

Mayamara Vaishnavism : A Case Study of Naharati Than

*Jayanta Gogoi

Independent Researcher, North Lakhimpur, Bihpuria, Assam (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 10 October 2018

Keywords

Mayamara Vaishnavism,
Aniruddhadeva, Naharati Than, Kala
Samhati, Moamaria Satra

*Corresponding Author

Email: jayantagogoi59@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This Paper is about the Mayamara Vaishnavism (One important Branch of Neo-Vaishnavite Movement of Assam) And its One important Than Naharati. After the death of Madhabdeva neo-vaishnavite movement in Assam divided into four sects or Samhati. They are The Brahma Samhati by the Damodardev, Purusa Samhati by Purusottoma Thakur, Kala Samhati by Gopala deva and Nika samhati by Mathura das and padma ata. And Aniruddhadeva (a disciple of The Gopala deva who established kala samhati) for the first time Established a Branch of Kala Samhati Satra in upper Assam and which was later on came to be known as the Mayamara Satra or Moamaria Satra and his neo-vaishnavite Ideology as the Mayamara Vaishnavism. Though Aniruddhadeva started his proselytising activities from *Vishnu Balikunchi* in 1601 A.D. But finding the place not congenial owing to the Dafala raids, he decided to shift his *satra* to some safe place and selected a spot on the bank of the Marnai river six miles south of the present Bihpuria of Lakhimpur district. Having fine artistic sense and architectural knowledge, he raised high embankments around the area and planted on it rows of *Nahar (Masua ferrea)* trees, for which the *satra* established there came to be known as *Naharati satra* (now than).

1. Introduction

To understand the Background of the Naharati Satra We must needed to know who was Annirudha deva because he was the main person who established this naharati Satra. There for to better understand the background of Naharati Satra we must needed to know who was Annirudha deva, at first & how Aniruddhadeva established the Naharati Satra (later on Than). Annirudha deva was born on Bhuyan Community on Thursday 15th Vaisakha in 1475 saka at the village Vishnu Balikunchi near Narayanpur of Present lakhimpr dist.His father Govindagiri also called Gondagiri reputed Sanskrit scholar of the locality and his mother Ajali was the daughter of the paternal uncle of Aniruddha deva. Aniruddha deva was the second of the three sons of Gondagiri a bhuyan & Ajali his wife.They migrated to this place from present Nagaon and found it suitable for living.

Aniruddhadeva was named Harakantha according to the Astrological Calculation, after his birth, and like any other boy of the Bhuyan families, he became a master of learning and a leader of thoughts .It is said that the morning shows the day. Harakantha was not an exception to this. It is stated by ancient literary critic Dandin in the nineth century A. D. that an would be poet is expected to have three qualities, first, the God-gifted inborn genius; second, the well received education, and third, constant practice. This old maxim has not lost its significance even today, though time changes rapidly. We see that Aniruddhadeva possessed a God-gifted genius, which is developed through proper education. Though the political situation made him move from place to place, his pen never stopped. In every new situation, he used to produce literature on devotion, which was either translation of certain books of the *Bhagavata*, or new creation in the form of *Ghosa*, or devotional songs,

which were all signifying the glory of *Namdharma*. From a glance of the creation of literatures by Aniruddhadeva, if it is taken on chronological order, it appears that his Assamese rendering of the well known Sanskrit verse "*Girau kalapi* is the first or the earliest one.we quote below first the Sanskrit verse and then the English Translation of this verse. The Verse is as below:

*Girau kalapi gagane payoda, laksantare ca
bhanur jale ca padmam
dvilaksa- induh kumudasya vandhu!.yo yasya
mitrarh nahi tasya ,duram.*¹

Translation:

When the clouds appear in the sky, the peacocks dance on the hills; the sun is at a distance of one lakh *yojana*(approx.more than 1 km), yet the lotuses blossom in the water; the moon, the friend of lily, is at a distance of two lakh (*yojana*), thus there is no distance between friends.

Some scholars opine that Harakantha (Aniruddha deva) established the *Vishnu BaliKunci Satra* at Narayanpur on the northern side of the Brahmaputra river before he had been Initiated into the *Kala-Samhati* by Guru Gopaldeva. But as soon as Harakantha(Aniruddha deva) had the blessings of his *Guru* and got initiated, he was named Aniruddha. Even after initiation Aniruddha stayed with his *Guru* Gopaldeva at the *Kaljhar Satra* for a period of three years, taking part in religious discourses and acquainting himself with further learning of the Sanskrit religious texts. At the time of departure to his own *home*, *Guru* Gopaldeva presented him a

¹ Mohidhar Phukan, *Bhakti Mangal Ghosa Rashamrit*, Sadou Asom Mayamara Samaj, 2015.pp.23-25

precious 'Ghosa Sastra' received from Mahapurusa Madhavdeva for the propagation of the *eka-sarana-nam-dharma*. According to his Biography, Aniruddhadeva established his *Vishnu Balikunci Satra* at Narayanpur only after having the Initiation & Initiated his father & mother into *Neo vaishnavism*. This is Written to his Biography as follows:

*Panchadasa sata Trayobincha Magha Masha
Sahi dino hontea jokhoisha Biopila
Nana Sthana Santea Bohu lukea Ashi Bhiyla
Khisoboka Dila Prabhu sarana Bhajana.
Ki kahibo terar Mahima Aganana.*

The English Translation of this verse is as follows:

'In 1523 Saka of Magh Month, Aniruddha deva published his *neo vaishnavite* ideology in the *Balikunchi Satra*. And when the news spread out many people from Various part of Upper Assam came to this Satra and got their initiation in to this new *satra*.'

His initiation of his father & mother into *neo-vaishnavism* Also Found in the *Guru Charit* As follows:

*Jimota Kipa Prabhu huwia Awatara
Matri Devahutika Jea Karila Nistara.
Jito Bakya Gopal Deva Boli Ashilanta
Seahi Mohabakya Pitry-Matry kao khunailanta.²*

The simple meaning of the Sanskrit verse is like this:

'Aniruddha Deva Established a Namghar in his Locality and placed Ghosa Sastra in the Chapel(Assamese: Thapona) of the Namghar and Initiated his father and mother and gave a spiritual speech (Maha bakya) to them as his Guru Gopal deva instructed to him.'

Aniruddha Deva built a *namghar* (prayer house), and placed on the *asana* in the *manikut* (sanctum sanctorum) the *guru-given Ghosa Sastra*. Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva became extremely popular there and people from the backward castes like the *Kaivartas*, the *Chutiyas*, the *Kacharis*, the *Koches* and the *Ahoms*, and also many from the upper castes came to him and got initiated. Even the Muslims were attracted to his fold. A person named 'Dheli Darji' (a Muslim tailor by profession) got his initiation and came to be known as Dhyanaapati and merged ultimately into the Ahom clan. This is indeed a rare example of initiating a Muslim after the famous initiation of Chandkha by Srimanta Sankardeva. Though Aniruddhadeva started his proselytising activities from Vishnu Balikunchi in 1601 A.D. But finding the place not congenial owing to the Dafala raids, he shifted to the bank of Marnai river and established there the *Naharati Satra* in 1606 A.D., This is Written to his Biography as follows:

*Dharma Pashar hontea Pancha Vharsha Thaki
Marnai kakha Aela Tahaka Upakhe
Panchadakha satra Astabinsa Sakabdata
Parama Sondara satra patila Tainito
Sari Sari Naharaka Tahitea Rohila
Ahi hatu Nahar Ati Satra Bhaila.³*

The English Translation of this verse is as follows:

After Continuously Published *Neo-Vaishnavite* Religion from Balikunchi for a Period of five year he (Aniruddha deva) shifted his *satra* to a new place called Marnai in 1528 Saka and there he Beautifully Planted rows of *nahar* trees in the new *satra* and that's why this *satra* is came to be known as *Naharati Satra*.

2. Growth of Naharati Satra

Though Aniruddhadeva started his proselytising activities from *Vishnu Balikunchi* in 1601 A.D. But finding the place not congenial owing to the Dafala raids, he decided to shift his *satra* to some safe place and selected a spot on the bank of the Marnai river six miles south of the present Bihpuria of Lakhimpur district. Having fine artistic sense and architectural knowledge, he raised high embankments around the area and planted on it rows of *Nahar (Masua ferrea)* trees, for which the *satra* established there came to be known as *Naharati*. Aniruddhadeva excavated a tank, built a beautiful and spacious *kirttanghar* and rows of huts in all the four sides for the residential disciples and got constructed a connecting road to the *satra* by his disciples. Aniruddhadeva celebrated the opening ceremony of the *satra* in a befitting manner with performance of *nam-kirtan* where a large gathering had participated. He continued to stay in this *satra* for twenty years from 1606 A.D. till his demise in 1626 A.D.⁴ It was from the *Naharati satra* that Aniruddhadeva pursued vigorously his missionary activities. The population complex of Narayanpur area included almost all the major caste groups of Assam, like the *Brahmins*, *Kayasthas*, *Kalitas*, *Chutiyas*, *Ahoms*, *Koches*, *Nadials*, *Kaivartas* and poor artisans like potters, blacksmiths, oil-presseres etc. Almost all people of the area accepted his initiation but he was more concerned with the down trodden because it were these people who most needed elevation in their social plane and a ray of light to dispel the darkness that encircled their mental horizon. In the character of Aniruddhadeva, there was complete harmony between thought and action. His teaching of equality was not merely a spiritual concept; it was practised in reality. All his disciples irrespective of their caste or social position received the same treatment. A Brahman because of his high birth or a Bhuyan because of his powerful social position could not get any privilege or priority. This sense of equality fostered among his disciples a sense of unity and day by day the number of his converts increased.

In the congenial atmosphere that Aniruddhadeva created in the new *satra*, he composed all his religious work. Aniruddhadeva started with making Assamese rendering of the 5th *skandha* of the *Bhagavata*, followed by-composition of the *Purunjan Upakhyan* based on the contents of the twenty-fifth to thirty-first chapters of the fourth *skandha* of the *Bhagavta*. Aniruddha Deva then composed a *git sastra* of nearly two hundred songs which are in line with the

³ op.cit.,Phukan,p.29

⁴ Bhudhar Das, *Mayamara AdyaGuru Sri Sri Aniruddha deva Aru Terar Dharma Dhar*,NabaPrinters,Dhakuakhana,2014.pp.58-65

² *ibid*,pp.26-28

Bargits of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, including six *totayas* and *Bhatimas* and prescribed *ragas* for each of them. These devotionally songs form a class by themselves and are considered as a valuable contribution to Assamese classical music. Thereafter Aniruddhadeva composed a religious scripture called *Bhakti-Mahgal-Ghosa* in 805 verses in line with Madhavdeva's *Nam-Ghosa*. This work contains the essence of the religious texts like the *Srimadbhagavata*, the *Gita*, *Hitopadesa*, some *Puranas* and *Upanisadas* and Vishnupuri's *Bhagavata Bhavartha Dippika* etc. Although most of these works are translation or adaptation of the original Sanskrit texts, yet their composition is so beautiful that they read as good as the original. This is possible because Aniruddhadeva had great proficiency of the Sanskrit language and in-depth knowledge of the Indian philosophy and the religious texts. Finally, Aniruddha Deva wrote another work called *Nij-sastra* in both prose and verse. This was meant for the senior grade of the disciples, who had learned fundamentals of Vaishnava philosophy. Its recitation therefore is still confined to this class of disciples and the work is considered a secret one. *Nij Sastra* is Very Secrete and it can only read by Double Intiated old mans with a advance Permission From the Nominal Head of the Naharati Than, which is Dinjoy Satra Satradhikar, Jogadananda Goswami. If any one without permission read this *Nij Sastra* than he must be either Mad or Blind or Deaf. As per the religious fraternity, Aniruddhadeva gave a respectable place to women. It not only gave them initiation but also the right to participate in the *Nam-Prasanga* and higher religious discussions along with men, which was a radical step in the conservative society of the time. While taking initiation, the novice is told that the *srutis* of the *Vedas* and for that matter, the instructions of the *Guru* are binding upon him as the words of his mother. Such an attitude made the image of women high in the society and instilled into their hearts a spirit

of equality with men. It was certainly for this reason that women could play a leading role in the *Moamariya* rebellion. Aniruddhadeva breathed his last after a short illness caused by fever on Monday, eleven *Puh* or *Pausa* (Assamese Month), that being the 10th day of the bright fortnight of the month, of the *saka* year 1548 corresponding to 27th December 1626. Aniruddhadeva was cremated at the *Naharati satra* campus. *Naharati* is therefore considered as the most sacred place by his disciples. Thousands of devotees still gather on the day of his death anniversary to pay their homage to him and participate in the *nam-kirttan* organised on the occasion there. Just before his expiry, Aniruddhadeva nominated Krishnadeva, the eldest of his five sons as his successor. But Krishnadeva Shifted the *Naharati Satra* to the *Khutiapota* of *Jorhat*. And there after the *Naharati Satra* lost its identity but the disciples of the Anirudha deva Preserved this area and there after this *Satra* Became a *Than*.

3. Conclusion

Aniruddhadeva through the elevation of socially backward local people by presenting before them a higher and healthier mode of life and by opening the portals of monotheistic religion to all, Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva fostered fellow feeling and universal brotherhood among different castes, communities and tribes and thereby led to the formation of a new society. *Naharati Satra* (Now called *Than*) is the second oldest *Satra* of *Mayamara Vaishnavism*. This institution is Precious place for the *Mayamara* Disciples. Thousands of devotees still gather on the day of his death anniversary to pay their homage to him and participate in the *Nam-kirttan* organised on the occasion there. Therefore *Naharati Satra* and Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva have even today a bond of unity among their disciples.

References

1. Das, Bhudhar, *Mayamara Adya guru Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva*, Kaustubh Prakashn, 2005.
2. Dutta, Sistikhar, *Origin of the Names Matak, Moamariya and Mayamara and their Historical significance*, Dibrugarh University, 2003.
3. Gogoi, Susil Kumar, *Vaishnavbad, Sri Sri Anirudhadeva aru Mayamara Samaj, Srimanta Sankar Sangha*, 2015.
4. Shastri, Biswanarayan, *Sri Sri Aniruddhadev: A Great Schlor & Sasint*, Dibrugarh University, 2003.
5. Baruah, Swarnalata, Ed., *Life and Teaching of Aniruddha deva*, Dibrugarh University, 2003
6. Das, Bhudhar, *Nava Vaisnav Dharma: Srimanta Sankardeva Aru Anugami Gurusakal*, Naba Printers, Dhakuakhana, 2014
7. Das, Bhudhar, *Mayamara Adya Guru Sri Sri Aniruddha deva Aru Terar Dharma Dhar*, Naba Printers, Dhakuakhana, 2014
8. Das, Kumud Chandra, *Austabhuj, Kaustubh Prakashn, Dibrugarh*, 2015
9. Gogoi, Manik, Ed., *Mahapurush Sri Sri Aniruddhadevor Jibon Charitra*, Rodali Publication, Dhemaaji, 2009
10. Goswami, Utsavananda, *Sanatan Bhagawati Dharmot Anirudhadevor Bhumika*, Kuhipat Printers, 2013
11. Nath, Dambarudhar, *Mayamara Vaishnav Samajar Than-Satra Itihas Aru Aitijya*, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, 2010
12. Phukan, Mohidhar, *Bhakti Mangal Ghosa Rashamrit, Sadou Asom Mayamara Samaj*, 2015