is devotedly followed. These prescriptions keep alive cultural ideas of hygiene and help to grow such habits in individuals. Besides fasting cleaning of cloths, Utensils and the homestead is prescribed on certain religious activities. The Hindu conception of cleanliness and purity is given emphasis through the religious activities. Individuals are compelled to follow these restrictions in those auspicious days.
Some people are generally proselytized in a *Satra* and they are asked to follow the customs and rules of the *Satra*. Such things are essential for the development of the body and mind. The objective of following the customs and rules is cleanliness. The inner being cannot be purified unless the outer one is been purified. The persons proselytized in the *Satras* are generally taught to give up the six evil passions such as desire, attachment, lust, anger and pride etc. There are some rules and customs for the building of character the violation of which is a grievous offence and the offender has to expiate by apstinence from food. There are strict rules about food habit and only simple food (*sāttik āhār*) prescribed so that the person remains honest in body and mind.\(^{25}\)

The Boros and kacharies seek for givenness before the God for their offences and pray to be purified of their sins.\(^ {26}\) They abstain from food and wear clean clothes during the worships and festivals and insist on remaining pure and holy. It gives indication of their philosophical bent of mind and their moral uprightness. The Boro society has preserved its morality and hygiene by such philosophical thoughts. There are some fixed rules and customs of the *satra* to be followed by every Vaiṣṇava after being proselytized. "He has to think of kṛṣṇa and recite the name of Mādhava before touching the ground after getting up from sleep. Then he has to recite the names of kṛṣṇa counting the rosary. He should have himself abstained from food on *akādasi*, on the death anniversary of *guru*, in the death anniversary of the father and on the *tithis* of *amāvaisya* and *purnimā*. He has to recite the name of kṛṣṇa before going to bed and follow all the other rules prescribed by the *satra."\(^ {27}\)

Much emphasis is given upon hygienic conditions of the

\(^{25}\) *Ibid* P. 102

\(^{26}\) Narzi, B.: *Boro Kachārir Samāj Āru Sanskriti* P. 229

\(^{27}\) Thakuria, R.: *Sāhitya Sanskritir Rengani* P. 61
Sākta institutions. The *Mahāsnāna*, the vedic ritual is prescribed before any kind of Śakti worship. Many things such as coconut water, the water of the Ganges, the water of sea, fragrant wood, scented oil, Sulphur, camphor, the leaves of neem, pancakasay-dipped water (water where in the barks of these five trees plum, Bakul flower, Jamu fruit, silk cotton tree, Barial are dipped) are essential for the *Mahāsnāna*. The *Mahāsnāna* of the deity is conducted with the vedic rites and *Mantras* and this water of *Mahāsnāna* is known as *snānodaka*. The devotees take this *snānodaka* with a pure mind and apply the rest on their heads. Whatever the scientific base of this *Mahāsnāna* may be, it helps in the purification of the body and mind of the devotees.

The first stage of the vedic prescriptions of worship in temples is *Jalasudhi* (purification of water). The water for the worship in a clean pot of copper or in a pot made of banana skin. Still this water is further purified by applying the leaves of *tulsi* to it along with reciting thereupon a vedic mantra. This ritual may impart knowledge that the water used for drinking should be purified first. The impure water should not be used as drinking water. The houses should be kept neat and clean for healthy living. It is a custom of the Assamese society to clean the houses and courtyards in the morning and then take bath before taking the breakfast. This custom is strictly observed in the *Satras, nāmagharas* and temples. The temple means home. So the people learn to help their homes clean like the temple.

It is strictly forbidden to enter the temple without taking bath after going to the lavatory. Such customs of the temple have given hygienic education to the general people. It is a custom to keep the lavatory away from the temple. Such a custom keeps the temple sanctified as well as free from atmospheric pollution. The rural society of Assam is getting such hygienic education from the temples.
The Hindus consider cow-drug as a holy thing. The courtyard of the temple is cleaned in the morning and cow-drug water is sprayed everywhere. Moreover now a days phenyl and bleaching powder are sprayed in the courtyards of temples which are very much crowded. Such things act as preventions of the germs of several diseases. Thus the religious institutions have played an important role in imparting hygienic education to the general people.

From the above discussion it can be inferred that in the sphere of imparting informal education the religious institutions of Nalbari like the Harimandira and others have played a very important role. The structure and the functional folk-lores of such institutions spread knowledge, ideals and messages and also serve the personal, social, cultural and aesthetic responsibilities. According to John J. Honigmann "Apart from providing a vehicle of pure expression, art achievers functions of considerable importance for individual, society and culture." The religious institutions have their importance in imparting spiritual, moral, cultural and aesthetic education in a society of illiterate people.

8.7 INTEGRATIONAL EDUCATION:

Folklore's function in integrating society and maintaining social cohesion cannot be ignored. "Like all beliefs which can be shared, religious beliefs provide a basis for people to unite together, and form integrated groups. If a society has a religion to which all or most of its members adhere, the religion will play a very important part in holding individuals to each other." By educating informally the masses, religious institutions can strengthen national integration. These institutions are unerring medium through which people can instill the feeling of national integration.

28. John, J, Honigmann : Understanding Culture P. 287
29. Wilkins, Elizabeth J. : An Introduction to Sociology P. 267
Festivals and ceremonies have played an important role in the field of integrational education. The people feel emotionally integrated by performing various activities in the festivals and ceremonies. "Festivals are the most concrete expression of collective emotions and loyalties." Performing artforms are observed in various festivals and ceremonies. Their contribution to the enriching of social cohesion and social integration cannot be ruled out. The Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata as well as the Purāṇas have been serving as instruments of national integration. The ojāpāli, dhuliya are based on the epics and Purāṇas. Hence, in the true sense, these artforms play an important role in the context of social integration or unification or assimilation among the different groups of people.

The religious institutions may rightly be considered as replicas of community life. Here opportunities are given to all the people to acquire community experiences in the various festivals and ceremonies. For example, instead of appointing labourers for various works people works as the labourers. The practice of making self-help and labour work a part of the daily life and training in the religious institutions as was the case of the old Ashrams yield good result. People should be encouraged to participate in programme of community development. It will create a positive attitude towards social service. These are helpful to achieve social integration. The religious institutions help to get rid of the individualistic tendencies. The stories of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata which are performed by ojāpāli, putalā nāc etc. help the children to think and work co-operatively. They learn how to adjust their social environment and also each other in the process of living. The performing artforms may enhance emotional integration which is the basis of unity and integration of a country.

8.8 EDUCATION REGARDING SOCIAL PROTEST:

Social protest is another function of folklore. Performing artforms by its songs and proverbs make complaint directly against social injustice, exploitation and oppression of the ruling agency. Generally, common people cannot protest directly against the ruling agency or stronger man. So they try to make complaint against them through jokes, tales and songs. Even in the Russians society common people protested against tsars through these media. Rightly does observes R.M. Dorson "I.G. Prizov had recognised that folklore reflected the real life of the people in their struggle against tsars, clergy, and land owners. I.A. Xudjakov had pursued the themes of social protest and class satire in popular tales and historical folk songs." 31 Betty wang observes "one of the most important functions of folklore is its service as a vehicle for social protest. Wherever there is injustice and oppression one can be sure that the victims will find some solace in folklore. Through jokes, songs and proverbs, the anger of the folk is vent upon the often frighteningly unassailable individual or institution." 32

In the same way, the ojâpâli artform is working as a vehicle for social protest. The ojâ and the dainâpâli as well as the pâlis through their jokes, songs and proverbs try to protest against the social injustice. The songs of protest are usually composed by the dainâpâli orally and the same are sung by him while the ojâ takes rest for a while.

The dhuliâ artform also is working as a vehicle for social protest. Sometimes they represent some satirical plays depicting social behaviour and sometimes they criticized the tyrannical behaviour of the Zamindars or village head man also. It is a kind of manifestation of the tensions of the oppressed society. They cannot express their

31. Dorson, R. M. (ed) : Folklore and Folklife P. 18
32. Wong, B. : "Folksongs as Regulators Politics" in The Study of Folklore, ed. Alan Dundes. P. 308
tensions in real life, but they are free to manifest through the medium of performance. Dhuliā performance can arouse humour overtoned with social protest.

Thus common people acquire education regarding social protest through these performances.

8.9 PROPAGANDA:

Religious institutions have played an important role in the field of propaganda. In the religious institutions ojāpāli, dhuliya, putalā nāc artforms are held during the various festivals and ceremonies. These are the most powerful propaganda media to direct the attention of the people towards a particular programme. People can use visual as well as auditory sense-organs in enjoying the various performing artforms which are not only source of recreation but also education. Some of the programmes are very educative. The performing artforms are very popular among all types of people. Hence, these can be used as propaganda vehicle among the masses.

The ojāpāli is one of the most popular artforms of Assam. Like other artforms, the ojāpāli also acts as "the forum for didacticsm, message and morality that transcends age and time"33. So, it is easier to employ as a successful medium of propaganda. Even Saṅkaradeva took the help of the ojāpāli to preach his new doctrine among the masses. The state Government of Assam makes good use of the ojāpāli as a propaganda vehicle in the context of family planning and social forestry as well as the 20-point programme and grow more- food and expansion of poultry farms etc. Besides prohibition of drugs, intoxicating things, dowry system etc. also exhibited through the various performing artforms. Not only the ojāpāli but also bhajana was also

33. P. Shyam, Traditional Folk Media in India P. 16
adapted to village development propaganda. Writes John J. Gumperz: "In at least one instance the Bhajana party technique was adapted to village development propaganda. A traditional Arya Samaja singer was employed by the community Development Block. He collected a group of flowers and lectured and sang about village uplift, using the Bhajana-raga for songs about public health, the Japanese method for rice cultivation etc. His activities have been regularly effective."

Thus through performing artforms religious institutions help in developing propaganda media.

8.10 AMUSEMENT:

The religious institutions play in recreation or amusement, particularly in the non-elite societies. Peerforming artforms, which are held in religious institutions during various festivals and ceremonies have great role in the field of amusement or education for leisure. "Leisure is a blessing, and is a problem of the twentieth century-- a product of the modern mechanistic civilization. " This problem is both in urban and rural areas. The introduction of division of labour in village economy leaves some spare moments free for all. In villages more than 60% of the population remains unemployed for 6 months. There are slack seasons in agriculture. Evenings are often free. Our village people are victims to litigation, petty quarrels, drinking etc. These days democracy have brought another influence to bear on their free hours the influence of the propaganda of politicians. Like the urban elite, the non-elite rural folk do not have scope for recreation or amusement like the movie or television or regular theatrical performances. Hence performing artforms are useful for them to make proper use of leisure. " When there was no regular drama in the

34. Gumperz, John J : "Religion and Social Communication in Village North India" (Religion in South Asia, ed Edward B. hcrper) P. 96
country the performances of ojapali provided to common people with edification and amusement. This performance involved three elements such as nṛtya, nāṭya and gīta. Unable to read and write, the rural folk, either men, women or children to enjoy the ojāpāli performance forgetting all the woes and sufferings of their poverty striken lives. The story sung by both the ojā and the pālis, riddles and proverbs and aphorisms used by the dāināpāli, incidents unfolded by both the ojā and the dāināpāli, and the abhinaya they perform are endless source of humour and amusement to the rural folk. People get means of recreation through the performance of dhuliya which is one of the important audiovisual artforms. Use of masks is one of the attractive features of this performance. Acrobatics include high-jumping, skipping, whirling the plates or sticks, sword-playful devices, rope-dancing, wrestling, animal-fights sometimes performed by masked characters. The language used is most colloquial interspersed with coarse jokes and vulgarity. The additional attraction of dhuliya performance is its mimicry. By this they can arouse humour overtone with social criticism. Thus dhuliya performance meets the psychological needs and provides satire and humour to the audience.