

Structures of Devotion: Exploring the Cultural Significance of Namghars in Assam

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Abstract

This paper examines the Namghar as a central institution in Assamese society, embodying the region's spiritual, cultural, and architectural ethos. Conceived by Srimanta Sankardeva, the Namghar functions not only as a religious space but also as a vital site of community interaction and collective identity formation. Moving beyond descriptive accounts, this study analyses the architectural features, symbolic meanings, and socio-cultural functions of Namghars through a qualitative and interpretive approach, drawing on historical texts, vernacular practices, and spatial analysis. The pivotal role of Namghar is not just as a place of worship but also as a central hub for social interactions and community activities in Assam. Namghars are built with local materials and traditional methods, representing Assam's commitment to sustainability and vernacular design. The paper contributes to existing scholarship by bridging architectural analysis with cultural theory, thereby positioning the Namghar as a dynamic institution that continues to sustain social cohesion and cultural continuity. It also underscores the need for its preservation as an integral component of Assam's intangible and tangible heritage. A major aim of the paper is to examine the relationship between the state and traditional institutions. After independence, the Indian state increasingly recognised cultural institutions such as the Namghar as symbols of Assamese heritage and regional identity. Government patronage, preservation initiatives, and political engagement with Namghars strengthened their public visibility. However, the paper also notes that state involvement sometimes transformed these institutions into instruments of political mobilisation and identity politics.

Keywords: Namghar, Architecture, Culture, Assamese Society, Identity Formation, and Assam.

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2.0 Introduction

The Namghar is a significant socio-cultural institution manifested through a vernacular architectural form in Assam, conceptualised and institutionalised by the Vaishnava reformer Srimanta Sankardev. It emerged within the broader context of the Bhakti movement, which spread across the Indian subcontinent between the 12th and 15th centuries, promoting egalitarian religious practices and community cohesion. This is a movement initiated against inequality between various religious groups, suppression and discrimination of lower classes, and malpractices in Hinduism (Neog 1998). Sankardeva tried to establish a strong community by removing differences of caste and religion by spreading the light of education among the people (Mishra 2022). He led the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam (Borah 2015 and Borah 2016), which reached its peak in the 15th century, and sought to establish equality among all by placing everyone in society on the same level. During this period, it became extremely important to create a platform where everybody could meet and discuss the issues of their society.

The Namghar is an essential architectural institution, considered one of the basic building blocks of Assamese society and an important marker of Assamese identity (Nath & Barua 2022, Rahman 2015 and Dutta 2017). It seeks to create unity among the people. Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev, as he is known by the people, founded and established Satras and Namghars, which bear the unique distinction of bringing together the Guru (God), deo (priest), nam (prayer), and bhakat (worshipper) together, and forming the foundation of Neo-Vaishnavism (NAAM 2018). Each of these elements carries its own relevance and importance. Namghars are miniature versions of Satras¹ in both physical structure and ideals. They are not only places of worship but also central hubs for social interaction and community activities in Assam. Namghars and Satras were established with the aim of promoting religion as well as literature, music, dance, drama, sculpture, and architecture (Hazarika 2019, also see Das1998). They play a significant role in building the spiritual and moral character of the people. They preach the ideals of righteousness and teach people to overcome pride and ego in the attainment of the divine (NAAM 2018).

Namghars play an important role in Assamese social life from various perspectives. These include establishing equality and promoting respect for all, acting as village parliaments, resolving disputes, serving as centres of planning and reform, and preserving ethnic culture (Hazarika 2019). They also function as centres for the promotion of mass education and the development of poor rural communities in Assam. In addition, Namghars serve as shelter platforms during various disasters. Their construction methods are unique and traditionally prevalent within Assamese society. This paper attempts to discuss the various technologies and construction systems of the Namghar.

This paper seeks to examine the Namghar as an integrated religious, architectural, and socio-cultural institution within Assamese society. By analysing its historical evolution, architecture, philosophical symbolism, and community functions, the study attempts to demonstrate how the Namghar continues to shape Assamese identity and social organisation. The paper further explores the relationship between traditional institutions and the modern state in the preservation, recognition, and politicisation of Namghars in contemporary Assam. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the Namghar as both

a tangible architectural heritage and an intangible cultural institution central to Assamese social life.

The paper is based on secondary works and both participant and non-participant observations and interview. The main aim of the paper is to understand the philosophical, socio-religious and contemporary dynamics of the Namghar that reflects Assamese cultural identity.

2.1 Review of Literature

The institution of the Namghar has attracted scholarly attention from historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural theorists because of its unique role in shaping Assamese society. Existing literature largely focuses on the religious philosophy of Neo-Vaishnavism, the socio-cultural contributions of Srimanta Sankardeva, and the role of Satras and Namghars in preserving Assamese identity and tradition.

Maheswar Neog (1998), in *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam*, provides one of the most comprehensive historical accounts of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement initiated by Srimanta Sankardeva (also see Pathak & Palit 2023 and 2016.). The study highlights how the Bhakti movement in Assam (Goswami 2013) challenged caste discrimination and ritualistic orthodoxy while promoting egalitarianism, devotion, and community integration. Neog states that the Namghar emerged as an institutional mechanism for collective worship and socio-cultural interaction among the Assamese people.

Similarly, Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti (2006) discusses the religious and cultural contributions of Sankardeva and examines the symbolic significance of the Guru Asana², devotional practices, and the institutional framework of Namghars. The study emphasises the role of the Namghar as a place of worship and a centre for moral education, spiritual discipline, and social integration.

Pallabi Hazarika (2019) analyses the construction technology and architectural features of Namghars in Assam. Her work focuses on indigenous construction techniques, locally available materials, spatial arrangements, and symbolic motifs used in Namghar architecture. The study argues that Namghars represent sustainable vernacular architecture deeply rooted in Assamese ecological and cultural traditions.

In another significant contribution, Ankita Dutta (2017) examines the role of the Namghar in identity formation and state-traditional institution relations in Assam. The study highlights how Namghars function as democratic community spaces and how state recognition after independence transformed them into symbols of Assamese cultural identity and regional consciousness.

Jayanta Madhab Tamuly (2016) studies the role of Satras and Namghars in peace building and social harmony. The research explains that these institutions act as centres of dispute resolution, social discipline, cultural continuity, and community participation. The study further emphasises their contribution to grassroots democracy and local governance in rural Assam.

Kiran Mishra (2022) explores Sattriya culture as a tool for social development and highlights the educational, artistic, and ethical functions of Vaishnavite institutions. The study discusses the contribution of Namghars in preserving indigenous art forms such as Bhaona³, Sattriya dance⁴, Borgeet⁵, and devotional music (Das 1998).

Several studies, such as by Chutia (2011) (Rahman (2015), Nath & Barua (2022), Bhaswati (2023), analyse the philosophical symbolism embedded within the material culture of Neo-Vaishnavism. The Guru Asana, decorative motifs, wood carvings, and spatial organisation of Namghars are articulated as symbolic interpretations of Sankardeva's devotional philosophy and egalitarian humanistic worldview.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into the religious, historical, socio-cultural, and architectural dimensions of Namghars, most of them examine these aspects separately. Historical studies largely focus on the Bhakti movement (Goswami 2013) and Neo-Vaishnavite philosophy (Barua 2011), while architectural studies concentrate on structural forms and indigenous construction methods. Similarly, sociological analyses mainly discuss community participation, social cohesion, and identity formation.

2.1.1 Research Gap

Despite the substantial body of literature on Neo-Vaishnavism and Assamese cultural institutions, there remains limited interdisciplinary research that integrates the architectural, philosophical, symbolic, and socio-political dimensions of the Namghar within a single analytical framework. Existing studies rarely examine how the spatial design, symbolic motifs, and vernacular architectural practices of the Namghar collectively contribute to identity formation, democratic participation, cultural continuity, and community governance in Assamese society.

Moreover, comparatively little attention has been given to understanding the Namghar as both a tangible and intangible cultural heritage institution that simultaneously functions as a religious space, socio-political platform, cultural centre, educational institution, and disaster shelter. The relationship between traditional Namghar institutions and modern state structures also remains underexplored in contemporary scholarship.

Therefore, this study attempts to bridge these gaps by adopting an integrated qualitative and interpretive approach that connects architecture, philosophy, culture, and social functions to understand the multidimensional significance of the Namghar in Assamese society.

2.2 Origin of the Namghar

Srimanta Sankardeva was one of the most influential figures in the religious and cultural history of Assam and played a transformative role in the socio-cultural reform of Assamese society during the fifteenth century (Neog 1998). Through the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, Sankardeva introduced a devotional tradition (Sharma 2003) that emphasised equality, social harmony, and collective participation. During his extensive travels across Assam, he established Vaishnavite monasteries known as Satras along with community prayer halls called Namghars, which later became the foundation of Assamese socio-cultural life. The term "Namghar" is derived from two

Assamese words: *Naam*, meaning prayer or devotional chanting, and *Ghar*, meaning house. Thus, Namghar literally refers to a “house of prayer” (Mahanta 1998). However, the institution extends far beyond its religious function. It serves as a common gathering place for community interaction, devotional performances, and theatrical traditions such as *Bhaona*. Sankardeva established Namghars as inclusive public spaces where people from different castes and social groups could gather collectively to practise *Naam-Kirtan*⁶ and express devotion toward a single supreme deity through the principles of *Ekasarana Naam Dharma*⁷ (Hazarika 2019).

Another popular name for the Namghar is *Kirtanghar*, particularly because of its association with devotional singing and congregational worship. Within the Satra institution, the Namghar occupies the central architectural and spiritual position around which other structures are organised. The development of Namghar architecture was closely associated with the growth of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement and the Bhakti tradition in Assam. The first Namghar is believed to have been established by Sankardeva at Bordowa in the present-day Nagaon district of Assam. After Sankardeva, his principal disciple Madhavdeva played a crucial role in spreading the *Ekasarana Naam Dharma* and expanding the Namghar institution throughout different regions of Assam.

2.2.1 The architectural structure of the Namghar

The Namghar is generally constructed as a large open prayer hall designed to accommodate congregational worship and community gatherings. Traditionally, Namghars were built using locally available materials such as bamboo, wood, reeds, thatch, and cane, reflecting the ecological adaptability and vernacular architectural traditions of Assam. Although many contemporary Namghars now incorporate modern materials such as concrete and corrugated roofing sheets, the essential structural pattern and symbolic design continue to preserve traditional architectural principles. The size of Namghar varies according to the convenience of the devotees (*bhakats*). Architecturally, the Namghar usually takes the form of a rectangular hall consisting of a central nave and side aisles separated by rows of wooden pillars. Architecturally, the Namghar usually takes the form of a rectangular hall consisting of a central nave and side aisles separated by rows of wooden pillars. Describing the Namghar of Garamur Satra⁸, B. C. Allen observed:

“The namghor itself is a huge structure...The roof is supported on huge wooden pillars, and the great floor space is entirely bar, save for one or two lecterns on which the sacred writings are reposing”. (Allen 1906:99)

The Namghar is a large prayer hall built in the traditional style and generally placed in the east-west direction. It is the central hall of worship where devotees gather and offer prayers. The hall is erected or supported by some pillars. The roof and shape of the hall is like a tortoise which is considered to be an incarnation of the Lord Vishnu. The apsidal roof has an elaborate structure in wood which is very typical of Namghar construction. The interior is a simple nave and two aisles with pillars. These pillars are in the number of 5, 7 and 7 pillars (*khutas*) usually, which divide the area loosely into chambers (Tamuly 2016). They are erected with wooden beams supporting an architrave over which rests the roof. These wooden beams are known as the *chati* and are either carved with motifs or painted. The central pillar of the Namghar is known as “Laikhuta” (Main Pillar) which is decorated with lotus motifs and draped with colourful



Figure 2.1: Typical Namghar Building

Source: Dulen Hazarika

2018). In past, roof of the Namghars was made of straw and walls were made of bamboo or wood. Now-a-days, there are concrete walls and tin roofs are commonly used in the Namghars. Walls are decorated with local decorative motifs, paintings of mythological characters; projections of dance steps, etc.

The sculptured reconstruction of the mythological characters and religious motifs in the walls of the Namghar are great source of attraction for the visitors (Tamuly 2016).



Figure 2.2: Religious assembly in Namghar

Source: Same as Fig 2.1

2.3 Parts of a Namghar

Korapat: The word *korapat* is derived from the word *kopat* and refers to the main gate or door of the Namghar. In Assamese, it is known as *toran*, the gateway to paradise and built right at

the entrance to the Namghar. According to legend, Jai and Vijaya, the gatekeepers of Vaikuntha (heaven), were banished from heaven because they succumbed to evils and temptations. In their later lives they were reborn as *asuras*⁹. Hence, the devotee should free his mind from all evil thoughts before entering the Namghar. God can never be attained without complete purity of thought and action. The spiritual and moral cleansing starts at the *Korapat* itself as one beholds the serene and blissful atmosphere prevailing in the precincts of the Namghar standing at the vantage point of the *Korapat* (NAAM 2018). *Korapat* is designed with lotus, peacock, elephants, and lions. Here the lion sits on the elephant indicating the evil power or sin (symbolically elephant) is dominated or eliminated by the Hari Nam (symbolically lion) (NAAM 2018).

2.3.1 Rangali Chora

It is the space between the *Korapat* and the *namghar*'s main prayer hall. When a devotee enters by crossing the *Rangali Sora*, then it is assumed that he plunges into Bhaba Sagar (the spiritual mysterious ocean) (NAAM 2018).

2.3.2 Monikut

Manikut is a small room, situated in the front portion of the Namghar. It is regarded as the most sacred space, attached to the east of the Namghar. *Manikut* is where the Guru Asana (sacred throne) is located. *Bhagawat*- the main holy text and the idols of deities are placed with special arrangement in the *Manikut* (Tamuly 2016). The Assamese word *monikut* consists of two terms: *moni*, means jewels and pearls, and *kornika*, means head or topmost part. *Manikut* literally means 'house of jewels', where *Bhagawat* is referred as the jewel. *Manikut* is also the site where other valuables such as wood carvings, metal works, ancient manuscripts, etc. are kept. It is a sacred area and beyond a certain boundary common masses are not allowed to enter (Tamuly 2016). Only specially trained persons are allowed to enter inside the *Manikut*. Particular persons are assigned the duty of maintenance of this sacred room. It is an independent room with separate roof attached to the Namghar, also called *bhajghar* in western Assam (NAAM 2018). It is fully walled, with no windows. This room is a later addition to the basic namghar structure.

It is believed that after long years of meditation the saints and sages finally had a glimpse of the Supreme Being seated under the bower of jewels and pearls. The term *monikut* owes its etymological origin to this religious belief extant in Hindu mythology. While paying obeisance at the *monikut* the seat of the divine, a total submission and surrender of one's self to the deity is required. In Neo-Vaishnavite philosophy, God is regarded as the supreme lord, while human beings are considered His devotees and followers. The spirit of devotion and service towards the divine is believed to foster spiritual communion with God. This sense of unity and surrender establishes a profound divine intimacy and provides individuals with a sense of spiritual security and belonging (NAAM 2018).

2.3.3 Guru Asana

The *Guru Asana* means 'Seat of the *Guru*'. It is a seven-tiered, triangular, wooden throne decorated with the motifs of tortoise, elephant, lion and peacock. Decorative wooden work is also have been seen in this *Asana*. There is no tradition of idol worship or *murti puja*¹⁰ in Namghar.



Figure 2.3: *Guru Asana*
Source: Same as 2.1

The sacred text is placed on the topmost tier of the *Guru Asana*. This wooden structure, characterised by its pyramidal form with a square base, standing on four pillars. At the base of each pillar there is a tortoise overpowered by an elephant and upon the elephant a flying lion is there. The whole structure is symbolic of ascending heavenly knowledge and accomplishment. The elephant is the symbol of sin and the lion is the symbol of power and destruction of sins. The lion represents *nam* and the elephant represents the evil desires of human beings (Das 2013).

The symbolic motifs incorporated into the Guru Asana carry profound philosophical and spiritual meanings within the Neo-Vaishnavite tradition of Assam. The tortoise represents stability, endurance, and the sustaining foundation of spiritual life. The elephant signifies worldly ignorance, pride, and material desires that obstruct spiritual progress. In contrast, the lion embodies divine strength, righteousness, and the triumph of devotion over human weaknesses. Similarly, the peacock and dragon motifs reflect beauty, protection, and the cosmic dimension of sacred knowledge. Together, these symbols transform the Guru Asana into not merely a ritual object, but a visual representation of moral discipline, spiritual elevation, and the philosophical ideals propagated by Srimanta Sankardev.

2.3.4 Assembly Hall

The Assembly Hall is bigger in size. It is built in a rectangular form towards east-west direction. The structure of the Namghar is traditionally constructed using bamboo and timber; however, nowadays several modern materials are also used in its construction.

2.4 Philosophical significance of the art and architecture of Namghar

The Satras and Namghars were established by Srimanta Sankardev as centres for imparting moral values, promoting education, and fostering various forms of cultural expression. These socio-religious institutions served as platforms for individual spiritual and intellectual development, while also enabling communities to acquire practical knowledge and social values essential for collective well-being and survival. By bringing the mass together in a place for a common cause, Sankardeva gradually made the people drop their egos, forget the differences, and feel oneness. To enlighten the common people, many of whom were unable to comprehend complex religious discourses and scholarly writings, Srimanta Sankardev extensively employed engaging and accessible mediums such as art, drama, dance, and music. Even in his literary works, he made effective use of allegories, parables, and symbolic representations to communicate philosophical and spiritual ideas in a simple and meaningful manner.

Again, the stuff kept in namghars, like Guru Asana, etc, are also symbolic representations of Sankardeva's teaching (Sarma 2023). *Namghar* is not thus only a place to pray but also a place where laities can get together, get enlightened with the teaching on the values of life and learn the skill of survival. It is also a place to carry forward the great teachings of Sankardeva by nurturing and improving upon what is already there.

In a research paper, researcher Ramala Sarma (2023) stated that Sankardeva's teaching media such as art, drama, dance songs, verse, myths, etc. that come under the board umbrella of material culture are very intricately related to one another. It is simply hard to put them separately without pulling the other. It is so perhaps because they all are the messengers of Sankardeva's predominant teaching *ekasharana naam dharma*. In the *namgharia* tradition, *Guru Asana* is one of the most prominent objects. In *Namghar*, *Guru Asana* is installed with *Gunamala*¹¹ on its top. Here idols do not find any place. This serene arrangement of the shrine speaks silently about the essence of Sankardeva's philosophy and faith. *Gunamala* is about the attributes of the formless or *Nirakar*¹²God. Its dignified presence in the Namghar symbolises the *Nirakar* God and the absence of idols indicates Sankardeva's incredulity in the system of idolatry. To give supreme importance to the formless self, it is placed on the top of Guru Asana.

To emphasise the supreme importance of the formless divine self, it is symbolically placed at the top of the Guru Asana. According to Srimanta Sankardev, ultimate reality is singular and formless; therefore, the worship of deities and the performance of ritualistic practices for the realisation of the absolute are considered insignificant. Murti puja, or idol worship, does not hold a place within Sankardeva's religious philosophy (Borah 2016).

The Guru Asana consists of three tiers, with the seven levels symbolically representing the seven heavens. It is adorned with motifs depicting elephants subdued through the chanting of God's name, signifying the triumph of devotion and spiritual consciousness over worldly power and ego (Borkakoti 2006). Other elements and objects associated with the main shrine are also reflective of the symbolic and philosophical dimensions of his teachings (Sarma 2023).

2.5 Discussion

One of the central objectives of Neo-Vaishnavism was the creation of a socially integrated egalitarian society based on collective harmony and moral values. Within this framework, the Namghar emerged as a democratic socio-cultural institution where equality was both preached and practised. The institution of the Namghar served as an important platform for public discussions, collective worship, festivals, and community-based decision-making processes involving all sections of society. It fostered a spirit of participatory governance at the grassroots level and may be regarded as a precursor to the Panchayati Raj system that is actively practised in India today. Within the Namghar, individuals were encouraged to express their opinions and participate freely in democratic deliberations concerning social and community affairs.

A general assembly, commonly known as the *raij*¹³, was composed of senior members representing each household of the village. Acting on behalf of the community, these elderly members collectively deliberated upon and resolved various issues related to village life and social welfare. The Namghar also functioned as a village court, where local disputes and conflicts were

addressed through dialogue and consensus-based resolutions, thereby promoting harmony and social cohesion within society.

In addition to its administrative and judicial roles, the Namghar acted as a moral regulator of society. Conduct considered indecent or detrimental to social discipline was discouraged, and corrective measures were undertaken with the objective of moral improvement and the preservation of ethical values among the people. Through such participatory and community-oriented practices, the Namghar functioned as an indigenous democratic institution embodying principles comparable to contemporary decentralised governance and Panchayati Raj. Consequently, it played a significant role in maintaining social order, collective responsibility, and cultural unity within Assamese society.

In Assamese society, the Namghar is regarded not merely as a religious institution but as a living centre for the preservation and continuity of indigenous culture and collective consciousness. It serves as a sacred space for learning, practising, and transmitting the cultural and spiritual creations of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev and Madhavdev. Various artistic and devotional traditions, ranging from *Borgeet* and *Dihanaam*¹⁴ to the classical dance form *Sattriya*, as well as *Ankiya Naat*¹⁵ and *Bhaona*, continue to flourish within the Namghar tradition. Musical instruments such as the *Khol*¹⁶, *Taal*¹⁷, *Doba*¹⁸, and *Mridanga*¹⁹ further enrich its performative and spiritual environment. Through these practices, the Namghar plays a vital role in safeguarding the traditional cultural heritage of Assamese society while inspiring younger generations to learn, preserve, and internalise these traditions as part of their cultural identity.

Philosophically, the Namghar embodies the idea of collective spiritual awakening, where art, devotion, and community life merge into a unified cultural experience. It transcends the role of a mere physical structure and becomes a symbolic space of shared memory, ethical discipline, and social harmony. In rural Assam, the Namghar also functions as a centre for communication and public awareness, contributing to the dissemination of information and the formation of collective public opinion within village society.

Furthermore, the Namghar serves as a community support institution during times of crisis and natural disasters. Owing to its spacious and accessible structure, it often functions as a shelter house during calamities such as floods, soil erosion, and other natural hazards. In such circumstances, the Namghar becomes a space of refuge, solidarity, and humanitarian support for affected communities. Its openness to all sections of society reflects the philosophical ideals of equality, compassion, and collective responsibility that form the foundation of the Neo-Vaishnavite tradition in Assam.

2.6 Conclusion

The Namghar represents one of the most enduring and influential institutions in Assamese society, functioning simultaneously as a religious centre, cultural institution, democratic platform, and community organisation. Rooted in the Neo-Vaishnavite philosophy of Srimanta Sankardeva, the Namghar has historically contributed to the promotion of social equality, collective participation, moral discipline, and cultural continuity in Assam. Its architectural form, symbolic motifs, and institutional practices collectively reflect the philosophical ideals of devotion,

harmony, and community integration. Beyond its spiritual significance, the Namghar continues to play an important role in preserving Assamese indigenous culture, artistic traditions, and local governance systems. It remains a vital centre for the transmission of devotional music, dance, drama, literature, and vernacular knowledge systems. Simultaneously, the institution functions as a space for public deliberation, social cooperation, and disaster response, thereby strengthening community resilience and social cohesion.

In contemporary Assam, the Namghar continues to embody the cultural identity and collective consciousness of Assamese society. Given its multidimensional contributions, greater efforts are required for the preservation and promotion of Namghars as both tangible architectural heritage and intangible cultural institutions. The institutional framework of the Namghar can also serve as an effective platform for community-based developmental initiatives related to social awareness, rural education, health, women's empowerment, disaster management, skill development, and cultural preservation.

Endnotes

1. Satras are monastic and cultural institutions connected with Assamese Neo-Vaishnavism. Satras preserve religious teachings, literature, music, dance, drama, manuscript traditions, and community discipline under the guidance of spiritual leaders.
2. The Guru Asana means 'Seat of the Guru'.
3. Bhaona is a traditional Assamese religious drama introduced by Sankardeva for spreading spiritual teachings among common people. It combines dialogue, costume, music, dance, masks, and storytelling based on religious narratives.
4. Sattriya means relating to Sattras. Sattriya dance is a classical dance tradition that developed within the Satras of Assam.
5. Borgeets are devotional songs composed mainly by Sankardeva and Madhavdeva.
6. Naam Kirtan refers to collective devotional singing and chanting of God's name accompanied by traditional musical instruments such as cymbals and drums. It forms a central part in Assamese Vaishnavite worship.
7. Eksarana Naam Dharma is the religious philosophy established by Sankardeva. The term means taking refuge in one God through devotion and chanting his name.
8. Garamur Satra is one of the major royal Satras of the Majuli Island, the largest river island.
9. Asuras are a class of demons in Hinduism who are opposed to the gods (devas). The struggle between devas and asuras represents the eternal battle between good and evil in Hindu philosophy.
10. Murti puja is the key Hindu practice of worshipping sacred images of God and divine personalities.
11. Gunamala is a concise devotional text composed by Srimanta Sankardeva. It is a condensed poetic version of the *Bhagavata Purana*. Written in rhythmic Assamese verse, it captures the essence of Lord Krishna's life, divine pastimes, and virtues in just six chapters, making profound spiritual teachings accessible to common people.
12. Nirakar means "formless" or "without physical shape;" also means from where all forms have emerged.
13. Raj refers to the common people, community, or collective public in Assamese society.
14. Dihanam refers to devotional songs or prayers sung in memory of the divine, especially during religious gatherings, ceremonies, and Nam-Kirtan practices in Assam.
15. Ankia Naats are one-act devotional plays from Assam, usually credited to Srimanta Sankardeva, and they are written in Brajvali. They mainly centre on Krishna and are staged as Bhaonas with music, singing, dance, and elaborate costumes.
16. The Khol is a traditional terracotta or wooden drum widely used in Assamese Neo-Vaishnavite devotional music. It is played during Naam-Kirtan, Bhaona, and religious festivals.
17. Taal refers to metallic hand cymbals used in devotional singing and Naam-Kirtan. They provide rhythmic accompaniment during prayers and religious performances.

18. Doba is a large percussion instrument traditionally used in Assamese religious and cultural performances. It produces deep rhythmic sounds.
19. Mridanga is a musical instrument like khol, but large in size with broad and comparatively narrow ends.

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Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that AI tools were used only for language editing, grammar correction, paraphrasing, and improving the overall readability of the manuscript. The conceptual framework, research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions of the study are entirely the original work of the authors. All AI-assisted outputs were carefully reviewed, modified, and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the authenticity, accuracy, and integrity of the paper.

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