CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In the above pages, it has been tried to understand and analyse various dimensions associated with the Sattra being a major institution playing a significant role in the cultural history of Assam in general and Nagaon district in particular with appropriation of various theoretical precepts, in the line of the objectives as laid out in the Introductory Chapter. Here in the concluding chapter it is tried to sum up the findings that have evolved from the study of the previous chapters and underlining the spectrum to the work carried out by the researcher. This chapter basically brings into fore three main aspects of the thesis. First, it gives a summary of all the chapters. Second it contains main observations on the data generated from the series of field work carried out in different points of time for the study and finally it suggests a few ideas relevant to the present study.

So far there have been a lot of studies on the Sattras lying in different parts of the state commencing with their manifold ideas, values and functions. But there are many areas of enquiry yet to be done, like how these ideas developed imbibed with a set of values and shaped an institution enduring through the ages with a distinct organizational character and provided a platform for their survival in the years that followed. This study on the Sattras of Nagaon with reference to Bardowa in particular has provided us with much insight to understand them from an ideological point of view.

The first chapter provides a theoretical framework for the entire study. It refers to the main objectives for the purpose of the study, research methodology, a brief review of the literature, focused area of research and the limitations of the work done.
The second chapter has highlighted the facets of the study of cultural history today. It has highlighted the interpretations by cultural historians and the recent trends that have evolved into a new cultural history.

The preceding three chapters contain analysis and observation based on field investigations taking into account three distinct features; rituals, economy and heritage studies emphasizing on the aspect of cultural history. Based on this, these chapters analyzes the concept of power and ideology, knowledge and power, individual and collective memory to denominate the contours that support the study of cultural history. Rituals, economy and heritage are important medium as well as outcome of cultural formations. Since our study is restricted to institutions and institutional growth, these factors play an important role in their development. Heritage develops with economy and they are co-related. The main focus of this thesis is to understand how the Sattras get so embedded in the lives of the Vaisnava community leading to its perpetuation.

The first finding of the work has been connected with the rituals, which are incredibly attached with the life of a Vaisnava and the whole Assamese community. As discussed in the previous chapter, the rituals have not altogether decayed in form and practice in the Sattras. It is observed that the rituals still play a great role in collaborating two different sets of minds. Rituals act as a communicator and help in the intellectual development of the individual. The timely deliberation of the rituals in the Sattras more or less affect the community and for that reason the Vaisnavas have not altogether shown disrespect towards their moral values and principles inherent in those rituals. Despite the fact that modern day technologies and developmental strategies have greatly touched the lives of the community attached with these institutions, their existence is still enduring with values and functionalities.

Economically too, the Sattras have a major role to play. The existence of the Sattras in the district is largely connected with the influence of the Vaisnava
ideology and vice versa. The village community is more attached to the Sattriya way of life than in the urban areas of the district. As such the economically sound Sattras are more largely situated in the villages where a lot of the population is still dependant on the agricultural production yielded from the lands owned by the Sattras through land grants given to them during the Ahom rule. Against a general notion that 'the more the produce the more influential the Sattras will be', the Sattras in the state as well as in the district are generally more in the practice of following an economy for self-support and self-sustenance. Though there are many reasons behind the decadence of many of the popular Sattras, the major one can be cited as modern ideologies contesting traditional values and beliefs. The individuals are more prone to adapt to themselves to changes whether for good or bad and in this contemporary tug of war the Sattras are the ones whose existence is at stake.

It is earlier observed that the Sattras are the heritage institutions preserving another set of heritage properties and tradition of the Assamese society. It is essential to preserve and conserve those traditions and objects. If left unattended, these institutions will tend to lose all aspects of their cultural and socio economic influences leading to their decay and downfall. The findings of the study reveal that preserving the diverse forms of Sattriya culture has become important in recent times. Adopting proper preservation techniques the antiquities should be preserved so that it could transcend limitations of time and remain as symbols of pride for generations after generations.

After a discussion on the Sattras of Nagaon on three important counts, it may be summarized that the Sattras have undergone changes mostly after the post-independence era. Even at this matrix of change, they are able to retain the Vaisnava philosophy through the pursuit of variant cultural forms and practices. However there are some inescapable circumstances which have crippled many of the prominent Sattras in the district. One of the major issues concerning their
sustainability is the heavy influx of illegal occupants on the Sattra lands as discussed broadly in Chapter 5 of the thesis. Although Sattras in general advocate the cause of harmony, social camaraderie and delegation of power and authority to the community, certain abstractions seem to be cropping up in certain Sattras, as observed in our field work, where there are feuds and disharmony emerging from the question of power and dominance. Whatever is inherited culminates to a strong urge to apply discretionary power of control over others. Different individuals have a different set of ideologies. These ideological differences are related to power and dominance by one group on the other. One of our findings is juxtaposed as a stumbling block to the developmental strategies of the institution. This can be only when individuals participate wholly with a liberal set of mind.

The contemporary life of man has undergone change in many ways. One of the major factors behind such changes is by ways of modernization, liberalization and globalization. The Sattras as institutions catering to several social and cultural requirements have also come under the influence of these factors. There are certain core problems which have been detrimental to the growth and sustenance of such institutions and some of these attributes are underlined in course of our discussion based on findings through investigations in the field. The problems identified also include ignorance towards preserving the heritage of the Sattras, inadequate resources from the state apparatus for their proper conservation and finally, lack of man-power to look after them with necessary care from time to time. These act as hindrances in the continuing path of development reflecting neglect shown towards the individuals related to it and the community at large. These have slowly crippled the lives of many and new developments take place in the community and at large generate a series of crisis in the society. The cultural fervor with traditional values cherished by many past generations since a long time has also face an erosion in course of time. Under a tremendous pressure a series of events have also brought in the decay of many of the influential institutions. Considering the discourse of change and modernity in
recent times the Sattras as institutions of both culture and religion are sometimes subjected to a situation like losing their legitimacy to a great extent. But among the findings, one major indicator is that the impact of modernization is felt more in the urban society than in the rural. In this context it can be said that the rural Vaisnava population have retained their tradition due to lack of exposition to many external factors. But the situation is other way round amongst the urban population.

It is noteworthy to mention here that time has come when the individuals should remain united and come to undertake a comprehensive measure or of making an effort for the sustenance of such institutions in the state. Since the Sattras acts as a mirror of the cultural heritage of the Assamese society, these are not to be merely seen as an institution securing only religious zeal within the community for they perform many socio-cultural and politico-economic functions. And for that matter, the Sattras should survive. Even amidst all obstacles which have been discussed in the present work citing three important areas; the economy, the ritual process and preservation of its culture, both tangible and intangible forms. It has become doubly important to revive what has been lost. Otherwise a whole range of forms and values would be lost. There are also pulls and pressures subdividing the individuals bringing in many conflicting issues with strategies in terms of its orientation and action. An institution like the Sattra could develop when it is prosperous from all angles, be it the economy, the societal influence or the everyday affairs which take place within the realm.

Against such a backdrop, the researcher has also marked some positive signs in some select Sattras as already been mentioned in the previous chapters. There cannot be a generalized concept on the change that has taken place as because the researcher has cited certain such Sattras within the district, which have flourished both in religious and cultural ways. These Sattras have received funds as well from the government to renovate and repair their property and are
having a wider social participation. Even in the midst of a global impact, there is a constant flow of parishioners inclusive of the youths and women, actively participating in all the regular affairs maintained within their premises. Right from organizing various sources of entertainment like bhāonās and other related performances to religious rites and ceremonies, these Sattras have embraced the laity to a considerable extent. Community development programmes like plantation and cleanliness drives and other welfare measures like organizing women with certain self-funding small-scale projects which have helped the village community to a great extent. In many cases, developmental works take place at the initiatives of the head administering a Sattra and his associates.

The main focus of this thesis is to analyse how things have been organized, managed over the years in an institution like the Sattra located particularly in a district of Assam. So far our study area is concerned as mentioned earlier on several counts, the Sattras have undergone changes. But, inspite of its many adverse conditions, Assamese Vaisnavism is found to be embedded deeply in the life of the community leading to its perpetuation. It is the Sattras which have carried out multifarious functions and they have been doing so for many years.

The relation of cultural history with the religious institutions is multilinear and unique in its own way. The Sattras form the locus of religious education. They not only have housed various religious artefacts since the time of their establishment but also have acted as a moderator of culture and cultural values. Despite the continuing changes from time to time; these have striven to overcome the state of inertia that often come because of unforeseen and other circumstantial situations in their economic as well cultural performances. Moreover, a modus vivendi is to be achieved between the state and the Sattras so that the efficiency is not questioned on both sides in the long run. For this there should be a constant
interaction of the state with the latter which would ensure its growth and development.

The Sattras of Nagaon have gained popularity in recent years. Quoting from Jawaharlal Nehru, Somarajan states, “if man did his duty and was ethically right in his actions, the right consequences would inevitably follow” (Somarajan 1993, 44). The same could be applied to the concurrent Sattras which are mostly at a crucial stage now. But as discussed in the preceding chapters there are many loopholes in their functional features. If at all this setbacks are removed, the Sattras which have lost their traditional values in the midst of globalization and modernity, would make a mark as an institution of repute in the near future. This wind of change should be for the benefit of the Assamese population at large.

Its uniqueness should be introduced to the new learners with proper representation about the rich cultural ingredients present in the institution itself. The changes witnessed in almost all the Sattras of the district can only be understood essentially as a process of ‘modernization’. By modernization is meant an indigenous, historical and ongoing process in which people participate both consciously and critically with renewed synergy and modernity in outlook. The Vaisnava followers of this region to a great extent have incorporated the values of modernity into their culture without losing the core values of the tradition of Vaisnavism. In view of the cultural history of the Sattras of Nagaon which is the theme of the thesis, the field research has helped to establish that the modes of change in this particular area can be seen in the headship of a Sattra, in terms of a rationalistic and democratic approach to the direction of change, an expression of freedom and responsibility among the members of the laity being affiliated to one or the other Sattra and a network of many such similar branch Sattras lying within or outside the district that sustain and propagate the ideals of the Neo-Vaisnava movement and hold the Vaisnava community together.
If we look at these institutions from a twentieth century perspective, the first thing that clings to the mind is the change in perspective towards this institution. And this gradual change is due to various ramifications as discussed by the researcher from different stances. Rituals, economy and heritage preservation are the three focal themes on the basis of which the study was conducted. It is observed that an institution grows only when there is an involvement from the community. That community collectively forms an identity.

Lastly the study reveals the fact that despite these changes due to the influence of modern developments, yet, in the long run the Sattras continue to be the soul of the Vaisnava community particularly amongst the people of Nagaon. The study emphasizes on the fact that these institutions creatively channelize new social and intellectual energies and as such they sustain.