CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

It is an attempt to throw light on the role of the religious institutions of Nalbari area with special reference to the Harimandira in imparting informal education. It is also an attempt to present a detailed description of Nalbari area with special emphasis on the Harimandira. We can get a total picture of different places through the religious institutions of such places. The religious institutions are cultural, religious and educational affairs and social facts. An attempt has been made to present a detailed plan of the thesis in the very introduction of this work.

The second chapter of the thesis deals with the demographic pattern of the area. In this chapter attempt has been made to uphold a vivid and detailed picture of Nalbari area in a scientific manner along with datas available from field study and other sources. Hence, it is presumed that a detailed study of the situation, topography, population composition, economic condition, education and literature, culture and so forth of Nalbari area has been made in the thesis.

A beautiful synthesis of the three cults viz, Śaktism, Śaivism and Vaiśnavism has been continuing in the religious life of this area. In this thesis a study has been made on these three cults in the third chapter. Regarding the popularity of Śaktism, Śaivism and Vaiśnavism in Assam has been discussed in the chapter.

In the fourth chapter of the thesis the role of Śaivism in the district of Nalbari has been discussed. In this data based discussion of the various Śaiva centres of Nalbari attempts have been made to throw light on the legends, myths, worships, festivals and so forth associated the Śaiva centres. Similarly the role of Śakta and Vaiśava
centres of the district of Nalbari have been discussed in the fifth and sixth chapters of this thesis respectively. A detailed discussion of each major Śākta and Vaiṣṇava centre has been made in such chapters. Hence it is presumed that through such discussions light has been thrown on some new aspects of Śaktism and Vaiṣṇavism.

An important chapter of this thesis is the Harimandira. In this chapter a detailed discussion of the Harimandira, which has influenced the social life of Nalbari to a great extent, has been made. Besides in the seventh chapter a detailed study has been made of the Rāsa-Mahotsava, festivals and ceremonies and performing arts associated with this Harimandira. The discussion made in the seventh chapter of the thesis amply prove that it is very significant chapter of this work.

Religious institutions as the media of education has been discussed in the eight chapter of this thesis. A detailed study of the kind of informal education imparted by the religious institutions has been made in the chapter. These are not only religious institutions, they go a long way in imparting moral, social, cultural, aesthetic, hygienic, integrational education and this fact has been wonderfully brought to light through this thesis.

Through such a discussion many other things have been brought to light. The role played by such religious institutions in many other spheres has been discussed.

"The religious institutions are a creation of the society. The religious consciousness is the total consciousness of the society"¹. The source of such consciousness are the religious institutions. "The

¹ Sarma, N.C. : Asamar Puriveśyakalā Ojāpāli, P. 271
religious institutions have been born against the background of the faith structure of the people². Hence the function of such institutions can be divided into two sections, viz religious and social.

The religious institutions are born on the basis of faith and confidence. The human being try for acquiring wealth, prosperity and to attain mundane happiness through them throughout the ages. At the same time they make attempt to attain spiritual bliss through spiritual thoughts. The mundane happiness is never the real happiness, so the people desire for spiritual bliss. That is why people go to mandiras and nāmāgharās with faith and devotion. The supernatural stories and legends connected with temples strengthen such faith of the people. As for example legends are associated with the Bāgheśvari temple, Vilvēśvar temple and Mādhava temple. Such legends and folk-tales make the people conscious of the supernatural aspects of the temples. The people dispel their miseries and welcome their well-being through worships in the temples and thus become associated with the temples.

There are Purohits, Satrādhikār and Deuris in temples, satras and devālayas. They bless the devotees at the end of the worship. The people consider such blessings to be the blessings of God and they hope that they will come out successful in their life with such blessings. Consequently they attempt at leading their lives with moral idealisms. Donations and offerings are connected with worships. Even the poor try to make offerings according to their capacity. This teaches them the ideal of sacrifice alongwith mundane pleasures.

A temple assumes the role of one of the main centres of a particular religious section of the society. Such a temple takes some

². Ibid.
decisions in the field of religion and communicate its decisions to all the temples throughout the country which are considered its branches. It is seen that some temples are established as replicas of some famous temple. The Mādhava temple of Hajo is practically a replica of the Jagannath temple of Puri. If a devotee cannot go to Jagannath temple of Puri, it is sufficient for him to go the Mādhava temple of Hajo. Besides if one visits the Jagannath temple of Puri, his pilgrimage is not complete if he fails to visit the Mādhava temple of Hajo. The Kāmākhyā temple of Dhamdhamā and Hāribhāṅgā are established as replicas of the kāmākhyā temple on Nilachal hills.

Some social activities are performed by the religious institutions. Such institutions are centres of informal education. Hence, these religious institutions have an important role in the sphere of informal education.

These religious institutions are also cultural centres. Hence, it is natural that the folk-culture is reflected through such institutions. While discussing how folklore can assume the role in the reflection of culture of society, William R. Bascom has mentioned three problems (a) the social context of the folk-culture, (b) the relation of folklore with culture and (c) the function of folk-lore³.

Various aspects are connected with religious institutions. Firstly we may mention the matter of satras and nāmagharas. Sārīkaradeva and Mādhavadeva established the satras. Later on their devotees established innumerable satras. As the kings patronised the satras, the spread and publicity of the satras were expanded. The satras established in all the corners of the state have helped in unifying the Assamese people binding them with the rope of religion⁴. The

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3. Bascom, R.: Contributions to Folkloristics, P.P. 40 - 41

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satras are the centres of radiation of Vaišnava culture and literature. The poets and literateurs remained in the satras under the influence of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva and composed poems and pads and thus created a literary atmosphere in them.

The Ankiyā-nāt, which Śaṅkaradeva created, has become a part and parcel of the Assamese culture. In the words of S.N. Sarma it may be said: "He is the inventor of a class of one-act plays known as Ankiya-nāt and the technique of performance was introduced by himself."

There is a specific routine for the daily and occasional rituals of religion in the satras. Among them Nāmkīrtan, Ghosākīrtan, Bargī, Bhatimā, Bhāgavat pāth etc., are important. The Vaiśnava festivals and celebrations are observed on the specified tithis. There is the cultural reflection through such celebrations. The assessment of art and architecture is done in the satras. The devotees give emphasis on the heightening of the beauty of nāma-gāthā and manikuta. Various items such as the seat of the God (singhasana), the idols made of wood, the wood sarāi, the thagi of wood, ivory work, the robes for bhāona, the necessary articles of bamboo and cane are made in the satras. This is the example of material culture.

The art of drawing is practised in the satras. "Though the art of drawing of narrow breadth of Assam is of a single style, two variations are observed in them. One is built up in the royal courts and the other is the satriya atmosphere. The illustrated Bhāgavata purāṇa recovered from the Bali satra of Nagaon give evidence in this regard. Besides many other pictures have also been recovered from other satras. The influence of Moghal art is more prominent and more sophisticated on the art of drawing built up in royal courts."

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5. Sarma S.N., *The Neo-Vaiśnava Movement And the Satra Institution of Assam*, P. 17
In the sphere of music and dance the Bargīt, of the classical tradition has been preserved through Ankar git, the git like Bargīt composed by the Mahantas of satras, and Bibāhar git. The use of classical rags and tāls can be observed in such ġīts. The technique of singing has its own characteristic features. Besides the classical songs, there is the use of quasi-classical and folk-music in the satras. The peculiarities of folk music are preserved in the satras in the songs such as barāgi nām, tbionām, ghosā, tokāri, and in the lyricism of the nāmas. Such lyricism is still preserved in the villages.

The temples are the centres of cultural reflection. The putālanāc had its origin in the temples. In chapter 89 of kālikā purāṇa it is suggested that Goddess Chandika can be satisfied with the dance of the putalā (panchālikābihār) and childlike humour.7 The meaning of the word pānchālikā is puppet.

The Devadāsindsay arose centring the temples. The dhuliya and ojāpāli are generally organised in the temples. Such arts are the active and lively container and carrier of myths, legends and other traditional stories. The myths and legends narrated and sung in such occasions are seen to be accepted as historical facts. Hence it may be said that the characteristics of culture are observed through the performing arts or that the "performing arts are the mirror of culture"8.

Knowledge about the forbidden and approved manners can be derived from the religious institutions. The temples, nāmagharas and devālayas are the public centres. B.K. Barua says "The nāmaghara is the national theatre.9 The people of all religious communities have access to this theatre, the rich and the poor get equal seats. In this nāmaghara the problem of some areas are discussed and the quar-

7. Sarma, S.N, : Asamiyā Nātya Sāhitya, P. 4
rels and conflicts are settled. The religious leaders of different areas assemble in the nāmagharas and find out the ways and means for the solution of religious problems, in the context of the contemporary society. The general people can derive knowledge about the forbidden and approved manners of the society from such discussions.

The reading out of religious books is a regular phenomenon in the nāmagharas. The nāmagharas in which religious books are not regularly read out, there is the practice of reading them out in the ceremonies. The reading of religious books means the recitation of the religious books such as Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Kīrtana, Nāmghosā, Bhāgavata-Purāṇ etc. In such occasions a large number of audience listen to the reader with attention. The reader explains the difficult portions of such books which cannot be comprehended by the general people. The audience can gain knowledge about good and bad things from this. The example of Ram-Sarasvati’s 'khatāṣuṛ baddha' can be shown in this context. It shows how disastrous it is to have lust for the wives of others and that death can be its consequence. It is forbidden to develop lust for the wives of others. The audience can derive this message from this kavya. Human beings have no way out in this world except the complete devotion to Hari (God). The five pāndava brothers and Draupadi provide the example in this regard. From this kāvyā the people can gain knowledge about the manners approved by the society.

Folk tales are told and pāsālisare read out in religious institutions of Nalbari during Pasati, Subachani worship and Satyanārāyan worship. Knowledge about forbidden and approved manners can be derived from them. Benjamin N. colby says "Folktales may describe sanctions and prohibited behaviour........ or describe the various types of useful behaviour and strategies."10

10. Benjamin N. Colby, "The Analysis of Culture Content and the Patterning of Narrative Concerns in text" in American Anthropologists, P. 381
The religious institutions may also be described as recreational centres. The villagers remain busy with their agricultural and family affairs throughout the year. Besides they are also tormented by various problems such as flood and famine. There are no recreational centres in the villages like the towns. Hence the village population enjoy the ojāpāli and bhāonā etc. conducted in the temples and namagharas during the ceremonies. "When there was no regular drama in the country the performances of ojapali provided to common people with edification and amusement."\textsuperscript{11}

The religious institutions have significant roles in imparting informal education. The illiterate people of the society can receive informal education from these institutions. The democratic thoughts are also expressed through the religious institutions. The performing arts conducted in the namagharas have some people holding portfolios such as Sutradhār, Gāyan, Bāyan, Khanikar, Dhuliya and Khuliya etc. The selection for such portfolios have been done in a very dramatic manner. The people with a greater degree of efficiency are selected for such portfolios. This arouses the sense of competition among the people. Consequently the practice of music and dance improves. The experts impart training in music and dance to the boys and girls of the village.

The young people of the village take part in the bhāonās performed in the namagharās. This helps them to improve their connoisseurship, imagination, aesthetic sense, clarity of utterance and memory. Thus informal education can be gathered from such activities in the religious institutions.

Socialisation is one of the important activities of the religious institutions. "Socialisation is an important social activity. With the

\textsuperscript{11} Neog, M.,: Tradition and Style, P. 34
help of this activity a person gets an opportunity to be integrated with the society." The religious institutions are meeting centres of all the people irrespective of their caste, creed, language and religion. The people get the opportunity to be united through the various activities of the religious institutions such as worship, festivals and ceremonies. The religious institution is in itself a cultural institution. The people of all the communities gather here. Besides, the satra institution has played an important role in social spheres. One of the most notable social contributions is the upliftment of the backward classes. It may be here asserted that Assam has never known of the untouchables; this vice could never infect Assamese society. The spiritual and social bond fostered by the satra reduce the rigour of caste distinctions; Non-Aryan tribes such as Koch, Moran, Chutiya, Ahom, Kachari, Rabha and a number of others were brought to the fold of the faith the satra stood for.

The Rāsa-Mahotsava celebrated in the Harimandira becomes an occasion for the meeting of people of all communities. The people of the different religious communities like Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Buddhists and people of different castes and tribes gather here during Rāsa-Mahotsava. The aim and objective of all is one and the same. The managing committee of the temple is vast. The committee consists of members belonging to all the corners of Nalbari district. As their aim is the same, it has become easier for them to be organised in a disciplined manner.

The role of the religious institutions in controlling and disciplining the society is significant. Sometimes there is a tendency on part of some individuals to indulge in anti-social activities. Some people deviate from the right path of life and indulge themselves in

13. Rastogi, T.C., : *Assam Vaishnavism*, P. 58
murder, dacoity, theft, rape and other evil deeds. The rise of such anti-social activities leads to a kind of chaotic atmosphere. The religious institutions can play a major role in this regard. The legends and myths associated with them help in the controlling and disciplining of the society. The Mādhava devalaya of Tihu can be shown as an example in this regard. There is a story about how some thieves went there to steal the ornaments from the temple and how they welcomed their death. There are legends about the Bāghesvari temple. The Hindus and Muslims surrendered before the Goddess after realising her greatness. When the society fails to bring a criminal back to the mainstream, the criminal is asked to take an oath before the Goddess in the temple not to indulge in further criminal activities. The general people believe that any false oath before the Goddess will lead to disastrous consequences. Thus the people refrain from evil deeds.

The religious institutions also play the role of media of publicity. The objective of Śaṅkaradeva in establishing satras was the organisation of Society. The main objective of the gītas, padas, nātas and drawing created by him was to establish the greatness of Lord kṛṣṇa. Drama is a visual art. The illiterate people can draw some moral lessons from the dramas. In the play "Rukmini Harana" it is written "Rukmini haranani nāma nātakani mukti sādhakam".14 (that is the play 'Rukmini Harana' helps in attaining salvations). Through such things the ideals of Vaiśṇavism is propagated.

The Harimandira has also assumed an important role as a media of publicity. The idols and statues against various backgrounds are displayed during the Rāsa-Mahotsava such as Bihu dance, Boro dance, Odisi dance and Satrīyā dance etc. In front of the rooms of such idols and statues the words written are "nāchonere āmi karisu minati, utha jāgā supta prān" (we appeal to you through our dance

14. Sankaradeva, Rukmini Haran Nāṭ
that you should awake from your sleep). Through this the message of unity of the people of hills and plains is expressed. The statue of Gandhiji expresses the ideals of Gandhi. The statues of Assamese, Bengali, Bihari and Oriya is a symbol of national unity. The statues of o mor surīa māt arouses the patriotic feeling in the onlookers. The statues of kushal Kunar, Kanaklata, the sati of Jerenga, Maniram Dewan and Lachit Barphukan inspire us to regain our lost glory. The message given by the statues of family planning, co-operative society and drug-addiction help in the betterment of the society. So the folklore not only propagates the echo of the past but also is the powerful voice of the present time.

The role of religious institutions in achieving social harmony is significant. The religious faith keeps the people of various sections of the society united in a single platform. At the end of the worship the people, irrespective of their caste and status, sit together and make offerings of flowers to the God or Goddess and receive blessings and prasād. Through such activities the harmony of the society is achieved.

The glory of the religious institutions has remained unaffected throughout the ages because of the faith and confidence of the general people in such institutions. Mandirās and nāmagbaras are being established even today. The kings patronized various religious institutions in the past. Now a days Governments are not very interested with such of religious institutions. The surnames of many people indicate their portfolios. They are holding in the religious institution, even some villages also known according to their designations of these people.

The tradition of the absolute confidence of the general people in the religious institutions has been continuing from ancient
times, to some extent. The blind submission to the past is not the
tradition. The historical sympathetic attitude towards the past and the
present is tradition. According to T.S. Eliot tradition does not lie only
in the pastness of the past but in the presentness of the past. As
tradition is a process, the inclusion of the present is natural in this
process. This is applicable in case of the religious institutions. "The
past should be altered by the present as much as the present is di­
rected by past." It is seen that there has been a change in the activi­
ties observed in the religious institutions. The construction of the
temples has been very much expensive. Of course the temples have
become more beautiful and more strong than they were in the past.
But some temples are on the verge of destruction and decay. It is due
to the mismanaged social life and financial weakness. still it can be
said that the help provided by the general people in this regard is
more than that of the government. The homely satras have progressed
towards destruction and decay due to lack of proper management
and chaos.

The taste of urban and educated rural people has changed.
Consequently there has been changes in the ceremonies observed in
the religious institutions. Of course such changes have been confined
to the social aspects of such ceremonies. There has not been much
change in the Vedic rites. Similarly there has been no change in the
devotion of the devotees.

Narrow religious education makes the people fanatic and
blind followers of dogmas and rituals of their own religion. They
develop communal out look, which destroys national unity. Such re­
ligious education often create mental conflict and confusion in the
minds of the general people. In the present -day-society, religion is
politicised in some countries of the World and is used as a means of

16. George, A.G.; *Critics and Criticism*, P. 127
political power. All the centres of religion - mandiras, satras and nāmagharas have become the centres of power and politics. The spiritual content of religion is gradually disappearing. The political leaders control the religious centres and their funds. In such an atmosphere, any religious preaching in educational institutions is likely to be manipulated. Attempts should be made to impart broad-based spiritual education, which will develop understanding and tolerance rather than fanaticism or communalism.

It is very difficult to perform all the social activities smoothly in the society which is full of problems in the present times. It cannot be claimed that the past glory of the festivals and ceremonies observed in the Harimandira has been preserved till today. Though there has not been any deficiency in the co-operation and enthusiasm of the committee of the temple and of the public, Rāsa-Mahotsava had to be observed in a very simple manner without much pomp and ceremony for two times.

The influence of social life is felt in all the creative activities, similar is the case with the Harimandira. Now a days self centredness has become a natural characteristic of the general people. Consequently some people have engaged themselves in establishing themselves in the society under the guise of religion. So there has been disorder and chaos in the festivals and ceremonies observed in the religious institutions.

Secondly a section of the people have self interest tried to make a festival like Rāsa-Mahotsava a great fair for fulfilling their self interest. Many business-men get a good chance to sell their commodities and as such they earn a lot. Consequently there has been a decline in the religious atmosphere of the Mahotsava. Moreover, a festival may affect the economy of the masses by taking them away from their respective works. Still the confidence of the people in the
Harimandira has not declined. The devotion, festivity and folk-education have remained unaltered. Presently the influence of the religious institutions has declined due to many other influences and changes in the society. Still their influence has not been altogether disappeared. The religious institutions still exert much influence in the social life. "Besides bringing about a harmony between the spiritual and mundane, in human life, the religious organisations are recognised as a powerful means of education."

No institution can survive for a long time without the patronage of the society nor its development can be achieved. The people extend their full co-operation to the religious institutions of nalbari in the celebration of festivals. Hence it can easily be said that the impact of the religious institutions in society and education as well as culture cannot be ignored.