ABSTRACT

The Vaisnavite monastery or Sattra as popularly known, is one of the central institutions that grew up in the late sixteenth century in the wake of the Bhakti Movement flourishing in Assam. These have attained popularity as institutions of culture and religion amongst the Vaisnava followers since then. Vaisnavism is an institutionalized religion and the Sattras are institutions leading to the continuance of Vaisnavism in the whole of Assam and its history and culture. In the present study emphasis is laid on analyzing the nature and function of these institutions basically focusing on rituals, economy and heritage also bringing the factors of social or community participation. These components are essential for the growth and development of any institution. And since the Sattras represent socio-economic, cultural and religious aspects of the Vaisnava faith, it is believed that a study of them will help in understanding its present status in the context of fast changing Assamese society. In recent times however, these long-established institutions have undergone considerable changes, and such changes have also wrought decadence in many of them. In the present work, it is observed how these institutions still manage to survive in an era of globalization and whether they could sustain with their traditional values. The study also emphasizes on the relations of power, ideological differences and ways of representation which are distinct in any institution that involves human. The Satras are in no way exception to these questions. It involves the community and has an impact on the society as well. The present work is divided into seven chapters together with the Introduction and Conclusion. The present work has made a detailed analysis of some selected Sattras principally situated in the district of Nagaon in central Assam being the focus area of the present study. For the accomplishment of the present work, data and information were collected from the members of the Vaisnava community residing within the premises of a Sattra and the laity as well mostly from Nagaon district. As such the study involved an informal way of interviewing
individuals (both insiders and outsiders). The methodology on which the study is based induces a cultural history perspective emphasizing on the notions of representation, knowledge, practices and power with a collective and individual approach. The key terms used in this study are cultural history, memory, representation, heritage, ritual, economy, power, practice, knowledge, Sattras, Vaisnavism etc.