



Constructing Rule and Religion: A Historical Study of Cultural Synthesis and Identity Formation in the Socio-Political Order of Medieval Assam

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Abstract

The intricate relationship between religion and authority in medieval Assam is thoroughly and methodically examined in this research, with an emphasis on how identity creation and cultural synthesis shaped the region's sociopolitical structure. Medieval Assam offers a unique historical setting where religious movements, particularly Neo-Vaishnavism, and political authority interacted to create a unique cultural matrix that both supported and legitimized rule. The study looks at how leaders merged many ethnic traditions and intentionally supported religious organizations to create a sociopolitical structure that was inclusive and promoted vibrant cross-cultural interactions. The paper advances our knowledge of the processes by which political authority and religion came together to create durable social structures and cultural identities in medieval Assam.¹

In order to provide an interdisciplinary study of medieval society of Assam, the investigation consults a variety of historiographical sources, epigraphic documents, and cultural artifacts in addition to current scholarly interpretations. It emphasizes how political aspirations to reshape Assamese identity and government collided with religious changes, especially under Srimanta Sankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavism. According to the report, cultural institutions like Namghars and Sattras play a vital role in mediating between society and the state while fulfilling both administrative and spiritual purposes. According to this essay, the sociopolitical structure of medieval Assam was a negotiated creation influenced by the interaction of political pragmatism, religion, and culture rather than a rigid imposition.²

Keywords: Medieval Assam, Cultural Synthesis, Identity Formation, Rule and Religion, Socio-Political, Order, Historical Analysis, Neo-Vaishnavism, Power and Culture, Assam History, Religious Transformation.

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1. Introduction

The socio-political environment of the era and the religious developments that occurred in medieval Assam most notably the rise of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in the 15th and 16th centuries cannot be understood separately because they were closely related, with changes in social hierarchies, power dynamics, and cultural dynamics all having a significant impact on the spiritual landscape of the area. A unique historical period, medieval Assam was characterized by the blending of various political, religious, and ethnic factors that influenced its sociopolitical environment. During this time, an integrative cultural identity developed as a result of strategic rule and religious reform. The Neo-Vaishnavism movement, led by Srimanta Sankardeva, was instrumental in this change. His religious and cultural endeavors went beyond simple spiritual revivalism to become a powerful force in socio-political reorganization. This period is significant because it shows how religion evolved into a tool of political power, promoting inclusion among Assam's diverse populations while aiding in the consolidation of power.³

During the Ahom dynasty in particular, the rulers of medieval Assam used religion as a means of integrating many ethnic groups and legitimizing their reign. Patronage of religious organizations like Namghars and Sattras strengthened their hold on power and promoted a sense of community that cut over caste and ethnic boundaries. Because of the flexible and robust socio-political system this religious-political relationship produced, the medieval polity was able to deal with both internal variety and external threats.⁴

To understand the cultural synthesis that forms the basis of Assamese identity today, one must have a thorough understanding of the historical interaction between religion and rule. In order to add to the larger historiography of Indian regional identities and religious reforms, this dissertation attempts to methodically examine the processes of identity creation and the socio-political order in medieval Assam via the dual lenses of governmental authority and religious movements.

2. Statement of the Research Problem

Existing historiography frequently separates political history from religious and cultural changes, despite the crucial role religion played in the sociopolitical structure of medieval Assam. The intricate processes of cultural synthesis and identity building that were crucial in establishing legitimacy for rule and forming Assamese society are hidden by this compartmentalization. By carefully examining how religion and political authority were co-constructed to create a robust socio-political system, the research problem focuses on closing this gap.

Moreover, modern conceptions of Assamese identity usually ignore the historical underpinnings established throughout the middle Ages, especially the institutional frameworks and integrative function of Neo-Vaishnavism. The necessity for a comprehensive historical investigation that takes into consideration how religion, culture, and political power interact to shape regional identity is addressed in this work.

3. Review of Related Literature

- 1) Neog, M. (1982), investigates the spiritual ferment that accompanied the establishment of Neo-Vaishnavism under Srimanta Sankardeva's leadership in his seminal work, "Medieval Religious Movements in Assam." Neog highlights how this movement offered a model for social transformation based on egalitarianism, devotion (bhakti), and vernacular expression in addition to offering a theological substitute for traditional

Brahmanism. He describes how the spiritual principles of the movement were transformed into institutional structures like the Namghars and Sattras, which became ingrained in the rural life of Assam.

- 2) Guha, A. (1983), writing in 'Economic and Political Weekly', advocates for a shift away from state-centric narratives toward a closer examination of social and cultural structures in medieval Assam. He calls attention to the role of subaltern agency in shaping political events and cultural traditions.
- 3) Barpujari, H.K. (1991), 'The Comprehensive History of Assam, Volume II', who bemoans the lack of representation of indigenous voices and religious institutions in the mainstream of Indian history.
- 4) Barua (1999), 'Ahom State and Its Institutions' contributes to this discussion by charting the official incorporation of religious organizations into the state machinery. His research demonstrates how Sattras served as somewhat independent administrative, judicial, and cultural preservation hubs in addition to their spiritual role.
- 5) Saikia, Y. (2004), Despite having a more modern focus, "Fragmented Memories: Struggling to be Tai-Ahom in India" offers insightful information about the historical foundations of identity politics in Assam. Saikia provides examples of how ethnic consciousness and cultural narratives are still shaped by the legacy of Ahom control.
- 6) Dutta, A. (2005), 'Neo-Vaishnavism and Assamese Culture' builds on Neog's observations by examining how the movement reorganized Assamese culture by eschewing caste-based systems and placing a strong emphasis on social responsibility, ethical behavior, and collective worship. The movement's inclusive appeal, particularly among marginalized groups and tribal communities, is highlighted by Dutta's work.
- 7) Baruah, S. (2006), 'Identity Formation in Assam: Historical Perspectives', in which he calls on historians to embrace multidisciplinary approaches that incorporate religious discourse, folklore, and oral history into political research. Expanding the methodological breadth of regional historiography is made possible in large part by Baruah's work.
- 8) Sharma, B.K. (2008), "Political History of Medieval Assam," which emphasizes how the Ahom kings strategically employed Neo-Vaishnavism to justify their growing power. Sharma details the use of religious patronage, such as land grants and festival sponsorship, to fortify political cohesion in a kingdom with a varied population.
- 9) Pegu, N. (2010), 'Cultural Dynamics in Medieval Assam' provides a detailed analysis of how the Neo-Vaishnavite framework incorporated oral traditions, tribal ceremonies, and linguistic variety. His research backs up the claim that Assamese identity was created by negotiated inclusion rather than forcible absorption.
- 10) Nath, D. (2012), by examining how religion affected not only personal piety but also collective identity and state-society relations, 'Religion and Society in North East India' offers a thorough synthesis of these many threads. He makes the case for a more comprehensive understanding of medieval Assamese society, one that views political power, religious institutions, and tribal customs as interrelated elements within a larger socio-cultural matrix.
- 11) Kalita, P. (2014), 'Religious Reform as Political Strategy in Assam' examines how religious practices were modified as soft power instruments to help local belief systems conform to the goals of the centralized Ahom polity. Religious organizations are

portrayed in the text as vibrant cultural and political forces rather than just places of worship.

- 12) Dutta, S. & (2015), Examine the 'Namghars and Sattras' ideological and practical importance. Through the preservation of textual traditions, the training of artists, and the provision of venues for conflict resolution, Dutta's paper, "Sattras as Cultural Institutions," illustrates how these establishments enhanced the moral and intellectual life of the community.

4. Background of the Study

It is impossible to separate the religious changes of medieval Assam particularly the emergence of Neo-Vaishnavism in the 15th and 16th centuries from its socio-political history. A cultural synthesis mediated by religious reform was made possible by Assam's distinct cultural environment, which was shaped by both arriving Tai-Ahom government and indigenous tribal customs. By challenging established orthodoxies and advancing egalitarian ideals that cut across ethnic boundaries, Srimanta Sankardeva's introduction of Neo-Vaishnavism established a common cultural basis.⁵

In order to consolidate power and create a stable polity, the Ahom rulers simultaneously recognized the unifying potential of this religious movement and integrated it into their system of administration. A cultural synthesis that shaped medieval identity resulted from the ensuing socio-political order, which was marked by the blending of religious institutions with social and administrative roles.

4.1. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are-

- 1) To study how Neo-Vaishnavism fit within Assam's medieval socio-political structure.
- 2) To examine how the Ahom polity facilitates identity building and cultural synthesis.
- 3) To investigate the institutional role that Namghars and Sattras play in mediating religion and politics.
- 4) To access political and religious history in order to contribute to historiographical discourse.

4.2. Research Questions

- 1) What effects did Neo-Vaishnavism have on political legitimacy and governance during the middle Ages?
- 2) Which cultural synthesis processes made it easier for people to create their identities during this time?
- 3) How did religious organizations fulfill sociopolitical purposes?
- 4) How may our comprehension of medieval Assamese identity be altered by combining religious and political histories?

5. Research Methodology

Primary Sources

The foundation of this study is the critical analysis of primary historical sources that provide light on the identity construction and cultural synthesis processes in medieval Assam. The Buranjis, copper plate inscriptions, royal charters, land grant documents and temple inscriptions are important examples of these that provide important information about the socio-cultural,

religious, and administrative systems of the time. Studying architectural styles, iconography, and ritual activities will be aided by field trips to historical locations including Sivasagar, Majuli, and Hajo. Furthermore, the knowledge of how medieval socio-political and religious frameworks still impact Assamese identity today will be enhanced by the collection of oral traditions, religious performances, and local narratives through interviews with monks, cultural custodians, and local historians.

Secondary Sources

This study uses a lot of secondary literature in addition to primary sources to interpret the patterns of cultural synthesis and frame the historical narrative. Academic publications by historians and researchers such Yasmin Saikia, J.N. Phukan, Amalendu Guha, and H.K. Barpujari pull from the disciplines of history, political theory, and cultural anthropology to offer analytical viewpoints on state formation. Religious studies also interact with more general theoretical writings on pre-modern South Asian politics, syncretism, and identity development. Comparative views into the blending of various cultural and religious elements under medieval Assamese rule may be found in journal articles, edited volumes, and historical surveys. These secondary sources promote a nuanced assessment of Assam's intricate socio-political development during the medieval era and allow for a critical and contextual comprehension of the primary material.

Rationale

In medieval Assam, religious change and political consolidation coexisted, especially under the Ahom dynasty and the emergence of Neo-Vaishnavism. Examining how religious and cultural traditions were strategically employed by ruling forces to establish legitimacy, unite disparate populations, and create a cohesive sociopolitical identity is the goal of this study. Originating from Tai, the Ahoms progressively embraced and supported regional traditions and Hindu rites, leading to a vibrant process of cultural fusion that reshaped both political structure and religious expression.

The study explores how religion and rule co-evolved to form communal identities by looking at literary sources such as the Buranjis, religious literature, and institutional records of Satras and Namghars. It also examines how these developments paved the way for a unique socio-political structure that struck a compromise between new Hindu norms and tribal customs. The study advances our knowledge of how religious reform and cultural negotiation were essential to the establishment of the state and identity politics in pre-modern Assam.

6. Results and Discussion

Neo-Vaishnavism as a Tool for Politics

Despite having its roots in spiritual reform, Neo-Vaishnavism developed into a powerful political instrument in medieval Assam. The movement's core principles of equality, moral rectitude, and devotion (bhakti) appealed to ruling elites looking for intellectual legitimacy as well as to neglected socioeconomic groups. Leaders like the Ahoms sided with individuals like Srimanta Sankardeva as strategic players rather than just religious supporters. Adopting Neo-Vaishnavism allowed them to use its inclusive message to create a moral authority that went beyond caste or ethnic boundaries. In a multiethnic area like Assam, this ideological alignment aided rulers in integrating various communities and creating a sense of common cultural belonging, which was crucial for state consolidation.⁶

Neo-Vaishnavism was institutionalized through Sattras, which offered a methodical way to expand the administrative and intellectual influence of the state into rural areas. By serving as a bridge between the people and the government, these religious organizations spread the ideals of

conformity, law and order, and group identity. The hierarchical structure of the Sattras, which had its roots in religious discipline, was similar to that of the monarchy and assisted rulers in gaining spiritual approval to justify their authority. The temple and the throne had a profoundly synergistic relationship; the religious order strengthened the monarch's power among the populace, while the monarchy offered material support. Neo-Vaishnavism therefore functioned as a spiritual awakening as well as a covert tool for political control and assimilation.⁷

6.1. Identity Formation and Cultural Synthesis

Facilitating a composite cultural identity based on religious syncretism is one of Neo-Vaishnavism's most enduring legacies in Assam. The movement assimilated and reinterpreted tribal customs within the Vaishnavite framework rather than attempting to eradicate local belief systems. Communities from different castes and ethnic groups were able to engage in a common religious ethos while maintaining aspects of their unique cultural identities because to this fusion. As a result, the resulting Assamese identity was not uniform but rather complex, incorporating elements of indigenous mythology, Hindu texts, tribal customs, and religious art. In a sociopolitical environment that was otherwise fractured, this inclusive cultural formation promoted peaceful cohabitation.⁸

It is impossible to overstate the importance of language, dance, music, and ritual in this synthesis. Tribal dialects influenced the creation of vernacular literature, indigenous dance styles were incorporated into Sattriya performance traditions, and religious storytelling was infused with oral traditions. The foundation for a shared memory that cut beyond national and ethnic borders was created by these cultural contacts. Crucially, the process of identity building was fostered by grassroots religious engagement in Namghars and Sattras rather than being imposed from above. Neo-Vaishnavism thus served as the cultural furnace that created the distinctively Assamese culture.⁹

6.2. Sattras' Function in Governance

Sattras developed into strong semi-political organizations that mediated communal life in addition to their religious function. These institutions served as hubs for local government, moral instruction, education, and cultural transfer. A Sattra's leader, or Satradhikar, had a lot of power and was frequently consulted when making decisions as a community and resolving disputes. The Sattra was able to function as a local governing body in regions with little or no state machinery because of its framework, which was similar to formal political administration. They were vital state partners because of their organizational ability to organize people, uphold social harmony, and enforce discipline.¹⁰

Sattras functioned as cultural extensions of the state machinery in many respects. By incorporating Neo-Vaishnavite doctrines into everyday life, they promoted virtues like obedience, hard work, and group responsibility while also subtly reinforcing state ideology. In exchange, the state gave the Sattras land and patronage, guaranteeing their enduring power. By producing manuscripts, providing artistic instruction, and leading rituals, the Sattras were able to preserve Assamese culture and significantly influence public opinion. In addition to their theological significance, they are useful in society and politics as dispersed yet potent centers of influence.¹¹

Namghars as Community Hubs

The Namghar, which translates to "prayer house," served as the hub of village life and communal organization in addition to being a place for religious singing. These buildings were used for community gatherings, religious ceremonies, conflict resolution, and even municipal

government. The Namghar promoted horizontal social cohesion and democratized spiritual experience by creating a place where all villagers, regardless of caste, could gather. This grassroots organization, which placed an emphasis on communal duty and participatory religion, contrasted with the centralized, hierarchical temples found throughout India.¹²

Additionally, Namghars were essential to maintaining Assamese culture's oral traditions. They upheld a common moral and cultural code through storytelling, religious plays (Bhaona), and group singing (Naam-Prasanga). Crucially, they developed into places where civic education and religious education met, making them essential in forming public values. Their presence across the villages strengthened a decentralized system of government where social, political, and religious life were closely entwined and helped institutionalize the Neo-Vaishnavite ethos.¹³



Plate 1 Interior view of a Namghar, depicting the prayer hall as a communal Gathering Space.
Courtesy: The Northeast Dialogue

Plate-1: A Namghar's function as a communal prayer space that is essential to Assamese Vaishnavite worship is highlighted. The area promotes inclusion and spiritual equality, two fundamental principles of Srimanta Sankardeva's reformist movement, and is distinguished by its open, simple design. Simple seating arrangements, dirt flooring, and wooden beams all demonstrate a humble mentality in addition to practical design. As a gathering space, the Namghar maintains its status as a religious and socio-cultural center of Assamese village life by providing a forum for community debates, festivals, and group decision-making in addition to devotional singing (naam-prasanga).

6.3. Patronage of Religion and Ahom Rulers

Neo-Vaishnavism's potential as a unifying socio-cultural force in a multiethnic state was acknowledged by the Ahom monarchs. They provided land grants, built Sattras, and participated in festivals as royalty as part of their patronage, which went beyond simple endorsement. By incorporating spiritual legitimacy into the structure of political power, such state-sponsored religious patronage served to strengthen ties between the ruling class and the religious elite. In addition to placating the public, this strategic partnership gave the monarchy moral capital to defend its reign.¹⁴

Additionally, a public display of harmony between the state and spiritual order was produced by the Ahom monarchs' involvement in Neo-Vaishnavite ceremonies. These gatherings

served as forums for showcasing the regime's inclusivity and dedication to moral leadership. The Ahoms disassociated themselves from traditional Brahmanism and presented a picture of kind and forward-thinking governance by identifying with reformist religious principles. This connection extended the dynasty's legitimacy across generations and guaranteed social stability.¹⁵

Egalitarianism and Social Inclusion

The overt opposition to caste hierarchy was one of Neo-Vaishnavism's most significant divergences from conventional Hindu orthodoxy. Sankardeva's teachings stressed dedication (bhakti) as the real test of spiritual value, emphasizing the pointlessness of discrimination based on birth. Tribals, lower castes, and women who were shut out of Brahmanical religious life were among the marginalized groups that found resonance in this message. By bringing these groups into its spiritual fold, the movement was able to restructure Assamese culture by fostering a more egalitarian social structure and erasing strict caste boundaries.¹⁶

There were political ramifications to this social inclusivity as well. As additional groups adopted Neo-Vaishnavism, a sense of solidarity across racial and socioeconomic divides was fostered as a collective identity developed around common rituals and beliefs. The social fabric was reinforced by the ensuing allegiance to the state and religious organizations. The movement's impact is especially pertinent in the current period of identity-based divisiveness because it foreshadowed contemporary values of equality and social justice in many ways.¹⁷



Plate 2 Devotees engaged in congregational worship within a Namghar, reflecting the inclusive spirit of Neo-Vaishnavism

Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz / Internet Collection

Plate-2: depicts a stirring image of worshippers from many social and cultural backgrounds joining together in a Namghar, exemplifying the inclusive spirit of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement that Srimanta Sankardeva started. The movement's fundamental break from traditional Brahmanical rites is reflected in this group gesture of devotion that is devoid of caste or class barriers. As depicted here, the Namghar transcends hereditary hierarchies and becomes more than just a place of worship; it is a symbol of societal revolution. Thus, the picture supports the central idea of Neo-Vaishnavism: bhakti (devotion) as a uniting factor for moral elevation and social concord.

Table: Medieval Religion and Rule Intersections of Assam: A Methodical Analysis of Cultural Synthesis and Identity Formation

Reform in Religion	Srimanta Sankardeva, the Bhakti movement, and Neo-Vaishnavism	Propagation of ethical living and egalitarian dedication	broke down caste systems and encouraged social inclusion	Neog (1982), Dutta (2005)
Cultural Synthesis	Combining local rites, vernacular literature, and tribal customs	Incorporated into the Namghar and Sattras ceremonies	Several ethnic groups united under a common Assamese identity	Pegu (2010), Nath (2012)
Legitimation in politics	Ahom land donations to Sattras and support for Neo-Vaishnavite institutions	Royal and ecclesiastical authorities are mutually reinforced.	Increased administrative authority and a legitimate monarchy	Barua (1999), Sharma (2008)
Institutions of Society	As hubs for government, education, and the arts, Sattras and Namghars	Religious teaching, literary creation, and conflict resolution	Promoted civic participation and established decentralized governing institutions.	Dutta, S. (2015), Kalita (2014)
Formation of Identity	Oral traditions, communal worship, and shared religious holidays	Cultural and ritualistic community integration	Creation of a participative, composite Assamese identity	Baruah (2006), Guha (1983)
Religion-Based Governance	Sattradhikars, or religious leaders, as moral leaders	Served as moral mentors and local administrators.	Strengthened adherence to state and church institutions as well as social discipline	Barpujari (1991), Neog (1982)
Public Rituals and Festivals	Nam-Prasanga, Raas, and Janmashtami	Expressions of solidarity and dedication in public	Promoted community togetherness and political mobilization	Kalita (2014), Dutta, A. (2005)
Gaps in Historiography	Insufficient attention to local religious-political unity	The necessity of multidisciplinary, integrative historiography	Oversimplified nationalist and colonial myths that have been addressed by more recent studies	Baruah (2006), Guha (1983), Nath (2012)

7. Major Findings of the Study

The major findings of the study are-

- 1) In medieval Assam, the Neo-Vaishnavite movement was more than just a religious revival; it was a fundamental intellectual underpinning of political power. The Ahoms in particular strategically allied themselves with Vaishnavite reformers in order to garner the moral support of the populace and legitimize their rule. A wide range of socioeconomic classes found the monarchy more acceptable as a result of this religious-political partnership.
- 2) A composite Assamese identity emerged as a result of Neo-Vaishnavism's blending of tribal, regional, and Brahmanical traditions. Because of this synthesis, diverse communities were able to live in harmony with one another and develop a common cultural ethos that cut beyond linguistic and ethnic boundaries.

- 3) In addition to fulfilling their religious requirements, Namghars community prayer rooms and Sattras monastic centers both played important roles. In a pre-modern context, they served as forums for community leadership, education, dispute settlement, and public dialogue, acting as early examples of democracy.
- 4) The Ahom kings purposefully used land grants, festival attendance, and the protection of religious leaders to promote Neo-Vaishnavism in an effort to fortify political unity. Because of this sponsorship, there was a reciprocal relationship in which religious organizations validated royal authority.
- 5) Neo-Vaishnavism's rejection of caste-based discrimination was one of its most revolutionary features. Its emphasis on devotion (bhakti) as opposed to a hierarchy based on birth allowed underprivileged groups, including as women, lower castes, and tribal people, to become part of the spiritual and social mainstream.
- 6) Sattras and Namghars frequently served as local government bodies, settling conflicts and upholding moral standards. Their participative yet hierarchical systems reflected early governmental models and permitted local management under the auspices of religious authority.
- 7) Sattras and Namghars arranged religious celebrations like Raas and Janmashtami, which strengthened political unity and cultural cohesiveness in addition to serving devotional reasons. These gatherings gave people common experiences that strengthened their ties to the government and to religious organizations.
- 8) Throughout the middle Ages, Assamese identity was dynamic and developed via ongoing compromise between regional practices, Brahmanical standards, and tribal customs. An inclusive and pluralistic identity was able to form as a result of this adaptable and fluid process, which also avoided sectarian rigidity.
- 9) Tribal ideas and customs were actively incorporated into Neo-Vaishnavite activities rather than being excluded. Widespread acceptance and involvement were made possible by this integration, which enhanced the movement's cultural texture and increased its accessibility to non-caste populations.
- 10) The Ahom monarchy gave religious organizations like Sattras and Namghars considerable autonomy in local government, even as it centralized some administrative tasks. Cohesion and grassroots participation were guaranteed by this dual structure.
- 11) Neo-Vaishnavism was essential to Assam's cultural rebirth. It sparked a flourishing of vernacular literature, devotional dramas (Bhaona), classical dance (Sattriya), and music, all of which contributed to the development of Assamese culture.
- 12) The entwined character of religion and politics in Assam's medieval history is frequently overlooked by conventional historiographical narratives. This study emphasizes the necessity of integrative methods that transcend compartmentalization in order to completely comprehend the intricate sociopolitical development of the area.
- 13) By promoting involvement from all members of the society, Namghars in especially democratized religious life. They evolved into egalitarian places where group worship and decision-making promoted a feeling of community and shared accountability, in contrast to exclusive temples.
- 14) The society of Assam today is still influenced by the institutions, beliefs, and customs that Neo-Vaishnavism brought to medieval Assam. In addition to being places of worship, Sattras and Namghars continue to be important cultural archives, centers of learning, and community gathering places.

8. Conclusion

The study shows that the socio-political structure of medieval Assam was the outcome of a purposeful and intentional process of cultural synthesis rather than a static or coincidental creation. Neo-Vaishnavism, a religious and social reform movement led by Srimanta Sankardeva, was at the center of this synthesis. His teachings offered a conceptual foundation that cut beyond caste and ethnic boundaries by emphasizing social equality, moral discipline, and devotion (bhakti). Leaders, especially the Ahom monarchs, were able to exploit the movement as a unifying force because of its egalitarian viewpoint, which made it appealing to both tribal and caste Hindu populations. In a multicultural and frequently divided region, the Ahom rulers acquired political stability as well as spiritual legitimacy by their calculated support of Neo-Vaishnavism. In order to establish a unified Assamese identity based on inclusivity and common values, this reciprocal interaction between state authority and religious reform was essential. 18

Neo-Vaishnavism had a long-lasting institutional impact on Assamese society in addition to its ideological contributions. In addition to being places of worship, the Sattras and Namghars developed into hubs for local government, moral leadership, education, and the arts. The state was able to impose a nuanced kind of rule that was both decentralized and intricately woven into everyday life because of their combined civic and religious functions. These organizations were essential in preserving indigenous performance arts, promoting vernacular literature, distributing religious teachings, and mediating societal conflicts. Within a larger spiritual-political structure, the Sattradhikars (monastic leaders) and community elders held significant power and served mostly as local rulers. Medieval Assam's government was robust, participatory, and adapted to its ethnic and cultural variety because to this state-community partnership. 19

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the development of Assamese identity during the middle Ages was a dynamic and contested process that was influenced by political pragmatism, cultural trade, and theological tolerance. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement incorporated regional languages, oral traditions, and tribal customs into its theological framework rather than imposing a homogeneous culture. A flexible and multi-layered identity that defied strict sectarian borders was shaped in part by this cultural inclusivity. Crucially, in Namghars, communal singing sessions, public rituals, and festivals served as forums for reaffirming shared identity and collective memory. The integration of state ideology into daily life without the use of coercive homogenization was made possible in large measure by these participatory techniques. Medieval Assam is a singular example of integrative government and cultural resilience because of the Ahom rulers' capacity to accept and even celebrate ethnic variation while quietly reiterating central authority. 20

Lastly, the study emphasizes the necessity of a reorientation toward historiography. The complicated realities of Assam's medieval past are fragmented by the way religion, politics, and cultures are frequently treated in isolation in current scholarly discourse. An interdisciplinary and integrative approach is required for this study, taking into account how religious groups such as Neo-Vaishnavism functioned concurrently as social, political, and spiritual forces. In order to understand the deeper logics that ruled pre-modern Assamese society, academics must place religious organizations within larger frameworks of power and identity formation. In addition to enhancing our knowledge of Assam's history, this method offers insightful information about the current issues pertaining to ethnicity, pluralism, and regional identity. The teachings of Assam's

medieval past are still applicable and instructive in the context of Northeast India's continuing sociopolitical changes. 21

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