CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

It may have been observed from the foregoing pages how the Saṅkaradeva movement had its ramifications in the later centuries and how a sect of the Order tried to keep up the ideals set by the propounder of the faith of bhakti in Assam. The Samhati division, as we have seen, came into being soon after the death of Mādhavadeva in 1596 A.D.

Both the Puruṣa Samhati and the Kāla Samhati emerged out of the main body of the Order in about the same period.

The Brahma Samhati, however, evolved prior to that, which of course, was not called a Samhati at that time. The Nikā Samhati, which came into existence comparatively late, was, however, included in the Puruṣa Samhati at the beginning.

Most of the satras of the Brahma Samhati came into contact with the Āhom court at different times and these institutions were able to receive patronage and encouragement from contemporary rulers. The Gosāis of such satras, therefore, were able to exercise some influence on the Āhom monarchs and nobles. In these satras some extra-religious activities grew out of the greed for money and prestige.
Some of the sattras tried to create certain formalities and other artificial features to acquire position and prestige in the society as well as in the royal court. There was a tendency of some sattras to attain supremacy over other institutions otherwise on an equal position. Such sattras scrambled in their attempt to occupy seats in the front place in their own rank in the royal court. Some sattras of the Purusa Samhati, however, were given the second row of seats in the court. The patronage of royal authority was responsible for the promotion of such extra-religious formalities. Even an officer, the Sattriyā Saruwā, had to be appointed to the duty to deal with the affairs of, and keep close contact with, the sattras. Naturally, the sattras had to abide by certain rules laid down by this officer in certain matters as might have been dictated by political interests. It was obligatory for such sattras to follow some directives from the rulers even in religious matters. Moreover, most of the sattras of the Brahma Samhati included some features not admitted by Sajnasrudeva and Āchārya Kazi. These institutions developed some distinctive
characteristics particularly in the case of including śārta and tantric rituals in the process of administering initiation.  

Sātras of the Brahma Sāhasrī, which in particular sought royal favour, were given special honour in the royal court. But those who did not consider such honour to be of such value and carried on their usual religious duties only, could not have such position in the royal circle. The inspiration for religious attainments of some sātras of the Brahma Sāhasrī was naturally replaced by the greed for power. It went to such an extent that the Sāhantas even took active part in the selecting of a ruler as well as in the dethroning of a ruling king. It is to be observed that the sātras of the luruṣa Sāhasrī kept themselves away from the direct control and influence of the Ākṣa royalty. It may be assumed that for the pursuit of their religious activities they considered it detrimental to keep closer touch with the kings and nobles. They would rather earnestly carry on

1 Dewan, ii. 42-43.
the tradition of their predecessors, Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, Puruṣottama and Caturbhujā. It was quite natural for the sattras having close contact with the rulers to adopt some formalities almost in imitation of the royal pattern. The rulers had quite a deal to worry about the sattras and associate themselves with rites and ceremonies of these institutions. It further became a part of the administration to include and impose some strict rules on these sattras that came in touch with the rulers.

The Kāla Samhati owes its origin to Gopāla Āta, one of the pioneer deputies of Mādhavadeva. Although the main tenets of the Kāla Samhati were based on the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, on most occasions we find that this particular Samhati exhibited some marked peculiarities of its own. This Samhati tried to spread the message of bhakti among all sections of people including the humblest rank. The Kāla Samhati became a bit liberal in the code of life meant for the Vaiṣṇavas. It is alleged in some quarters that crypto-
Buddhism, which was in vogue even in the time of Śākharadeva, made its way into the Vaiṣṇava faith and practice particularly among some followers of the Kāla Saṃhāti.²

This might be one of the main reasons for the underrating of this schism by the Kāruṣa Saṃhāti. Moreover, the Kāla Saṃhāti was associated with the Kāyāmarīyā insurrection, when a section of its adherents, the Kāyāmarīyās, revolted against the Āhom king. As such, they had to face dire retaliation from some Āhom rulers of the time.

The Kāla Saṃhāti and the Brahma Saṃhāti had played their parts in the political history of Assam. The Kāyāmarā-sattra of the Kāla Saṃhāti grew in wealth and power almost on an equal scale with some of the Āhom nobles and princes. The followers of this group also increased to alarming proportions. The Diing-sattra became prominent in about the same period.³ These two sattras could not

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² Information gathered from Sañornā: Batta Ṣān-lagovā, an eighty year old monk of Jardovā.

³ Note: Śrī Śrī Sākharadeva, Sūrā.
maintain good terms between themselves due to the varying influence of the ruling class. This led to the growth of a faction within the Kāla Samhāti. Even the Gosāis of the Dihing-sattra stood openly against those of the Māya-marā-sattra in battle array. But the Gosāis of the Salaguri-sattra of the Puruṣa Samhāti, who also came into close contact with the Ahom royalty, did not plunge themselves into such acts against some sattras of equal rank. Some sattras had to participate in such activities due to the pressure or influence of the ruling power. But the rulers could not compel the sattras of the Puruṣa Samhāti to do so, because they did not care much about the favour or disfavour of the administrators. They did not consider it to be their obligatory duty to try to please the rulers at all. The sattras of the Puruṣa Samhāti, therefore, did not take any active part in the political activities of the time.

During the reign of Sulikphā Lara Raja (1679-1681 A.D.), the Gosāi of the Dakhinī-sattra became very powerful. This sattra, as we find elsewhere, played a leading rôle
in the political history of the period. Likewise, some sattras of the other Samhatis also played active parts in the politics of the time. Although the followers of the Vaisnava faith in Assam were divided into groups, their creed remained one and the same.

The records of Assam Vaisnavism available to us so far give the impression that its leaders of the period under review expounded *ṣa- system of the Vedānta philosophy. They rested content with what Śaṅkaradeva himself set forth in his works. In spite of their existing differences all the adherents of the faith considered themselves to be an integral part of the main body of the Order. It was openly declared⁴ that despite their differences, all the sattras followed the fundamental principles of Vaisnavaism of Śaṅkaradeva. Though the divisions were in vogue among the followers, there was a spirit of toleration and co-operation among them.

The differences between the Puruṣa Samhati and the other three schisms of Assam Vaisnavas were mainly on the

⁴ Āi Kanakalātar Caritra, pp.62-66.
points of some esoteric observances to which we have referred in the foregoing pages. Despite such differences, the Assam Vaisnavas carried on almost unitedly the message of bhakti to the remotest corner of the State. Instances are not wanting to prove the fact that the Brahma Samhiti and the Nika Samhiti came under the influence of the Purusa Samhiti. In fact, the influence of the Purusa Samhiti on the other schisms was always felt in certain aspects. It was quite natural for the followers of other three Samhatis to look up to Bardowa, the central institution of the Purusa Samhati, for inspiration and guidance when and where possible or necessary. Of course, there are some peculiarities of lesser magnitude in each Samhati in matters relating to the daily observances and other similar things. The Purusa Samhiti sattras have influenced the other sattras and even the Caitanyite sattras of Assam in the matter of various modes of chanting congregational prayer and in

5 see Chapters II and III.
the management of the sattra institution as a whole. There was, however, no cardinal difference among the four-fold division of Assam Vaisnavism.

It may be noted that the Puruṣa Samhāti exhibited some marked peculiarities of its own, particularly in the matter of the procedure of chanting prayers, which has been operating till the present day. We have dealt in some detail about the religious, social, cultural and literary history of the Puruṣa Samhāti from its earliest phase down to the current century. The Gosāis of the Puruṣa Samhāti earnestly considered literary and cultural activities to be a distinct part of their duty. A large majority of the dramatists of the period hailed from the Puruṣa Samhāti sattāras. A good number of scholars and poets flourished during the period, and some of them were honoured with land grants and other gifts by the contemporary rulers. In the period a good bulk of literature was produced and devotional writings of a considerable number by the saints of the Samhāti came into existence. Multiplication of new sattāras at different

8 see Chapter II, fn. 37, 39.
places of Assam continued, and these institutions became, as usual, the centres of religious as well as cultural activity of the people around them. As a result of that the scope of literature, music and fine arts extended in a considerable way. Such was the zeal in this respect that economic hardship and other difficulties could not stand on the way of pursuit of such activities. With varying fortunes, these sattra institutions have actively survived many a crisis. Almost the entire population of the Assam valley came under the influence of these sattra institutions. Through the activities of the Mahantas, the cultural tradition was carried on with great zeal. Thus it added to Assam's religious literature; introduced and popularised the arts of dance, drama and music; encouraged and revived handicrafts and introduced the art of illuminating manuscripts and painting.

Sattras affiliated to the Purusa Samhata never encouraged formalities, pomp and grandeur like that of the sattras of the Brahma Samhata, where a craving
for prestige and love of wealth, conservatism and orthodoxy in place of catholicity, tended to become dominating features. On the contrary, the sattras of the Purusa Samhati used to maintain an intimate and sincere relationship between the guru and his disciples, and the greatness of a sattra depended upon the religious attainments of the Gosai concerned. The rigidity of caste in devotional and other religious matters was totally denounced by the Purusa Samhati and a sense of equality and fellowship between the guru and his disciples and among the fraternity grew. Some Sattrakars, like some of their predecessors, selected persons irrespective of caste and community, to act as Superiors (Adhikars) on the strength of religious accomplishment alone. Most of the villages were affiliated to one or other of the satras having their respective association in matters of intellectual and cultural activities.

It is to be admitted that the tradition of the activities of the Gosais in various fields still persists in the State. Of course, it is noticed that with the
impact of western civilisation and the growth of rationalistic ideas among the people, a process of gradual decadance in most of the sattras has long set in. There is, on the other hand, an awakening tendency in India which has brought about a change in the outlook of the people and which urges upon them the necessity of assessing properly the cultural wealth they had. It is significant that 'the reformers' and revolutionaries in many parts of the world had often used religion and the appeal to the past to bring about changes in the social and political spheres'.

The Purusa Samhati has made a considerable stride in this direction since the very days of the modern period of our history.