



Naamghar Association of America

NEWSLETTER

WWW.NAAMGHAR.ORG

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MESSAGE FROM THE BOR-MEDHI

Dear community members and well-wishers of NAAM,

We have learned to live with Covid around us in a safer manner, practicing the recommended techniques. Now coming to this fourth quarter newsletter of 2021 from NAAM, it is my pleasure to highlight a few key points:

- A) We celebrated the Sankaradeba Janmotsav this year in October for the second time in a row in the past two years. We have decided that NAAM will organize a mid-year fund raising event with ticket sale and donations, and then the Janmotsav for free to our audience of well-wishers.
- B) We continue to meet with Assam / Indian government officials wherever possible to talk about our cause for a Naamghar in America. This included my wife and I visiting the consulate's office in New York City in November 2021 to meet with Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Honorable Minister of State for External Affairs and Education, Govt. of India. Dr. Singh is a Manipuri and did his Ph.D. at Guwahati, Assam. Additionally, a few of us met with Dr Ravi Kota, Minister (Economics), Embassy of India, Washington DC in December to update him about our efforts.
- C) The New York Consul General (CG), Mr. Vijayakrishnan, advised us to

register NAAM at their government website, which was completed: indiainnewyork.gov.in. Anyone can go to the site and view NAAM now. We can also modify it easily. I put the contact details of the three of our seven trustees besides myself, namely, Shyam DevChoudhury (Secretary), Purandar Sarmah (Treasurer) and Niren Choudhury (Trustee).

- D) I completed my one full year of on-line classes taken at the HUA (Hindu University of America), the fourth quarter being on a class on Ramayana by Shantanu Gupta. He clearly explained that there are only two epics in India or even globally that qualify to be called *Itihash*, and they are Mahabharata and Ramayana, the former being 7000 years old and the latter 14000 years. An *Itihash*, by definition has three attributes, namely, history, storytelling, and learning *Dharmic* principles with critical thinking.
- E) Dr. Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti, President of Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva, is organizing an international webinar series on Sankaradeva. The speakers for December 2021 to February 2022 have been selected and includes Dr. Arshiya Sethi of New Delhi in December 2021, Geeta Thandi of the Bay Area of California in January 2022, and myself in

February 2022. The topic assigned to me was “Comparison between Christianity and *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma*”. Therefore, I prepared an article on this topic, which is shown in this issue of the newsletter. I would welcome your thoughts, preferably prior to my seminar delivery in early February 2022.

Finally, greetings to all for a safe and happy Holiday season and the New Year.

I am looking forward to your feedback and continued co-operation to drive the processes for our Naamghar mission.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Dr. Binoy K. Bordoloi, *Bor Medhi*

Email: binoy.bordoloi@gmail.com

UPDATE ON FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Encouraged by the successful cultural event hosted on August 28, 2021 to raise community awareness about NAAM's activities and to raise funds for a Naamghar in North America, NAAM is planning **additional such fund raising activities in 2022**. Stay tuned.

NAAM also soliciting your donations via its website (<https://naamghar.org/>), NAAM Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/NaamgharAssociationOfAmerica/>), and the “DONATE” button on this page to fund a community Naamghar in North America.

We encourage our well wishers who shop at Amazon, to use the link <https://smile.amazon.com/> and add "Naamghar Association of America" as the designated charity.

By adding a charity at Amazon Smile does not cost you additional charges. It is free.

NAAM is looking forward to an active participation of the community (Assamese diaspora) for realizing a common dream of building a Naamghar in North America. Please use the “DONATE” button below and/or contact Dr. Binoy Bordoloi at binoy.bordoloi@gmail.com for additional information. Thank you!



Please contribute to NAAM's effort to build a naamghar in North America:



FEATURED ARTICLE

COMPARISON BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND EKA SARANA NAMA DHARMA

By Dr. Binoy K. Bordoloi

This article is divided into four parts as follows:

- 1) *Sanatana* Dharma and the Hindu Mind
- 2) Essential Elements of Hinduism and *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma*
- 3) Comparison of Beliefs in Hinduism and Christianity
- 4) Sattra practicing *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma* vs. Catholic Monastery

Chapter – 1: *Sanatana* Dharma and the Hindu Mind

The correct name for the religion of the Hindus is “*Sanatana* Dharma” (Eternal or Universal Righteousness). The word Hindu is derived from the ancient Persians, who invaded North-Western India around 600 BC. They came across the Sanskrit speaking people living across the river Indus (called *Sindhu* in Sanskrit), and therefore called them *Sindhus*. In the Persian language, the word “*Sindhus*” became Hindu, and hence the people living in India came to be known as Hindus.

The early Hindus composed Vedas (i.e. the hymns, the primary scripture of Hinduism), between 6000 to 2500 BC, and the persons managing the affairs of the Vedas were known as Brahmins. The following are the milestones in the development of Hindu religious thoughts. It should be recognized that the authorities differ on dates to which some of the earlier events are assigned.

(I) Early Vedic Period: 6000 – 1500 BC

Rig Vedic hymns were created in this period.

(II) Later Vedic Period: 1500 – 300 BC

Vedic mantras were recorded in this period. Aranyakas and Upanishads were added to the collection of Vedic hymns. The Hindu mind evolved from the worship of the natural forces to the conception of a single all – encompassing Universal Spirit, known as Brahmins in the Upanishads (not to be confused with “Brahma”, the God of Creation).

(III) Sutra Period: 700 – 200 BC

Sankhya and Brahma Sutras were recorded in this period. The development of Buddhism and Jainism also took place in this period.

(IV) Epic Period: 500 BC – 200 AD

This period saw the development of the **Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagawad Gita**, Manu Sangheeta, some of the earlier Puranas and the Philosophical Sutras. The higher training of Upanishads was made available to the common people in the form of ancient stories and legends. According to the faculty member of HUA teaching Ramayana in Fall-2021, Shantanu Gupta, it is however safe to say that **Mahabharata is about 7000 years old and Ramayana about 14,000 years**, for which he cited evidence/references for the two **Itihashes** (meaning it has three aspects – history, story, and Dharma, all in one).

(V) Puranic Period: 300 AD – 1500 AD

Puranic and Tantric literature was developed in this period.

(VI) Darshana Period: 750 AD – 1000 AD

The establishment of Sankaracharya Advaita Vedanta Philosophy and the decline of Buddhism in India were the two land-marks of this period. The advent of devotional movement occurred among mystic poets of South India known as *Alwars*.

(VII) Bhakti Movement: 1000 AD – 1800 AD

This period saw the rise of devotional worship expounded by Ramanuja, Ramananda, Kavir, Tukaram, Guru-Nanak, Mira Bai, Chaitanyadev, **Sankardeva**, and other religious teachers and saints.

(VIII) Modern Hindu Renaissance: 1800 AD – 1950 AD

Many Hindu religious leaders, saints and scholars nourished Hinduism in this period. They unified Hindus in India by opposing caste system, by opposing excessive bad influence of ritualism and idol worships. The note-worthy leaders of modern Hindu Renaissance include Ram-mohan Ray, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurovinda, and Mahatma Gandhi.

Hinduism, a religion of universal harmony and peace views mankind as one large family. It is concerned with the principles that define the universe, the individual, and God. In Hinduism, there is the eternal pursuit of the purity and true knowledge that are essential to recognizing the brotherhood and oneness of all mankind. Hinduism is a fellowship of all those who believe in the following seven essential doctrines:

- (1) Divinity of the Individual Soul
- (2) Universal Tolerance and Harmony

- (3) Diversity of the Human Mind
- (4) Purity of Reasons and Freedom of Thought
- (5) Non-violence and Peaceful Co-existence
- (6) Reverence of All Forms of Life
- (7) Laws of 'Karma' ("As you sow, so you reap")

Chapter – 2: Essential Elements of Hinduism and *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma*

Hindus believe in the following concepts:

A) The Creation

Hindus believe that the universe is without a beginning (anadi) and without an end (ananta). Hindus declare that non-existence can never be the source of creation. Therefore, the universe is more accurately said to be the "projection" of the Supreme Being rather than a creation. The universe is projected in cycles. Whenever the word 'beginning' and 'end' are used in Hindu Scriptures, they simply denote the beginning and end of a particular cycle. Each cycle is divided into four Yugas:

- (1) Satya Yuga
- (2) Tetra Yuga
- (3) Dwapara Yuga
- (4) Koli Yuga

At the end of Koli Yuga, the universe is dissolved by Pralaya and another cycle begins. **Each cycle of creation lasts one Kalpa (i.e. 12,000,000 human years or 12,000 Brahma years).**

B) Supreme Reality

Hindus believe that the Supreme Reality has two aspects:

(1) Transcendental (Impersonal)

(2) Immanent (Personal)

In transcendental aspect, it is called by various names, such as Supreme Self, Ultimate Reality and Nirguna Brahma. The Supreme Reality is considered form-less, attribute-less, immutable, indeterminate and unapproachable by the human mind. The Supreme Reality is the nature of absolute existence, absolute knowledge, and absolute bliss.

In immanence, the Supreme Reality is viewed from the personal aspect, such as Iswar, Paramatma. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, infinite, just, merciful creator, preserver and controller of the Universe.

C) Incarnation

Whenever righteousness declines and un-righteousness rises, God incarnates Himself on earth in human form to restore righteousness.

D) Atma

Atma is immortal and divine. Atma means God within, usually translated as “Soul” or “Spirit.”

E) Mokshya

The ultimate goal of Hindu religious life is to attain freedom from the cycle of birth and death and attain union with God. The union can be achieved through:

(1) True knowledge (Jnana)

(2) Devotion (Bhakti)

(3) Right work (Karma)

F) Guru

The true Guru is God-realized-master. He/she teaches us by setting an example

with his/her daily acts of his/her own life. **Srimanta Sankaradeva** was such a Guru, who started the **neo-Vaishnavite** movement.

G) Doctrine of Karma

Ignorance is viewed as the cause of bondage (maya). True knowledge attained by the Grace of God through a Guru burns this bondage just like a blasting fire burns firewood to ashes.

H) Unity of Existence

The aim of life is to live harmoniously on earth and seek union with God

I) Dharma

Hindus believe that the Dharma is essential for accomplishing material and spiritual goals and for the growth of the individual and the society. **Srimanta Sankaradeva** preached about **Eka Sarana Nama Dharma**. He taught that one needed to worship only one God for spirituality, Krishna.

J) Universal Prayer

Universality of prayers is a great feature of Hinduism. Hindus do not pray for themselves alone. Their prayer is designed for all of mankind at the conclusion of their worship or religious ceremony. The same is practiced in **Eka Sarana Nama Dharma**, where one sings a devotional song for prayer.

Chapter – 3: Comparison of Beliefs in Hinduism and Christianity

Hinduism is respectful of all religions as shown in *Jnanayoga* (Gita, Chapter -5, Shloka-11). A brief comparison is summarized in Table-1 (next page).

Table-1: Comparison of Hinduism and Christianity

Hinduism	Christianity
A. Hinduism is the world's oldest surviving religion. It has no human founder, and is beginning-less, as it predates recorded history	A. Christianity was founded by Jesus of Nazareth about 2000 years ago in Israel
B. Major scriptures are Vedas, Bhagawad Gita, and Epics and other Shastras	B. Major scriptures are Bible, Old and New Testament
C. Hinduism has three main denominations: Shaivism, Saktisism and Vaishnavism	C. Christianity has three main denominations: Roman Catholic, Eastern Catholic, and Protestant, which has numerous denominations
Major Beliefs in Each	
1. There is only One Supreme being. He is both immanent and transcendent, both the Creator and the Manifest Reality. There is no duality of God and the world, but only unity	1. There is but one God, who reveals Himself as Father, Son and Holy Ghost. God is Creator, but He is distinct from his creation. There is duality of God and the world
2. There is no beginning or end of the universe. Universe has existed eternally, and only undergoes cycle of creation, preservation and dissolution	2. The world was once created by God, but corrupted by sin. Under a divine scheme, the world moves towards God for final perfection
3. The soul is not created by God, but it is a part of God. It suffers in the world due to " <i>Maya</i> " (i.e. cosmic ignorance)	3. The soul is created by an act of God. It suffers in world for original sin
4. Upon death the soul enters the astral world and remains there until it re-incarnates in accordance with the Laws of Karma . The soul is born again and again as Karma resolves. God neither judges nor punishes the soul, and as such there is no Judgment Day. Salvation (union with God) is the goal of religious life	4. The soul enters heaven or hell depending on the quality of life. On the Judgment Day, the dead is brought to life again and rewarded or punished with eternal life with God or eternal hell, respectively
5. Proof of God's existence lies in direct communication with Him, through the grace of a Guru, who guides an individual on a spiritual path	5. Jesus is God for the earth and therefore only sure path to salvation.
6. Worship of God is in the form of a deity or a point of concentration and is both ritualistic and meditative, centered around the Temple or home Shrine, a Naamghar	6. Worship of God is congregational with simple rituals centering around the place of worship in the Church

Chapter – 4: Sattra Practicing *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma* vs. Catholic Monastery

Majuli, under the district of Jorhat, is the largest inhabited river island in the world. One must cross the Brahmaputra River by boat to get there. It is a treasure house of our heritage and **neo-Vaishnavite** culture. As pointed out in Chapter-2 above, **Srimanta Sankardeva** was born in Assam, the North-East part of India, in the **Bhakti Movement** period of 1000 AD to 1800 AD. He was the **Guru** to guide the natives of this region on a spiritual path. Srimanta Sankardeva, his disciple Madhabdeva, their followers successively established sixty-five **Sattras** in Majuli. The total number has been reduced due to flood and erosion. It is believed that there are about twenty-two Sattras in Majuli today, and about eight hundred in Assam.

These Sattras are very unique, because there is no similar institution in any other part of India, though reportedly the institution resembles, to a certain extent, the Buddhist monastery or the Matha of the mediaeval period. The prominent Sattras in Majuli include Auniati, Dakshinpat, Kamalabari and Garamur. When one visits a Sattra, one would appreciate its calm, quiet and peaceful environment.

Sankardeva started preaching about *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma* in these Sattras. It means that one needs to worship only one God, Krishna, and not many Gods and Goddesses. While he studied the Hindu scriptures extensively, he decided to write the devotional poetry praising one God in the native language, instead of Sanskrit, prevalent at that time. His objective was that a common man or woman would be able to understand the devotion to God. This was the neo-Vaisnavite movement that he initiated by doing away with idol worshipping but praising only one God in one's heart. Thus, his deity was a Guru Axon housing the books of **Gunamala**, or the **Kirtan Ghosha**. Then Madhabdeva created the **Naam Ghosha**.

The Sattras are small communities with four principal parties. The religious head of the

institution is known as Adhikar or **Satradhikar**, (*Guru*). Then comes the Dekha-Adhikar, the heir apparent, thirdly, the clerical devotees known as Bhakats, (*Xishyas*), residing within the four walls of the Sattra, and lastly, the devotees or disciples of the villages leading house-holder's life. In some Sattras the Adhikar as well as the Bhakats are residing within the Sattra compound living a celibate life, whereas in others they are married and lead a family life. The head of the Sattra is popularly known as "Adhikar-Gosain" in case he is a Brahmin, and "Mahanta", if non-Brahmin. A woman usually can remain within the four walls of a Sattra in the day-time only and as a rule must leave by sun-set. Some Sattras still follow this principle, but some no longer practice this.

Auniati Sattra is one of the most prominent of the Sattras of Majuli. It was established in 1653 at Auniati in Majuli by the Ahom King Jayadhwaj Singha. It has a **Naamghar** (prayer hall), and a **Monikut** (that houses the deity of the Guru Axon where the scripture is kept, e.g., **Bhagavad, Gunamala, Kirtan, or Naam Ghosha**). It also has **Gurugriha** (residence of the Satradhikar), residence for Bhakats, Treasury, Auditorium, Library -cum- Museum, Store house, Guest House, Sanskrit Tol and Press. The sixteenth Satradhikar of Auniati Sattra was Dr. Sri Sri Pitambar Deva Goswami since 1998. There are about four hundred Bhakats in Auniati Sattra at present. It has several branches outside of Majuli. A major one is at Kaliapani, Teok, near Jorhat, and another in North Guwahati.

If one compares a Sattra with the Catholic Monastery, some of the following points may be noted, as summarized in Table-1. Parishes are also included for comparison, whether Catholic or Protestant.

Table-2: Comparison of a Sattra with a Catholic Monastery

<u>Attributes</u>	<u>Catholic</u>		<u>Majuli Sattras</u>
	<u>Monasteries</u>	<u>Parishes</u>	
Organization	These house monks (or Convents for nuns) who have given their life to the services of God and will perform prayerful activities to serve the community; pontiff at the Roman Catholic Church is the Pope; the hierarchy is : Pope > Cardinals > Archbishop > Bishop > Priest	Parishes are large groups of worshiping lay people at neighborhood churches, whether Catholic or Protestant; individual Catholic church is headed by Chief Priest, always a man, whereas the Protestant church is headed by a Minister, who can be a woman; Catholics have confessionals, but Protestants do not.	Sankardeva's socio-cultural-religious innovation was Decentralized Leadership Management; every Sattra has its independent Satradhikar, who is the chief executive officer, and he may form a committee of Bhakats for their viewpoints; Satradhikars do not report to any centralized authority
Earning a Living	Living expenses of inmates are from donations, alms and sponsorships; certain orders earn money, but none is individually kept, all goes back to Monastery or Convent		Bhakats live on agricultural activities; Sattras generate their own income from assets they own, though donations are received also
Cultural Activities	There is no cultural activity requirement, though they can have special calling for music, teaching or nursing		Participation of Bhakats in Satriya cultural activities is a requirement, e.g. in Satriya dance, music and dramas/ <i>Bhaonas</i>
Practicing Celibacy	Only Celibates; Roman Catholic priests take a vow of celibacy and abstain from sexual relations		Sattras have both celibates and house-holders or families; celibacy seems to be a minority; one example is Auniati Sattra

To conclude, I present you the Universal Prayer of the Hindu Mind:

- সৰ্বেভবসুখিনঃ / “Xarbe Bhabantu Xukhinah”
(May all of mankind be happy)
- সৰ্বেসক্কাৰিৰাম্যঃ / “Xarbe Xantu Niramayah”
(May all of mankind be healthy)
- সৰ্বেভদ্রাপিসম্যক্ / “Xarbe Bhadrani Pasyantu”
(May all of mankind experience prosperity)
- মাক্ষিতদুঃখঃভাগভবেৎ / “Maa Kachitt
Dukhbhaga Bhabett” (May none in the world suffer)

(This article is prepared in four chapters. The first three stem from thought-provoking hand-written notes, which were found in the diary of the author's late father, Dr. Nobin C. Bordoloi, Jorhat. It has been prepared after a suggestion by Mohesh Kalita, New Jersey to facilitate a group discussion during the "Gita path" get-together on August 4, 2012, at the residence of Dr. Aradhana Satin, New Jersey, daughter of Late Debeswari & Sudhir Baruah, Jorhat. Author also thankfully acknowledges additional comments and thoughts received from Late Dr. Brojen Bordoloi, New Jersey, Late Dr. Kripanath Borah, New Jersey, Dr. Robert Satin, New Jersey, Dr. Phanindra Sarma, Michigan, M. Ismail Hossain, Guwahati, and Late Dr. Kutubuddin Ahmed, Jorhat.

The fourth chapter was prepared by the author after a dialog with an associate of Johnson & Johnson, where the author worked in his professional career. The associate's name is Dr. Maggie D'Aversa, an American of Irish descent, and a catholic by religion. However, the author takes full responsibility of the content).

The author can be reached at: binoy.bordoloi@gmail.com.



RECENT AND UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Mrs. Rupanjali Baruah, wife of Dr. Anil Kumar Baruah, both residents of Mumbai, donated land in Karjat, a city in Maharashtra about 64 km east of Mumbai, to establish the first Naamghar in that region.

Karjat is well known for the Bahiri Cave which is a Hindu pilgrimage site. Additionally, the ancient Kondeshwar Temple located in Karjat is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The famous Kondana Caves, the 16 man-made caverns dating from

the 1st century B.C. which were home to Buddhist monks, are located about 12 km away from Karjat.



Q&A

Q: What is NAAM?

A: Naamghar Association of America, Inc. (NAAM) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit spiritual and cultural organization formed to construct and manage a Naamghar for the Assamese diaspora to celebrate and perform the spiritual traditions and philosophical teachings of Srimanta Sankardeva. With strong ties with all the *Satras* of Assam, NAAM seek to provide a forum for learned spiritual leaders and traditional artistes to share their knowledge and talent with the current and future generations of the Assamese diaspora.

Q: What are the immediate goals of NAAM?

A: Some of the immediate goals of NAAM include spreading awareness on NAAM initiatives, build a digital media platform, plan for fund raising, and participate regularly in Naam-proxongo. NAAM seeks volunteers from the large Assamese diaspora across the United States to achieve these goals. Please join us (details at the bottom of this newsletter). In our planning activity, the first

priority is to identify what is needed to establish a temporary *Naamghar*. This will make the *Guru Axon*, consecrated by the Sri Sri Auniati Satra Satradhikar, more easily accessible to the public, while we work on the longer-term project of building a permanent *Naamghar*.

Q: Does NAAM collaborate with other organizations?

A: NAAM is actively seeking to collaborate with all community organizations which are willing to help achieve NAAM's mission. NAAM plans to have meaningful discussion with all organizations in our community; please contact us if you would like to be a part of this conversation (contact details at the bottom).



HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH NAAM?

JOIN THE NAAM WORKING GROUP (WG):

We need your help in achieving the dream of building a Naamghar in North America. Therefore, NAAM is open to everyone who is interested in building the Naamghar.

If you are interested in getting involved actively in NAAM's mission, please join the NAAM by sending

an email to: Naaminfo@Naamghar.org. The WG meets regularly via teleconference/video conference to discuss various issues that are related to NAAM and its mission and goals.



NAAM WORKING GROUP TEAM MEMBERS

Following individuals comprise the current NAAM working group (WG) team. ***We invite all individuals who are sincerely interested in the Mission and Goals of NAAM to join the NAAM team.*** The current WG members are:

- Iswar Agarwalla, NC
- Niraj Barbara, PA
- Dr. Sanjib Bhuyan, NJ
- Pranab Bora, WI
- Lolit Bora, PA
- Subhasini Bora, NC
- Dr. Babul Borah, OH
- Utpal Borah, VA
- Dr. Binoy Bordoloi, NJ (Bor-medhi)
- Manoranjan Bordoloi, NJ
- Monidipa Bordoloi, CA
- Susanto Bordoloi, CT
- Malabika Brahma, NJ
- Debojit Chowdhury, CA
- Niren Choudhury, NJ
- Bikul Das, MA
- Namita Das, VA
- Dr. Pradip Das, MO
- Shyam DevChoudhury, PA (Secretary)
- Dr. Saswati Datta, OH
- Hemanga Dutta, NJ
- Panchali Dutta, NJ
- Sawmick Dutta, CA
- Prandeep Gogoi, NJ
- Ajoy Hazarika, NY
- Kamalakshi Hazarika, NJ
- Suranjoy Hazarika, NJ
- Priyadarshini Inman, NC
- Dr. Jukti Kalita, NJ
- Rashmi Kalita, CA
- Sangaurav Kaushik, NC
- Nilanjona Mahanta, CA
- Nabanita Mazumdar, WA
- Chayanika Mohan, NC
- Rachna Nath, AZ
- Shakhyar Neog, NJ
- Dr. Yashwant Pathak, FL
- Anu Perlmutter, VA
- Nilakshi Phukan, NC
- Gayatree Prasad, CA
- Dr. Purandar Sarmah, NJ (Treasurer)
- Vavani Sarmah, CA

Contact Us

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