

Traditional Education System, Satra Institutions and the Bhakti Movement: A Historical and Contemporary Analysis

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Abstract

The traditional education system of Assam occupies an important place in the history of society and culture. The Satra institutions were not merely centres for the propagation of religious education; they also played an important role in the development of ethics, literature, music, theatre, and social consciousness. In particular, through the Bhakti Movement initiated by Srimanta Sankardeva, education was made more accessible to the people. The movement contributed to the dissemination of knowledge, the development of a sense of equality and humanitarian values in society.

This research paper analyses the historical background of Assam's traditional education system, the educational role of the Satras, and the social significance of the Bhakti Movement. The study shows that this system made a special contribution to strengthening cultural unity, moral consciousness, and social harmony in society. Although its influence has declined to some extent with the expansion of the modern education system, the re-evaluation of this heritage and its incorporation into the field of education in the present context is highly relevant.

The study attempts to demonstrate that the traditional education system of Assam and the Satras are not merely memories of the past; they can play a guiding role in value-based education in modern society.

Keywords: Traditional Education System, Satra, Srimanta Sankardeva, Bhakti Movement, Value Education.

1. Introduction

When discussing the traditional education system, it can be observed that this system was fundamentally social and religious in nature. The Bhakti Movement occupied an important place in the history of education in Assam. The Gurukul system was the principal centre of traditional education. The spiritual relationship between the guru and the disciple, devotion of the disciple towards the guru, and education provided in a natural environment were the main driving forces of the traditional education system. The Gurukul or Tola system provided religious knowledge as well as education in ethics and conduct. Education in this system was not limited merely to the acquisition of knowledge; it also taught a way of life. This traditional education system had been continuing in society for many years.

This system gradually advanced through the Satras established in Assam for the propagation of the Neo-Vaishnavite religion initiated by Srimanta Sankardeva. The Satras were established as important institutions of education and culture. In addition to religious knowledge, they provided education in art, culture, music, ethics, values, and conduct.

At present, the absence of value education in the modern education system has emerged as one of the major problems. Education is not merely a means of acquiring bookish knowledge or securing employment; it is also a process of character formation and the development of human values. The modern competitive education

system has become increasingly commercial and materialistic, which is not a good sign for building a harmonious society.

The main objective of this research is to examine how the Satras established for the propagation of the Neo-Vaishnavite religion served as centres of traditional education and how, along with religious education, they provided education in art, culture, music, dance, and humanitarian values, and to assess their relevance in the modern period.

2. Literature Review

The foundation of the traditional education system of the Satras was **Bhakti**. The word *Bhakti* has been interpreted from different perspectives. Generally, the word Bhakti refers to service and devotion towards God. Bhakti means single-minded love and devotion towards God.

Lakshminath Bezbaroa, in his famous work *Tattva-Katha*, has referred to Bhakti as sweet and exceedingly sweet. Through Bhakti, a relationship is established between the devotee and God. Through this relationship, the devotee seeks to attain God or liberation. In Sanatana Dharma, the four principal paths are Karma, Jnana, Yoga, and Bhakti. All four paths can be followed for attaining God, but all four are not equally easy. Comparatively, the path of Bhakti is considered easy and accessible. It is described as the easiest means of attaining God's grace, and Bhakti is regarded as the expression of the heart.

Maheswar Neog, one of Assam's leading cultural scholars, in his research work *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Assam: Sankardev and His Time*, has discussed in detail the emergence of Vaishnavism in Assam, the religious movement of Srimanta Sankardeva, and the establishment of the Satras. He has also explained how the Satras developed as centres of society and culture.

Satyendra Nath Sarma, in his research work *Neo-Vaishnavite Movement and Satra Institution of Assam*, has discussed the development of the Vaishnavite Movement and the formation, rules, administration, and social role of the Satra institutions.

Another scholar, Niranjana Goswami Dagariana, in the study *Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam and Cultural Impact*, has analysed the cultural influence of Vaishnavism and the Satra institutions in Assam. The study also discusses in detail the influence of Satra-associated music, dance, and literature on social life.

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the research paper are:

1. To analyse the characteristics of the traditional education system.
2. To study the social and educational impact of the Bhakti Movement in Assam.
3. To discuss the educational role of the Satra institutions.
4. To determine the relevance of traditional education and Satra culture in the modern education system.

4. Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology has been adopted in preparing this research paper. For this purpose, writings from different books and articles have been consulted. The historical analysis of these writings has been undertaken, and the relevant books have been analysed and studied to develop the research paper.

5. Discussion

5.1 Traditional Education System

The traditional education system was an educational system that had been continuing in society for many years. In this system, the teacher or guru played the principal role in imparting knowledge. The importance of original and practical knowledge was given priority in the traditional education system.

The Gurukul system was the main centre of this traditional education. Religion, morality, and conduct were given great importance. The guru exercised authority over the educational system, and the education system was carried forward through Tolas and Pathshalas.

In this system, education did not mean merely the acquisition of knowledge. It also included teaching the way of life, which is something that is sometimes lacking in today's examination-oriented education system.

Educational institutions have gradually been transformed into commercial institutions, where greater emphasis is placed on occupational and professional skills instead of humanitarian values. Therefore, for building a stable society, the values and behavioural education of the traditional education system have become extremely important in the modern education system.

5.2 Educational and Social Role of the Satra Institutions

The Satras were centres of education for the people as well as centres of spiritual and cultural learning. Dance and music, the presentation of Borgeet, the beautiful rhythm and disciplined presentation of Bhaona, and the preservation of social norms and values have remained successful contributions of the Satra institutions even today.

Although the principal objective behind the establishment of the Satras was the propagation of the Neo-Vaishnavite religion of Srimanta Sankardeva, through Bhaona, Borgeet, Raas, dance, and Sattriya art, they also contributed greatly to the cultural development of Assam.

The role of the Satras in maintaining social harmony by imparting religious and moral education is immense. Through the influence of the Satras, Naamghars were established, which helped create a disciplined way of life in rural society. Along with spiritual education, the Satras also provided value education.

Even today, people from almost all sections of society benefit from the activities of the Satras. The new generation is responsible for controlling the tendency to be overwhelmed by foreign culture and for reviving humanitarian and spiritual values.

In this context, all the Satradhikars of our Satras need to work collectively and move forward in a planned manner. At present, under the guidance of Pitambar Dev Goswami, the Satradhikar of Auniati Satra, the objective of promoting Sattriya culture, morality, and spiritual values can be further strengthened through the organisation of Bhaona festivals based on Assamese traditions and through the establishment of Auniati University.

The inclusion of the study of the Satra in the curriculum of Auniati University, the introduction of the subject as a Value Added Course, and the approval received from the University Grants Commission demonstrate that Satra culture and spiritual education remain relevant even today.

5.3 The Bhakti Movement and Education

Although the main objective of the Bhakti Movement in Assam was the propagation and expansion of the Neo-Vaishnavite religion, the movement also played a significant role in removing social evils, increasing devotion towards one God, reducing caste-based discrimination, and creating a healthy society.

Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavdeva were successful in leading this movement.

Through the establishment of Satras and Naamghars, and through Borgeet, Ankiya Naat, Kirtan-Ghosha, Sattriya dance, and Naam-Prasanga, a new Vaishnavite religious and cultural tradition was developed in Assam.

Through music, Kirtan, theatre, and other forms of artistic expression, devotion towards God as well as education and social consciousness were introduced among the people. These forms remain relevant today and their importance cannot be ignored in the educational system of the future.

5.4 Relevance of Historical and Modern Education Systems

The historical education system demonstrates that education is not limited merely to the transmission of knowledge; it also teaches the morality, culture, discipline, and philosophy of life of society.

Values such as truthfulness, self-control, and respect for elders were given importance in the historical education system. These aspects are highly necessary in the modern education system.

The historical education system played an important role in the preservation of language, literature, religion, art, and culture. Giving importance to the preservation of language, literature, and culture and ensuring their protection for the present and future generations have become extremely necessary in modern education.

The historical education system also gave importance to the physical, mental, and spiritual development of learners along with academic knowledge. This can be seen as being compatible with the concept of holistic education in the modern education system.

The historical education system also provided learners with knowledge related to daily life, agriculture, handicrafts, warfare, and other practical skills. These can be regarded as forms of skill education that have now been incorporated into the curriculum of the modern education system.

The modern education system can also learn moral values and good conduct through the Satras, as well as provide collective education through Naamghars and community-based activities. Therefore, the Satra institutions have an important role to play in the modern education system.

6. Findings

1. The Bhakti Movement made education more people-oriented and contributed to providing collective education.
2. The Satra institutions have played an important role in developing the education system by providing religious education, dance, music, art, literature, and cultural education.
3. The excessive emphasis on vocational, mechanical, and examination-oriented education in the modern education system has revealed a lack of value-based education.
4. There is considerable scope for incorporating traditional educational practices into the modern education system.

Conclusion

From the discussion of “**Traditional Education System, Satra Institutions and the Bhakti Movement**”, it can be understood that education is not limited merely to textbook knowledge; it has a deep role in the development of social and moral values.

In the modern, technological, and increasingly materialistic education system, the absence of value education can be strongly felt. The lack of devotion towards the teacher and the absence of a spiritual relationship between the guru and disciple have become important problems in the contemporary education system.

In this context, the educational principles of the Satras and the traditional education system—respect for the teacher, value education, and the educational practices of the contemporary period—can be applied to make education more productive.

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