

Construction Technology of Namghar of Assam, India



Puspanjali Hazarika

Abstract: *Namghar is the identity of the Assamese Community. Namghar tried to make unity among people. It is a part and parcel of the Ek Xaran Nava Vaishnava religion promoted by Srimanta Sankardeva. Sankardeva tried to establish a powerful community by eliminating all the differences regarding cast and creed and distributing the light of education among the people at a time when Assam had faced a pathetic condition on religion. Namghar and Satra's were established aiming at promoting literature, music, dance, drama, sculpture, and architecture along with promoting religion. According to prominent scholar Dr. Maheswar Neog, Nam, Deva, Guru, and Bhakat are the base of Nava-vaishnava religion. The bhakats from the rural areas follow their life along with serving the God and the Guru. They were able to promote the Nava- Vaishnava religion among the people while living a strict spiritual life. Therefore to Nurture Vhaisnav's culture and worship the God Namghar was established. The impact of the rules and regulation followed in the Namghar have certain impacts on the villages all over Assam. Different festivals are celebrated in Assamese society. In the same way, there are different festivals that are celebrated in the Namghar. They were originated with the root relating to Navavahsinava religion. For example- Tithi of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, Ankiya Nat, Rash, Janmastami, Fakuwa, Pal Nam, Bar Sabah, Gokhai Bihu are Celebrated in the namghar. And namghar plays a vital role in Assamese social life from various perspective. These include- establishing equality and promoting dignity to everyone, Acting as a village parliament, solving dispute, centre for planning and reform, preserving ethnic culture, etc. Besides it works as a forum for shelter during different hazards.*

From the constructional point of view, it is a very unique method used, which is traditionally dispatched among the Assamese community. This paper tried to discuss various technology and constructional system of Namghar.

Keywords: Technology, Namghar, Assam, Architecture, Sankardeva, Monikut. Society. Lay-Out.

I. INTRODUCTION

Namghar literally means The House of Names. Namghar is a combination of two words 'Nam' + 'Ghar'. In the Assamese language, 'Naam' denotes 'prayer' and 'Ghar' refers 'house'. Namghar is the prayer house of the Assamese community. More than a reverent place of worship, a Namghar is considered as a commonplace of gathering for congregations, as well as theaters for dramatic performances (*bhaona*). Assamese culture is primarily based on Vaishnav Dharma which is the creation of Srimanta Shankardeva, the greatest Assamese of all time.

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Shankardeva had created Satras and Naamghars for Assamese people where they can culture and practice naam (devotional songs) and Bhakti of God (devotion). Shankardeva believed in only one God and invited people of every religion to follow his Eksharan Naam Dharma, where God can be achieved by extreme devotion and faith in one God, and the way to find God is by uttering His name by Naam. The another name of namghar the *kirtanghar*, is also the key structure in the *Sattras* (monasteries of the *Ekasarana* religion) where the other buildings are positioned around it. It is the permanent feature of every village, town and city of Assam. This has transformed Sankardeva's religion to a living religion. The *Namghars* also serve as a panchayat-hall, where the villagers gather to discuss various issues or problems of the village and community life and political as well as economic and social subjects. Such type of institution brings unity among the Assamese community. During medieval times, the main prayer house was variously named as deva-griha, satra-griha, devar-mandira, gosain-ghar, hari-griha, kirtana mandira, prasangar ghar, mani-kut or bhaj-ghar. The Namghar's doors remain open for people of every walk of life irrespective of caste, creed and gender.

Origin of the Namghar:

Namghar was a creation of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva, who can reform the Assamese community. He can developed all aspects of the Assamese community. Namghar construction technology also developed along with Navabaisnav religion and Bhakti movement.

Introduction of Namghars by the Vaishnavite saints like Damodaradeva, Madhavadeva, and Sankaradeva lead to the practice of Naam and culture. The first Namghar established by Sanakardeva at Naamghar at Bordowa in Nagaon district.

Construction Technology of Namghar:

The *Namghar* is generally a large open hall where people can collectively offer prayer. Originally constructed with bamboo, reeds, and thatch, the *Namghar* is even now a humble structure without any outward show or ostentation. It has gabled roofs, the western facade being apsidal. A *Namghar* of the ancient type (the modern *Namghar* is simply an open rectangular hall) consists of a nave and side aisles with rows of wooden pillars separating the nave from the aisles. According to the number of bhakats or disciples to be accommodated, the size of Namghar varies.

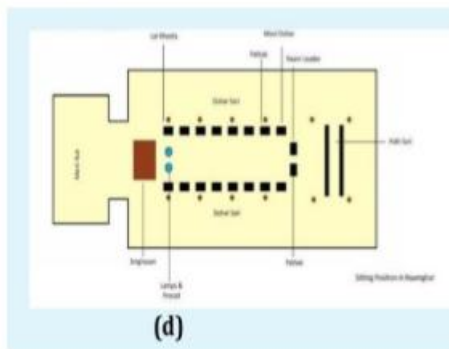
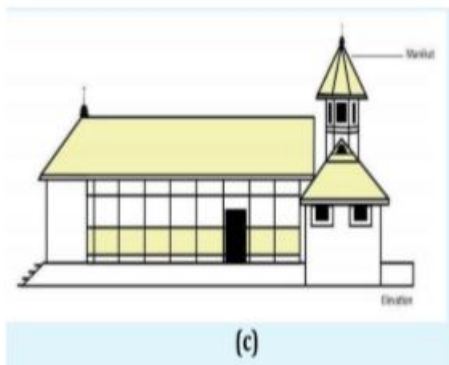
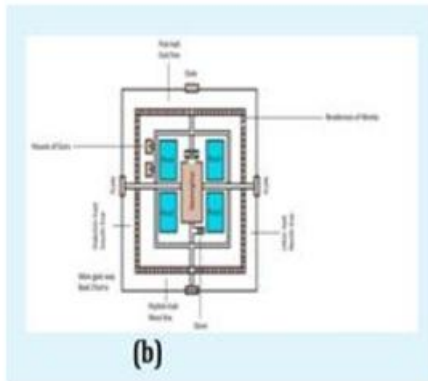
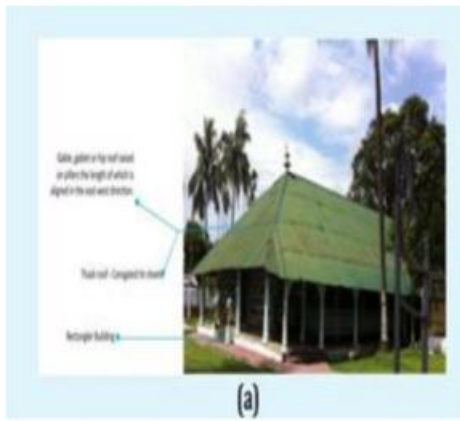


Figure: 1 Layout of a Nghar in a Satra in Assam. (a) Overview of Namghar in India, (b) Plan view of Satra, (c) Side View of Namghar of Assam (d) Plan view showing the interior design elements in Namghar (Monga & Das, 2018)

Various parts of Namghar:

Assembly Hall:

The Namghar is rectangular is a rectangular house with a gable in an east-west direction. The structure prepared with bamboo and timber but now it is prepared by concrete. A veranda includes the outer wall.

The gate of Namghara is very attractive to the sculpture of a lion, hanuman, etc.

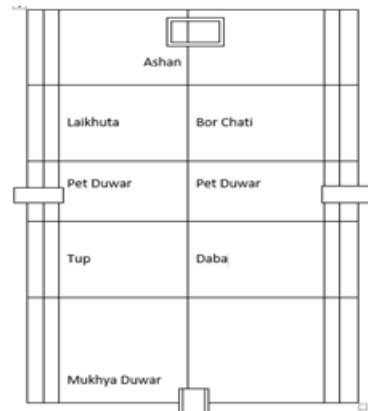


Figure: 2- Internal View of Namghar

Manikut:

The actual shrine where the sacred scripture is kept is called **manikut**. It is a small structure than Namghar in eastern side. It is the sanctum -sanctorum of the entire establishment and as the sacred scripture and all the valuables of the Satra are kept here, it is called **manikut**, literally the house of jewels.

The west end of the hall does not, in general, have doors and windows, though very often it leads to an independent room called *manikut* (literally: the jewel hut), also called *bhajghar* in western Assam, with its own roof. It is fully walled, with either no windows or small ones and also function as a repository of important articles.

Guru Asana:

The Guru Asana, literally the Seat of the Guru is a seven-tiered, triangular, wooden throne adorned by the tortoise-elephant, Peacock or Dragon motif and other decorative woodwork.

Idol worship is absent in a Namghar and no idol is worshipped, even that of Krishna, in any form. The only object of veneration being the sacred text placed on the top-most tier of the Guru Āsana. The gurus message as well as the highest truth propounded by him.



Figure: 3- Guru Asana

Various Perspective Of The Namghar In The Assamese Society: With all these effects, the namghar has certain other imprints in the society. It shapes the public views. It creates awareness among people. It also affects society in a variety of ways.

- a) **Establishing Equality And Promoting Dignity To Everyone:** The namghar is a platform of public discussion and public festivals. Here the people from the villages take part in every moment with the same courage and inspiration. Thereby it creates a sense of equality. In the namghar, people collectively recognizes others at various occasion who does something for the village. Thus it identifies their dignity and respect.
- b) **Acting As A Village Parliament:** The namghar provides a platform for discussion of various issues. Everyone can present their opinions. From these opinions, a democratic discussion takes place. Thus it behaves like a village parliament and form the view of the people.
- c) **Solving Dispute:** The namghar is also a platform for solving disputes. Therefore it acts as a village court. Small disputes are discussed in the Gram Sabha and certain resolutions are passed. These resolutions are taken as the order or the ruling of the Gram sabha. Everyone accepts it and obeys it.
- d) **Centre For Planning And Reform:** The Gram sabha organized in the Namghar lays the foundation of the planning and reform in the villages. The public funds to be used are opened there for discussion. Certain other rules and regulation in the society are modified in the Namghar.
- e) **Preserving Ethnic Culture:** The namghar is the Centre of all cultural activities. It starts with the Boorgeet to the Dihanaam, from dance t drama etc. thereby it helps to preserve the traditional culture

of the Assamese people. It provide a platform for cultural development and preservation.

- f) **A Forum For Shelter During Different Calamities:** During different calamities like Flood, the Namghar is used as a place of shelter. The Namghar has a large area and is accessible to all the people in the village. Therefore it is easy to use as a place for temporary settlement during a natural disaster.

II. CONCLUSION:

Namghar is the soul of the Assamese community, which can create unity and continuity among the Assamese community. From the constructional point of it is very unique in nature. The Namghar constructed with all essential components for any program. With changing context Namghar construction technology also change. So study and preserve of the constructional technology of Namghar is very essential. Traditional technology studies can open the door for the architectural structure of the Assamese house. Namghar is an integral part of the Assamese people. It is a Centre of cultural development different festivals are associated with it. Different cultures are developed with the influence of the Nam Ghar. Individuals Namghar, Singhasan Xarai, Ghanta Handloom, etc. have a close connection with it. Moreover, it is a community centre for all Assamese people. Our study titled “ Namghar as A Social Institution: A Study on Its Importance on Assamese Social Life” we can conclude:

- a. Namghar is the epicenter of the cultural development of Assamese people. Different occasions like tithi of Shrimanta sanakrdeva, and Madahvdeva, Janmastami, Rakh, Bhaona, Bihu, Bor sabah are celebrated in a namghar through these festivals in the namghar people get the opportunity to learn music dance and drama classes in the village level.
- b. It is observed that all the village people celebrate these festivals with great respect and spirituality.
- c. The Assamese people are united socially by these namghar e respective of caste creed and economic differences.
- d. The Namghar plays an important role in the maintenance of respect towards elders and love towards, Youngers in Assamese society.

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Puspanjali Hazarika, is a PhD Research Scholar of Department of Assamese, Dibrugarh University, she completed B.A in Assamese with first class first position from Dibrugarh University. And she Completed Masters of Arts in Assamese with first Class, She also cleared UGC- NET with JRF. She presently works on the field of cultural heritage of Assam and Language diversity of Assam. She published research paper

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