CHAPTER V

The Religious Institutions.

1. The Temples:

The temples, the 'Namghars' and the 'Satras' are the main institutions which have been playing a vital part in the social, religious and cultural life of the Assamese people for the last four hundred years; in case of temples the period is even longer than that. The 'Namghars' and the 'Satras' are the gifts of the Vaisnavite movement. Prior to the Vaisnavite movement, the temples played to some extent the same role as has been played by the 'Namghars' in the subsequent period in the life of the Assamese people. The temples along with their attached 'Natghars' were the main centres of their social, religious and other cultural functions. Along with the growth of the 'Namghars' the predominance of the temples considerably declined; however, the religious and the cultural functions and other festivals held in the temples did not stop and held the ground till the close of the Medieval period. What little cultural remnants of the pre-Vaisnavite period, the Assamese people can boast of to-day, are doubtless the contributions made by these temples. The temples, with their attached 'Natghars', had been carrying on their cultural activities side by side with the 'Namghars' for a considerable period when at last, losing their vigour they came to be quiet and indolent owing to the more unsympathetic outlook cherished by the Vaisnavite movement against them as well as to the absence of royal patronage for their maintenance. The temples of Dergaon, Dubi, Hajo and Kamakhyā carried on their activities with equal force till the end of the Medieval period and the last two are still functioning with equal vigour. The influence of the temples and the 'Namghars' and the life of the Assamese people is manifold. It may not
be possible on our part to quote appropriate authority in support of our views; but we think, the traditions which are still rife in these institutions, will stand as testimony to our points. Because of the absence of proper patronage, the temples lost their former status and dignity.

That there were innumerable temples in existence in the early and in the Medieval period, can be realised from the relics and the ruins lying scattered all over the State, as well as from the temples still in existence either in dilapidated or in good condition. During the Medieval period, at the instance of the Koch and the Ahom kings a large number of temples were newly constructed and a large number of old temples were rebuilt. The first Koch king Biswa Singha raised many temples in his kingdom including the famous temple of goddess Kamateswari. His son king Naranarayana and his brother Chilarai, renovated the famous temple of Goddess Kamakhya on the Nilachala hillock (near modern Gauhati) which was destroyed by a Mohammedan invader. The temple was completed within a period of six months under the supervision and guidance of the artist named Megha Mukudam. The temple was ceremonially dedicated by offering sacrifices, and performing Homa. It is further stated in the 'Vamsāvali' that king Naranarayana dedicated 140 paiks for the services in the temple, besides endowing lands and other professional people, such as Brāhmaṇas, Gaṇakas, Naṭas, Bhāṭas, Tāntis, Mālis, Kamārs, Kāhārs etc. The Ahom kings also donated lands, paiks and professional people to the temples and 'Devalayas' of the State. There was one officer known as 'Devaliā Barua' in charge of the temples and 'Devalayas' of the different temples and 'Devalayas', the temples dedicated to the god Siva and goddess Pārvati or Durgā are more numerous.
A part of the temple, through which one can enter into the main temple, is called 'Natghar', where people enjoy dance or music or theatrical performances held on the occasion of any religious or social function or any festival in the temple. Amongst the musical and theatrical performances held in these temples or 'Devālayas', the 'ujē-pāli', the 'Deodhani nrtya,' the 'Patalā nāch' etc. are worth mention. Both in the early and in the Medieval period, the customary dance of the 'Devadāsi' at the time of worship in the Śiva temples, formed a part of the liturgy. The temples at Biswanāth Dergāon and the Dubi Devālaya are the best examples of it in the Medieval period. The temple at Hājo, though not a Śiva temple, yet the 'Devadāsi' dance was a special feature of it. The Devadāsi nrtya continued in these temples under the patronage of the Ahom kings during the whole period of their rule and continued till the advent of the British rule.

Like the 'Namghars', the 'Natghars' attached to the temples, served as the best place for the neighbouring people to assemble not only to enjoy cultural functions, but also to discuss and settle their social problems. The people held their religious discussions and listened to the sacred books, read by Brāhmaṇa priests, in the 'Natghars'. There were scholars and writers centering round the various temples and a number of literary works of the early period are accredited to some of them. In the temples, the religious festivals, particularly the festival observed in connection with the deity to whom a particular temple is dedicated, are observed with great devotion and enthusiasm.

2. The Namghars:

Along with the spread of Vaisnavism, inaugurated by Sankardeva in
the 16th century, a large number of 'Namghars' (prayer Halls) sprang up throughout the length and breadth of the country. The existence of a village, inhabited by Hindu people, without a 'Namghar', in Assam, in fact, can hardly be conceived of. Almost all the Hindu inhabitants from Brāhmaṇa down to the Keot, Koch, Chutiā enjoy equal share in the village 'Namghar' differing a little in the social status only. Through the 'Namghar', everybody living in the village, can demand social equity and justice; even the Mohammedans who happen to live in the neighbourhood of the village and cannot enter into the 'Namghar', can demand justice and equity at the initiative of the 'Namghar'. Of course, the Mohammedans generally live together making a separate unit of village among themselves. The Mohammedans have their 'Masjids' in their villages, where they offer prayer and hold other religious functions according to the Islamic rites.

The 'Namghar' is a Socio-religious cum cultural centre of the villages. This is the place where the village inhabitants put their heads together to discuss matters regarding social, economic and other problems of the village. The village people observe their occasional social functions and festivals in the 'Namghars'. Here, the petty cases of offence or crime and feuds and quarrels are decided by the elderly men of the village who pronounce judgements on them. Whatever decision they arrive at or whatever punishment they impose upon the wrong-doer, the party concerned is bound to abide by it or undergo it. The higher authority of the State also approved the decision of such trials. Of course, trials on social and religious offences were only held in the village 'Namghars'. The Political offenders or the rebels were tried by the higher officers, either in the
court of the headquarters or in the court of the king in the capital. Again, whenever the 'Namghar' authority considers a social or a religious crime or an offence to be of serious nature, such a case is committed to the Satra, to give verdict upon it. Whatever plan or decision is taken by the assembly of the village people in the 'Namghar' for the general welfare of the village, must be accepted by all. In case of failure to abide by, a person or persons would be boycotted and debarred from participating in any functions and festivals held in the 'Namghar' and no villager is allowed to accept the invitation of such a boycotted person.

Thus, the village 'Namghar' fosters unity and administers justice among the inhabitants of the village. It further helps a great deal in solving the problems of the village as well as in working for the all-round progress of the village. As for instance, when the village people feel the need of a road, or a tank, they all assemble in the 'Namghar' and take a decision to construct a road or to dig a tank, and accordingly all the adult male members of the village work unitedly to construct a road or dig a tank for their common use. Thus the institution of 'Namghar' has been a potent factor in generating a spirit of co-operation and mutual benefit amongst the populace of the village.

The village 'Namghar' is primarily meant for observing religious functions and festivals. Like the Church, this is a community prayer-hall, where the supreme Lord Visnu, in the form of Krisna, is only worshipped. The Hindu people living in the same village, but belonging to different sects, other than Vaisnava, also, can participate in the functions held in the village 'Namghar'. In the 'Namghar', the village people perform their
annual religious functions, such as 'Nāmgoā', 'Barsabāh' etc., and religious festivals, such as 'Jamnāstami', 'Siva Chaturdasi' etc., and observe other days also having religious significance by holding recital of 'Nāma-Kirttana'. The theatrical performance, known as 'Bhāonā' in Assamese, of the plays written by Sankardeva and Madhabdeva, are also held along with the functions and festivals. The death and birth anniversaries of the Vaisnavite preceptors are observed in the village 'Namghar' with great devotion and enthusiasm. Now and then, at their leisure time, the village people listen to the religious discourses or reading of the Ṛk epics and 'Purāṇas' in the 'Namghar'.

Whenever a Satrādhikār (excluding the Satrādhikārs of the four main Satras viz., Āumiāti, Daksīnpāt, Garamur, and Kurūbāhī) or a Mahanta or a representative of the Satrādhikār, such as the 'Rājmedhi' comes to the village, he is usually received in the village 'Namghar' and arrangements for his food and lodging are made here. During their occasional visits, the Satrādhikārs initiate the neophytes in the 'Namghar', who cannot make time or afford to go to the Satra for the same.

The 'Namghar' serves a veritable seat of learning, the art of dancing, singing and playing on musical instruments. The young-folk of the village learnt (even now) the art of 'Bhāonā' performance, the art of singing and dancing and the art of playing on musical instruments from the elderly artists of the village and this tradition is still continuing. In the archive of the 'Namghar', the manuscript-works, called 'Puthis' in Assamese, were preserved. The scribes, who were entrusted with the task of copying manuscripts, had been doing their works in the 'Namghar'. The village artisans render their utmost skill in decorating the 'Namghar' by all means. They
decorate the 'Manikuta' (the room attached to the 'Namghar', where the idol or the sacred scripture is kept on a specially decorated seat called Simhāsana) and the posts and beams of the 'Namghar' with drawings, illustrations and carvings. The two sides of the entrance to the 'Manikuta' are decorated with wooden images of 'Jaya' and 'Vijaya' and at the approach to the 'Simhāsana', i.e., the altar, images of 'Garuda', 'Lāruagopāla', 'Nānumāna' etc. are carved. We come across another structure called 'Cho-ghar' which can be equated roughly with a modern green-room.

To conduct the social and religious functions of the village people, there is a set of functionaries in each village. These functionaries or office-bearers are assigned seats of honour according to the rank and status of their office in the 'Namghar', whenever a function is held. Among these officials, the 'Kedhi', the 'Satola', the 'Namlogowa', the 'Pāthak', the 'Deuri' are the main.

The village 'Namghar' generally consists of three main houses, viz., the 'Manikuta', the 'Namghar' and the 'Cho-ghar', and sometimes the fourth being a porch called 'Bāt-Chorā'. Some 'Namghars' are found constructed without the 'Manikuta', the 'Cho-ghar' and the 'Bāt-Chorā', perhaps owing to the financial difficulty. The 'Manikuta' is an integral part of the 'Namghar' and in those 'Namghars' where there is no 'Manikuta', the 1st room from the side of the 'Manikuta' of the 'Namghar' serves the purpose of a 'Manikuta'. The 'Namghar' is a large open hall where a congregation of people can offer their prayer. The 'Manikuta' is comparatively a small shrine, attached on the eastern end of the 'Namghar' as a repository of the idol or the sacred
book. 'Manikuta' literally means the place where the 'Mani', i.e., the jewel is placed. Here, 'Mani' is taken to mean the idol or the sacred book. As to the prevalence of the term 'Manikuta', Dr. S.N. Sarma writes: "It cannot be said with certainty how the word 'Mani-kut' came to mean the shrine where the idol or the image is kept. In this connection mention may be made of 'Mani-Saila' or 'Manikuta', the hillock where the shrine of 'Hayagriva-Madhava' is situated. This shrine of 'Madhava' has been the centre of Vaisnavism at least from the 10th century onwards. The term 'Manikut' to mean the small shrine attached to the 'Nāmghar' may be an extended use of the original word 'Manikuta' of Hajo, the place of the 'Madhava' temple. Again there is a Dravidian word 'Kottam' which means a temple or shrine, 'Kuta' may be a variation of 'Kottam'. But these are all conjectures."

In the 'Nāmghars' where idol is not kept in the 'Manikuta', "a Vaisnavite scripture, held in high esteem, generally composed by Sandardeva or his successor Madhavdeva is kept in the 'Manikuta' on a Simhasana or wooden tray for offering prayer." The Simhasana is a specially decorated wooden seat having three or five or seven or nine stairs, each stair being supported by four leogriff models. The Simhāsana, where the scripture is kept, is also called 'Thāpanā'. Above the Simhāsana is fixed a decorated canopy with five whisks, made of yak's tail, hanging from the four corners and the centre of it. The other properties of the 'Nāmghar', such as 'Ḍabā' (drum), 'Kāh' (bell), 'Ghaṇṭā' (bell), 'Sankha' (conch), 'Śarāj' (raised tray), 'Bata' (tray), 'Tāu' (an utensil made of brass), 'Charī' (tub), 'Urāl' (a mortar), 'Urāl-māri' (pestle), 'Hāddā' mat etc. are also kept there.

According to Dr. S.N. Sarma, the 'Nāmghar' is a large open hall with gabled roofs; the western facade is apsidal. The ancient type of 'Nāmghar'
consists of a nave and side aisles with rows of wooden pillars, separating the nave from the aisles. According to the number of disciples, it has to accommodate, the size of the 'Namghar' may vary. The 'Namghar' which is constructed from east to west lengthwise, consists of three or five or seven rooms. The room of the western end is a gabled room. Towards the west of the 'Manikuta', the right hand post of the 2nd pair is wrapped with a piece of red apron at its upper part. This is the main post or pillar of the 'Namghar' and is called 'Laikhuta'. Arrangement of seat at the base of this post, on any social or religious function, is made for the Satradhikār or Mahanta, whenever they attend such functions. In the absence of the Satradhikār, the highest functionary of the village 'Namghar', is generally provided with a seat by the side of this pillar. The sitting arrangement for the Brāhmaṇas, is made on the right hand side, just near the Simhāsana. The northern side of the 'Namghar' is reserved for women. Towards the west of the 'Laikhutā', people can take their seats; but those who belong to the backward community, are to take their seats in the apse of the 'Namghar'. The elderly people who are initiated into the faith and are considered higher in devotional line are offered seats in the first row and at the time of distributing 'Prasāda', they are served first. At the time of 'Nama-prasanga' (recital or litany of Holy names), the members of the recital party or choir take their seats in the room towards the west of the 'Laikhutā' in two rows, from east to west, facing each other, leaving the middle portion between the two rows, vacant. The leader called 'Namlagovā', takes his seat at the central place of the two rows at the end. The place occupied by the 'Namlagovā' is called 'Sir'. At the right hand side of the 'Namlagovā', a little above towards the east, his main supporter,
known as 'Mul-Dohar', is seated. The two rows are known as 'Doharar-šāri'. At the back of the 'Namlagowa', the row occupied by the other participants is known as 'Palir-šāri'.

The 'Cho-ghar' is constructed on one side of the 'Namghar' adjoining to it. As said above, on the occasion of a 'Bhāona' performance, the make-up of the players is done here. After the 'Bhāona' performance, the village people preserved their masks, artificial dresses and ornaments, weapons used by the actors etc., in the 'Cho-ghar'. This 'Cho-ghar' serves the purpose of a modern green-room at the time of 'Bhāona' performance. On the other hand, it may be called a miniature museum of the village people. The 'Bat-chora' is a small two-roofed hut at the entrance of the gate to the 'Namghar'.

During the period of the observance of ceremonial impurity or uncleanness, such as at the death of a person or birth of a new baby in the family, the family members are not allowed to enter into the 'Namghar'. In the case of natal impurity, the members of the family are allowed to enter into the apsidal room, but the period of impurity is observed very strictly in case of a death in the family and in such a case the members of the family are not allowed to enter even into the apsidal room. So also, a sinner or an offender is not allowed to enter into the 'Namghar' and to participate in any function held there, so long he does not expiate himself for the sin as directed by the scriptures or pay the penalty charged for the offence by the Society.

The expenses of the functions and festivals held in the 'Namghar'
are met from the compulsory subscription made by the village people, both in kind and cash. Whenever the necessity of constructing the 'Namghar' is felt by the people, the village people were required to render not only physical service but also to subscribe other housing materials. There are other sources of income. Every family is required to keep aside a certain amount of money for the village people on the occasion of ceremonial functions held in their houses, which is credited to the account of the 'Namghar', in charge of a prominent person of the village. Proceeds from fines and other fees like expiation fees are also earmarked for the 'Namghar'. The village people for their common purpose can spend money from this account. Sometimes, money collected by 'Huchari-party' (a band of dancers and singers) at the time of 'Bihu' festival is also deposited in this account.

Thus in the social life of the Assamese people, the 'Namghars' have been playing a vital part since the 16th century. It is an inextricable organ of the village life. This is the place where the village people observe their religious functions and festivals, solve their social problems; this is the place where the village people not only learn to stand united but also enjoy the bliss and benefits of a homogeneous social life. This is the place, centering round which the culture of dancing, singing, playing on musical instruments, making of wooden and earthen images, bamboo, wood and cane crafts etc. grow up amongst the illiterate village people. The literate persons, however, are enjoined to the 'Namghar' to write drama, poetry and translate sanskrit works and copy manuscripts. Here in the 'Namghar', the village people preserve their properties required for the functions and festivals, the manuscripts and the products of art and crafts.
cultured by them. The catholicity of temperament and the tolerant attitude of the Assamese people are, to a great extent, moulded by democratic institutions like the 'Namghar'. To put in the words of Dr. E.K. Barua, the 'Namghar' is the national theatre of the Assamese people as well as the museum of the Assamese national culture.

3. The Satras:

About Satra institutions of Assam, Dr. S.N. Sarma has thoroughly discussed. In the religious, social and cultural spheres of the Assamese society, the Satra institution occupies a pre-eminent place since the 16th century. The Satra institution, in the opinion of Dr. Sarma, to a certain extent resemble the "Buddhist monastery or Matha of the medieval period. But unlike those, it has entered into the very texture of the Assamese society, as such it forms a vital part of Assamese social system." A large number of Satra institutions grew under the auspices of the Vaisnavite movement throughout Assam. Originally the term 'Satra' was used in the sense of sacrifice. But in the neo-Vaisnavite period the word lost its original meaning and came to be used in the sense of a religious association or sitting where recitation of 'Bhāgavata' took place daily. It is believed that the word came to be used in Assam from the incident of listening to the 'Bhāgavata Purāṇa', told by Suta, by an assembly of old sages. The recitation and listening to 'Bhāgavata Purāṇa' by the holy association of 'Bhākatā' (Bhaktas) is a regular feature of the daily religious activities in the Satras and it resembles the assembly of old sages listening to 'Bhāgavata' told by Suta. In the earlier phase of the Vaisnov movement, during the life time of Sankardeva, the term 'Satra' was used in a loose
sense; it simply meant an association of holy persons. But later on, it came to signify a particular type of well-organised religious institution. Along with the progress of the Vaisnava movement, innumerable Satras came to be established with various officials and accessories. Bhattadeva, one of the eminent scholars and preceptors, defines a 'Satra' in the following lines:

"Yatracaranti Saddharmān kevalā Bhāgavat-priyāh / Navadā Bhagavadbhakti Pratyaham yatra vartate // Tat-Satram uttamam kṣetram Vaisāvāh Sūra-vanditam / Tatrastha Vaisāvāh sarve Harināma parāyanāh //

(Translation - The place where the gods' favourite staunch devotees perform their religious and ninefold devotional duties to God, is the supreme place Satra, highly admired by the Vaisnavas and the gods; there live the Vaisnavas, the lovers of Harināma.)

There are four principal parties which constitute the Satra institution forming a community among themselves. The parties are: (1) The Adhikār, or the Satriya, that is the head of the Satra, (2) The Deka—Adhikār, that is the junior Adhikār, (3) The Bhakats, that is the clerical devotees residing within the walls of the Satra and (4) The Sisyas, that is the lay devotees or disciples living in the village and leading household life. Now, there are mainly two types of Satras. In some Satras, the Adhikār and the clerical devotees living within the walls of the Satras, lead a celibate life and they are known in Assamese as 'Udāsin Satras'. In the other type, the Adhikār and the other devotees lead a married life. "There is yet a third type of Satras where the Adhikar only leads a celibate life without detaching himself from the family life altogether."
In the first type of Satras the organisational side and the community life is more stronger than the latter two types.

The head of the 'Satra' is known as 'Adhikār' and his junior is 'Deka-Adhikār'. It is difficult to agree with Dr. Sarna in his remark that "The head of the Satra is popularly known as 'Adhikar Gosain' in case he is a Brahmin and Mahanta if he is a non-Brahmin." As to the prevalence of the term 'Gosāin', the question was once discussed in Assam. It is believed that the term 'Gosāin' or its original sanskrit 'Gosvāmi' came to be used in Assam along with Banamali Gosain who had been living in Kochbehar. Having heard the reputation of Banamali Gosain, the Ahom king Jayadhvaja Singha invited him to his country. Banamali Gosain founded the Dakṣināt Satra in the great river-island called Majuli. Since then, the term 'Gosāin', it is believed, came to be used in Assam. We cannot agree that the term 'Mahanta' is used by the non-Brahmin preceptor; the word 'Mahanta' is found used by Brahmin preceptors till recently. Of course, it is true that the Brahmin preceptors prefer to use the surname 'Gosāin' or 'Gosvāmi' after their names and now-a-days it is universally used by them. The 'Adhikār' is the religious head and spiritual guide of the members under his jurisdiction." In the Barpeta Satra, the 'Adhikār' is elected by the 'Bhakats' attached to it. In many of the 'Udāsin' Satras, the future 'Adhikār' or the Deka-Adhikār' is appointed during the life time of the incumbent. For the post of the 'Deka-Adhikār', a boy, within teens, from a married Satra of the 'Sahati' (sect) is selected. In selecting such a boy, his mental and physical fitness are also taken into consideration. Before investing him as 'Deka-Adhikār', education along with other training for a considerable period is imparted in
order to qualify him in all ways for the dignified post. In case the 'Dékā-
Adhikār' goes against the will of the 'Adhikār' or does not behave properly,
the 'Adhikār', with the consent of his disciples, may discharge him and
select another. In the Satras, following the family life, no uniform rule is
adopted in appointing an 'Adhikār'. In some Satras seniority of age is taken
into consideration in appointing an 'Adhikār', but he must possess other
religious and moral qualities and be free from any blemish of mental or
physical decrepitude. On the death of an 'Adhikār', the 'Dékā-Adhikār' is
generally installed in his (Adhikār's) gaddi by holding "a special ceremony
of investiture where the 'Adhikārs' of allied Satras formally install him
on the Adhikarship by offering 'Nirmālī' (garland of flowers or of Tulasi
leaves offered with blessings)". 12

For conducting the religious services and for the smooth and
efficient management of Satra, several functionaries are appointed in the
different branches of it. According to the size and status of the Satra,
the functionaries vary in number. The important among them are: (1)
Barpujāri (head worshipper of the idol), (2) Bardeuri (the chief officer
in charge of articles required for worship), (3) Malīā-Barūr (in charge of
beads and garlands), (4) Guś-Bhandārī (in charge of betel nuts), (5)
Purohit (priest), (6) Bar-Āldhārā (the chief attendant), (7) Bar-Bhandārī
(the chief treasury officer), (8) Chāul-Bharāli (granery-keeper), (9)
Bar-Srāvani (the chief listener), (10) Bar-Bhāgāti (the chief reciter of
Bhāgavata), (11) Bar-Pāṭhak (the chief reciter of vernacular scriptures),
(12) Bar-Śāmlagoa (the leader of Nāma-kṛtāṇa), (13) Barkākati (the chief
clerk or scribe), (14) Bar-śātāniyār (representative in the royal court or
abroad), (15) Bardoloi (astrologer), (16) Bargayen (the chief singer), (17) Barbayan (the chief player of instruments), (18) Rajmedhi or Barmedhi (an agent of the Satra in the village in charge of collecting 'Guru-kar' i.e., tithes, in the village), (19) Uja (professor or preceptor). Most of the above functionaries are held in the highest honour and are called 'Sat-Manbhagia' (Sat=seven, Man=prestige, bhag=portion), i.e., they, by virtue of their office are entitled to additional portions symbolical of their position and prestige. Besides the functionaries mentioned above, there are posts of other officers of the second, third and fourth grades, working in different branches. The officers of the lower orders, though immediately responsible to their respective heads, are ultimately responsible to the 'Adhikar' who can appoint or discharge them."

The devotees or sisyas attached to a Satra can be divided into two categories, viz., the (i) clerical devotees and the (ii) lay. The clerical devotees are the functionaries of the Satras like those mentioned above, who generally live within the walls of the Satra. In case the Satra is an 'Udāsin' one, like their chief, they also lead a celibate life. For such clerical devotees, teenager boys are recruited from the villages and are trained under the supervision of the older celibate devotees of the Satra. The lay devotees are those popularly known as Sisyas who live in the villages leading a household life.

The main object of the Satras is to propagate faith and initiate neophytes. The cardinal principles of their religion and devotional practices are explained to their disciples. They always keep a watchful eye upon the moral conduct of their disciples and try to enhance
the standard of it by formulating and explaining the ethico-devotional code of life among them. In the period of our discussion when the states of Assam were indifferent towards education, these Satra institutions were serving as the centres of education and learning. "Like the Buddhist 'Sangharasams' originally used for residential purposes, subsequently turning into academic centres, the Satras of Assam similarly introduced for the propagation of religion turned later on into educational and literary centres also." The major Satras have been maintaining educational institutions known as 'Tols', under learned scholars, where students from different parts of the State have been assembling to acquire knowledge in different subjects under them. Dr. Sarma says that it is the Satra institution, which had been keeping the candle of learning and knowledge unextinguished from the remote 16th century till the early part of the last century. The Satra institutions have been rendering valuable services in the different branches of art, being the cultural centres of classical dance, music painting, wood carving and other crafts of bamboo and cane. Besides, the Satras were the main literary centres which enriched the Assamese literature with their contributions, particularly with drama, songs and biography.

There are three main constituent elements of the Satra institutions, viz., the 'Namghar', the 'Manikuta' and the 'Chāri-Hāti'. We have already discussed about 'Namghar' and 'Manikuta'. Let us now discuss about the 'Chāri-Hāti', i.e., four rows of huts. In a Satra institution, particularly in an 'Udāsin' Satra, the 'Adhikār', the 'Deka-Adhikār' and the clerical devotees live together within the Satra compound. For the residential purpose of these parties, four rows of huts are constructed around the 'Namghar' — the main prayer hall, on its four sides, each of which is known as 'Hāti'.
GROUND PLAN
OF
A TYPICAL SATRA OF ASSAM
Again each of the 'Hātis' is known by the direction in which it is situated; for example, the 'Hāti' or the row situated in the eastern side is called 'Pub-Hāti' (eastern rows) and so on and so forth. In view of the fact that celibate devotees would live in the huts, simplicity is strictly maintained in the construction of these huts and no deviation from the fixed plan of construction is allowed. The 'Adhikār' and the 'Deka-Adhikār' are provided with more commodious and comfortable huts in the eastern row.

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13. Ibid ... pp. 104 -105.
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