CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 TOPIC OF THE STUDY:

*Mandira* i.e., temple pays special attention to the religious and cultural development of individual. In a *mandira* religious ceremonies and festivals are celebrated with full faith and devotion. On such occasions every man observes certain formalities of prayer and meditation, behaves in a noble manner and practises many virtues like charity, generosity, fellow-feeling, pity, kind-heartedness, humility, emotional control and the like. Temple plays a great role in the propagation of sacred ideas. In the Hindu society the importance of temples and other type of religious centres in this regard is paramount.

Russel says, "Religion is based on faith—a firm belief in something for which there is no evidence." ¹ 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.² The religious beliefs aim at teaching people how to develop a wider attitude towards life and towards the society.

Religious institutions have made significant contributions to the field of education. Apart from religious activities, temples are centres for cultivation of moral and aesthetic values in Indian society. Many other activities are associated with religion. During ancient and medieval periods, religious institutions were the centres of education and education was given by religious specialists. So, religion and education were closely related. Moreover, religion induces man to lead a moral life. Influenced by it, man tries to mould his character

1. Russel, B. Human : *Society in Ethics and Politics*. P. 125
according to those ideals which religion establishes. Thus indirectly religion has educated man since ancient days.³ The educative aim of religion has been noticed by the scholars. As Taneja observes “Education and religion have a common aim of liberating men from darkness, ignorance and slavery. Both wish that man should have open mind liberal vision and catholicity of outlook. Both of them emphasize tolerance, equality, fraternity and humility.”⁴ Besides “Religion resolves the conflicts of thought and action and reduces psychological anxieties. Those who give religion a social interpretation think that religion brings social cohesion and teaches us to treat the whole mankind as ‘Fraternity’. Religion gives to people the rationality to live life gracefully.”⁵ He further says “The spirit of true religion, which has universal elements of all the religions of the world, must be woven in the warp and woof of the whole gamut of educative process. Ethical and moral development of the individual and the society should have the first priority in a genuine system of Education.”⁶ B.N. Dash observes, “All the religions have a well defined code of moral and spiritual values-what is good, and what is evil; what is done and what is not done etc.”⁷ So, it can be said that religion plays a positive role in the field of education and it is possible to fulfil then easily by religious institutions.

Assam is a place in the North-East-Region of India in which various mandiras, satras, nāmagharas are found. In folk societies of Assam there are different forms of the Hindu religious centres. They have imparted specially religious, cultural, social, aesthetic and moral education to the Assamese people.

The Harimandira is a famous temple in the heart of Nalbari

⁴ Taneja, V.R : Foundation of Education, Philosophical and Sociological. P. 202
⁵ Ibid
⁶ Ibid
⁷ Dash, B.N : Op- cit. P. 334
town, which is also the district headquarter. It develops the whole personality of the individual, physically, intellectually, morally, socially, aesthetically and spiritually. Through its various activities like craftworks, games, sports, social service programmes and the like, the Harimandira caters to the man's social, constructive, artistic and other impulses. Thus our village folk irrespective menfolk and womenfolk not only acquire knowledge but also develop the requisite habits, skills and attitudes. Moreover, the religious centres develop cultural sense of people.

1.2 AREA AND PEOPLE OF THE STUDY:

Etymologically Nalbari means a place of reeds. This word is nothing but a hybrid formation of ‘Nal’ (reed), an Austric word + ‘Bari’ (courtyard, compound, dwelling place, living place), a Sanskrit oriented word from Vatika. This area was once a meeting or living place of Austroloids, Mongoloids and Aryans. The present culture and traditions of the entire people of this area appear as a composite culture. The district is a new administrative unit created out of the Kamrup district in 1985. Before that, it remained a subdivision of the Kamrup district. Nalbari has become a district for administrative purposes, yet socially or culturally, it cannot be isolated from other parts of the neighbouring districts, i.e., Kamrup and Barpeta. Be that as it may, Assam is located to have been one of the migratory lands of mankind; hordes of people of different origins came over to Nalbari region at different times. Of them, the Indo-Mongoloids are discernible in the formation of the population pattern of the district. During pre-independence of India Nalbari was a small area about ¾ revenue mouzas around the small town Nalbari. But now Nalbari means a district which an area of 2257 sq. Km.8 and its present population is

also about 10,16,390. This district is also now known as one of the most progressive areas within the state. The head quarters of this district is also Nalbari, which is considered as a newly developed town with urban facilities of a Municipal town. When some one says about Nalbari region it does not mean only the district, but it means some more areas beyond the present district boundaries, and thus to the common people the conception of Nalbari region includes Hajo, Rangia, Patacharkuchi, Bajali etc. But actually these places are not located within the jurisdiction of Nalbari district.

The present Nalbari District is an abode of various ethnic groups like the Boro, Rabha, Saraniya and so on. Like other regions of Assam, the cultural life of Nalbari region is a beautiful synthesis of the non-Aryan and the Aryan cultural elements. The impact of tribal elements is quite plousible in the cultural and religious life of this region.

The Boros of this area have rich cultural heritage. They are worshippers of Bāthou. Kherāi is an important festival of the Boros. They worship Bāthou with rituals and songs as well as dances. Further more they celebrate various worships and festivals round the year. Many Boro people have absorbed in to the fold of Hinduism through the process of Sanskritization. Besides many of them have merged into the Assamese way of life, even they have accepted Assamese language as their mother-tongue through the process of Assamization.

1.3 PROBLEM OF THE STUDY:

The study of mandira, satra and nāmaghara in the district of Nalbari is important in the historical and social spheres, as their emergence brought considerable change into Assamese society.

9. Ibid.
Religious teaching is essential to generate equilibrium in men and women so as to enable them to lead harmonious life in the scientific and technological age of tensions and conflicts. So, it is very important to observe how the Harimandira and other mandiras, satras and namagharas interact and institutionalize a system of mass education. Some people have discussed about these religious centres. But even today nobody has studied properly about these religio-cultural centres. There must be a systematic study how our people acquire knowledge and develop the requisite habits, skills and attitudes from these religious centres.

The study of religious centres like mandiras, namagharas and satras in the district of Nalbari, needs to be analysed within the socio-religious influences that operate on Assamese society. The role of these religious centres in imparting informal education to the rural folk have been published in many souvenirs, journals and magazines. Most of these, of course, were not based on any scientific and systematic study. Hence, there is an ample scope for systematic study.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The main theme of this study will be the description of various mandiras, namagharas and satras with special reference to the Harimandira situated in the heart of Nalbari town. So, a systematic study of religious programmes, religious activities and prayers associated with the temple is essential for the proper knowledge of the rural societies. Naturally, all these institutions are scattered in rural areas except the Harimandira. So, patronage of these centres, role of the common people and how these people learn from these institutions are to be included in the study. Moreover, how these centres act as an informal agency of education and help in fostering communal harmony and integration is intended to be integral to the present study.

It must be admitted that there are various demerits of
these religious institutions. Sometimes negative, evil forces try to use these centres for their narrow, communal and political ends. The study envisages to focus light on various aspects of these institutions.

1.5 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY :

The objective of this study is to make a systematic survey of the educative role of different religious institutions in Assamese society with reference to Nalbari areas. The study will focus the process of transmission of religious, moral, aesthetic, social and cultural values through various sacred institutions. It will also include a discussion of forms of knowledge disseminated through activities observed in the religious centres.

Besides these, there are some beliefs, customs and practices connected with these religious institutions which provide the masses easy access to scriptural knowledge. These beliefs, customs and practices are based on some narratives narrated in religious scriptures which can educate the illiterate village people indirectly and without their being aware of it. Therefore, an attempt has been made in the present study for a systematic assessment of the nature of education imparted by these religious institutions with special references to the Harimandira among the menfolk and the womenfolk of the district of Nalbari.

1.6 SOURCES OF THE STUDY :

(a) Primary sources
(b) Secondary sources

Primary sources: Primary sources are mainly based on field works. Systematically collected field data which are associated with the Harimandira and neighbouring temples and namagharas in the district of Nalbari. Moreover, views of priests and local social
workers are also included.

**Secondary sources**: Secondary sources have been collected from local souvenirs, journals and magazines. Some magazines published by different religious institutions on their spiritual knowledge and historical background have provided many materials for the study. Besides other published material have been used.

### 1.7 METHODOLOGY:

Methodology is the way one goes about the investigation under question. The subject of the chosen study is “Role of the religious institutions with special reference to the Harimandira in imparting informal education among the people of the district of Nalbari.” To establish the educative role of the religious centres the present study has employed the socio-historical method. The principal modes of data collection are as follows:

#### 1.7.1 Observation method:

Observation has been an important tool for gathering materials on different types of cultural performances during a festival or ceremony held in the religious institutions. At the beginning, various types of religious activities have been minutely observed and after that other methods have been pursued to accumulate detailed data.

#### 1.7.2 Participant observation method:

The anthropological method of participant observation has been put to use during different festivals. Being a resident of the study area the researcher has collected data by her personal involvement.
1.7.3 Interview method:

The interview method has been used to collect various details. Different types of specialists have been interviewed to gather elaborate information. For example, interviews with priests and important members of the management committees of the religious institutions were useful for collection of great deal of information. Knowledgable persons of the district have provided many useful details.

1.7.4 Questionnaire method:

Questionnaire schedules have been canvassed to collect different types of impressions of the menfolk and the womenfolk regarding significance of religious institutions. A prepared questionnaire to collect names of temples, satras, namagharas, names and functions of festivals and ceremonies, their time of occurrence, associated rituals and their role in imparting education has been distributed among the village chiefs and youths of the district of Nalbari. Another questionnaire has been canvassed among the selected religious specialists and the menfolk and the womenfolk to collect their impressions on the educational functions of the religious institutions.

1.8 Works done so far in this field:

Assam is full of religious centres. In the district of Kamrup there are various religious centres. Nalbari, a part of erstwhile Kamrup district is also a land of temples, namagharas and satras etc.

Some studies made on these centres pertaining to folklore, culture and history. The study of Assamese religious cults and sacred institutions owe considerably to reputed scholars such as Dr. B. Kakati, Dr. B.K. Barua, Dr. P.C. Choudhury, Dr. P. Goswami, Dr. M. Neog, Dr. S.N. Sarma and Dr. N.C. Sarma whose works are laudable.

But the institution of the district of Nalbari has been left out
no book on this particular aspect of the district has been published as yet, though some articles are found in some souvenirs, magazines and news papers etc. They are "Sonāli Jayanti Smritigrantha, Śrī Śrī Harimandir, Nalbari", "Rupāli Jayanti Smritigrantha, Śrī Śrī Durgā pūjā, Bogalsroad chock", "Asam Sābītya Savār trichatwāringsat Tibu Adhibesion, Tibu", many articles by Sri P.N. Choudhury, Sri S. Sarma, Sri H.N. Sarma which are published in news papers, magazines and so forth.

However, a contemporary study of these centres awaits an educational analysis as proposed by some scholars because most of analysis on these institutions have centred around philosophical or historical perspectives. But the study of educative role of the religious institutions of Nalbari area was not done till to the present study.

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