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Importance of Auniati Sattra in the Sattra Culture of Assam: A brief overview.

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## Abstract :

Sattra is a unique structure of the neo-vaishnavite movement initiated by SrimantaSankardev which was introduced to propagate the ideals of neo-vaishnavism around 500 years ago. The Sattra institutions contributed immensely to the socio-cultural and spiritual development of assamese people. The Sattra are not just monasteries, but centres of traditional performing arts. The songs and dances initiated by Shri Sankardev, such as Borgeet, Bhatima, Jumura, Chali, Paalnaam, Apsara, Satriya etc. are taught and prmoted here apart from numerous other crafts, of which making is particularly significant. Sankar deva established the institution "Satra" for socio religious reform of the society. Starting its journey in 16<sup>th</sup> century, the institution still continues with ups and downs in phrases of history.

Before the Sankardeva there were no cultural unnity in Asssam. The Vaishnava Sattras had attracted the isolated classes of society and under the direct patronage of Sattras they had been able to form of unity in one platform. So Satra is an important institution for Assamese people. This study dwells to analyse the Sattras in Assam which is called Satriya Culture.

Keyword Sattra, Sankardeva, Culture, Vaishnavism, Prasanga, Ghosha-Kirtan, Manjira, Nandotshab, Auniati.

# **Introduction :**

The institutions of *Sattras* arevery prominent feature in Assam that is intimately related to the culture and tradition of the state. These institutions were formed in medieval period as a result of *NavabaishnavBhakti Movement*. The Bhakti movement refers to the theistic devotional trend that emerged in this period especially in Hinduism.Since the late fiftieth Century the *Sattra* and*Namghar*(Temple) has been arising at verious period all over the

Assam till today. The external feature of the *Sattras* can be explained in such a way, firstly Batsora, at the main entrance to the Sattra, then Kirtan-ghar, Bhajghar or Manikut followed by Sabhagriha (the assembly house). In the Kirtan-ghar or Manikut, the Bhagawatorstatue of Lord Sri Krishnais placed in a specific location, which is called as Ashan or Thapona. In front of the Ashan, lights, incense stick, holly books, benzoic incense etc are kept. Besides these the surrounding of *Sattra* consists of *DoulMandap*, rest rooms for devotees and rooms for miscellaneous use .The holly prayer, sound of various musical instruments like *Doba*, *Khol* (a special type of drum), *Borkah* (a type of disc played by both hand) provides a cool and devotional peace environment to the entire area. The family and residential area of devotees are situated to the outside of the Sattra area. These dedicated devotees along with other people in the area together forms this organisation. With this external feature the Sattra is a social organisation where cultural practise along with religious ideologies are discussed. Moreover these satra plays crucial role as the court of villagers. Basically, a healthy society is formed under a Sattra.

In this strategic discussion, it becomes necessary to take assistance of different articles relating to the subject and the data of the lord of the *Sattra* along with evangelists. The names of such people are thankfully mentioned in this article. Since this discussion could not cover entire dimension of stated topic due to the number of reasons, so it is expected to be completed by the investigative researchers only. I hope this study will help to such researchers at least to some extent in near future.

#### History of the Satra in Assam:

It is ambiguous to say exactlywhen the seed of vaishnabism had scattered in Assam. There is some evidence that it was germinated since fourth- fifth AD. The Religion Bhagawata also entered Assam along with other influences of pre-Gupta period and at the same time became potential following the well establishment with immenseroyal welcoming within very short period.In this period four **Parba**was formed in order to spread the religious mythologies. Sattrayan was the fouth part of this parba and great santsrisriDamodardev was seen in this period of fourth part. This saint was younger than Sri Shankardeva, hence he was also known as little master. Their progenitors were inhabitant of the same place and both the family were held together by same principles and standard of living. The forefather of Damodardeva was from Nalasha village in middle Assam. Due to the accusation of involving in Bhuyan Rebellion they became victim of torture by Ahom king, for that reason they flew towards the lower part of the state away to Kamrup and stayed in Hazo, the centre of Vaishnavism for a few days. According to Nilakantha, Ratneswar and Sarbeswar, two elder brothers of Damodardeva were the**Bhagawati**(spiritual reader of holly book Bhagawat)of Madhavmandir Hajo. at Assam.(Auniatisatrarburanji, page :13, TirthaNathSarmah)

After the period of Great Sangardeva, the ethnicity of Vaishnab in Assam divided into four parts. However, the core religious principle was not manipulated any more but slight differentiation was seen in their traditional and external features.

Under the influence of the power Ahom kingdom some of the Sattras occupied by Brahman emphasized onShruti- Smriti, and easily became favourite of the king. Following the conspiracy of Krishnaram, the Bamunia sari Sattra was formed in the model of Mohapurushiya Sari Sattraand accordingly could able to declare pride of rich. The wealth and properties had become the sign of superiority for a sattra rather than spiritual and ethical contents. In that particular period the culture of Bengal such as model of mobile theatre, music, and many other non-vaishnabic music, song, dance etc invaded to the traditional Vaishabic culture and deformed it egregiously. One such part was formed under the guidance and supervision of Ahom king and his his officials. DamodarBiprawas present in this part, along with which a few number of SattrasfromBangshigopaldeva side adapted the 'effect of Sakta'. They were able to achieve lots of contribution at different times in different ways from the Ahom king. In such situation also the other Sattraslook for not even single chance to strengthening the economic condition of the Sattra by keeping direct relation to the dwelling of king. That is why the condition of most of the Sattrasin Assam is not only poor but impeded also.

The Ahom king JayadhwajSingha established Niranjandeu, the spiritual reader of KuruwabahiSattra in a place of Auniati area, and showed him great respect in this way. Later, this place was named as **AuniatiSattra**. After that only, the **BamuniaSattras**likewise,**MahapurushiaSattra** was recognized as **Bamunia** or **RojaghoriaSattra**and became powerful. These four sattras of **Brahma Samhati**wasAuniati, Dakshinpat, Garmurh, Kuruwabahi.

Depending upon the speech 'MatitesheAax' spoken by Sri Sankardeva, four satras from the side of his grandson (son of sankarev'sdaughater) were redesigned **MahapurushiaSarisatra** – Naruwa, kowamora, digholi and samuguri. Since these satras are continuing generation after generation, this troop was named as **PurushSamhati**. After stabilising the **MahapurushiaSarisatra**inAhom kingdom, the subject of Samhati division grabbed effectively.

In reality, after the invitation of Ahom king JayadhwajSingha, Damodardev came upward from lower Assam and influenced him by describing the fact of the differences amongst the vaishnabism at that period in details. The king, satisfying on him established the **NarowaSatra**for him and sent people to rediscover the **BardowaSattra**. ThakurPurusuttam and Saturbhuj each of them selected 12 religious masterS and sent them to spread the religious culture to all over the Assam and that is the main reason of getting majority by this sanghati. According to that, SaturbhujThakur consideredDamodardev as the most obedient son and offered all the rights and responsibility to Damodardeva before he passed away. Later, those branches expanded to a number of satras. (*Satrasangskritirruprekha;pageno:3-6,keshabananda Devagoswami*)

Likewise the entire Assam was saturated with a number of sattras. The strong bond between general public and saints has changed the infrastructure of the society. Then by the support of Ahom kings, lots of sattrasspreaded the religion and towards the end a strong relationship had established between royal families and satras. The sattras, the unique and fundamental creation by Assamese spiritual leaders became an inevitable part of Baishnavismand contributed lots to the Indian Religious culture.

#### Satra: from the Religious point of view

The rules and regulations, religious maters and moral ideologies of sattras all together are discussed under the religious point of view of the sattra. The pyayer is considered as first and foremost task, similarly service to the spiritual leaders (Guru) of the sattra is obligatory. Personally, a **vaishnab** has to follow these rules. This personal care all together is termed as **Prasanga**. A number of rules of regular prayer have been established for devotees with the help of Vaishnabdevotees, these are named as **SaidhyaPrasanga**. Saidhya denotes fourteen. According to some books of 18<sup>th</sup> centuries Madhabdev is believed to be the one to implement fourteen principle of prayer. However, after that hiseldest grandson PurusuttamTalukder had given a distinct strategy of Prasanga system. As evidence, we can point to the rule to sing **Namghosha**before**Kirtan**and the fact of singing Guru Bhatima of Madhabdev in the evening in the assembly of prayer. (*Satrasangskritirruprekha;page no:33,keshabananda Devagoswami*)

Some of the relative principal rules to be followed in a Sattra from the point of religious view are discussed below:

1. Playing Taal: In its simplest form, it consists of a pair of small hand cymbals. The clash cymbal, taal is made of bell metals i.e. bronze, brass, copper, zinc etc. Each cymbal is connected with a cord which passes through hole in its center. The pitch of different types of taal vary according to their size, weight and the materials used. A player can also adjust the timbre by varying the point of contact while playing.

As soon as sun rise, an older devotee plays **Bhortaal.** The rhythm consist once at atime followed time thrice at the same time. A specificsong is also sung at this rhythm. Like other Prasangas**Raag** is absent here. Finishing the song, devotee stands up and plays four songs of **Gosha** one by one in the same rhythm and move around the **KirtanGhar** or **Manikut**.

2. **Manjira:** The devotational song is sung in rhythm played by taal and palm. **Doharisongs**are played at that time, followed by four Gosha songs and then a **Kirtan song.** In middle of the kirtan song the spiritual megssages and meaning of the lyrics are described in various manner. Both of them are finished before the sun set.

3. **Moring prasanga of women:** In the morning, the women pray by lighting **Bonti** (temple oil lamp); **Pradsad** is not distributed. As like as Monjira, here also the Prasanga is sung as **Shir**and**Dohar**. The special rhythm is followed in the Morning Prayer, but not in the evening. In general, they sings five **Ghoshas**in the morning; in special occasion nine Ghoshas also are to be sung in some Sattras, followed by a **Kirtan**. In some places two DuloriGhosas are sung after the Kirtan; sometimes DuloriGhorha is seen to be

replaced by "Ram-Ram-Ram-Ram-Ram"**Haridhwani**as conclusion of the Prasanga. No **uponishad**issungat the end of the prasanga by women.

4. **DerporiaJoraPrasanga:**Inkirtanghorthisprasangais performed in group (Joradhora) where temple is enlightened with oil lamp. The instruments such as **Gurughota**, **Doba-kah** followed by **khol-taal** is played and praying is done in a specific rhythm and the program is conluded by **Haridhwani**.

5. **DerporiaPrasanga:** This**prasanga**is considered to be the principalprasanga. Only one person ( the spiritual reader) perform this, by playing **Bhortal** or **Patital**. Here seven ghosha is sung followed by a kirtan. **Dulorighosha** is sung according to the need. The **Prasad** is distributed after finishing of this prasanga, which contains battle leaf and battle nut, Uncocked Rice, Peanut, Zinger, Salt in **chana and moong**, fruits like Banana, Coconut, Cucumber, Apple etc.

6. Paath and Upodesh: At the end of any Prasanga the "Advice speech" is sung as prayer, in specific rhythm and cool voice. It is called Upodesh. The Naam-prasangais considered to be conclude by Haridhwani after the Upodesh.

7. Jora orKhulPrasanga in the evening: This Prasanga is performed withGayan-Bayan and instruments such as Khol-TaallikeDerporiaPrasanga.

8. **Ghosha-Kirtan:** Eachmemberof Shir and Dohar plays a pair of Bhortal. Like other Prasanga, here also a prayer is played at first in rhythmfollowed by a Ghosha of **Namchanda** and four other Ghosha. Then a kirtan and a Diha, suitable to the subject of the Kirtan is played. After that the program is concluded with **DuloriGhosha**.

9. **Evening Naam of women:**As like as morning, the women perform Naam-Prasanga in the evening. The rhythm of Morning Prayer is played by clapping both hands, however in the evening the instruments like Khol-Taaletc. are played by Gayan-Bayan. Here a Ghosha of Naamchanda is played followed by four Ghosha then program is concluded with kirtan with Doha followed by Haridhwani.

10. **Prasanga of Playing Taal:** An old devotee performs this Prasanga as soon as the sun set with the help of **Bhortaal**, like in the morning. Before and after this Prasanga instruments like **Doba-kaah** is played. **Bonti** is also lightened at the same time.

11. The Gun-gowaPrasanga in the Evening: It is performed before and after prasanga of Taal Playing with Doba-kaah and lighting the Bonti. At first a song is sung in specific Raagfollowed by recitation a chapter of Gunmala. Then a chapter Leelamala, An upodesh, Chopoi, Devabhatima, Totay and Guru bhatima are played in chronological order. This programme is called as Gun-GuwaPrasanga. Haridhwawniis not played, instead again the Prasanga is started by singing a song in Raag. At the last of all, a Ghosha of Naamchanda is played followed by a Kirtan and programme is concluded in specific rules through Jayadhwani.

12. **Jora or KholPrasanga:** Like DerporiaKholPrasanga, a difficulttaal, specially**JutiaTaal** is played in order to make the programme more interesting. 13. **GhoshaPrasanga or Ghosha:** After the JoraPrasanga, Ghosha-kirtan is played, like evening Prasanga. Here a number of suitable **Dihas**to the subject of Kirtan are played in middle of the Kirtan.

14. **Last PaalJora:** This Prasanga is performed as the conclusion ceremony at the end of the day, with Gayan- Bayan, Khol-Taal at night.

Only thePrasangas are not regular religious activities in a Sattra some other activities include Festivales and events those are mentioned in **Panjika**. Some such activities are Birth and death **Tithies**of both Gurus "shankardeva and Madhabdeva", Nandotshab, Falgotshab, Rashotshab, Paalnametc. can be mentioned.

#### The birth and Death Tithies of both the Gurus:

MahapurushSriSriSankardeva and Madhabdeva was the starterand spreader of Baishnavism in Assam. The birth days of them are celebrated as jubilee in all the Sattras in entire region as the day long activity. Specially, on the **SuklaDashamithithi** of **Ashin**month (September-october) it is celebrated from morning with special rituals.

**Nandotshab**: The principal source of this vaishnab religion is Lord Krishna or Vishnu. Three important festivals relating to the birth and death ceremony of Lord Krishna is still celebrated all over the Assam, those are **Janmastomi**, Nandotshab, and **Paseti**. From the next morning of Jonmastomi, Nandotshab is started. The childs plays **Buka-Bhawna**, or **Pek- Jatra**withmud. However, the mud is not mixed with cow dung or any other materials. The women donot take part in this game or celebration. In some Sattras mustard oil is poured on earth and people are forced to fall and sleep over it. The Nandotshab in **Rajapukhuri**Sattra of south Kamrup, Assam is very significant. There mud is spread over the field of KirtanGhar and people get dirty and dances in rhythm of various music and songs. Similar celebration of Bukabhawna is also seen in Gujrat. (*'Axomiyasanhshkritirkonika', page no:200, edited by: Narayan Das, ParamanandaRajbonshi*)

**Falgotshab**: It is the festval of colour. The symble of colour represents the happiness and cheerfulness of life, specially the Falgotshab in BarpetaSattra is significantly important. All the activities how Sri Krishna goes to the house of **Ghunusa** and how he is stopped while returning from there, are shown very interestingly by the devotees through various **Naat- Bahwna**. **Sihnaajatra** is another principal attracted programme of this festival.

#### History and Religious direction of AuniatiSattra.

The preliminary reason of establishment and development of AuniatiSattra was ruling by various Kings at that period. In the Month of **Bhada** (August-September), 1956, **Nariya Raja** (**Sutingpha**) ascended the throne as the ruler of the upper part of Assam. A long days before his period, three followers of **Brahma Sanghati**started the **Bhagawati** religion. They were **Joyhoridev**, **Gopaldev** and **Niranjandev**. This sanghatispreaded to the peak during Niranjandev. When Nariya Raja rised with flying colours, his elder song became violent in upper Assam.

In the month of Kati (October-November), 1570, Nariya Raja was dethroned and then he was poisoned and killed by his officers. He got punishment due to the mistake of his son. Then his elder son Sutamla or KhahuwaGohain ascended to the throne, according to the Hindu took the name

JayadhwajShingha. Although he was not a follower of vaishnabism at the time of ascending, he was familiar with the Bhakta tradition and their system. He supported the Sattra culture more than his father. Before killing Nariya Raja jayadhwajSingha kept him separately in **Rongkham**and**Rajmaw**, came regularly to look after her husband. Naria Raja, at that time advised for his son, "Tell to the son, without changing the base, it is not easy to be the king." Following the advice of his father, the king interchanged his officers, along with his wife. He killed his brother as well as mother also for the throne. Father was also be killed by the workers of kitchen by poisoning. Just after ascending to the throne, three earthquakes were noticed within fourteen days. At that period Earthquake was considered as the symbol of outcome of sin of the king. The king was shocked specially because of three times earthquake was seen within fifteen days. He was suffured badly from the depression because of decease his brother, mother along with his wife. The natural disaster multiplied his depression Two times. At this situationfollowing the order of Rajmaw, the king established Guru Niranjandeb at Naukashal (place where the boats are manufactured) and listened about lord shit Krishna continuously for a few days. Then he learned about the significants of bhakti and enlightened with various knowledge. Then he became the follower of lord krishna.(Auniati shatrar buranji, Page No 81-82, Teerthanath Sharma).

At first this Sattra was on the North bank of River Dihing. At that period Dihing was at the place of today's Brahmaputra; later a stream of Brahmaputa joined to the Dihing River. But people never said it as Luhit, instead they called as Dihing only.

"Aunipatekobrikshataasil

Taarshomipotjatoshutrashajisit //

Etekesheaauniatinaamshutrakahe /

Dokshinedihingonodimohabegebohe //

Mohadevdoulnodishikuloiaasoy /

Shivarupshivakpujoynorosoy ||"

(KobichandraDwijokritakeshabaSoritapada)

Nariya Raja built AuniatiSattra on the North of River Dihing and just opposite of that, a temple of Lord Mahadeva was situated on southern bank. The *Aunipan* was there in a tree of this place. *Aati* means peak of elevated place. Cultivation can be done in these places. Beacause of this *Aunipan* in an *Aati* the name of this place was *Auniati*.

#### The Rules and Rituals of Sattra:

"Sharbbendriyanangsharbbeshbishnougotiranuttama |

Shwabhabikeebhagawateekarmajamuktihelini ||"

(shattatantra -4-14)

Dedicated devotation to Lord Bishnu with all the eight organs is called *KarmajaBhakti*. The devotees do not feel the need of anything if they achieve this *Bhakti*. The 24-30<sup>th</sup>verses of 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book "*Satottwotantra*", describes how to achieve KarmajaBhakti by praying Bhagawat with one's own organs. (*Auniatisattrarburanji,PageNo258-259,TeerthanathSharma*).

## **Regular Puja:**

The devotees meet **Paramatma**(god) in Manikut. Sri SriGovinda (Lord Bishnu) lives in Manikut and controls all the activitied in the Sattra. All such activities in AumiatiSattra is performed and concluded in his name. The activities like Bathing, Offering Prasad of Puja and Praying etc are performed continuously to the Lord Govinda and four other statues on his both sides. The head devotee is responsible for bathing and praying to the Lord Govinda and other devotees perform these activities for the rest statues.

The door of Manikut remains closed till the last of the prayer to Lord Govinda. After that the devotees receives *Nirmali* and meet the Father of the Sattra as soon as open the door.

Besides regular Puja, yearly some other Pujas are also celebrated in some special days, for example *Jonmastomi, tnibor ekadoshi, Nobamna and Kati bihu*. Again, in special puja of *BahagBihuBhog, Pitha, Ladu* and *Prasad* are also distributed. Besides the *Tithies* of forfathers, the Tihies of other *Mahapurush*alao celebrated in AuniatiSattra. Specially, tithies of MahapurushSankardeva, and Madhabdeva, BahagBihu for seven days, Kati Bihu, and Maghbihu are celebrated. Specially, the Sattra is enlightened with 21 pairs of *Banti*on the day of Kati Bihu. The Paal-naam and Rasotsab is also celebrated in respective manner.

#### **Branches of Sattras**

There is the facility of connecting and educating the students regularly through the branches of main Sattras. At that period the transportation was not very convenient, hence it was difficult to go to the same place regularly in a very short interval; for that reason the students were contained in a specific place for longer period and they were educated in these places. However this was the universal system of education in those days. Later these places were converted to branches of a main Sattra. At first during *Niranjandev*, *Karigaon(Kattigaon)* was the only such sub-Sattra. Gradually it was expanded to *Govindapur, Geberapara and GiriPahumara*.

	place or name of the	Bigroh present or
District	Branch	not
Dibrugarh (sodia)	Boragi Moth	No
North Lakshimpur	BoliagaruSattra	No
	Gobindapur	Yes
Shivasagar	BhuyahatSattra	yes

At present the Sub-Sattras are;

Nagaon	JagiSattra	yes
	RohaNangothaSattra	yes
	KrishnaiKhat-sattra	yes
	DhingSattra	yes
	Edoliyaborsattra	yes
	BorbariSattra	yes
	SamoguriSattra	yes
Kampup	North GuwwahatiSatra	yes

#### In short about the Sri SriAuniatiSub-Sattra of North Guwahati:

AuniatiSattra is one of the four **Raja Sattras**established in Assam. The other such Sattras are Kuruabahi, Dakshinpat and GormurhSsattra. It was established in 1557. There are fourteen sub sattras situated in various districts of Assam under the main sattra. One of them is situated to the North of famous AshwaklantaDewalaya, that is on the north side of River Brahmaputara in Kamrup district. In 1837 Sri sriKamalchndraDebagoswami took 60 Bigha land in lease from AshwaklantaDewalaya and established the AuniatiSattra. Before that it was situated in Amoni (Now bharaluFatashil), Kamrup metro.(BornilSangskriti, page no 259, Bhabendra Nath Saikia) The principal **Bigroh**of this Sattra is GopinathMahaprobhu. As soon as GopinathMahaprobhu came, this sattraraised with flying colours.

Thereafter, the head monk of AuniatiSattra**Bhagawatbhaskar**SriSriHemchandradev travelled the entire India for 10 months from 1879 to 1880. Gathering the experiences of this period, he reformed the AuniatiSattra of North Guwahatito the modern form with concrete.

PaalNaam is one of the important programms those hold in this Sattra every year. Rash of Dakshinpat and Paalnaam of Auniati is known by every single person of Asam. The Paalnaam is organized for three days from 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of the month Kati (October-November). However, in main Sattra it is celebrated for 5days from 25<sup>th</sup> of the same month. Thousands of people attend this festival every year.

The meaning of Paal is group. The hostellers of the Sattra perform this paalnaam one by one hostel wise in these days. All hostellers perform atleast once a day. The regular prayer is continues without any disruption from 10AM to 5 PM along with the paalnaam. At the last the head monk and young monk prostate on the ground with eight parts of the bodyand worship. The specific person offers blessing, who is responsible for that. This blessing can be considered as a special property of auniatiSattra. Here all the saints' and **shiromonis**ofvaishnabism in entire India are remembered. In the blessing a stanza is spoken for the betterment and satisfaction of all components of nature like river, mountain, sea, tree, animal, bird, water, earth etc. In this way of blessing a message is conveyed about the existence of God in everywhere and to praying him is the best way of satisfaction, happiness and solution of all the problems.

From the day of establishment of this Sattra the chief priests were NandinathSarmah, BhaddeswarSarmahandDurlavSarmah respectively. Now this position is occupuying by Sri BhaendranathSarmah. The surrounding of this Sattra is

To the East: The river Brahmaputra

To the West :SankardevShishuNiketon

To the Nort :DirghrswarisndDoul-gobinda Temple

To the South: Ashwaklantadewalaya.

This is about the AuniatiSatra in short.

# **Conclusion:**

The sattra plays an important role in the socio-cultural field of Assam. The manners and customs of these satras are traditionally following all over the Assam. There is need of details study about the other sides also those have been inculdesd by these sattras. Focussing these nee it is trying to include some specific points relating to the Sattras such as history, religious background and customes of the Auniatisattra.

In order to systematic study, a brief history of Assam is included in first chapter along with the origin of Sattras in this place. Similarly, the idea of various customs or religious activities by which a sattra is conducted regularly are discussed in the second chapter. The fourteen Prasangas along with the death anniversaries of the Vaishnab Saints and other related yearly festivals such as Janmastomi, Falgotsab, Rash- mahotsabetc are discussed to the possible extent in this chapter.

At the last, the focus- origin and traditional customs, religious activities of the Auniatisattra is discussed. At the same timev, the AuniatiSattra of North Guwahati as a branch of the main Auniatisattra, Majuli, Assam, is discussed along with some other related matters. From the ancient period all the religious activities are still prevailing appropriately. We hope that the same will be continued in future also.

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