



AN OVERVIEW OF TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGES OF DARRANG DISTRICT, ASSAM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SATRAS AND TEMPLES

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Abstract: Cultural heritage describes the bequest of the palpable artifacts and impalpable attributes of a particular community or society that are handed down from ancestral generations, maintained in the present and preserved as a means of their own style of sustenance. Palpable or tangible heritage refers to buildings, historic places, monuments, artifacts etc which are considered worthy of preservation for the future. Darrang District of Assam is rich in cultural heritages such as Satras, temples, folklore, artwork, food, languages, artifacts, festivals etc. The present study emphasizes on the study of the tangible cultural heritages of the Darrang District, Assam with special reference to Satras and temples.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, tangible, intangible

INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, traditions, practices, places, objects, artistic expression and values. Cultural heritage may be either intangible or tangible cultural heritage. Cultural Heritage produces tangible representation of the value systems, beliefs, traditions and lifestyles as part of human activity. As an essential part of culture as a whole, Cultural Heritage contains these visible and tangible traces from antiquity to the recent past. The World Heritage Convention 1972 states that cultural heritage is the unification of monuments, groups of buildings and site where the term monument means the architectural works, monumental sculpture and painting works, elements of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and contributions of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science. Tangible heritages cover the monuments, groups of buildings and sites and the scope of environments as natural properties. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003) defines intangible cultural heritage as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith that communities, groups and in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. Cultural heritage links the past and present. It contributes to human culture and society in different ways. Cultural heritage witnesses the traditions, beliefs, contributions, achievements and development of a society. It helps in keeping records of the past traditions and cultures and helps the present generations to follow the same. Cultural heritages may attract tourists from different places and it can increase the income benefits of the local inhabitants. In the development of a particular society, cultural heritage plays a very important role.

Study Area

Darrang District, Assam

Darrang district is one of the most important administrative districts of Assam. It is situated between 26°12N to 26°57N latitudes and 91°42E to 92°22E longitudes. The district covers an area of 3481 SqKm which is surrounded by Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan in the North, River Brahmaputra in the South,

Sonitpur in the East and Kamrup in the West respectively. It lies 70 kms from Guwahati connected through National Highway 15 with neighboring districts such as Kamrup, Udalguri and Sonitpur. Nearest airport is at a distance of 70 km from Darrang District. Mangaldai is the headquarter which lies in the heart of the District. There are many other smaller towns which includes Sipajhar, Kharupetia, Orang, Majbat etc. According to the census of 2011, the total population of Darrang District is about 9.28 lakh. Many racial elements such as the Austro-Asiatic, the Dravidians, the Tibeto Burmans, the Mongoloids and the Aryans inhabit the district. Sex ratio of the district is 954/1000 male and the literacy rate is 63.08%. The history reveals that the name 'Darrang' has come from the Sanskrit word "Dwaram" which means 'door'. The district has been a gateway which connect Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet with Brahmaputra valley. According to some surveys and researches, Darrang district came to be known after the middle age –up-rising of the king Biswa Singha Naranarayana. Later it may have formed a part of the ancient kingdom of Kamrup and with decline. Darrang has been under the rule of Bodo Kacharis and Bhuyans. Interestingly, Darrang district has a long history of confrontation against any oppressive rule. The great event of 1894, popularly known as "Patharughator Ran" (battle of Patharughat) is one such instance. It is also known as Assam's Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. Further, during the freedom struggle Darrang also played a very glorious part. People actively participated in the various aspects of movements and thereby contributed to the achievements of Indian independence. The prominent attractions of this place includes its various historical forests, national parks, historic temples, historic tanks, folk songs, folk dance, etc. The national park in the district is the Orang National Park. One wildlife sanctuary and two reserved forests namely Khalingduar, Showalpur etc portraits the gray past of the District. History of Darrang District speaks about the colorful cultural heritages of the region.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To investigate and record the cultural heritages of Darrang District.
2. To study the tangible and intangible cultural heritages of the district.
3. To understand the origin and development of the heritages.
4. To study the present condition of the heritages.

METHODS AND TECHNOLOGY

Descriptive survey method, observation method, interview method and secondary data have been followed for data collection.

Tangible Cultural Heritages Of The District

The tangible cultural heritages of the District include the historic Satras, temples, tanks, etc which are described below-

Satras Of The District

The word 'Satra' has been derived from the Sanskrit word 'Sattra'. In Sanskrit the meaning of the word Sattra is 'Sacrificial Session'. The word Satra has been used from the Vedic period. In many Sanskrit literatures like Satapath Brahman, Bhagavad Purana, the word Satra was mentioned. In Vedic literature, if the yajna was performed for more than 12 days then it was called as Santrayajna. In Bhagwat Puran also the term Satra was used to refer to Yajna. Here one word 'Brahma Satra' was used. In Mahabharat also the term Satra is present. Mahapurush Sankardeva used the word Satra when he translated Bhagavad Purana as the place where Bhagavad purana is read and heard. Earlier the word Thaan was used instead of Satra. Dr. Pratapchandra Choudhury stated the word Satra was used from the 13th century. Though the foundation of Satra developed by Mahapurash Sankardeva but the development of full fledged Satra was developed by Damodardeva. Mahapurush Madhabdeva also contributed to the establishment of Satra.

Satras Of Darrang District

There are many Satras prevalent in Darrang District. Some of these are discussed below-

1. **Khatara Satra:** The Khatara Satra is situated at village Khatara in the west from the Mangaldai town under Dipila circle. This Satra was established by Govinda Atoi, a pupil of Mahapurush Madhavdev. Govinda Atoi was the most favorite pupil of Mahapurush Madhavdev among the 12th pupils and born at Lesakona village of Rangia District. He followed the Vaishnavite religion under Madhavdeva and contributed in spreading the religion among the people of Assam. He was sent to Darrang District where people practiced Shaktism and Shaivism as Govinda Atoi was a brave and strong person. When Atoi came to Darrang District he stopped his boat at Khatara village. At that time the place was covered with dense jungle or forest and four mischievous persons lived there. Those people were called Khat (mischievous persons). These people did not allow Atoi to spread the Vaishnava religion. Atoi requested them to accept the religion but they denied him. Atoi met Madhavdeva and told him about the situation and asked him for solutions. Then Madhavdeva gave him four statues of lord Ram, Lakshman, Sita and Hanuman which were brought from Ayodhya for performing Ramleela Naat and told Atoi that these statues will help him in solving the problem. Then Atoi came back to the village and established the four statues in a temple. The four mischievous persons then took Vaishnavism with Atoi's advice. Atoi successfully established a Satra there and gave the name khatahara as the Khats were defeated with Sankardeva's Vaishnavism knowledge. Later this name is used as Khatara. Atoi observed an incident in this place that a frog was eating a snake and by observing this incident Atoi took the decision of establishing Vaishnavism there. This Satra was patronized by Darrangi king Dharmanarayana. Dharmanaraya sent an inscription there and according to the inscription the Satra was established in 1568. From its establishment, the Satra is performing as a cultural hub for the region. Many cultural activities like *Naam- Prasanga, Borgeet, Thianaam, Kholbadan, Sor-saporir Naam, Nagara naam, Angkia Bhaona, Boka Bhaona, Khulia Bhaona* have been practiced in this Satra from its establishment. Many festivals are also observed there namely, Pacheti, Doul or Holi, Deul, Bargopini Sabha, Borsova, Suberi, Death anniversary of Govinda Atoi, Janmastami, Birth and death anniversary of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, etc.
2. **Devananda Satra:** Devananda Satra is established at Hindughopa village of Sipajhar Division of Darrang District. According to Dr Maheswar Neog as mentioned in his book 'Pabitra Assam' this Satra was established by Ramananda Brahmacharya. He made Kamalakanta Sarma as the Satradhikar. Kamalakanta took the title Goswami. After Kamalakanta, his sons Atyananda, Sanatyananda and Deavananda became the Satradhikar. The Satra was named after the Satradhikar Devananda. In Devananda's term, the Ahom king Shivasingha offered land in the name of the Satra through a copper plate. Some prominent festivals practiced in this Satra are Janmastami, Nandotsav, Bokabhaona, Pacheti, Motheni, Maghbihu, Bahagbihu, Deul, etc. Matheni is the most famous festival of this satra.
3. **Biswa Satra:** This Satra is established at Pithakhowa village near Hazarikapara post office and Devananda Satra of the District. This is the only Satra where Shaktism is followed. The Satra was established by Biswarup Bhattacharya in 1681 and he was brought by Chialarai to Assam. Though generally Vaishnavism is practiced in Satras, there is an exception in this Satra. In the Manikut, the statues of Durga, Vishnu, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Mahabhairav are established and Shiva linga, Saalgram, etc are also present in this Satra. Some festivals like Durgapuja, Lakshmi puja, Shivratri, etc are observed in the Satra.
4. **Chaturbhuj Satra:** Chaturbhuj Satra is situated at Sitalabari chuburi of Bhuktabari village under Sipajhar circle. This satra was established by Govinda Atoi and it is said to be contemporary to Khatara Satra. There is no Satradhikar in the Satra. Earlier the Satra was taken care of by the Satradhikar of Barpeta Satra and he selected a man from the ancestors of late Lakshmiram Medhi and gave all the responsibilities of the Satra. The Medhi family took care of Satra till Lakshmiram Medhi was alive. Lakshmiram Medhi's son Prema Mahanta also took responsibility of the Satra for some days. But nowadays the Satra is observed by a Committee. The committee selects the Deuri of the Satra for performing daily worship. The main festivals observed in the Satra were the Birth and death

- anniversary of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, Janmastami, Raas purnima, Bhagawat Paath in Kati and Bhada month.
5. **Bhagawati Satra:** This Satra was established by Narottam in 1598 at Devananda village near Hazarikapara post office of the District. The Parashar Gokhai people performed Bhagawat Paath in Darrangi king Dharmanarayan's royal court therefore the satra was named as Bhagawati Satra. The birth and death anniversary of Mahapurusha Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, Janmastami, etc are main festivals observed in the satra.
 6. **Bhavadev Satra:** Narayandev, one of the five prominent acharyas of Mahapurush Damodardev established the Satra in 1540 at Pachim Nayakpara village. That Satra was managed by a man named Bhavadev therefore the Satra was named as Bhavadev Satra. A Vishnu Vighrah is established in the Satra. The Ahom king Lakshminath Singha and Gourinath Singha offered land to the Satra when Dharmanath Goswami was the Adhikar of the Satra. The Darrangi King also patronized the Satra.
 7. **Narayan Satra:** This Satra was established by Anandiram Rajbanshi, a pupil of Nandiram Muktiar Ataa in 1883 at Andherighat village which is located 40 km west from Mangaldai town. Janmastami, Holi, Bhagawat Paath, birth and death anniversary of Mahapurush Madhavdev and Sankardev are observed in the Satra.
 8. **Bairagi Satra:** Pandit Dineswar Sarma mentioned in his book Mangaldai Buranjee that a Surya Bipra Boiragi has established the Satra in Jaljali village. This is a Damodari Satra. According to the Satradhikar Tapeswar Goswami the Satra was established in 1480 by Aniruddhadev Goswami. Damodardev's tithi and Aniruddhadev's tithi are observed in the Satra as the main festival. There is a Vishnu Vighrah in the Satra.

Temples And Maths Of The District

In Darrang District a temple is popularly called as mandir, devalaya, than, math, gokhaighar, etc. The term devalaya is a Sanskrit word which means the abode of a Deva or divine being. In this study the two words devalaya and math are used to denote the term temple. There are so many temples in the Darrang District. Some of the historic temples are described below-

1. **Shree Shree Kamakhya Math Devalaya:** This devalaya is basically a shakti peetha which is located at Balipota village under Lakshimpur Gaon Panchayat. It is believed that the naval part of Devi Sati fell down in this place where the devalaya was constructed. King Dharmanarayana reconstructed the devalaya in the 17th century. There is a tank named Lakhimpur tank which has a deep relation with the devalaya. The present study puts emphasis on this devalaya and is described below broadly.
2. **Ardhanareswar Shiv Mandir:** This Shiv Mandir is situated at Patidarrang village of the District. In this temple Lord Shiva is worshiped in his Ardhanareswar form. Ardhanareswar means half male and half female. Here half male depicts lord Shiva and half female depicts Devi Parvati. Basanti puja is the main festival of the temple which is celebrated for three days. Shivratri is also celebrated there.
3. **Shiala Vaishnav Mandir:** This temple is located at Deomornoi village. There was a very divine Vaishnav named Shiala Vaishnav who was the priest of the temple. He worshiped every morning in a temple and collected water from a river called Digwasa. One day some sailors came to the place and they occupied the area from where water was collected for daily worshiping. That day the priest's wife could not collect water as the ghaat was occupied by the sailors. Then the Vaishnav became angry and he cursed that the river will be dried and the sailors will sink with their boats. After that the place is known as Deomornoi or Moranoi and the temple was established in the memory of the priest Shiala Vaishnav thus it is named as Shiala Vaishnav Mandir. Deul is celebrated on 9th Bohag every year.
4. **Narikali Shiv Mandir:** This temple is located at Narikali village near the 15 no national highway. The history of the temple dates back to the 12th century. People believe that it all started with worshiping exhumed stones. Even the temple was also made up of stones. In the 1950 earthquake, the stone walls of the temple collapsed. But, there was no effect on the 'Shivling'. Later, the inhabitants of Narikali village reconstructed the temple firstly with bamboo and thatches, then with timber and finally into concrete structure in the recent past with the help of donations raised by the Devotees

from all around the State. The collapsed stones are still preserved in the campus of the temple. Shivratri is celebrated as the main festival of the temple. The worship of Vishnu, Ganesh and Kartik is also practiced in the temple.

5. **Kapurpuri Thaan:** Kapurpuri mandir is situated at Kacharijhar village of the District. There is a very big or old tree where people pray to a Yonipeeth and a Shivlinga. The females offer clothes to a three stepped stone which is placed there and the myth related to the ritual that if someone offers clothes there they will be expert in weaving. Bathou puja or Shiv puja is observed in the thaan.
6. **Shree Shree Basudev Devalaya:** The history reveals that the Devalaya which is popularly known as 'Shree Shree Basudev Devalaya' dated back to 11th century. This Devalaya is situated at Jhakuapara & Somola village of Darrang District, which is 16 km from NH 15 of Assam. It is believed that there was a jungle where the Bishnu Bigrah were discovered by the people of the village. They observed that every day one cow came to offer her milk to the Vishnu Vighrah. Then the villagers decided to clean the jungle and rescued the Vishnu Vighrah and built a temple named as 'Shree Shree Basudev Devalaya'. From then the villagers have been worshipping the Vighrah. The devalaya is described broadly below as it is one of the two areas of the present study.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, we can understand that the Darrang District is really very rich in cultural heritages and it is not easy to cover all the heritages in one article. Some heritages are left out in this article such as Ratnawali Satra, Patidarrang Satra, Gelabil Satra, Pora Satra, Haribil Satra, Polabhitha Satra, Bor Outula, Kurua Dihing Saanpara Devalaya, Madhab Gokhai Mandir, Mathajhar Shiv Mandir, Rudreswar Devalaya, Nalkhamara Mandir, Mukteswari Mandir, Salmas Utha Mandir, Maori Satra, Bamundi Satra, Hayagriv Madhab Mandir, etc.

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