

**A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDY
ON THE *SATRA* INSTITUTION OF ASSAM
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BARPETA *SATRA* AND ITS
RELATIONS WITH THE *HATIS* (CLUSTER OF
SETTLEMENTS)**

A Thesis submitted to the University of North Bengal

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in

Anthropology

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDY ON THE SATRA INSTITUTION OF ASSAM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BARPETA SATRA AND ITS RELATIONS WITH THE HATIS (CLUSTER OF SETTLEMENTS)" has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Samar Kumar Biswas, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of North Bengal. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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ENLIGHTENED MIND IS THE MARK OF A GREAT

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In doing the work she has fulfilled all the requirements of doing Ph.D. as stipulated in the relevant provision of the Ph.D. regulations (New).

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ABSTRACT

A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDY ON THE *SATRA* INSTITUTION OF ASSAM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BARPETA *SATRA* AND ITS RELATIONS WITH THE *HATIS* (CLUSTER OF SETTLEMENTS)

The thesis under consideration entitled ‘‘A Socio-Religious Study on the *Satra* Institution of Assam with special reference to Barpeta *Satra* and its relation with the *hatis* (cluster of settlements)’’ is a comprehensive study in which an attempt has been made to focus on Assam and its people, *vaisnavite* (those who are worshipping Vishnu) movement in Assam, origin and development of *satra* (a *vaisnavite* institution) institution in Assam, *hati* (cluster of settlements), structure of Barpeta, religious rites of the *satras* in Assam in general and Barpeta in particular, impact of *satra* in the day to day life of the people of Barpeta, relations of the people of Barpeta and Barpeta *satra*, constitution of Barpeta *satra*, socio religious importance of *satra* institution in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular.

The neo-*vaisnavite* movement of Assam initiated by Sri Sankaradeva during the last part of fifteenth century is remarkable for the religious and social life of medieval Assam. Its impact on religion, literature, fine arts and social life of Assam, particularly on the Brahmaputra valley, is indeed great and abiding from which Barpeta *satra* in the district of Barpeta, Assam is in no exception. The most notable characteristic of the neo-*vaisnavite* movement in Assam is the *satra* institution through which the faith was propagated and established. It may be monastic as well as semi-monastic in form. The importance of this institution lies in the fact that it is intimately connected with the Assamese society and it has become a part and parcel of Assamese life. The history of *vaisnavism* (cult of worshipping Vishnu) in Assam cannot be treated without reference to the *satra* institution. The religious activities of the *vaisnavite* householders are conducted in accordance with the direction of *satras*. For the *vaisnavite* movement in Assam the *satra* institution acted as an aid in making the Assamese society united. During the last few centuries of its existence it has been enriching the Assamese life socially, culturally and economically. But these roles of

satra institution are not altogether independent of religion; rather these may be termed as the products of the same religious movement.

This study has been conducted at Barpeta *satra* and Barpeta town in the district of Barpeta. There are altogether 22 *hatis* at Barpeta town. Among these 3 are principal *hatis* and other 19 are secondary *hatis*. The *satra* is the main centre of religious activities of the people of Barpeta. The social life of the people of Barpeta is related with *satra*. The extent to which the beliefs and practices of religious rituals influence social life and relationship constitute the functional aspect of religion. At Barpeta all the local people follow *vaisnavism*. Apart from secondary sources like published books, journals, official records, internet and news papers, primary sources like observation, participant observation, questionnaire and schedule and interview method were used to complete this work.

The introduction of the thesis deals with the theoretical analysis of the statement of the problem, review of literature, research scope, aims and objective of the study, hypothesis, methodology and the division of the study into chapters etc.

Assam and the People through which we have discussed that Assam are unique and splendid and is a composition of three racial elements, namely- the Australoids, the Mongoloids and the Caucasoids. The process has made Assam the most diversified state in the country, both ethnically and linguistically and one of the very few in the world. The mighty Brahmaputra flowing across Assam is fondly called Luit by the Assamese. The Brahmaputra has moulded human civilization on both its banks. Its climatic atmosphere is good for plants and animals. The sun rises to awaken the land and her people and set beautifully in the evening, allowing the moon to shower beauty once a month by reflecting the sun rays. The emerging development perspective in terms of economically integrating the North East with the south east Asia holds out a great promise for the development of the region in general and Assam in particular. To achieve these goals, collective initiatives should be taken for developing a unified single market by resolving border disputes, removing barriers to movement of goods, labour and capital, developing inter-state transport and communication, harmonizing policies and developing common strategy for research and development, utilizing water resources and developing tourism. Most of the people living in Assam follow Hinduism and two sects of Hinduism such as *sakta* (follower of *shakti* cult) and *vaisnava* are found among the Hindu People of Assam. Among them a majority of population follow *vaisnavism* because of its simplicity. The festivals of Assam serve a

great cause by encouraging different communities to live in harmony, irrespective of belief, custom and level of development. Assamese food habits imply the food items consumed by the majority people of Assam. Because of the geographical characteristics of the area in the broader sense, both the tribal and the non-tribal people use particular food items as their principal food for lunch and dinner which are now becoming very popular among the people outside Assam and lots of such ethnic food hotels and restaurants are grown up through which Assam, its people and their socio-cultural activities are automatically highlighted. The area of Assam and different social aspects of Assamese people will be discussed here. Detail information is provided in Chapter II

In chapter III the studied area and its people have been discussed. Here general descriptions of Barpeta town and *hatis* have been discussed. The *hatis* are mainly related to the *satra*. In this chapter a demographic outline of the people of three principal *hatis* has been made. The old name of Barpeta was Tantikuchi. It suggests that it was the abode of weavers. Once a group of weavers came from Sibsagar district of Assam and settled here. Barpeta was once in the middle of the Brahmaputra River. Hence the name was Barpet or Barpeta. Again to one opinion, it was the center of learning (*barpith*). The word Barpeta is a corrupt form of *barpith*. Barpeta is a center of religious activities. Barpeta is one of the most ancient *satras* of Assam. Barpeta town was declared district head quarter of Barpeta district of Assam in the year 1983. The mighty Brahmaputra is flowing along the southern side of the district. The land of the district is gradually sloping from north to south. The distant from the Bhutan Hills to the bank of the Brahmaputra is in about 40 feet slope. The distant is a vast plain area except for a small hillock on the south named Baghbar hills. The River Brahmaputra has a numbers of tributaries within the district, namely Pohumara, Kaldia, Nakhanda, Beki, Palla and Chaulkhowa. Historically, Barpeta was a part of old Kamrupa Kingdom. The king of the Barman dynasty ruled over this part. That was also the time when different tribes like the Dravidians, Mongoloids, and Austrians etc lived together. Later on hordes of the Aryans began to penetrate this region through its western boundary and settled here. Thus interconnection of population of ancient tribes and communities took place and a mixed race evolved in course of time. A mixed language also developed incorporating liberally a vast array of words belonging to different non Aryan languages into the main lingua-franca which belong to the Indo Aryan group of language known as Assamese language in

course of time. The religious history of Barpeta is related with the coming of Sankaradeva to this place and staying permanently at Patboushi near Barpeta. People of different caste and communities are living here. Hindu community is the majority community. Among the Hindus, majority of the people follow *vaisnavite* religion. Inter-marriage between castes, communities etc are also quite common now. With changes in time, there have been considerable changes in the nature and composition of population. In the past most of the people were petty traders; but today the no. of office goers, teachers, pleaders etc have increased. Barpeta *satra* was established by the grant of land given by Ahom monarch Siva Singha. Afterwards during the British rule, Barpeta was declared a township by amalgamating 22 *hatis* of the *satra* and the town dwellers led their life according to the rules and regulations of the *satra* organizations. The main objective of *hati* formation was to streamline the activities of the people and to assign different *satra* related works among different people. Studied area is a unique distinction for smooth running of various activities of the *satra* particularly with the ecclesiastical affairs of the *satra*. All the people of the *hatis* are Assamese and they follow *vaisnavism*. They have good water supply facilities, good sanitation system, good communication facilities for which the settlement is definitely an urban settlement. In regards to the dress and ornaments as well as the food habit of the people is purely depend upon the Assamese culture and traditions. All the *hatis* have the place of popular gathering which is very significant in the socio-cultural and socio-religious life of the people of Barpeta. Now the town has been extended and due to dearth of residential space people originally living in the *hatis* prefer to shift their residences to such areas where they can construct their houses in a spacious plot of land. It is now a general tendency of the people to shift their residences towards the town from villages for various amenities enjoyed in towns. Generally people living in joint families prefer to have new establishments for their own families. Due to such tendencies of the people, new localities have grown up on the outskirts of the township. People having new establishments on these localities also maintain their allegiance to the *hatis*, where they originally lived. In this way there has been a necessity for organizational change of the *satra*. In this respect the *satra* authority as well as the public should come forward to take necessary steps.

Chapter IV is about the *vaisnavism* and *satra* institution in Assam. *Vaisnavism* and *satra* institution of Assam have been broadly discussed here. *Vaisnavism* was first propagated in the medieval Assam by Sankaradeva and the most notable characteristic

of the *vaisnavism* of Assam is the *satra* institution. Sankaradeva the great saint who established the neo-*vaisnavite* movement was born in Assam. He was one of the greatest reformers of mankind but tragedy is that he remained more or less unknown beyond the state. Sankaradeva wrote drama when Shakespeare was not born. Sankaradeva owing to his inner mind set got the strength to elevate the lower caste people to a right status. He asserted that all people are having common identity and social standing and before the Supreme Being all such distinctions disappear. The main theme of Sankaradeva's neo-*vaisnavism* is *ek-sarana-naam-dharma* (spiritual shelter in one deity). It explains that God is only one and this religion is for all, irrespective of caste and sex. Both of these views are maintained by Barpeta *satra*. The special feature of Assamese neo-*vaisnavism* is the *satra* institution. Due to popularity of this new religion, many people belonging to different castes and creed espoused the new religion. *Satra* institution helped in the unity of the Assamese society. It is also a chord linking Assam with the rest of India. *Satra* is the main institution around which all religious and cultural activities move. In the initial stage of neo-*vaisnavite* movement by *satra*, it meant a religious sitting, some times in the open field or an association to hold religious discussion rather than a systematic institution. In the course of time this infant institution began to develop on a distinct line and ultimately features and characters of its own. The importance of neo-*vaisnavite* movement in Assam does not lie in the religious aspect alone. It also contributes much to the social unity and reform the cultural development of the Assamese people. It gives new literature; introduce a new type of music, dance and drama. The *satra* influences on various arts is worth mentioning. The *satra* has been acting as the model of morality by keeping close vigilance over its disciples. The persons living in the atmosphere of these religious institutions are polite and highly polished in their behavior.

Chapter V is about *vaisnavism* and *satra* institution at Barpeta. The *hatis* are mainly related to the *satra*. Barpeta *satra* popularizes the art of classical music in the form of *bargeet* (a kind of song) and drama which is called *ankiya-bhaona* (a kind of theatrical performance) and others also. The performance of *bhaona* gives birth to a class of artisans who are specialized in the art of preparing masks, costumes and effigies. Besides the religious text written by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, some other religious texts like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are also discussed in the *satra*. One unique feature of Barpeta *satra* is that it is democratically managed. Rules

and regulations for management of the *satra* came into existence. A number of functionaries also had been created for smooth running of the *kirtanghar* (prayer hall) and it is continuing till date. Barpeta *satra* has a constitution of its own. Barpeta *satra* is rich in every aspect, like- religious, social, economic and cultural. Apart from the religious aspect, Barpeta *satra* has tremendously influenced the social and cultural lives of the people. It has taught people to respect all castes and creed and behave all people equally. During the long courses of its existence, Barpeta *satra* has undergone various changes in all fields. Such changes are noticeable in structure, organization, management and so forth. Though the *satra* is maintaining its traditional character in religious activities very important changes have taken place in the management of the *satra*. It is noticed that there are some disregards have developed for the *satra* among some young generations due to impact of modernity against old values and traditions. Changes are of course rapidly taking place in the culture, the way of life etc. but there is another side that some young stars are whole heartedly obeying this culture. Barpeta is a place of trade and commerce but now some people have done other services also. The participants in traditional functions of the *satra* say that when the older generation will die, the *satriya* culture which was introduced by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva will be vanished. As a result there will be a lack of skilled artists in various art forms in the *satra*. The schedule caste had no access to the *kirtanghar* run with cosmopolitan principles and liberal ideas. But due to the efforts of some liberal minded persons and public organizations, the *satra* authority granted permission to all the Hindu people to enter the *satra*. From that time the *satra* is running according to the principle. Till date females have been debarred from entering the *kirtanghar*. It is known that, women were given due importance in earlier times. But the position of woman later on degraded to a large extent in the male dominated society and they were debarred from entering into the *kirtanghar*. Strong demand is being raised from time to time in favour of women's entry but inside the town there are strong groups who are dead against the entry of women. It is hoped that sooner or later, this attitude will get softened and all restrictions in the entry of women will be removed.

Chapter VI is about the relations between *hatis* and *satra*. There are several relations between the people residing in different *hatis* and the *satra*. *Vaisnavism* and *satra* institution of Assam have been broadly discussed here. *Vaisnavism* was first propagated in the medieval Assam by Sankaradeva and the most notable characteristic of the *vaisnavism* of Assam is the *satra* institution. The organization of Barpeta *satra*

tries to attract the people towards every aspect of the *satra* affairs. One such affair is maintenance of social justice amongst all. The *samuha bhakata* (commoner devotees) of the *satra* is concerned with preserving social norms among the people of Barpeta. It should be noted that particular *hatis* and different dynasties of Barpeta are assigned with the duties in different *satra* centric rites and rituals in different periods of time and these are still in vogue. An individual *hati* has got its own organization covering social, political and economic aspects. In the daily prayer services people of different dynasties perform their own duties. In this service other people also perform their duties. During the time of *satra* festival people of different dynasties, different caste population and people from every *hati* perform their duties. A person who is initiated to the *mahapurushiya* (following the doctrine of Sankaradeva) faith and wishes to take a share may be able to enlist him as a member of the *samuha* (commoners). The institution of *samuha bhakata* in the past took greater responsibilities of management and supervision of daily activities including religious activities. For this purpose, there were regular sittings of the *samuha* in front of the *matha* (cylindrical shaped structure) twice in a day just after the Morning Prayer and also the afternoon prayer. Now such type of *samuha-bhakatar-mel* (sitting of the *samuha bhakata*) is not regular but occasionally such sitting is requisitioned. It is evident that the members of the *samuha* maintain their relation with the *satra* and involve themselves in such matters of the *satra* relating to the organization and management of the properties. From the days of Mathuradas Burha Ata, trade and commerce expanded to new areas. Traders of Barpeta expanded their trade to Dhaka, Rongpur and Moimansing. As the time passed, the number of trading communities has increased and their trades become hereditary. But as time passes on, the professions of most of the communities have come to the verge of extinction. We can take the example of lime worker, which have already abandoned their profession because of non availability of raw materials. Blacksmiths, goldsmiths and other caste based professions have abandoned their professions at least partially. A large number of people have also changed their professions. Modern education is one of the reasons for this large scale change in professions.

Chapter VII is about the socio-religious importance of the *satra* institution in Assam with special reference to Barpeta *satra*. In this chapter special attentions have been made on socio-religious importance of the *satra* institution in Assam in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular. In this chapter right from the establishment of Barpeta

satra to the status of women in the *satra* have been discussed. Although detachment from material pleasure and attainment of salvation are the hallmarks of *satra* institution, yet its activities are not solely confined to religion alone. It has made immense contribution to social and cultural life of the Assamese society at large and to this *satra* centric town in particular. This *satra* has unfolded some essential aspects of social and cultural life, such as projecting the way of how to lead a sound life before the socially backward people, emphasizing the belief of one religion, one God before the people irrespective of caste or creed, relaxation of harsh caste system through admittance of values and equality of status, encouragement of cottage industries and such other essential aspects of life. The *satra* has influenced in different ways not only the residents of Barpeta, but also the people of the neighbouring *satras*. Barpeta has been acting as the symbol of morality and truth by focussing close attention of its disciple. It is a common knowledge that people living under the influence of the *satra* are sober and gentle. In conversation among themselves they use passive voice in order to mark politeness. The influence of the *satra* in the case of different art and culture is worth special mention. The *satra* has specialized in classical songs and dances. It has also introduced acting. Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and other religious heads wrote and popularized *ankiya-bhaona*. The staging of *bhaona* created a class of expert artists who were specialized in the art of preparation of dresses for the actors, manufacture of idols and their ornamentation, manufacture of furniture etc. The relics of these art forms are still evident at Barpeta *satra*. Every *hati* has a *haitar-ghar* (community hall), where the people of the *hati* can meet and discuss different religious and social matters. Every *hati* has also a *hati* treasury from where the people can borrow loan to meet their needs. The *satra* has also encouraged the residents to engage themselves in different trade and commerce. In the neo-*vaisnavite* religion propagated by Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and others, there is no distinction among people on the basis of caste and creed. This is the principal theme in the *vaisnavite* religion. Sankaradeva initiated the people of low castes and even Muslims into the fold of his religion.

Though Barpeta *satra* is a religious institution but it has great importance in socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political life of the adjoining areas. The impact of *satra* in the daily life cycle of the adjoining area through formal and informal activities is an important aspect. Communal harmony and universal brotherhood,

contribution towards the classical dance and cultural activities of Barpeta *satra* is a unique one. Barpeta *satra* is a platform for spreading *vaisnavite* movement in Assam. This *satra* is an institution patronizing unique *satra* based culture of devotion to Lord Vishnu embraced by the people of Barpeta in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular. Barpeta *satra* has much significance and the *hati* system of Barpeta paved the way for promotion of socio-cultural and spiritual life of the people. There is no entry of women inside the *kirtanghar* and Muslims are not given the permission to enter inside the whole *kirtanghar* campus till date. One interesting system found here is that there is a *hati* bank (fund) in every *hati* of Barpeta. To get a loan from the *hati* fund one is to mortgage gold ornaments of approximately equal value to the loan amount. In the annual meeting of the *hati* fund, which is held in the *haitarghar* in the first week of the month of *bahag* (April-May), interest on loans are to be paid. The *hatis* and the *satra* in Barpeta are platforms of communal harmony and universal brotherhood. Barpeta *satra* has discharged the duty of spreading the *vaisnavite* movement in Assam and the impact of *kirtanghar* and its religious and spiritual activities which are helpful in the promotion of literature, art and culture. It has been found that almost all the peoples of the *hati* were educated and the density of population in the *hatis* was very high.

It is quite impossible to draw any inference based on a topic of great importance. The division of the study into chapters, it may be mentioned that it is simply a matter of convention rather than of convenience; the whole study should be treated as an integrated analysis rather than of loose fragments. This work is a humble attempt to fill up the gap to present an integrated analysis about ‘A Socio-Religious Study on the *Satra* Institution of Assam with special reference to Barpeta *Satra* and its relation with the *hatis* (cluster of settlements)’ based on the source materials so far.

It is very difficult to study a *satra* institution as a whole due to prevailing superstitions and introvert nature of the people, particularly amongst the women. So it has a great scope to study the other nature like political, economic etc of the *satra* institutions in near future.

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PREFACE

The neo-*vaisnavite* movement is a glorious chapter in the religious history of Assam. It has lots of impact not only on religious life but also on the social and cultural life of the people of Assam. The movement was initiated by the saint-poet Sankaradeva in the last decade of fifteen century. As a result of neo-*vaisnavite* movement, *satra* institution was established and was headed by Sankaradeva and the first *satra* was established at Bardowa, his native place. Later on lots of *satras* were established in Assam by other *vaisnava* saints. The importance of the institution lies on the fact that it is intimately connected with the Assamese society and it has become a part and parcel of Assamese life. Contributions of this institution towards the spreading of *vaisnavism* in particular and the cultural development of Assam in general are indeed great. Therefore, the study of the *satra* institution covers the entire field of Assamese *vaisnavism* since its beginning. The movement brought in its wake, literacy and artistic renaissance at Barpeta also and as a result Madhavadeva the chief disciple and apostle of Sankaradeva with proper help to Mathuradas Burha Ata (one of the chief followers of Madhavadeva and the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra*) established a *satra* in 1583 AD. Barpeta *satra* is one of the earliest and most influential *satras* in Assam. The people of Barpeta live in different *hatis*, follow neo-*vaisnavism*. It is to be noted here that the people living in different *hatis* are intimately related to different aspects of the *satra* functions. In this regard the relations between the *satra* and *hatis* at Barpeta town and socio- religious study on the *satra* institution in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular is an important matter as it may have a great impact on the people of Assam in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular. An attempt on ‘A Socio-Religious Study on the *Satra* Institution of Assam with special reference to Barpeta *Satra* and its relation with the *Hatis* (cluster of settlements)’ has been made here in the following pages. The work is prepared for the Doctoral Degree of the University of North Bengal.

In preparing this work, all available source materials both primary and secondary have been carefully examined before use. But in spite of my sincere efforts, error may have crept into it.

It has been tried to arrive at the nearest point of the aim in respect of the proposed study. However we never claim perfection. I take this opportunity of expressing deep

gratitude to Dr. Samar Kumar Biswas, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of North Bengal who took so much trouble in guiding my research work in the midst of his manifold activities and academic engagement.

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The study titled ‘A Socio-Religious Study on the *Satra* Institution of Assam with special reference to Barpeta *Satra* and its relation with the *Hatis* (cluster of settlements)’ is the outcome of my research work to be submitted for PhD degree in the University of North Bengal. The present work is a study which neither demands full credit for new discoveries nor is a major break-through in the study of ‘A Socio-Religious Study on the *Satra* Institution of Assam with special reference to Barpeta *Satra* and its relation with the *hatis* (cluster of settlements)’. It is a humble attempt to research the subject, which in some points is fully introductory in nature and shows some scope of study in future. Constructive criticism in this respect is always welcome.

A research work is an open ended academic voyage. A collective effort is always working as an inspiring factor behind the culmination of a positive result of the voyage. Therefore, one should acknowledge the support and assistance received at the different levels in course of the study.

I have no words to express my deep sense gratitude and acknowledge my ineptness to my revered Guide and Supervisor Dr. Samar Kumar Biswas, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, North Bengal University for his sincere guidance and valuable suggestions that he gave me in every step of my work. I also owe a debt of gratitude to all the faculty members of the department of Anthropology of the same University for providing me necessary help and assistance.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Religious understandings are a part of culture, just as other understandings are. And the anthropologist's task is to understand them, not to judge them. Religion may be defined as the "people's belief in spiritual beings and forces." The human society is an organization of individuals. The effects of socio religious influence of the beliefs and rituals on the society as a whole as well as on individual member of a community are well perceptible. As such, social functions are related to the needs of the individuals and play a vital role in the society. The needs of man are varied. No doubt, his biological needs, such as- food, clothing and shelter are the fundamental needs. His moral, cultural and religious needs are also not the less important. These fundamental needs derive from their religious functions and rites which give great strength and fulfill mental desire to live on with. Sir James Frazer in his Golden Bough (1890) said that, "By religion it is meant that a propitiation or conciliation of power superior to man which are believed to bend and control the cause of nature and of human life. It is the fact that no man is religious who does not govern his conduct in some measure by the fear or love of God. All over the world the people have various types of Religious beliefs."

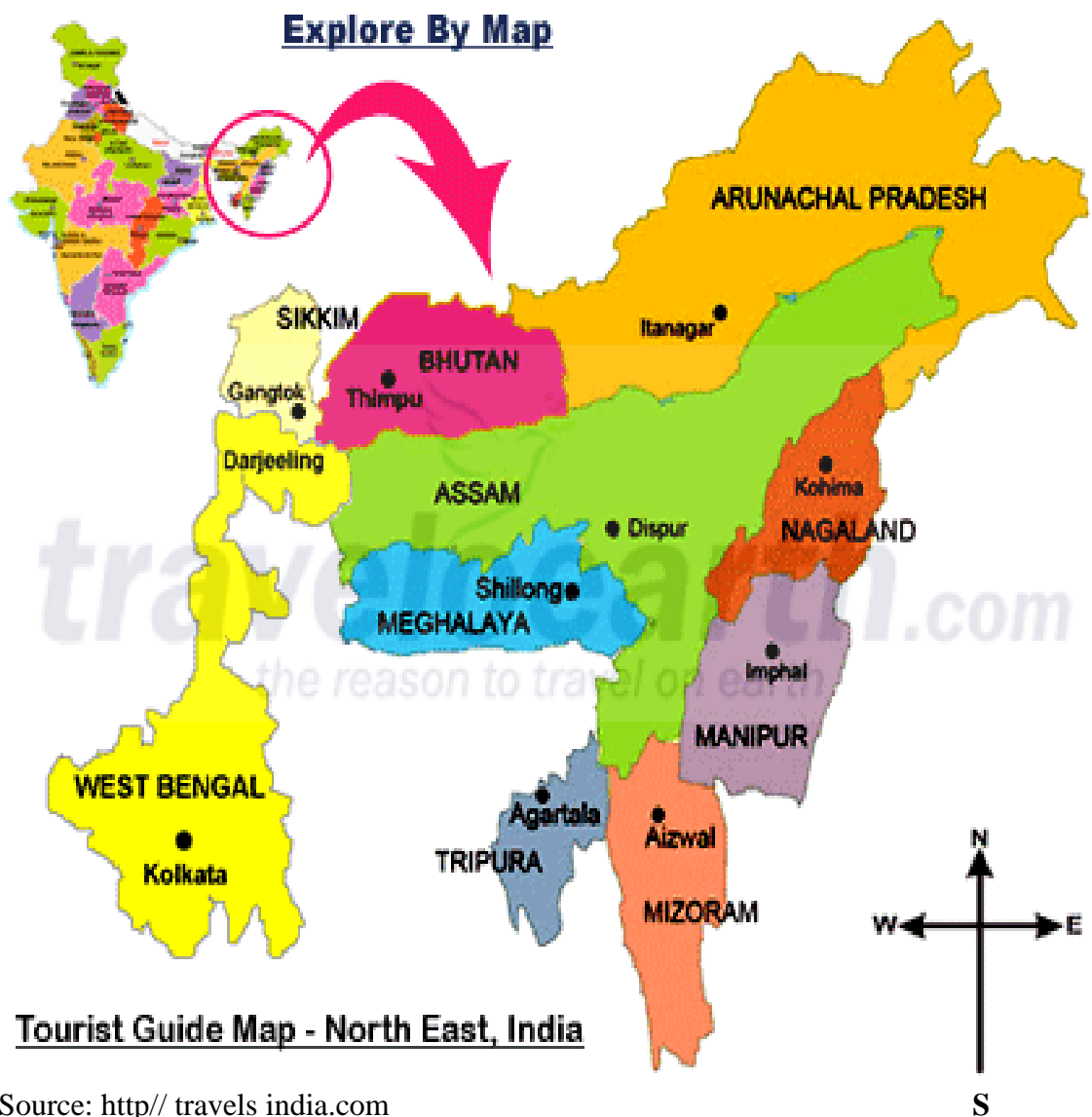
All religion consists of a mental attitude regarding the super natural beliefs. The most wide spread manifestation of this attitude is in the shape of beliefs and rituals that are deeply imbedded in all cultures. These systems of belief and action work upward and out ward throughout the cultural fabric. At some points they thread so finely in to the total pattern that it is impossible to say whether the religious ends and the mundane begins.

No people have been found to be withholding belief in supernatural powers of some kind. However, many deals with the problem of life by practical measures, there is always a margin of uncertainly and often of anxiety. Religious ideas and behaviors seem to arise out of situations in which human beings find themselves unable to provide simple explanations or solution to events they consider important. Madan and Mazumdar (1990) stated that, "Religion is the human response to apprehension of something, or power which is supernatural and supersensory. It is the expression of

the manner, and type of adjustment effected by a people with their conception of the supernatural.” From the etymological point of view, Bouquet said, “Religion is derived from the root word religio, which means to bind together”, and religion actually does it. Religion plays a role in social control, does not rely on alone. This is done through notions of right and wrong thing. Religion is its role in the maintenance of social solidarity. Religion, as the pattern of society, plays a very significant role in the life of the people of the society by providing not only the greater feeling of security but also the hope of a tolerable future. Religion bestows morality valuation, restriction of evil thoughts and controls the society in the proper path.

In this regard the relations between the *satra* (a *vaisnavite* institution) and *hatis* (cluster of settlements) at Barpeta town in Barpeta district of Assam, which is one of the seven states of North East India (map) and socio-religious study on the *satra* institution in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular is an important matter as it has a great impact on the people of Assam in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular. The neo-*vaisnavite* (those who are worshipping Vishnu) movement of Assam initiated by Sri Sankardeva during the last part of fifteenth century is remarkable for the religious and social life of the medieval Assam. Its impact on religion, literature, fine arts and social life of Assam, particularly on the Brahmaputra valley, is indeed great and abiding from which Barpeta *satra* in the district of Barpeta, Assam is not an exception.

Sankardeva, Madhavadeva and Damodardeva may be styled as *trimurty* (trinity) of Assam *vaisnavism* (cult of worshipping Vishnu). The movement brought in its wake literacy and artistic renaissance in Assam in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular. The movement did not differ in essential points from similar *vaisnavite* movement in other parts of medieval India. The movement may therefore be called a part of the “All India *Vaisnavite* Movement” of the middle age. In practical application of the principles and tenets and in working out the details of the faith, it evolved a cult of its own best suited to the genius of the people. The new cult, thus moulded according to the local circumstances is popularly known as the *mahapurukhiya dharma* (following the doctrine of Sankardeva). The real name of the cult is *eka sarana nam dharma* or the supreme surrender to God viz-Vishnu or Krishna (Sarma, 1999: introduction). The most notable characteristic of *vaisnavism* in Assam is the *satra* Institution through which the faith is propagated and established. It may be monastic as well as semi monastic in form. The *satra* institution is intimately connected with the Assamese society and it has become a part and parcel of Assamese life.



'The *satra* institution was established during the last part of the 15th century or first part of the 16th century by Sankardeva. The first *satra* was established by him in the field of mustard crops of Kusumbara (father of Sankardeva) at Bordoia under Nagaon district of Assam around 1503-1504 A.D. It was the initial form of *satra* Institution' (Kakati, 1921 cited in Neog 1980: 12). It is worth mentioning that the *satra* have continued to be established in different places of Assam till today. The Assam District Gazetteers (1905) have recorded 288 *satras* excluding many branches of those *satras*, spreading over the entire Brahmaputra valley. All of them are not uniform in size and affluence but they are marked by the same foundational characteristics.

Satras are generally situated on quadrangles surrounded by *palisadas* (walls). Each principal *satra* is marked by the existence of a *namghar* (place of worship), a *manikuta* (sanctum sanctorum), a *batchora* (gateway) and two or four rows of *hatis*. Each *satra* consists of three principal parties, viz i) *adhikara* (abbot) and *deka adhikara* (deputy) ii) *bhakata* (devotee) and iii) *samuha* (commoners). The first two parties generally reside within the four walls of the *satra* campus and the last via the *samuha* in the village outside the *satra* leading householder's life (Sarma, 1999: 139). Barpeta *satra* is the earliest and most influential *satra* of *mahapurushiya* sect (Sarma, 1999: 177) as well as the chief monasteries of Assam (Neog 1965: 137) which was established by Madhavadeva the chief disciple and apostle of Sankaradeva with proper help to Mathuradas Burha Ata (one of the chief followers of Madhavadeva and the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra*) in 1504 *sakaabda* (Pathak, 1959: 12). Barpeta *satra* is situated at Barpeta town at a distance of about 100 K.Ms to the north west of Guwahati city. Barpeta town is the head quarter of the district of the same name. It is said that, Sankardeva, while travelling by boat westward from his abode in upper Assam, first set his foot at Barpeta and moved to the nearby village Patbaushi, where he established a *satra* in 1546 A.D.

Barpeta *satra* is situated at a place which is also a well known center of communication and business. The *satra* is well planned. Probably there was wide publicity about its importance and as a result there are a large number of devotees of the *satra*. The *kirtanghar* (place of worship) of the *satra* is also known for its magnificent construction and design. Originally, a *satra* based community; Barpeta emerged as a dwelling place of non peasant community in course of time. Due to the geographical condition of the place, the people of Barpeta have taken to petty business instead of agriculture. As the *satra* institution itself is taken up for study, its

ramification on the social organization and cultural life of the township is also covered by a very considerable extent. At Barpeta, Mathuradas Burha Ata was the first to establish different *hatis*. Later on the municipal area included all the 22 *hatis* of Barpeta. Especially for Barpeta and Barpeta *satra*, Mathuradas Burha Ata did many things of lasting effects, such as- formation of the committee to publish *vaisnavite* literature, fourteen units of prayer service in the *satra*, preservation of ancient rites, training facilities, introduction of fund collection on *hati* basis, appointment of office bearers for the management of the *satra* etc. People in Barpeta *satra* living in different *hatis* are closely related with the *satra* in various aspects. There are a number of functionaries in Barpeta *satra* who are articulated with the traditional functions since early times in regard to daily activities and also in times of various festivals. It can be gathered that various persons were closely related with the affairs of the *satra* in the early stage, the descendents of whom are still continuing such duties. Mathuradas Burha Ata, who by way of giving recognition to the *satra*, brought from various places persons proficient in different activities of the *satra* and settled them in Barpeta. These functions were fixed by Mathuradas Burha Ata for smooth running of the *satra* (Pathak, 1959 reprint 2006: 72). Their Specific duties are related to daily prayer services and can also be noticed at the time of annual festivals, such as *doul* Festivals, *domahi* or *bihu*, *kirtan* festival, *janmastami* etc. Some of the members of these families working as teacher, government jobs or business activities also join as functionaries in the *satra*.

Review of Literature: It is a fact that the historical and religious literatures of Assam are very rich. The names of the following scholars who have contributed to different aspects of religion, culture, art and literature of Assam are worth mention. The contributions of L.N. Bezbarua's two works (1911) and (1914) deserve mentioning. But these two, especially the latter, are not written with a critical mind, and therefore, make no discrimination between the supernatural and the real, the historical and the legendary. S.K. Bhuyan (1957) dealt exclusively with the people of Assam. Reference on Barpeta *satra* and its relationship with the people in the *hatis* was mentioned in passing only. Dr. S.N. Sarma's (1999) work was an attempt at systematic study of the *satra* institution. Though this is a valuable book for the researchers on *vaisnava* cult in Assam, it is not so much informative about the relation between the *hatis* and *satra*; particularly the Barpeta *satra*, Assam. Maheswar Neog (2004)'s book was the

collection of a few important studies in Assamese culture, which dealt with various aspects of the society, culture and religion of Assam. Another important book by Maheswar Neog (1965) gives a detailed account of Sankaradeva with his background and a resume and appraisal of his work. In this compact volume is presented almost all that we need to know about the Hindu culture of Assam as it expressed itself through *vaisnavism* and the *eka-saraniya* faith which may be described as Assam's expression of the mediaeval pan Indian *bhakti* movement. In this work Dr. Neog did not miss anything that is apropos to the study of Sankaradeva. He has treated all aspects of the subject in his twelve chapters. Audrey Cantlie's (1984) book deals with all the aspects of Assamese people including the *satra* institution, but it is not much informative about Barpeta *satra*. Neo-Vaisnavism and Other Religious Cults of Assam: A Study in Conflict is an article published in a book edited by Dambarudhar Nath (2011) based on research and analysis of North Eastern region. In this article *vaisnavism* and the *bhakti* system form the subject of analysis in terms of its institutional structure, its nature of impact upon tribal societies and its role in the process of social transformation, religious communities to integrated castes have been discussed. Dambarudhar Nath (2012) mainly deals with the *bhakti* movement and the *satra* institution, its origin and evolution, historical retrospective of Garmur *satra*, and state, Pitambardeva Goswami and social reforms, cultural activities, administration and economy of the *satras* of Assam. The significance of this work lies in that it is a rational and analytical work and based on modern historical methodology. Rani Kakati (1986) highlighted the origin of religious faith and different customs and tradition associated with it. But the work is not out of the limitation of study in this particular field. Digambar Das (1995) dealt with the history of Barpeta *satra*. He highlighted the social-political-cultural history of Barpeta. The author wrote about Barpeta *satra* and the religious-cultural activities of people. Phanidhar Adhikary (2010) is a critical study on the topic of influences of *satra* upon the people of Barpeta district of Assam. We are able to get much information from this work. Dewarah and Associates (1987) treated on the economy of Barpeta district. The Religious-Cultural aspect of the study was not given any weight. Akshay Kr. Mishra (1990) was a work on the life history of Mathura Das Buhra Ata, the first *adhiikara* of Barpeta *satra* and his varied activities. There were references of the religious-cultural relationship of the *satra* with the people but the analysis was not in depth. Gokul Pathak (1969) dealt with the varied religious-cultural activities of the people in relation to the *satra*. But it

does not provide much information about the relationship between the *satra* and the people living in different *hatis* of Barpeta. In addition to the above books relating to the subject any other important source materials for the study of *satra* institution have been consulted.

Research Scope: From the above review of literature it has been seen that the existing literature in the subject “A Socio Religious Study on the *Satra* Institution of Assam with special reference to Barpeta *Satra* and its relations with the *Hatis*” is still scanty. Though a number of studies have been made by eminent personalities of Assam, but none of these books dealt in depth about the relationship between the *hatis* and Barpeta *satra*. But with due respect to the above it is mentionable that none of them have clearly dealt with the socio religious study on the *satra* institution of Assam with special reference to Barpeta *satra* and its relations with the *hatis*. So, it is intended to study the topic for research on some new dimension for the same.

Aims and Objectives of the Study: There are several scopes of the study of neo *vaisnavite* movement in Assam particularly at Barpeta. Such study enables one to know about the nature, origin and development of the *satra* institution, religious rites and practices of *satras*, particularly Barpeta *satra* and constitution of Barpeta *satra*. However my prime aim is to know about the *satra* institution of Assam and Barpeta *satra*, relation and impact on the socio-religious life of the connected people. But to conduct any particular study objectives are necessary to gain new insights into the problem. Objectives also help one to find out new facts lying hidden and to invent new ideas to the existing stock of knowledge and for making advancement in research studies. Objectives differ depending upon the nature of the object of study. Thus through the following objectives of the study has been conducted.

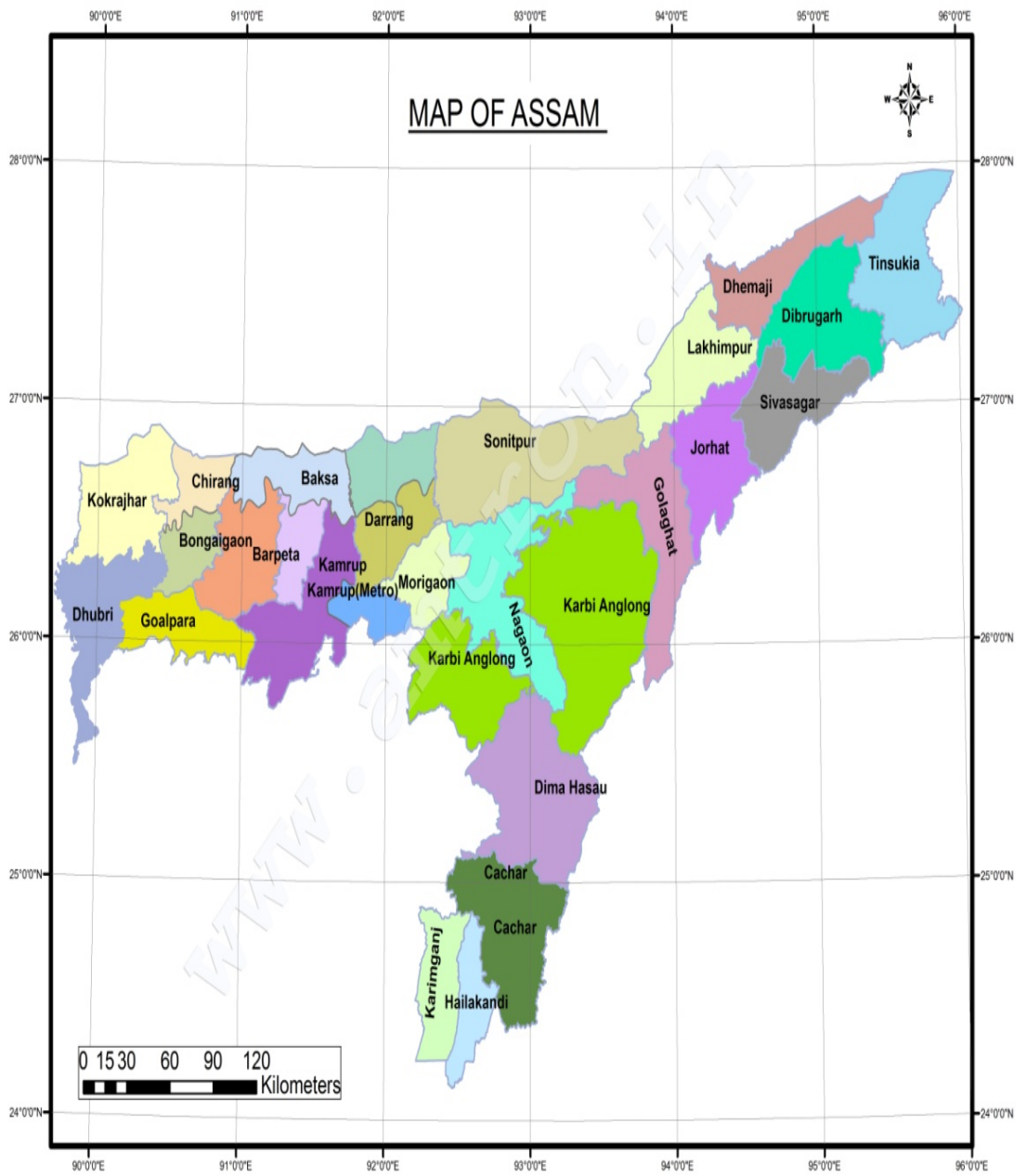
1. To know about the *hatis* and the *satra*.
2. To know the impact of *satra* on the daily life cycle of the people.
3. Knowledge about some formal and informal activities of the people related to the *satra* as a whole may be obtained.
4. To know about the *vaisnavite* movement in Assam as a whole.
5. To study about the nature, origin and development of the *satra* institution.
6. Religious rites and practices of the *satras*, particularly Barpeta *satra*.
7. Constitutions (*satrar sangbidhan*) of the *satras*, particularly Barpeta *satra*.

8. To study about communal harmony and universal brotherhood as vouchsafed by the tenets of the *satra* institution.
9. Various activities of the *kirtanghar* in the promotion of art, literature and culture.

Hypotheses: The hypothesis of the study are given below-

1. Whether Barpeta *satra* is a platform for spreading *vaisnavite* movement in Assam.
2. Whether Barpeta *satra* is an institution patronizing unique *satra* based culture of devotion to Lord Vishnu embraced by the people of Barpeta in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular.
3. It is assumed that Barpeta *satra* has much significance and the *hati* system of Barpeta could pave the way for promotion of socio-cultural and spiritual life of the people.
4. The *hatis* and the *satra* in Barpeta are platforms of communal harmony and universal brotherhood.
5. Barpeta *satra* has discharged the duty of spreading the *vaishnavite* movement in Assam.
6. Whether impact of *kirtanghar* and its religious and spiritual activities are helpful in the promotion of literature, art and culture.

Methodology: This study has been conducted at Barpeta *satra* and Barpeta town in the district of Barpeta, Assam (map). Barpeta *satra* is one of the most notable *satras* of Assam. At Barpeta, the contribution of Mathuradas Burha Ata, the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra* in the organizing *hatis* is notable. He divided the town into three *thul hatis* (principal) namely Dakshin *hati*, Uttar *hati* and Na *hati*. With these *hatis* there are another 19 *sakha* (secondary) *hatis* (Pathak, 1959: 72). People of different castes and creed live in the same *hati*. These *hatis* may be considered as organized on the basis of division of labour, each *hati* having its own share of works to be performed in the *satra* context. Three *thul hatis* have been selected, where around 500 to 600 families are living. These three *hatis* bear close relation with the ecclesiastical affairs of the *satra*. 100 families of each *hati* (all total 300 families) have been selected by random sampling to carry out the field work.



Source- [http// travels india.com](http://travels india.com)

In a study of this type, where perception and belief system relating to order, authority and status are extended across both time and space and contemporary reflection on a living cult and its tradition are strong and vibrant, it is difficult to confine source materials to archival or textual material or even to formal questionnaires during field work. So apart from secondary sources, the proposed research work has been intended to adopt the analogical method based on field work. Secondary data consist of published books, unpublished thesis, official documents and records, journals, news papers, internet etc. Primary data consist of questionnaire, schedule, focus group discussion, interview, observation, and participant observation etc. Published books, official records and internet have been used in studying Assam and Assamese people. Data on age and sex, marital status, place of birth, education, household information, regarding domestic animals has been collected from household schedule which has been discussed in the chapter of the studied area and people: Barpeta town and the *hatis*. In this chapter major parts of data have been collected through observation. Apart from published books, different journals and news papers have been used in preparing the chapter *vaisnavism* and *satra* institution in Assam. In preparing the chapter *vaisnavism* and *satra* Institution at Barpeta, apart from secondary sources, primary sources like observation, participant observation and interview method have been used. Primary sources like- questionnaire, schedule, focus group discussion, interview, observation, and participant observation etc and some secondary sources like published books, journals and news papers have been used in preparing the chapter on relation between *hatis* and *satra*. All the above mentioned secondary sources and primary sources have been used in preparing the chapter socio- religious study on the *satra* institution of Assam with special reference to Barpeta *satra*. In formulating the plan for the present study right from the field work to writing down the description, it has been found convenient to maintain a wide approach. The whole study has been organized into eight chapters including the introduction. In this study in chapter I, the above matters have been discussed. Chapter II is about Assam and its people. The area of Assam and different social aspects of Assamese people have been discussed here. In chapter III discussions of the studied area and its people have been discussed. Here a general description of Barpeta town and *hatis* has been made. The *hatis* are mainly related to the *satra*. In this chapter a demographic outline of the

people of three principal *hatis* has been made. Chapter IV is about the *vaisnavism* and



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satra institution in Assam. *Vaisnavism* and *satra* institution of Assam has been broadly discussed here. *Vaisnavism* was first propagated in the medieval Assam by Sankardeva and the most notable characteristic of the *vaisnavism* of Assam is the *satra* institution. Chapter V is about *vaisnavism* and *satra* institution at Barpeta. In this chapter from the establishment of Barpeta *satra* to the status of women in the *satra* have been tried to discuss. In chapter VI relations between *hatis* and *satra* have been discussed. There are several relations between the people residing in different *hatis* and the *satra* and these are discussed here in this chapter. Chapter VII is about the socio-religious importance of the *satra* institution in Assam with special reference to Barpeta *satra*. In this chapter special attention has been made on socio-religious importance of the *satra* institution in Assam in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular. The last or chapter VII is an overview of the whole work connected with the previous chapters.

Few maps, some relevant photographs, appendix, glossary also have been appended for proper understanding of the problems connected with the subject under discussion.

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CHAPTER II

ASSAM AND ITS PEOPLE

The Area- Assam

Geographically Assam hardly seems a part of India. For many centuries, it has occupied a peripheral position, both geographically and politically in relation to the rest of India. The details of the area of Assam are discussed below-

a) Location: “Assam is mentioned as Pragjyotisha in both the Epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Pragjyotisha includes not only the whole of Assam and parts of North and East Bengal but also the hill tracts upto the border of China. It is known for the first time as Kamarupa in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta and in the early *purana*. The boundaries of Pragjyotisha Kamrupa did not remain static or constant throughout, but underwent changes in different for reasons like political or others. The western limit receded from the river Kartoya to the Manah under the Tai-Ahoms, the great Shan stock in South-East Asia, who had ruled the territory from the thirteen to early nineteenth century. Goalpara district which was an integral part of the ancient Kingdom of Kamrupa was occupied by the rulers of Bengal for several centuries, but was reunited in 1874 when Assam was constituted as a separate province comprising the two valleys of Brahmaputra and the Barak and the hill tracts in the middle, north and the north east. Since independent in 1947 major changes have again taken place in respect of its territorial limit: with the exception of two districts- Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills” (Barpujari, 1990: 1-2).

Now Assam serves as a major gateway to the northeastern corner of India. It shares borders with the countries of Bhutan and Bangladesh and is surrounded by the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya, which together with Assam, are called the Seven Sister States of the country. To the east of Assam lay Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur, to the west lay Bangladesh and Tripura, whereas Mizoram and Meghalaya lay to the south of Assam. Geographically, Assam is an important state of north east India. The position of Assam is between 24-28 degree north latitude and 90-96 degree east longitude. The area of Assam covers 78433 sqr. kms (Taher, 2013: 1). Geographically, Assam can be

divided into Brahmaputra valley in the north, Barak plain in the south, and Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills that divides the two regions. The state is surrounded by hills and mountains on three sides. There had been frequent intercourse between the people of the hills and the plains. A few of the tributaries of the Brahmaputra are snow-fed but the majority of them depend on the monsoons for their volume. They dry up during winter, but along with the rains swell up and overflow their banks and at times cut for themselves fresh channels through alluvial soil of the valley. Even the mighty Brahmaputra shifted its course from time to time.

b) History of the Name: The mythological period of Assam narrates several legendary anecdotes that signify the religious heritage of the state. From Vedic epics to tantric tales, Assam finds special mention in some of the important mythological manuscripts of India. The Danava rulers and Lord Krishna were the two prime mythological figures in the history of Assam. Going by the myths of Assam, it can be said that in the ancient periods, it was a favorite dwelling place of many epic characters. The beginning of the mythological era of Assam started with the domination of the Dynasty of Danava. The archaeological surveys indicate towards the fact that the earliest human communities that appeared in the land of Assam were Australoids and Mongoloids. Known as Kiratas, the Mongoloids were believed to have ruled the entire state of Assam through their capital in Pragjyotishpura.

The province of Assam and its people are very little known abroad. Yet by its earlier name of Kamrupa, it is better known to Hindu India as a land of magic and witchcraft with its famous Tantric shrine Kamakkhya (Kakati, 1989: 1). The province is differently called in different historical period. Its most ancient name was Pragjyotispura. By this name it is referred to in the two great epics- *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and the principal *Puranas*. “In classical Sanskrit literature both Pragjyotisa and Kamrupa occurs as alternative names of the country. Kalidasa referred to it by both the designations” (Kakati, 1989: 1). “In epigraphic records, the name Kamrupa was first mentioned in the Allahbad inscription of Samudra Gupta in the fifth century” (Kakati, 1989: 1).

“The modern designation of Assam was connected with the Shan invaders of Brahmaputra valley. Since 1228 the easternmost portion of the Brahmaputra valley came under the domination of a section of great Thai (Tai) or Shan race which spread eastwards from the boarder of Assam over nearly the whole of further India and far

into the interior China. It seems curious that while the Shan invaders called themselves Tai, they came to be known as Asam and Acan in contemporary Assamese literature. In modern Assamese they are referred to as Ahom, which is a modern phonetic development of earlier Asam” (Kakati, 1989: 1). According to Ahom tradition the name means “unequaled” or peerless and was applied to them in administration by the local tribes (Gait, 2010: 241). During the periods of 13th century, Assam was ruled by two prime Dynasties of Kamarupa and Ahom. Under the rule of Ahom dynasty, Assam started a new journey towards becoming a developed land of India. It is between 13th and 19th century that several tribal communities also came into the historical forefront of Assam. Kacharis, Chutias and Koch were the prominent tribal groups that were found in the medieval times of Assam. According to Ahom tradition the name means ‘unequaled’ or peerless and was applied to them in administration by the local tribes (Gait, 2010: 241). The Ahoms later on turned back the tide of Mughal conquest in the face of repeated incursions by the governor of Bengal (Gait, 2010: 241). The British first intervened in the area in 1824, when they become part of Mughal Empire but pursued an independent political existence outside and thus began the colonial era of Assam (Gait, 2010: 245). Under British administration the term Assam was originally used to designate the six districts of the Brahmaputra Valley under the control of the commissioner of Assam (Gait, 2010: 244). The post-colonial periods of Assam starting from 1947, witnessed many important events such as- emergence of several separate states like that of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh, the Assam movement by AASU, the formation of separate states for tribal sects, United Liberation Front of Assam and Assam Students Union etc.

c) Climate: Scarcity of materials renders it difficult for us to reconstruct the climatic condition of ancient Assam. But we know from the Chinese traveler Hiuen-Tsang is that the country was “Low and damp”, Shihabuddin Talish, the Muslim chronicler who had accompanied Mirjumlah in his expedition to Assam in 1662, informs that ‘It rains for eight months in the year, and even the four months of winter are not free from rain.’ (Gait, 2010: 141-142). Assam is situated in an area of tropical monsoon climate. Its location, situation and topography have given it its own type of climate which is somewhat different from the other parts of India. It has a tropical monsoon type of climate with dry winter and hot wet summer, and later varies from part to part

within the State depending on location, physiographic and other physical factors. During summer the climate is comparatively hot, but in the winter season it is cold. From May to November the climate is humid.

Rainfall: Between March and May when precipitation in northern India is at the minimum, Assam gets some amount of rainfall which keeps the temperature low. Assam experiences an average rainfall 230 cm. The rainy season begins with the onset of monsoon in June and it lasts up to October. Rainfall is heavy and it is the period when the peasants grow paddy in the field. Rainfall peters out slowly during the month of September and it completely stop during the month of October (Taher, 2013: 5).

Temperature: Assam has a moderate temperature. In the plains and foothills of the state, the temperature varies in summer between 28^{0C} and 36^{0C} and in winter between 05^{0C} and 28^{0C}. December and January are the coldest months with temperature remaining in between 5^{0C} and 28^{0C}, while June, July and August are the warmest months with temperature ranging between 28^{0C} and 36^{0C}. The higher parts of the hills and plateaus of the State record a relatively low temperature from 18^{0C} in summer and 2^{0C} to 25^{0C} in winter (Taher, 2013: 5). Earthquakes are of frequent occurrences in this region under which structural monuments are liable to collapse and disintegrate in course of time.

Soil: Soils have been developed on sedimentary, metamorphic rocks and alluvium under the predominant influence of climate, vegetation and topography Uplands soils are dominated by Ochrepts 33 per cent whereas Aquents 29 per cent and Aquepts 12 per cent are the major soils in valleys and flood plains. Soils are acidic, low in fertility and exchange capacity. The soils of the Central Assam range are generally well developed, moderately to strongly acidic with varying degree of aluminum saturation in sub-soils, high in organic matter and low in cation exchange capacity (Sen, Murali, Dubey, Velayutham 2001: 11,45-52). The soils of Brahmaputra valley and Barak valley are alluvial and fertile. These soils, in general, are very deep, poorly drained to well drained, slightly acidic to neutral. North bank soils of the valley are relatively coarse textured than those of south bank and constitute nearly 60 per cent of the total Entices of the state.

River: The River Brahmaputra flows along the middle of the plain following a course which runs from the north-east to the south-west and then in the westwards direction and finally towards the south beyond Dhuburi. The Brahmaputra plain has a gentle

gradient with a large number of tributaries within Assam, like- the Dihang, the Dibang and the Lohit merge near Pasighat and the new mighty river is known as the Brahmaputra. Lots of other rivers flow in Assam. All most all of these are Subsidiary River of the mighty Brahmaputra. There are three rivers flow in the middle part of Barpeta town, namely- River Na-Khanda, River Maranadi and River Chaulkhowa.

d) Flora: Assam has a good measure of plant diversity because of monsoon evergreen forests, tropical semi evergreen forests, most deciduous forests, riparian vegetation, marshes and grasslands. The monsoon evergreen forests have tall trees, intertwining climbers and lianas, epiphyte, saprophyte and dense undergrowth. The presence of very tall trees like *halakh* (East Indian almond) and many varieties of orchids is a noteworthy feature of this type of forest. The tropical semi evergreen, most deciduous forests provide immensely valuable hard woods like *saal* (Indian dammar), *teak* (teak), *nahar* (ironwood tree), and *gamari* (white teak). The riparian vegetation as well as the vegetation found in the swamps and marshes support tall grasses like *nal* (tall reed), *ikara* (thatch grass) and *tara* (galangal) (Taher, 2013: 8).

e) Fauna: The rich vegetation of the state supports numerous varieties of animals from worms and insects to mammals. Assam has wildlife sanctuaries, the most prominent of which are two UNESCO World Heritage sites- the Kaziranga National Park, on the bank of the Brahmaputra River, and the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary, near the border with Bhutan. The Kaziranga is a refuge for the fast-disappearing Indian one-horned rhinoceros. The state is the last refuge for numerous other endangered and threatened species including the white-winged wood duck or *deohanh*, Bengal florican, black-breasted parrotbill, red-headed vulture, white-rumped vulture, greater adjutant, jerdon's babbler, rufous-necked hornbill, Bengal tiger, Asian elephant, pygmy hog, gaur, wild water buffalo, Indian hog deer, hoolock gibbon, golden langur, capped langur, barasingha, Ganges river dolphin, Barca snakehead, Ganges shark, Burmese python, brahminy river turtle, black pond turtle, Asian forest tortoise, and Assam roofed turtle. Threatened species that are extinct in Assam include the *gharial*, a critically endangered fish-eating crocodilian, and the pink-headed duck (which may be extinct worldwide). For the state bird, the white-winged wood duck, Assam is a globally important area. In addition to the above, there are three other National Parks in Assam namely Dibru Saikhowa National Park, Nameri

National Park and the Orang National Park (Choudhury, 1996: 82-83). Assam has conserved the one-horned Indian rhinoceros from near extinction, along with the pygmy hog, tiger and numerous species of birds, and it provides one of the last wild habitats for the Asian elephant. Kaziranga and Manas are both World Heritage Sites. The state has the largest population of the wild water buffalo in the world (Choudhury, 2010: 35), The state has the highest diversity of birds in India with around 820 species. With subspecies the number is as high as 946 (Choudhury, 2000: 90), the mammal diversity in the state is around 190 species (Choudhury, 1997: 30).

People of Assam

The indigenous and long settled inhabitants are recognized as Assamese, not only in language but also in the total way of their life style. Now the details of the people of Assam are discussed below-

a) Ethnographic Profile: Assam is the home land of a large number of populations of various ethnic affiliations having disparate socio-cultural heritage and speaking different languages. They entered Assam through different routes from different directions and different intervals of time. The people of Assam can be divided in to several groups on the basis of religion, race, language etc. During the last few decades with the advancement of scientific knowledge, discovery of sophisticated apparatus and instrument, formulation of new methodology, new anthropological thoughts and concepts also have developed. Genetic concept of race has remarkably influenced the earlier anthropological approach to the study of ethnic groups in any geographical area. The racial criteria of earlier times are being gradually replaced by several markers and their gene frequencies. While interpreting biological observations very often emphasis is given on changeability of physical features and population dynamics caused by diverse factors. Ongoing processes of this nature have brought many changes in the biological characteristics of several population groups of Assam (Das, 1981: 34). In such changing situation the importance of studying ethnic elements in a people has obviously been diminished in present time. But at the same time it must be admitted that to outline the ethnological background of the people of a country even now classical or conventional approach of anthropology is followed.

On the basis of some anthropometric data, A.C Haddon found several ethnic types in Assam. (1) Dolichocephalic-platyrrhine type (Pre-Dravidian) is strong among the

Khasi, Kuki, Manipuri, Kachari etc; (2) Dolichocephalic-mesorrhine type (Nesiot element) is noticed in the Naga and other hill tribes; (3) Mesocephalic-mesorrhine types occurs in India among the Lepcha and Murmi and in certain castes in Bengal and Bihar; (4) Brachycephalic-leptorrhine type which came from the north and is related to the Eurasiatic group; (5) Brachycephalic-platyrrhine is a variety of the Pareocean (Haddon, 1924: 116).

B.S. Guha refers in the census of India (1931) six main races in the population of India: Negrito, Proto-Australoid, Mongoloid, Mediterranean, Western Brachycephal and Nordic (Das, 1990 in Barpujari 1990: 11). On the basis of hair form and certain elements of material culture, Hutton, Mills and others have pointed to the existence of a Negrito strain in Assam. Hutton is of opinion that the earliest occupants of India were probably of the Negrito race and this element formed one of the earliest strains in the people of the hills of Assam (Haddon, 1922 cited in Das, 1990: 13). One of the most important racial elements in the context of studying ethnic history of Assam is the Australoid. The Australoids are known by different names like- Pre-Dravidians, Prto- Australoids, Vedda, and Nishada. They are characterized by dolichocephalic head, marked broad nose, dark brown skin colour, short stature and wavy hair. They resemble the Caucasid in respect of many characteristics and hence they are considered as a sub-division of the Caucasoid by the name Archaic Caucasoid (Das, 1990 in Barpujari 1990: 13). Among the various Bodo tribes of Assam there appear certain Australoid ethnic traits (Haddon, 1922 cited in Das, 1990: 13). When individual tribes of the Bodo group are considered separately, one would find that the Rabha, Garo and Mikir Have Dolichocephalic head form in India. There is no doubt that the tribes of north-east India are predominately Mongoloid. The Mongoloid populations entered into region through various routs at different times. Though these populations differ from each other in respect of certain traits of physical feature, culture and language, yet basically they are of Mongoloid origin and speak languages which could be grouped under a broad heading Tibeto-Burman. Linguistically, the Tibeto-Burman group as a whole is divided into two main branches; North Assam and Assam Burmese. The north Assam branch is formed by the various Arunachal tribes. The Assam Burmese group includes three groups- Bodos, Nagas and Kuki-Chins (Das, 1990 in Barpujari 1990: 17). The Ahom of the Tai or Shan group of the Mongoloids entered Assam in the thirteen century. They conquered Assam and settled themselves mostly in Upper Assam. Another race came to Assam was Alpines or

Armenoids. They have been described as brachycephalic with leptorrhine noses. But among the present day people of Assam, Alpine characteristics are insignificant. The high caste Assamese are by and large mesocephalic. In this context mention may be made of the Kalitas of Assam who were supposed to have been of Alpine origin and who had early settlements near about Sadiya (Kakati, 1989: 59). It is generally believed that the Kalitas or their ancestors entered India from the west, settled in Upper India, and ultimately entered Assam, and they were Ksatriyas. The Indo-Aryans predominate in the valleys of the Indus and the Ganges. In the Gangetic valley they form a continuous chain up to western Bihar. Beyond that limit the Indo-Aryan elements occur sporadically in eastern Bihar, Bengal and Assam. In these regions this type is mostly confined to the people of upper castes. It must be admitted that the physical features of all the Indo-Aryans living in different parts of India are not the same. Hybridization, ecological changes and other biological causes may be the factors responsible for such ethnic variations.

b) Caste and Community: The early inscriptions refer to the traditional castes and professional communities in Kamrupa or ancient Assam. From thirteenth century onwards fresh waves of Brahmanas from Gunda, Kanauj and other parts of North India migrated to Assam. Some learned Brahmana families were also brought by kings to reinforce the Brahmanical tradition. From medieval religious biographies the existence of a large number of *tols* or *chatrasalas* manned by Brahmana scholars are known. The Brahmanas married their girls before attainment of puberty and did not personally plough their field. They earned their livelihood by means of agriculture, teaching, priestly duties and services to the state. The Daivajnas known as *ganaka*, being professionally astrologers, study astrology and earned their livelihood mainly by astrological calculations. The earliest reference to the Daivajna is found in the Kamauli grant of Vaidyaveda of the twelfth century. References to the Daivajna are found in the medieval literary works of Durgavara and in land grants of the Ahom Kings. The Kayasthas, originally a professional class, were engaged in maintaining accounts and serving as scribes. In the Nidhapur grant of Bhasarvarmana both Karanikas and Kayastas are mentioned. During early medieval period some Kayasthas managed to carve out principalities for themselves under the control of the Kamata kings. Sankardeva's family hereditarily enjoyed the office of the chief among the Bhuyans, mostly of the Kayastha community. The Kalitas are more numerous than the

Brahmanas or Daivjnas in Assam. They are scattered all over the Brahmaputra valley. The origin of the Kalitas is obscure, but since the beginning of the fourteen century they have been occupying a respectable status in the Assamese social life. It has not been definitely established whether any relation, ethnic or cultural, exists between the Kalitas of Assam and those of Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. Whereas the Kalitas of Assam are caste Hindus and those of Orissa and Uttar Pradesh are treated as backward tribes. Assamese scholars' like- P.C. Choudhury and K.R.Medhi have tried to prove that the Kalitas of Assam originated from the Alpine stock that migrated to eastern India before the Vedic Aryans. According to the *Katha-guru-charita*, there was a Kalita desa on the Himalayan foot-hills in the north-eastern region where the ancestors of Gopala Ata lived (Lekhuru, ed 1952: 96-98). The Keots occupy the position next to Kalitas. The origin of the Keots has not been dealt with by any scholars either from the anthropological or from the cultural point of view. But it is beyond doubt that the term originated from the Sanskrit Kaivarta which became *kevatta* (boatman) and finally Keot. The Koches or the Rajbangshis are related to the Bodo-Kachari group of Indo Mongoloid stock. When a section of them after assuming the political power came under the religious influence of Brahmanas and Vaisnava preachers and were converted to full-fledged Hindus they assumed the name Rajbangshi or Koch. Although they are not given the status of the Kalitas or Keots, yet they are assigned a higher status in the caste ladder. The Ahoms are also considered as a separate caste. They were the ruling dynasty for six hundred years and started accepting Hinduism from the sixteenth century. It may be mentioned that the community gradually developed and increased in number in course of centuries since its arrival in the thirteen century by absorbing local people into its fold.

Tribes man, both unassimilated as well as semi-assimilated, spread over the entire valley governed by their age-old customary laws, practices and institutions. In regard to settlements, Bodo-Kachari elements spread over the entire Brahmaputra Valley and some parts of the Barak valley. In course of time many of the tribal people were converted to Hinduism and became Koch or Saraniya Kachari and gradually adopted Assamese as their mother tongue. There were large settlements of the Garo, Khasi, Karbi, and Bodo-Kachari tribal people in the south bank of the Brahmaputra. The Karbis mainly resided in the Mikir Hills in the southern parts of central Assam. The Khamtis, the Doaneans, the Tai-phakes, the Turungs, are small Buddhist communities

which migrated to the north-eastern region of Assam from early part of the eighteenth century.

In Assam there seems to have been little or no distinction of castes from professions and each caste or tribe practiced all the arts which are known in the country. They were farmers, traders, blacksmiths, carpenters, extractors of oil, potters, weavers, dyers etc, but they had not the art of shaving, washing or bleaching, working in leather or of making sweet-meats, butter and ghee. Barring a few professions, it is true; all others could be practiced irrespective of caste or creed. Thus goldsmithy, blacksmithy etc., could be adopted as professions by a Kayastha or a Kalita or by a Keot.

c) Demography: Demography is quantitative study of human population and changes in them that result from births, deaths and migrations. Human population holds the pivotal position in the socio-economic and political structure of a society. The significance of demographic changes lies in its impact on the administrative and political structure of the system. Assam is known as the melting pot of diverse cultural elements, the Indo-Aryans and the Austro-Mongoloids being the central one. As a result of the long-term migratory flow into it, Assam is linguistically and ethnically the most diversified State in India and even in the world context. Major components of its social mosaic are Hindus (64.89 per cent) and Muslims (30.92 per cent). In terms of language, the major indigenous language the major indigenous linguistic group is the Assamese. The schedule caste and schedule tribe communities represent 6.90 per cent and 12.40 per cent respectively according to the 2011 census (Goswami, 2013 in Deka 2013: 112-113). According to the census report of 2011, the total population of Assam is 26, 638,407, which constitute about 2.59 per cent of the total population of India (Population Census Report 2011. Higher population concentration was recorded in the districts of Kamarup, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Barpeta, Dhrubri, Darrang and Cachar. As per 2011 census, total population of Assam was 31,169,272. The total population of the state has increased from 26,638,407 to 31,169,272 in the last ten years with a growth rate of 16.93 per cent. The Assamese Hindus are the largest community people in Assam. The population of Assamese Hindus in Assam is 11,379,000 making up 36.50 per cent of Assam population at 2011 census. The People of India project has studied 115 of the ethnic groups in Assam. 79 69 per cent identify themselves regionally, 22 19 per cent locally, and 3

trans-nationally. The earliest settlers were Austro-Asiatic and Dravidians speakers, followed by Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan speakers, and Tai-Kadai speakers. Forty-five languages are spoken by different communities, including three major language families: Austro-Asiatic (5), Sino-Tibetan (24) and Indo-European (12). Three of the spoken languages do not fall in these families. There is a high degree of bilingualism. In 2011, literacy rate in the state was 73.18 per cent. Male literacy rate was 78.81 per cent and female literacy rate was 67.27 per cent. In 2001, the census had recorded literacy in Assam at 63.3 per cent with male literacy at 71.3 per cent and female at 54.6 per cent. Urbanization rate is recorded at 12.9 per cent. The density of population in Assam which was 42 persons per sq km in 1901 census rose to 482 persons per sq km in 2011 census.

But not all those who return themselves as Assamese speaking are considered to be Assamese. The term Assamese is sometimes used to refer to those people who are citizens of Assam. In this sense it includes the tea garden labour and Maymensinghi settlers. More generally however, it is used to denote the indigenous and long settled inhabitants who are recognized as Assamese, not only in language, but also in the cultures and the way of life (Cantlie, 1984: 124). The vast numbers of people residing in the state live in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society and speak languages belonging to three major groups: Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan (Goswami, 1992: 33). Assam is often regarded as the melting pot of a large number of ethnic tribes and races, living together in an environment of harmony and peace. At the time of the 1961 census there were 16307 inhabited villages in Assam with an average population of over 500 per sq. km (Census of India 1961, vol.iii, Assam: 113).

d) Language: Assamese is the main indigenous and official language of Assam, while Bengali holds official status in the three districts in the Barak Valley and is the second most widely spoken language of the state (Distribution of the 22 scheduled languages, census of India (Registrar General and census Commissioner, India 2001, January 4, 2014). Traditionally Assamese was the language of the commons (of mixed origin – Austroasiatic, Tibeto-Burman, Prakrit) in ancient Kamarupa and in the medieval kingdoms of Kamatapur, Kachari, Sutiya, Borahi, Ahom and Koch. Traces of the language are found in many poems by Luipa, Sarahapa, etc. in Charyapada (c. 7th–8th century AD). Modern Assamese language consists of two main currents. The speech

as represented by the Kamrupi and Goalpariya dialects of western Assam constitutes the main current of Assamese language flowing from one end of the state to the others. Moreover, Assamese in its traditional form was used by the ethno-cultural groups in the region as lingua-franca, which spread during the stronger kingdoms and was required for needed economic integration. Localised forms of the language still exist in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh. The form used in the upper Assam was enriched by the advent of Tai-Shans in the 13th century (Gogoi, 1986: 120-125). Linguistically modern Assamese traces its roots to the version developed by the American Missionaries based on the local form in practice near Sibsagar (Siwoxagor) district. Assamese (*Osomeeya*) is a rich language due to its hybrid nature with its unique characteristics of pronunciation and softness. Assamese literature is one of the richest.

The word Dimasa etymologically translates to "Son of the big river" (Di- Water, ma-suffix for great, sa-sons), the river being the mighty Brahmaputra. The Dimasa word "Di" for water forms the root word for many of the major rivers of Assam and the North East India like Dikrang which means green river, Dikhow which means "fetched water", Diyung (huge river) etc. The Brahmaputra River is known as Dilao (Long River) among the Dimasas. Many of the towns and cities in Assam and Nagaland derived their names from Dimasa words. For example- Dimapur (a capital of Dimasa Kingdom), Dispur, Hojai, Diphu and Khaspur (Goswami, 1954: 34-35). Bodo is an ancient language of Assam. Spatial distribution patterns of the ethno-cultural groups, cultural traits and the phenomenon of naming all the major rivers in the North East Region with Bodo-Kachari words (e.g. Dihing, Dibru, Dihong, D/Tista, Dikrai, etc.) reveal that it was the most important language in the ancient times. Bodo is now spoken largely in the Western Assam (Bodo Territorial Council area). After years of neglect, now Bodo language is getting attention and its literature is developing. Other native languages of Tibeto-Burman origin and related to Bodo-Kachari are Deori, Mising, Karbi, Rabha, and Tiwa (Goswami, 1954: 34-35).

There are approximately 7 lakhs Nepali speakers spread all over the state forming about 2.2 per cent of Assam's total population. Majority of the Nepali speakers are found in the district of Sonitpur where over 3 lakh people speak in Nepali language.

There are speakers of Tai languages in Assam. A total of six Tai languages were spoken in Assam. Two are now extinct.

- Tai Phake

- Tai Aiton
- Khamti
- Khamyang (critically endangered)
- Ahom (extinct)
- Turung (extinct)

The Tai Ahom language (brought by Sukaphaa and his followers), is no longer a spoken language today. The language is receiving increased attention for research after centuries of usage by the Bailungs (traditional priests), (Gogoi, 1986: 134). Bengali is the official language in Barak Valley and the widely spoken language. Sylheti, a dialect of Bengali is mostly spoken in the region of Barak Valley. Sadri, a dialect of Hindi, Santali, Kurukh and Mundari is spoken by the 6 millions tribal population (Tea tribes) spread in the tea garden dominated districts of Assam. They were brought as tea estate labourers by the British from the tribal heartland of central-eastern India to Assam during the 1860s. They are mostly found in the districts of Upper Assam and Bodoland Territorial Administration Districts.

Economy: The economic life of a country is generally controlled by three factors, the geography of the landscape, the climate and the general habit of the people inhabiting it. Assam is furrowed by two large rivers, the Brahmaputra and the Barak, while the mountains and hills on the different fringes give rise to innumerable rivulets that help the irrigation of the land, augmented further by the largest amount of rainfall in the province. Inhabited by men of diverse ethnic origin in this topographical set up, the economic pattern of the land assumed diverse characters. If we agree to the view that the Austro-Asiatics were one of the earliest inhabitants of the land and then it may be inferred that they for the first time introduced there the cultivation of rice and certain common fruits and vegetables. They also seem to have introduced the method of taming the elephant and the horse.

Economy of Assam today represents a unique juxtaposition of backwardness amidst plenty. Growth rate of Assam's income has not kept pace with that of India's during the Post-British Era; differences increased rapidly since the 1970s. While the Indian economy grew at 6 per cent per annum over the period of 1981 to 2000, the same of Assam's grew only by 3.3 per cent. In the Sixth Plan period Assam experienced a negative growth rate of 3.78 per cent against a growth rate of 6 per cent of India's. During the post-liberalized era (after 1991), the gaps between growth rates of

Assam's and India's economy widened further. In the current decade, according to recent analysis, Assam's economy is showing signs of improvement. In the year 2001-2002, the economy grew in 1993-94 constant prices at 4.5 per cent, falling to 3.4 per cent in the next financial year. During 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, in the same constant prices, the economy grew more satisfactorily at 5.5 and 5.3 per cent respectively. The advanced estimates placed the growth rate for the year 2005-2006 at above 6 per cent.

In the 1950s, soon after the independence, per capita income in Assam was little higher than that in India; it is much lower today. In the year 2000-2001, per capita income in Assam was INR 6,157 at constant prices (1993-94) and INR 10,198 at current prices, which is almost 40 per cent lower than that in India. According to the recent estimates, per capita income in Assam at 1993-94 constant prices has reached INR 6520 in 2003-2004 and INR 6756 in 2004-2005, which is still much lower than the same of India (Deka, 1961: 32-45).

Sectoral analysis again exhibits a dismal picture. The average annual growth rate of agriculture, which was only 2.6 per cent per annum over 1980s, has unfortunately fallen to 1.6 per cent in the 1990s. Manufacturing sector has shown some improvement in the 1990s with a growth rate of 3.4 per cent per annum than 2.4 per cent in the 1980s. Since past five decades, the tertiary sector has registered the highest growth rates than the primary and secondary sectors, which even have slowed down in the 1990s than in the 1980s. Agriculture accounts for more than a third of Assam's income and employs 69 per cent of total workforce. Assam's biggest contribution to the world is its tea. Assam produces some of the finest and most expensive teas in the world. Other than the Chinese tea variety *Camellia sinensis*, Assam is the only region in the world that has its own variety of tea, called *Camellia assamica*. Assam tea is grown at elevations near sea level, giving it a malty sweetness and an earthy flavor, as opposed to the more floral aroma of highland teas. Assam also accounts for fair share of India's production of rice, rape-seed, mustered, jute, potato, sweet-potato, banana, papaya, areca-nut and turmeric. Assam is also a home of large varieties of citrus fruits, leaf vegetables, vegetables, useful grasses, herbs, spices, etc. which are mostly subsistence crops. Assam's agriculture has yet to experience modernization in a real sense and is lagging behind. With implications to food security, per capita food grain production has declined in past five decades. On the other hand, although productivity of crops increased marginally, still these are much

lower in comparison to highly productive regions. For instance, yield of rice, which is staple food of Assam, was just 1531 kg per hectare against India's 1927 kg per hectare in 2000-2001 (which itself is much lower than Egypt's 9283, USA's 7279, South Korea's 6838, Japan's 6635 and China's 6131 kg per hectare in 2001). On the other hand, although having a strong domestic demand, 1.5 million hectares of inland water bodies and numerous rivers and streams and 165 varieties of fishes, fishing is still in its traditional form and production is not self-sufficient.

Apart from tea and petroleum refineries, Assam has few industries of significance. Industrial development is inhibited by its physical and political isolation from neighbouring countries such as Myanmar, China and Bangladesh and from the other growing South East Asian economies. The region is landlocked and situated in the eastern most periphery of India and is linked to the mainland of India by a flood and cyclone prone narrow corridor with weak transportation infrastructure. The international airport in Guwahati is yet to find airlines providing better direct international flights. The Brahmaputra suitable for navigation does not have sufficient infrastructure for international trade and success of such a navigable trade route will be dependent on proper channel maintenance and diplomatic and trade relationships with Bangladesh.

Assam is a major producer of crude oil and natural gas in India. Assam is the second place in the world (after Titusville in the United States) where petroleum was discovered. Asia's first successful mechanically drilled oil well was drilled in Makum (Assam) way back in 1867. The second oldest oil well in the world still produces crude oil. Most of the oilfields of Assam are located in the Upper Assam region of the Brahmaputra Valley. Assam has four oil refineries located at Guwahati, Digboi, Numaligarh and Bongaigaon with a total capacity of 7 MTPA (Million Metric Tonnes per annum). Bongaigaon Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited (BRPL) is the only S&P CNX 500 conglomerate with corporate office in Assam. One of the biggest public sector oil companies of the country, Oil India Ltd. has its plant and headquarters at Duliajan.

Although having a poor overall industrial performance, there are several other industries, including a chemical fertiliser plant at Namrup, petrochemical industries at Namrup and Bongaigaon, paper mills at Jagiroad, Panchgram and Jogighopa, sugar mills at Barua Bamun Gaon, Chargola, Kampur, cement plant at Bokajan, cosmetics plant of Hindustan Unilever (HUL) at Doom Dooma, etc. Moreover, there are other

industries such as jute mill, textile and yarn mills, silk mill, etc. (Deka, 1961: 32-45) Unfortunately many of these industries are facing loss and closer due to lack of infrastructure and improper management practices.

f) Kinship system: Man does not live alone in society. From birth till death he is surrounded by a number of people. Some of these people are his relatives, some are friends some are neighbours while all others are strangers and unknown to him. He is bound to all those people who are related to him either on the basis of blood or marriage. The relations based on blood or marriage may be close or distant. The bond of blood or marriage which binds people together in group is called kinship. According to the Dictionary of Anthropology, kinship system includes socially recognized relationships based on supposed as well as actual genealogical ties. These relationships are the result of social interaction and recognized by society. ‘The most universal and the most basic of these bonds are based on reproduction; an inherent human drive is called kinship’ (Mazumdar and Madan, 1990: 90). There are two kinds of such bonds found in the society. This is- 1) bond between spouses and their relatives on both side and bond between parents and their children and that between children of the same parents. “The Assamese recognize two categories of kin comprehended in the term *mitir-kutumba* i.e. affines and agnates. The *kutumba* is usually identified with the agnatic line or house (*bamsa*) and *bangsa* connected by marriage becomes affines (*mitir*) of one another” (Cantlie, 1984: 25). There are two consanguine groups- *bangsa* (the descent group) and the family (Cantlie, 1984: 25). In Assamese society the descent group is defined by descent in the male line from a common ancestor within seven generations (Cantlie, 1984: 26). Some say the descent group lasts forever and that no marriage should take place as long as any connection can be traced, but in practice few men can name their great grand fathers (Goswami, 1982: 53) In Assam commensality is seen as the defining criterion of a single family. In every household there is one kitchen and rice pounder. Division of a joint family is understood as eagling separately (Ali and Medhy, 1982: 106-109).

Affinity is conceived in terms of the translation of women, both physically and ritually from one descent group to another. Affinities usually persist for two generations. (Ali and Medhy, 1982: 136) A son in law is required to visit his wife’s parents at least three times a year at the seasonal festivals and his children will know and visit their mother’s house where their maternal uncle lives. The descent group is

defined by descent in the male line from a common ancestor within seven generations. Some say the descent group lasts forever and that no marriage should take place as long as any connection can be traced, but in practice few men can name their great-grandfather.

g) Marriage: Every kind of human grouping comes into being, and is maintained through a process of recruitment by which various persons become its members. In every human family the majority of its members are recruited into it by being born into it. But before children can be born, some women or men must be recruited into it. A family comes into being through such a communication of spouses. Marriage is the socially recognised form of such recruitment through communication. ‘Marriage is formal union of man and woman by which they become husband and wife.’ (Soanes, 2003: 548). The dharmasastra writers speak of eight forms of marriage- *brahma*, *prajapatya*, *daiva*, *arsha*, *asura*, *gandharva*, *rakshasa* and *paisaca*. These eight forms of marriage may be grouped under the following heads:

1. Marriage in which the father made a gift of his daughter- *brahma* and *prajapatya*.
2. Marriage which more or less resembled the sale of the girl, however insignificant or veiled that may be *daiva*, *arsha* and *asura*.
3. Marriage or union effected without the consent of the father or the guardian- *gandharva*, *rakshasa* and *paisaca* (Chattopadhyaya, 1990: 218).

One ancient custom that is followed even today among the higher castes of Assam or elsewhere in India is that, the would be wife should not be *sapinda*¹ or direct blood relationship of the groom. Though thus there is no doubt that we can trace the influence of Aryanism on the marriage system of ancient Assam, still it is not unlikely that the matrilineal society of the Khasis and the Garos may have influenced the *stri-acara* rites of the higher caste Hindus. On the other hand while according to the orthodox view, endogamy is the general rule as a restriction on marriage, “with the hill tribes there is usually no definite prohibition against marriage beyond the tribal limits, and endogamy is nevertheless well-established in practice (Chattopadhyaya, 1990: 224).

¹ Sapinda relationship arises between two persons through their being connected by particles of one body.

In Assam every separate ethnic and religious group follow its own system of marriage though the majority of its population follow the Hindu system. Of the eight kinds of prescribed marriages only the *prajapati* system is now prevailing among the Hindus.

Among the Assamese Hindus, marriage is first contracted by negotiation and prohibited degrees on both sides are always carefully avoided (marriage-assam online portal/ online.assam.govt.in). Marriage is prohibited within the descent group for seven or nine generations reckoned by matrilineal descent from a common male ancestor. Marriage is also prohibited with the daughter's line consisting at her related by cognate decent from a common ancestor within 5 generations. (Cantlie, 1984: 89) In practice, however, marriage take place when the old people can no longer trace any relationship, possession of a common *gotra* (clan) name is also a bar to marriage (Ali and Medhy, 1982: 174-175). A *gotra* takes its name from a permit in ancient times and membership indicates relative patrilineal descent from the off springs or disciples who shared his grazing ground. In practice, however, the *gotra* system limits the choice of spouse only in the case of the Brahmins and perhaps a few *Kayastha* families, as almost all the other castes are members of *kashyap gotra* within which marriage is allowed (Cantlie, 1984: 90). Non Brahman castes require a *gotra* name only for the performance of Vedic rites and if as often happens a man does not know his *gotra*, the priest will assign him to *kashyap gotra* (Cantlie, 1984: 90).

One ancient custom that is followed even today among the higher castes like, *Haribhakata* (fellow initiate) acquires a common soul which enables them, even if of different castes to eat together. They address each other as *tavai* (father), *amoi* (mother). One cannot marry the sister of the other and cannot their children intermarry (Gogoi, 1990: 79). The same prohibition applies in the case of the *sakhi* (friend) of groom and the friend of bride who is closely associated with the pair in the wedding rites and become identified with them. The groom usually acts as his *sakhi* (Gogoi, 1990: 69). Marriage by negotiation and elopement are seen in the Assamese society.

h) Religion: Religion is an integral part of any community or society, necessary for its development. It is often considered as an organized approach for leading a fulfilling and happy life. Religion means 'the belief in and worship of a God or Gods or a particular system of faith and worship' (Soanes, 2003: 755). Hinduism, being the major religion in Assam, comprises about 64.9 per cent of the total population (www.bharatonline.com). There are two sects of Hinduism such as *sakta* and

vaisnava are found among the Hindu People of Assam (Sharma, 1990: 327). The common features of the religious practices of most of the primitive people may perhaps be named as fertility cult and ancestor worship often assuming the form of phallic worship and headhunting. These features may be identified in some way or other of the megalithic remains of ancient Assam. Since the practice of raising megaliths still continue with some of tribes, it is difficult to be defining about the date of these remains. Nevertheless, the megaliths, even those raise in recent times, afford us as a glimpse into the primitive religion representing the similar religious beliefs and practices. From earlier times *saktism*, the cult of worshipping a female Goddess is found in Assam. Traditionally Kamrupa has been recognized as the principal center of the *sakta* cult with its chief temple of Kamakhya. Through the ages Kamakhya has remained the most celebrated center of the *sakta* cult in Assam. The *Kalika Purana* has been composed in ancient Kamrupa for the very purpose of glorifying the Goddess Kamkhya. As related in *Kalika Purana* the genital organ of the Devi fell at Kamakhya, when her dead body has been carried hither and thither frantically by Lord Siva. The hill where Kamakhya is situated represented the body of Siva himself (Sharma, 1990: 317-318). A majority of Assamese Hindu is the *vaisnavas*. The *vaisnavas* do not believe in idol worship and perform the *nama-kirtana* where the glory of lord Vishnu is recited (www.assam.org). Assamese *vaisnavism* is institutionalized at village level in the *namghar*. The *namghar* is the local community hall within which its members ordinarily live their lives. In every village there is at least one and usually several *namghars* whose members from a 'religious congregation consisting of a restricted association of household who combine specially for the religious purpose for maintaining a local centre of devotional worship (Cantlie, 1984: 144). The Hindus of Assam have certain peculiar customs and rituals which may be termed as the popular religion. The tribal contribution to the religion of Assamese Hindus is perhaps of the greatest order in the domain of this popular religion. As an example we may mention the *bihu* festival which is observed by the Hindus of Assam with a religious fervour. It will be seen that the kings often made gifts of land to the Brahmins on the occasion of the *Bahag bihu* and *Magh bihu* for gaining religious merits. On these occasions the Hindus say prayers and *naam-prasangas* and offer *naivedyas* as a part of their religious life. A judicious analysis however would show that the *Bahag bihu* had an origin in the primitive fertility cult, as evidenced by its songs and dances which are full of sexual symbols and

significance (Gogoi, 1990: 88). The *Magh bihu* too may be traced back to the primitive harvesting festival.

The other religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism etc. are also practiced in Assam. According to the 2011 census, 61.5 per cent were Hindus, 34.22 per cent were Muslims (Census of India, 2011). Christian minorities 3.7 per cent are found among Scheduled castes. Bodos account for 40 per cent. Other religions include Jainism (0.1%), Buddhism (2.0%) Sikhism (0.1%) and Animism (amongst ,Khamti Phake, Aiton etc. communities). Out of 32 districts of Assam, 9 are Muslim majority according to the 2011 census of India. The districts are Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Morigaon, Nagaon, Karimganj, Hailakandi, Darrang and Bongaigaon.

i) Festivals: Festival is that which we may call ceremony or merry making or a jubilee. These are the external expression of social behavior and the symbolic representations of situations. Modern festivals emanated from the beliefs and magical rituals of the ancient community. In the Oxford Dictionary the meaning of festival is- (i) a series of performances of music, plays, films/movies etc. usually organized in the same place once a year, a series of public events connected with the particular activity or idea (ii) a day or period of the year when people stop working to celebrate a special event, often a religious one (New Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2005: 567). Festivals form an essential aspect of a culture. Assam has a rich cultural heritage as it is a land of composite cultures and it is a land of great social and cultural diversity. The development of culture of a society is expressed through its activities. It is closely related to the rites and rituals, art and practices of the society. Through the different periods of history; different ethnic groups have enriched Assamese culture with their contributions. Assamese people celebrate most colourful festivals because Assam is a perfect fusion of heritage of different tribes and sub tribes from time immemorial. The festivals of Assam are mainly agricultural, but also include religious and social flavours. From the various festivals and rituals one can easily understand the rich and raw culture of Assamese people. The major festivals of Assam are divided in four categories. These are (1) Religious festival (2) Agricultural festival (3) Folk festival and (4) Other festival.

The most important social and cultural celebration of Assam is the *bihu*. It is celebrated in Assam by both tribal and non-tribal communities and is basically seasonal and agricultural. There are three *bihus*- *rangali bihu*, *kangali bihu* and

bhogali bihu. This festival is observed with great enthusiasm irrespective of caste, creed and religious affinity. *Rangali bihu* is observed in mid- April. It is observed by dancing and singing in open spaces as well as in the houses. The second important *bihu* is the *bhogali bihu*, a harvest festival celebrated in mid January. It is celebrated with community feasts. The *kangali bihu* is observed in mid October. The name *kangali* means poor, because by this time of the year which is before the harvest is low in a common man's house (Gogoi, 1990: 90). The *bhatheli* or *suari* festival is primarily a magical rite associated with fertility cult current in the district of old kamrup, Goalpara and Darang. The Bodos of Assam also observe it as *bhatheli* meaning- going down the stream (Gogoi, 1990: 92). The *maho-ho* festival of the undivided districts of Kamarupa, Goalpara and Darang respectively show similarity of purpose. The *ambubashi* or *ameti* is another seasonal festival based on the fertility cult (Gogoi, 1990: 99). This festival is celebrated in Kamakhya temple with religious fervor. As most of the native population of Assam is *vaisnavite* Hindu, So that the cultural life of Assam is interwoven with the activities of two important cultural and religious institutions the *satra* and the *namghar* (www.assam.org, assamese people and their culture). The *vaisnavite* Hindu people observe all the *satra* centric festivals like- *doul jatra* (the festival of colours) *janmastami* (birth anniversary of Lord Krishna) *kirtana* (Death anniversary of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva). Especially at Barpeta *satra doul* festival is observed in a grand way. Seasonal festivals, such as Durga puja, Lakshmi puja, Kali puja, dewali, Sivaratri etc. may be considered as calendaric. The festivals of Muslims such as Muharram, Sabebat, Ramzan, and Idd-uz-zaha are calendaric. Similarly Good Friday and Christmas are also observed here. The non tribal Hindus, the tribals and the Muslims possess their own set of sacramental festivals associated with rites of life-cycle. The life cycle festivals are limited to birth, death and marriage rites. An important rite is annaprasanna, ceremony of putting rice in a child's mouth for the first time. The Tai-Ahom community celebrates death rite, known as the *medam-me-phi*, with elaborate procedure with oblation to the dead and sacrifices to the God (Sarma, 2013: 235).

j) Food: Every state of India has different food habits and style of cooking. Indian traditional cuisine is a blend of vegetarian and non-vegetarian food items. Assam is popularly known as the land of Red River and Blue Hills. Assamese food habits imply the food items consumed by the majority people of Assam. During medieval Assam

acquired and develop its own ethos in respect of food, drink, dress and articles of daily use and luxuries. In their food habits majority of the people were non-vegetarians, a majority belonging to upper castes took vegetarian diet. Even the Brahmans who were invariably vegetarians in almost all other regions of India were non-vegetarians in Eastern India. The digest-writers of Kamarupa on *dharmasastras* have also accepted, though with reluctance non-vegetarian diets for upper caste Hindus of Assam. The *Yogini-tantra*, (*Yogini Tantra*, 2/5/289-91) a work of the sixteenth century, gives a long list of fishes, animals and birds that could be offered to gods, goddesses and *sradhas* (memorial). The list of animals suitable for offering is goat, deer, musk-deer, whisk-deer, iguana, tortoise, hare, wild bear and rhinoceros (Sarma, 1994: 199). Rice was the main item of food. Assam produced varieties of fine, superfine and rough rice for different use. From different varieties of rice not only the two principal meals were prepared but also the breakfast and tiffin, viz. *muri*, *akhai*, *cira* (preparation from fried paddy and rice) were made. Cakes of different varieties were also prepared from pounded or powdered rice. The *Katha-gurucarita* gives a long list of sweet and dishes which included *dadhi* (curd), *dugdha* (milk), *ksira* (condensed milk), *lavanu* (butter), *ghrita* (clarified butter), *madhu* (honey), *paramanna* (rice boiled in milk sugar), *akhai* (parched paddy), *cira* (flattened rice), *zeni* (sugar), *puri-luchi* (wheat-cake fried in ghee), *pitha* (cakes prepared of rice powder) (Lekharu, 1952: 212) Sankardeva, in his rendering of a book X of the *Bhagavata Purana* gives an exhaustive list of different sweet and delicious eatables in different places (Sarma, 1994: 199). Some of these no doubt are found in the original Sanskrit texts, but most of them were local preparations. The preparations quoted in the Assamese version are various curries having different flavours: sugar-cane, *akhai*, *cira* sweet balls of rice-powder, molasses, fragrant banana, curd, milk, honey, ghee, rice-cakes, ripened jack fruits, rice boiled in milk and sugar, a mixture of milk, condensed milk, cream, sugar-candy, refined sugar and preparation of fried in ghee (Sarma, 1994: 199). Nowadays also such kinds of dishes are eaten by the Assamese people. *Dal* (pulses), *paleng-sak* (garden spinach), *jali komora* (tender pumpkin), *jira-marichbata* (pasted pepper and cumin seeds), *kacu-sak* (edible arum shoots), *kachkaal* (green banana), *rau-machar gada* (back portion of the carp fish), *citalar kalathi* (the lower thorn less part of the *cital* fish), soup of *magur* fish and *mula* (radish), with the sol fish with jujube fruit, tender castrated goat, cane-shoots, fried pieces of *brinjal*. Assam is very rich in different varieties of citrus fruits, the juice of which with or

without mixing water was also served. Among high caste Hindus indulgence in wine or spirituous liquor was considered a great sin. But tribal people cultivated the habit of drinking liquor from childhood and it is a must in all their social and religious gatherings. Liquor is brewed from rice, and is called *lao-pani* or *joo*. The Assamese are addicted to chewing *tamol-pan* (areca-nut and betel leaves) with lime and tobacco. Sometimes clove, cardamoms, camphor etc. were added to make it tasteful. It is offered to guests as the first item of entertainment; the offering of *tamol-pan* in a tray or *sarai* is considered a great honour to person or persons concerned. The *Yogini Tantra* has remarked that the women of Kamarupa are habitually addicted to *tambuls* (Sarma, 1994: 199). The staple food of the Assamese people is rice. Typically, an Assamese plate would contain *bhat* (rice) with *dal*, *masor jool* (fish curry) or *saak* and *bhaji* (assam en.wikipedia.org). Rice is one of the main dishes in Assam and variety of different rice are grown and eaten in different ways- roasted, rounded, boiled or just soaked. Fish curry or simply fried fish is one of the most important dishes. Birds like ducks and pigeon are also used as dishes. Pork and Mutton dishes are mainly popular among the younger generation. Another favorite combination can be loochi with curry or *bhaji* which can be vegetarian or non- vegetarian, and *asar* (pickle). Two main characteristics of a traditional meal in Assam are *khar* (apatiter) and *tenga* (swore). The food is usually served in bell-metal utensils. Some portable items made from rice are *muri*, *ankhoi*, *chira*, *sandah* (made from rice) etc. *Pitha* is a kind of rice cake makes an integral food item of the Assamese plate during the festival of Bihu and other major occasions.

k) Art and Crafts: The tradition of a place finds expression in the local art and craft. Even a cursory look at the various handicrafts and handloom products made in Assam will amply justify this statement. The artists and artisans of Assam are known far and wide for their exquisite craftsmanship. In addition to the world famous silk products, bamboo and cane products of Assam have also occupy an important place in the handicraft industry of the state. With the spread of the *vaisnavite* movement the mask and paintings industry also developed. There is a sense of simplicity and styles in the skills of the Assamese crafts man and this is what makes their products so unique and charming.

The abundance of bamboo and cane in the forest of Assam has made it easier for the local people to use these raw materials in the manufacture of various bamboo and

cane products. Handloom comprises of one of the oldest industries in the northeastern state of Assam. It is known far and wide for its rich textures and designs. So much importance is attached to the industry that it is customary for every young Assamese girl to acquire the skill to weave, in order to qualify for marriage. Similarly the goldsmith knew how to produce excellent products with new designs and textures. Masks are used in theatrical performances depicting various characters and this is one of the most popular industries of Assam. Masks are known as *mukhas*, are said to be the base of the Assamese culture and tradition. They revolve around the Assamese tribal myths and folktales. Since ages, these masks have been the centre of each and every cultural event in the state. In the same way metal craft industry is one of the oldest cottage industries of Assam. The traditional paintings of Assam served as a source of inspiration to thousands of art lovers across the country. Wood craft is also traditional art and culture of Assam.

1) Education: Education means the acquisition of knowledge and experiences as well as the development of values, skills and attitude which help a person to lead a better or wonderful life. From the epigraphic and literacy sources it can be safely presumed that the ancient Indian system of education and curriculum are prescribed by the *dharma-sutras* (Sarma, 1990: 287). Those were also followed in Kamrupa. The formal education imparted in *tols* and *pathsalas* was not widespread as to cover all sections of population. It was mainly confined to the upper stratum of the society, like- the Brahmins, the Kayastas and the Kalitas. Under the *gurukula* system, from the *upanayana* (initiation) till the ceremony of *samavartana* (convocation) the pupils studied at the house of his teacher and carried on his academic life according to the code of conduct prescribed by the *dharma-sutras*. According to Gautama a student should devote twelve years to study one Veda. The curriculum for all the castes was not identical, although a modicum of certain fundamental branches of studies was imparted to all. In the case of Brahmin pupil, emphasis was laid on the knowledge of the Vedic studies. With the passage of time the Vedic study came to be regarded as a secondary importance for the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas. In the Arthashastra of Kautilya, it is held that the education of the Kshatriyas, especially of the royal princes, should include the study of the triple Vedas. Similarly the education prescribed for the Vaisyas was vocational-oriented besides a superficial knowledge of the Vedas and Vedangas (Sarma, 1990: 289). So far as the study of the Vedas and ancillary branches including different systems of philosophy are concerned, the

burden of imparting instruction was shouldered by the Brahmans. But the vocational or technical education befitting the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas was probably left to professionally skilled persons who either acquired proficiency through the hereditary process or imbibed through professional guilds.

Nowadays Assam occupies a distinct place in the field of education among the whole north eastern region of India. The overall literacy rate of Assam is 64.28 per cent, where the literacy rate of male is 71.93 per cent and female 56.03 per cent. Large numbers of educational institutions are established here imparting education to the students of entire north eastern region. Formal education starts in schools with elementary, secondary, higher secondary. Then the students move to a college and pursue education in a stream he is interested in. The Directorate of Elementary Education of Assam organizes numerous activities to universalize Elementary Education (UEE). The Elementary education in Assam includes classes from Class I to Class VII, within the age group of 6 - 14 years of students. Secondary and higher secondary schools in Assam covering class tenth and twelfth respectively. Assam has set up many educational institutions for higher studies following high standards to impart education in the field of engineering and management. The Government of Assam provides free and compulsory education for children till the age of 14. The requirement for technical education has been increasing gradually as a result the government has paid more attention in this field and set up many esteemed institutions in Assam. Assam has 5 universities namely Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati (Guwahati), Assam Agricultural University (Jorhat), Dibrugarh University (Dibrugarh), Gauhati University (Gauhati), Tezpur University (Tezpur) and Assam University.

m) Dress and Ornaments: Assam manufactures three kinds of silk, viz, *endi* (cotton silk) *muga* (a kind of golden coloured silk) and *pat*. (Sarma, 2013: 202) *Gomceng* and *mejankari* were the finest varieties of silk which were mainly used by the gentry and members of the royal family. Usually cotton clothes were worn, but on ceremonial or official occasions apparels of *muga* and *pat* were used. In medieval biographies of *vaisnavite* preachers we come across certain areas or villages known for producing silk. Budha Ata, one of the foremost disciples of Madhabdeva hailed from Tantikuchi where silk cloths were produced. Ananta Kandali, one of the junior contemporaries of Sankardeva, in his autobiographical reference to his ancestry gives an interesting

description of the locality in which silk was produced in abundance. He refers to Hajo which probably included Suwalkuchi which still produces *muga*, *pat* and *endi* ((Sarma, 1994: 203). Haliram Dhekiyal Phukan gives a list (Haliram.112-3) of dresses used in Assam during the pre- British days. The Vaisnava literature and the Manasa cycle of kavyas contain numerous references to apparels used in early Assam.(Ramananda, a biographer Sankardeva of 17th century, describes the dress of the great saint thus: *sire sukla pag, pitapacara gawat/raktavarna bhuni pindhi katti prdesat/divya malatira mala pindhiya sirat/sugandha candana lipinsarva sarirat* means with white turban on the head, a yellow wrapper on the body, a garland of galati flowers on the turban and sweet scented candana paste all over the body, Sankara dressed himself. The common man used only two pieces of cloths, viz. *bhuni or dhuti* as the lower garment and *pacra or cellang* (light wrapper) as upper wear. A cotton towel having coloured borders was also indispensable. The use of *jama* (coat) *chauga* and *askan* or *chapkan* (long flowing shirt) and *ijar* (pant) probably came to be used by the nobles and officers towards the later part of Ahom rule, though the Koch kings and nobles of western Assam and Cooch Behar might have used them earlier because of the influence of Muslim Bengal. A short coat, called *mirjai* reaching upto the waist was also used. According to the *Deodhai Buranji*, *tangali* (waist band) *bachowal* (waist cover) and *hashati* (hand-towel) were adopted by the Dihingiya Raja from the Barabhuyans of the north bank after shifting them to the south bank in 1505 (Rajkumar, Itihase suwara casata Basar,p.843). The use of *paijar* (a kind of shoe) was the exclusive privilege of the kings and nobles, the common people were not entitled to put on *paijar*. They used *kharam* (a wooden sandal) and *phanti* (a flat wooden slipper with straps) when necessary.

As a protection against the sun and rain people used country made *japi* (sun-shade) of various dimensions. Some of these were decorated with artistic designs and ornamentation. The smallest one resembling a sola-hat was used only against the sun. The biggest one called *barjapi* about seven or eight feet in diameter was symbol of prestige and nobility. It was usually carried by a servant alongside the lady or the noble. Married ladies used *sarudaiya japi*, the surface of which was often decorated with red velvet and designs. The earliest reference to umbrella is found in the *Manasa-kavya* of Mankar, an early sixteen century poet. Mankar describes Madhavdeva as carrying an umbrella and a stick while approaching *Durga* for alms (*Hate lathi laila gosain kandhe laila chati/ calia devara deva yathai parvati*).

The Assamese women were expert weavers. There was a strong belief that unless a wife could clean cotton, spin yarn and weave martial attire for her husband within a night he might not return victorious from the fight. Wearing apparel of the females generally made of cotton was mainly *buku kapor*, *riha* or a scarf and *mekhela* or a waist coat. These two with a *chelleng* (wrapper) formed the whole dress of women. The finest textiles both cotton and silk, referred by Dhekiyal Phukan were hitherto worn by the members of the royal family and dignitaries (Sarma, 1994 in Barpujari 1994: 204).

Ornaments of gold, silver, ember and copper studded with jewels were used by both males and females. As in the case of dress, restrictions existed in use of ornaments also. According to satsari Asam Buranji, Bhaga Raja (1641-1644) passed prohibitive orders not to use gold ornaments by the commoners. The use of luxurious articles was also prohibited. How far these restrictions were observed in practice cannot be ascertained because a large variety of ornaments are recorded in medieval literature and chronicles. Probably no such restrictions existed in the regions ruled by the Koches and Muslims. Madhava Kandali of the 14th century mentions *batrisa alamkara* (thirty two varieties of ornaments) specifically mentioning *mukuta* (crown), *kundala* (ear-ring), *satasani* (seven stringed necklace), *napura* (anklet), *pagari* (probably tinkling bells) *kankana* (wristlet or bangles) *keyura* (armlet) *ratnanguli* (gold ring), (Lekharu, 1952: 211).

Haliram Dhekiyal Phukan, gives an exhaustive list of ornaments used by the people of Assam (Haliram, 114-5). According to him no male or female in Assam remained unadorned without ornaments. Men used to wear *keru* (clove-shaped ornament) and *loka-para* in ears, *mala-mani* (necklace of coral beads) around the neck and *gamkharu* (bangles) in the wrist. The common people, who barely managed to live from hand to mouth, could not afford to put costly ornaments but a chain of coral beads very often adorned their necks. Besides the ornaments noticed in the early literature and chronicles noted above- the Assamese also used *bena* (a necklace having a crescent-shape pendant), *gejera* (almost like a *bena* with a slight difference), *sithipati* (an ornament worn on the parting of hair), *dugdugi* (a bejeweled pendant), *cakali* (a circular gold ornament of the neck) and a few others. Besides gold and silver, ornaments of bronze were used by the poor people.

Nowadays Assamese people wear very simple dresses and mostly weak hand loomed clothes. The traditional dress worn by womenfolk of Assam is called *mekhela-chadar*

or *riha-mekhela*. This traditional dress is made from cotton or silk and *muga* silk which are the pride of Assam. Now a day's some women and almost all the girls like to wear *salwar* suit, *sari* and other modern dresses. The traditional dress worn by the men folk of Assam is *churia* or *dhoti* and *kameez* or shirt and over it a *chadar* known as *cheleng* is spread (www.jaiaaiaxom.com,assam).

Assam is a peripheral state of India and seems hardly a part of India, geographically and politically. The indigenous people who have settled here for a long time are called Assamese. People outside Assam knew very little about its people. The ancient name of Assam was Kamrupa. It was also known as Pragjyotishpura. This is a name with which Assam was referred to in the two great epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Assam state is surrounded by hills and mountains on three sides, but it is not entirely cut-off from Tibet of China and south East Asia lying beyond them. There has been movement of men, materials, plants and animals directly and indirectly between Assam and the above mentioned areas. Assam, along with rest of the north-east India is transitional zone between south Asia and south-east Asia. Locationally Assam is bordered by two foreign countries, namely, Bhutan and Bangladesh and seven Indian States, namely, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. Assam is situated in an area of tropical monsoon climate. Its location, situation and topography have given it its own type of climate which is somewhat different from the other parts of India. It has a tropical monsoon type of climate with dry winter and hot wet summer, and later varies from part to part within the State depending on location, physiographic and other physical factors. Assam is fairly rich in vegetation and it supports numerous varieties of animals from worms and insects to mammal. It will be evident that Assam was the home of the two major races of mankind, the Caucasoid and the Mongoloid and also the Australoid. With the advent of the Mongoloids of the Tibeto-Burman stock from the north and north east, the Australoids were pushed to the more infertile regions. In course of time the Mongoloids and early Caucasoid partially or wholly absorbed the old Australoid strains, yet in the lower stratum of the population the traces of the later element are discernible. Evidently Assam is the meeting place of diverse ethnic strains which contributed to the evolution and development of different racial groups and culture of north-eastern India. The illegal influx-triggered high population growth of Assam is tremendously straining the economic and political set

up of the state, creating immense pressure on the land use, natural resources and existing socio-cultural fabric unique to the region. The excess population of the unauthorized immigrants and their descendents is a potent cause for retardation of progress as well as a threat to peace and stability in the state. Villages of Assam are usually made up of families from a number of distinct castes. The caste system although it exists, is not as prominent as in other parts of India. Among the Assamese, a form of Hinduism exists with two contrasting emphases, that of caste and sect. In caste, one finds polytheism, hierarchy and membership by birth, and collective ideas of humanity, mediation of ritual specialists, rites conducted in Sanskrit through priest, complexity and extravagance of ritual, multiplicity of image and salvation through knowledge or works. In sects, one finds monotheism, egalitarianism among believers, membership by invitation, individual ideas of humanity, direct access to spiritual revelation, worship conducted in the vernacular by the congregation, simplicity of worship, incarnation of God in the written word and salvation through faith and mystical union. Occupation is an important factor in the making of castes, artisans and specialist caste usually being considered lower status than cultivators and numbers of castes are subdivided on this basis. Assam has all the important attractions like hill resorts, pollution free environment, water, natural game sanctuary etc. which together provide an excellent potential for an important tourist belt. The emerging development perspective in terms of economically integrating the North East with the south east Asia holds out a great promise for the development of the region in general and Assam in particular. To achieve these goals, collective initiatives should be taken for developing a unified single market by resolving border disputes, removing barriers to movement of goods, labour and capital, developing inter-state transport and communication, harmonizing policies and developing common strategy for research and development, utilizing water resources and developing tourism. The *bamsa* is a closely-knit affective group of neighboring houses characterized by mutual support and strong feelings of involvement and comprehension. Men are usually very interested in the affairs of their agnates whether they are on good terms with them or not. In Assam every separate ethnic and religious group follow its own system of marriage through the majority of its population follow the Hindu system. Of the eight kinds of prescribed marriages only the *prajapati* system is now prevailing among the Hindus. The fluid nature of marriage in Assam enters in to the nature of the caste process. Caste affiliation at the local level is chiefly defined by kinship and affinity.

The festivals of Assam represent different traditional behavior constituting a composite culture of the state. The festivals follow the same pattern of founding on a myth, celebrating at appropriate time of the year or at a time befitting the occasion and merry making, but always maintaining the essence of association with the natural processes. The festivals of Assam serve a great cause by encouraging different communities to live in harmony, irrespective of belief, custom and level of development. Assamese food habits imply the food items consumed by the majority people of Assam. Because of the geographical characteristics of the area in the broader sense, both the tribal and the non-tribal people use particular food items as their principal food for lunch and dinner. Nowadays like other people, Assamese people especially the new generations are attracted to have junk foods. Assam is the confluence of a number of tribes and culture and this is reflected in the traditional handicrafts but in recent times due to the effects of globalization changes have been seen in the patterns and designs of Assamese art and culture. The artists created a tradition of about many years of art and painting in Assam. A few artists of the *satras* kept the flame burning till early 20th century. The devotion of the artists to the cause of art, which imbibed from the aesthetic of the *bhakti* movement to create something great and grand, contributed to their survival. Assamese as an Aryan language has retained every distinctive characteristic of the mother language, but it has discarded some elements to borrow more efficient ones from languages locally available. Nowadays Assamese people wear very simple dresses and mostly weak hand loomed clothes. Globalization has influenced the young generation to wear the modern dresses and ornaments also.

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CHAPTER III

THE STUDIED AREA, BARPETA TOWN AND THE *HATIS AND ITS PEOPLE*

Barpeta Town

Barpeta an erstwhile sub-division of Kamarupa district was elevated to a district in the year 1983 comprising entirely the earliest geographical boundary of the old Barpeta sub-division with the head quarter at Barpeta town (map). Barpeta has the unique destination of carrying traditional culture by its honourable possession of the *kirtanghar* (prayer house) of entire Assam. Barpeta though financially better off amongst the districts of Assam, lacks entrepreneurial skill for industries and enthusiasms. This is because of adherence to prove business like transport by the richer section of the town called the *mahajans* (merchant) who prefer ‘a bird in hand is better than two in the bush’. The whole geographical area of Barpeta district comprises of nine revenue circles, 12 community development blocks, 150 *gaon* (village) *panchayat* covering a total of 885 villages. The towns of the districts are – Barpeta, Barpeta Road, Sorbhog, Howly, Pathsala, Sarthebari, Kalgachia and Bahari. Barpeta town and Barpeta Road are under municipal Board and remaining towns except Bahari are under Town Committees. Bahari is a census town (Roy, 2012: 63). The district is bordered by the Bhutan Hills on the north, Kamarup and Goalpara district on the south, Nalbari district on the east and Bongaingaon and Kokrajhar district on the west (Roy, 2012: 63). The total geographical area of this district is 2282 sq. K.M (Census 2011) In the southern part of the district the river Brahmaputra has created a number *chars* (Tiny river islands). The total area of the *chars* is estimated to be around 13,000 hectares and total numbers of farm families there on are about 15,000 (Hossain, 2014-15: 2). Now the details are studied below-

a) *Physical features of Barpeta:* The northern part of Barpeta district was originally, partially covered by natural forests and grassy land and the southern part by marshy land. The land of the district is gradually slopping from North to South and the differences in attitude between highest northern strips to the lowest southern are approximately 40 feet (Das, 1995: 5). Topographically the whole district is a vast

Map 4: Map of Barpeta Town



Source- 2014 indiamapsonline.com

plain area expect for a small hillock over the southern part called Baghbar hill and there are another two hills named Phulora and Chatala. The distance from the foot hills of Bhutan to the bank of Brahmaputra on the south is about 100 K.M. (Das, 1995: 6). The whole district is a vast plot of agricultural plain.

The climate of Barpeta remains mild and pleasant round the year. There are two distinct seasons- summer and winter which is provided by tropical monsoon climate. The summer season of March to May is followed by the Monsoons from June to September. This is followed by cool winter season from October to February. Humidity is higher at Barpeta (Raychoudhury, 2012: 8).

The river Brahmaputra flows from east to west across the southern part of the district. Other rivers that flow through the district are Beki, Manah, Pohumara, Kaldia, Nakhanda, Choulkhowa and Bhelengi from North to South. Rivers Pohumara and Kaldia join near Barpeta town to form river Nakhanda whereas Palla and Beki join with Nakhanda to ultimately form Choulkhowa River (Raychoudhury, 2012: 9). The soil of Barpeta district may be classified as sandy-loamy and forest-soils.

Barpeta town is the districts headquarter of Barpeta district. Barpeta town is situated 90 K.M. North West from Guwahati. Geographically the position of Barpeta town is 26° 19.01.62" North and 91° 00.19.74" East (Patra, 2012: 15). According to census of 2011, the total population of the district is 1,693,622 and the total population of Barpeta town (under municipal board) is 42649 of which 21241 are male and 21408 are female (District Statistical hand Book, 2012-13: 12). The total area of Barpeta town (under municipal board) is approximately 12.81 sq km. The town consists of 22 *hatis*. Of these, three *hatis* are *thul* (principal) *hatis*. These are – Uttar *hati*, Dakshin *hati* and Na-*hati*. The other *hatis* are – Da *hati*, Isswapur *hati*, Kewaliya *hati*, Galiya *hati*, Mukhi *hati*, Bilortari *hati*, Khataniyar *hati*, Joganiyar *hati*, Bar *hati*, Pathak *hati*, Rangpur *hati*, Major *hati*, Fata *hati*, Gayan *hati*, Palangdi *hati*, Kumar *hati*, Dola *hati*, Ghoramara *hati*, and Ambari *hati* (Pathak, 1959 reprint 2006: 72).

At Barpeta, there are artisan industries like – bell-metal, ivory ornaments, pottery etc. and even special kind of fireworks where skilled artisans have shown expertise. For all practical purposes, Barpeta operates through Barpeta Road which has the dual advantages of Railway and National Highway. Barpeta Road is at a distance of 20 K.M. from Barpeta town.

Barpeta gradually developed as a centre of trade and commerce during the medieval period. Different handicrafts such as pottery, blacksmith, goldsmith etc. also developed side by side. The importance of Barpeta as a centre of business and commerce owed its origin to its location and topographical advantages. Barpeta was situated at the border of two medieval kingdoms viz- the Ahom kingdom and the Choch kingdom. Moreover being bounded by rivers on all sides, it facilitated trade and commerce through rivers. At a time when modern means of transport were unknown, rivers were the easiest route through which men and materials could move. Barpeta had easy access to different places though rivers and country boats were the chief mode of transport. Land routes were not safe because population was very thin and forests were infested with tigers, wild bears etc. After annexation of Assam with the British Empire in 1826, regular trade with Dhaka and other places of Bengal took place through the Brahmaputra River and this lasted till partition of the country (Baruah, 2009: 218)

b) *Historical Aspects of Barpeta:* Barpeta has been known by various names like- Tantikuchi, Porabhitha, Mathura, Vrindavana, Choukhutisthan, Nabaratna-Sabha, Icehakuchi, Puspak Vimana, Kampur and Barpeta (Pathak, 1959: 3). Barpeta town is now the district head quarter of Barpeta district; it is difficult to say the point of time from which human settlements began in the Barpeta region. However, from mythological point of view, it can safely surmise that people settled here from the 5th or 6th century AD. The kings of the Barman dynasty ruled over the ancient Kamarupa of which Barpeta was a part. The most notable monarch of this dynasty was Bhaskar Barman. People of different tribes lived in ancient Kamarupa like the Austrians, the Mongoloid, and the Dravidian etc. King Bhaskar Barman himself belonged to the Mongoloid dynasty. Later on hordes of the Aryans began to penetrate this region through its western boundary and settled here. Thus population of ancient tribes and communities took place and a mixed race evolved in course of time. Caste rigidities were comparatively less in such society. A mixed language also developed incorporating liberally a vast array of words belonging to different non Aryan languages into the main lingua-franca which belong to the Indo Aryan group of language known as Assamese language in course of time. According to Hiuen Tsung, "Their language slightly differs from language of mid-India" (Goswami, 1970: 1). Names of places and rivers of Barpeta locality bear ample testimony of this fact,

such as Baradi, Sundaridiya, Bheraldi, Budarurtup, Bilartari etc. may derived from Bodo language (Goswami, 1991: 27). The monarch and tribal chieftains embraced the Hindu religion although the common people followed different animistic religious practices. Some of the tribal Gods and Goddesses were Aryanaised in course of time and accepted in the Hindu Pantheon. Goddess Kamakhya is such an Aryanaised deity (Kakati, 1989: 32-34). During the reign of Koch king Naranarayana, Barpeta was a part of the Koch Kingdom and was known as the Baosi Pargana. Due to various reasons people from Ganges valley migrated to Assam valley. One of the reasons for such migration might be population explosion. There were also other causes like social and political upheavals, epidemic, natural calamities etc. In the process of migration, population of Baosi Pargana which Barpeta was a part increased rapidly. As a result, the tribal population in the plains of Assam had gradually pushed to the foothills of Bhutan. A notable community which migrated to Assam was the Kayastha. They were peasants as well as administrators. They used to occupy large tracts of land and carried on agriculture with the help of servants. As administrators, they ruled over different part of Assam under the suzerainty of the Ahom king (Dutta Baruah, 1941: 33).

According to Digambar Das, "Like other places of lower Assam, the Bhuyans had come from Kanouj, Gaura etc. and settled in Barpeta region". By caste, they were Kayasthas. The area where they had first settled was known as Khetri Pargana. In course of time, the Khetri Pargana was broken up to form three *mouzas* like Sarukhetri, Barkhetri and Chenga. The Bhuyans were also appointed to hold important posts in both of Ahom and Koch regime. The Bhuyans are inhabitants in Barpeta town. The Bhuyans played an important role in the development of agricultural economy of Assam. They were also the patrons of education and learning. During the reign of the Koch king Barpeta came to prominence. During that period, Sankaradeva and his chief apostles Madhavadeva, Damodaradeva and Harideva along with other religious Gurus appointed by them preached the Mahapurushiya religion in different parts of Assam with their head quarters at Barpeta. Many *satras* had established in different parts of the district. People were attracted to the *satras* because of liberal socio political and economic ethos of prevailing in the *satras* (Das, 1995: 46).

The religious history of Barpeta is related with the coming of Sankaradeva to this place and staying permanently at Patboushi near Barpeta. Sankaradeva had to live his

native place Bardowa for fear of the kocharies. Sankaradeva along with his kinsman left the place and stationed them at Dhuwahat in Majuli. At Dhuwahat, he met Madhavadeva. Madhavadeva after conversation proved to be an able disciple and successor of Sankaradeva. Due to an unhappy incident, Sankaradeva had to leave Dhuwahat soon. He and his relatives set out for Kamarupa, within the kingdom of Naranarayana (Iekharu, 1952: 50).

c) Origin of the name of Barpeta: There are several stories about the origin of the name of Barpeta. According to some local people, Barpeta was once in the middle (belly or pet) of the Brahmaputra River. In course of time, water receded and an island emerged. Hence it is called *bar-pet* (big belly) and ultimately Barpeta (Roy, 2013: 12). Some say it is a corruption from *bar-pit* and means the great throne, great alter or with reference to the grant of lands conferred on the *satra* (Roy, 2013: 12). It is also said that there was *pith* (center of learning) and from this word the name Barpeta has emanated (Roy, 2013: 13). Another view is that Sankaradeva made a prophecy to the effect that the place would be *bar-pith* (a great sacred place) and from this the present name Barpeta has come after a series of phonetic changes. The name Barpeta is related to a *beel* (fishing swamp) known as a Barpeta *beel* which is started to have been situated within Barpeta. (Pathak, 1959: 3).

The old name of this place is Tantikuchi¹. It was so called because 120 weaver's families had come from a place Khonakhokora of upper Assam and settled here (Pathak, 1959: 3). Even today the women of Barpeta are expert in the art of weaving. Sankaradeva with the help Madhavadevba and some weavers including Gopal Tanti² (Raychoudhury, 2007 second edition 2011: 20) prepared the famous *Brindavani Bastra* for presenting the same to the Koch King Narayana (Khan Choudhury, 1936: 101). In this cloth the life and activities of Sri Krishna and his childhood at Brindavana were beautifully decorated with the help of multicolored threads. As such later on the place was regarded as a sacred place. Tradition goes that the *kirtanghar* of Barpeta *satra* was constructed in equal size of the *Brindavani bastra*³ (Pathak, 1959 reprint 2006: 34).

¹Tantikuchi: (place of weavers)

² Gopal Tanti: Later on known as Mathuradas Burha Ata and became the first *adhi-kara* of Barpeta *Satra*.

³ *Brindavani bastra*: A cloth designed by Sankaradeva on which the early life of Krishna was depicted.

It is also called Porabhitha⁴ because a great forest fire burnt down the place to ashes. Another name was Ishakuchi because of the aesthetic beauty of the place and the customs and traditions of the people living here. It was also called Choukhutisthan means place within four pillars of *deva* (lord), *guru* (teacher), *bhakat* (devotee) and *dharma* (religion). Barpeta was called Mathura and Brindavan because of its spiritual beauty and aesthetic manners. Because of the fact that Sri Krishna's Chariot flew over Chunpora of Barpeta in his journey to kundil it was called Puspak Birman. Another name of Barpeta was Kampur because of the work culture of the people (Das, 1995: 2-3).

d) Economic Base of the Society: The main base of the society was business because at early times Barpeta was very rich in agricultural products. The river Brahmaputra and its various tributaries flowing through the district wash the plain every year and make it fertile. Therefore agricultural products like banana, mango, black berry, litchi etc were produced. Another product in the plain of the district is bamboo. Bamboo grew wild and the people could preserve any amount of bamboo they need from the nearby forest. But now due to increase of population and devastation of forests, bamboo is not available free of cost. But people grow bamboo in their homestead which fulfills their domestic need as well as marketable surplus. The surplus agricultural products were purchased by the traders. There was flourishing trade between Barpeta and such places of west Bengal, through boat. As a result a new class of middle man, waders emerged in the Barpeta society and through trade, they became affluent (Goswami, 2010: 178).

Trade: During the later part of Ahom rule, some *adhikaras* amassed large property and became rich very quickly. One of the reasons for meting out insult to Mayamaria Mahants during the reign of king Siva Singha was their growing economic power. Amalendu Guha wrote about the growing economic power of the *satras* thus- "the relationship between the semi peasant traders and craftsman on the one hand and the *satras* on the other deserves careful attention. The *satras* are important not only as centers of religious activities but also as market for industrial products. The traders associated with the *satras* as devotees are important buyers of agricultural as well as industrial goods offered as tribute to the *adhikaras* by devotees which piled up in the

⁴ Porabhitha: a place burnt by fire.

satras and sold away. In some *satras*, the *adhikaras* themselves are traders. They also lent money to traders and the peasants and thus became rich” (Guha, 1993: 77).

Handloom: The old name of Barpeta was Tantikuchi. According to legend, some weavers who came here from Sibsagar district of upper Assam to escape the mayhem caused by cholera which had broken out there in epidemic form. So this place took the name Tantikuchi. In course of time, the *satra* was established. The old name Tantikuchi proved beyond doubt that Barpeta at the time was famous for weaving. Mathuradas Burha Ata (Gopal Tanti), the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra* was the master weaver among the weavers. The weavers of Barpeta produced the famous *brindabani bastra*. To fulfill the wishes of Koch king Naranarayana, Sankaradeva engaged the weavers of Barpeta to make the said cloth (Talukdar, 2010: 162).

The liberal *vaisnavite* faith propagated by Sankaradeva and Madhvadeva attracted people of different castes and communities to the fold of *satra*. Many of devotees were businessman and craftsman. Kaliram, Dharam, Ramdhan, Bhabananda, Ranga and Ram were doing large scale business communicating by boat and later on they became devotees of the new religion. Bhabananda was later on known as Narayan Das Thakur Ata and he established some *satras* like Kanara *satra*, Jania *satra* etc (Lekharu, 1952: 76-77). Artisans, who lived at Barpeta and whose descendents are still living at Barpeta like- blacksmith, goldsmith, carpenter, *mukhi*⁵ who produce lime by burning shells of snail, *Kumar*⁶, *Hira*⁷, fisherman, washer man, oilman etc.

e) Organisation of society: Mathuradas Burha Ata’s grand plan aiming at organizing the society of Barpeta *satra* into 22 *hatis* brought about consolidation of the society in a way, which still remains relevant. He also clearly delineated the functions of different *hatis* and castes in different rites and rituals connected with different functions of the *satra* (Pathak, 1959: 5). The economy of Barpeta during medieval period was simple commodity producing economy and social division of labour was limited. The use of money was also limited. In the villages, barter was the prevailing mode of exchange among the peasants. From expansion of trades and commerce, the use of money and credit should be extensive. Since the circulation of money was limited, trades did not expand considerably. People fulfilled their reciprocal needs by

⁵ *Mukhi*: who produce lime by burning shells of snail.

⁶ *Kumar*: working with a wheel to make earthen pot.

⁷ *Hira*: working without wheel to make earthen pot.

means of barter. Thus there developed the self sufficient village economy. Money was in use only in the case of foreign trade, within this limited periphery, a trading class was formed at Barpeta. Since Barpeta is surrounded almost on all sides by perennial rivers and mighty Brahmaputra is not far away, it was possible to reach different destinations including different places of Bengal from Barpeta easily through mercantile boats. At one time, Barpeta became the hub of commercial activities. Even during the easy part of British rule in India, when there were no railway lines connecting Assam with the rest of India, rivers were the chief means of transport (Raychoudhury, 2000: 168).

Health facilities: There is a medical college hospital at Barpeta town named Fakharuddin Ali Ahmed Medical College Hospital. It caters to the medical needs not only to the town people but also to the people of the neighboring villages. The hospital is equipped with modern instruments for conducting surgical operations. It also provides facilities both for pre and post natal treatment. Apart from the civil Hospital there are also several private clinics.

Religious center: The *kirtanghar* of Barpeta *satra* is the most important religious center of the town. Apart from it, there is a big Siva temple and a Kali temple. Nowadays small sized Siva temples are also found in different *hatis* and market place of the town. There is a Mosque situated at the heart of the town. A good number of *satras* were founded by these great saints and scholars that are considered religious-cultural institutions or monasteries that had a deep impact on the social, political, economy etc. of the region. Although the *satra* institutions were established for the propagation of *vaisnavite* faith with passage of time these institutions gradually transformed into open universities to become all embracing socio-cultural centers covering numerous subjects including education, music, dance, sculpture, drama, fine-art, ivory-works etc.

Educational institutions: In total there are 66 educational institutions at Barpeta town. There are two degree colleges, one is M.C. College and the other is Barpeta Girls College. M.C. College is the 3rd college of Assam. At Barpeta town 1 Law College and 1 B.Ed college are also situated. There are 3 private junior colleges also. An ITI is also situated here. 9 high school and 2 higher secondary schools are running. There are 15 private English and Assamese medium schools here at town.

Central school (Kendriya Bidyalaya) is also situated here. The number of primary school is 30. There are 5 art schools at Barpeta town.

Various Establishments: The Deputy Commissioner's office along with various attached departments is located within the town; office of the Superintendent of police is also located here. The head quarter police station is situated by the side of the river Maranadi. There are branches of different nationalized banks like – the State Bank of India, UCO Bank, Allahabad Bank etc. A branch of Assam Gramin Vikash Bank is also located here. Some private banks like – H.D.F.C. and Bandhan Bank are opened their branches at the town. District library and District Museum are situated here. After declaration of the district in the year 1983 several offices of Deputy Directorate is established. The town has two braches post office and a telecommunication office. Divisional offices of P.W.D. and E&D are also located here. The court of the District and Session Judge is established at the town after declaration as a district.

Geographical Features: Barpeta town is located about 90 KM. away towards the North West of Guwahati. On the east of Barpeta is the Nakhanda River. On the west is Chaulkhowa River. On the North is the Mora River and on the South of the town is Ganakkuchi and Rayatpara (Das, 1995: 1). The town is almost entirely surrounded by rivers. The town is situated in a low laying area. Therefore during rainy season, it is like an island. The town has an area of 5 square KM (Das, 1995: 1). Being surrounded by rivers almost on all sides the landscape is very beautiful. The great earth quake of 1897 caused depression of about 6 to 15 feet and therefore water fills up by the low lying areas. People say that there was a big swamp in this place. Hence, this place was named as *Barpeet* (big swampy land), but with the change of time the name *Barpeet* is also changed and people call it now Barpeta (Pathak, 1959: 3).

People of the area: Barpeta developed in the 16th century AD as a business center (Goswami, 2010: 177). Because of its proximity to rivers like Chaulkhowa, Manah, Beki and the Brahmaputra, trade and commerce were carried on an extensive scale to the riverine route. Trade relation was established with places like Dhaka, Murchidabad, Maimonsing etc. (Roy, 2015: 2). Barpeta exported rice, mustard seed, cotton etc. while the major items of import were Castile, silk, various industrial goods, spices etc. Regular trade and commerce created a rich section of business men to amassed large fortunes with the advent of British rule, the volume of trade and

commerce increase manifold. However with the introduction of railway lines the importance of riverine trade lessened to a great extent. Barpeta no longer remain the hub of trading activities. However, the riverine trade continued up to the time of independence but with the partition of the country into India and Pakistan, trading activities completely ceased through east Bengal, because it now become a part of an alien country (Roy, 2015: 5). After independence the main means of communication became the railways and since then railway line did not pass through Barpeta town, it lost major importance as a business center.

After independence Barpeta town was made the sub divisional head quarter of old Kamarupa district (Raychoudhury, 2010: 217) In the year 1983 Barpeta was declared the district headquarter of Barpeta district. As an administrative head quarter it has a number of office establishments which cater to various administrative and developmental needs of the people. Moreover the town has a number of degree and higher secondary colleges for both arts and science.

The population of the town is composed mostly of Assamese Hindus. The Muslims form a small minority of the town population. People belonging to other religions like- Buddhism, Christianity etc are conspicuously absent. There is only one Marwari family found belonging to Jain religion. There are also a number of Bengali Hindu families live here. Number of crafts such as- blacksmith, goldsmith, pottery maker, ivory works etc flourish in the town. The people speak dialect of Assamese language. Most of them follow *vaisnavism*. But there are some worshipers of Kali, Durga and Siva also.

With the passage of time there have been considerable changes in the nature and composition of the population. Formerly most of the people were petty traders. Now a sizable number of populations are government service holder, teachers, doctors etc. A number of people are now attracted towards trade and business. The lowest rung of the population consist of *thela* pullers, rickshaw pullers and day labourers.

Flora and Fauna: The landscape of the town presents beautiful scenery with plants and trees of different varieties. People plant trees like- mango, Jack fruit, guava, banana, etc. At the backyard of their homestead trees are also planted for provision of fuel. On the front side coconut and betel nut trees are planted. Flower plants are also planted for beautification. Besides these, roads are adorn on both sides with plants like- Simolu, Sisu, Segoon, Sonaru, Krishnasura, Radhasura etc. During summer

season, the whole landscape of the town wears a green look with the luxuriant growth of grasses.

There is no forest by the side of the town. So, wild animals are not found. But the people are habituated to rear domestic animals and birds, like- cow, goat, pigeon, duck etc. chicken is forbidden by religion. Some wild birds are seen here.

Studied Area: The Three Hatis

Sites of cloisters for monks within the main enclosure of a *satra* and outside this enclosure for married clerics have been known from the earliest times as *hati* or *bhakatar hati*, 'Rows or sets of huts or rooms for the monk'. A *hati* is "a row of houses attached to a religious constitution or school or the residence of disciples or students" and Hemchandra Barua seeks to connect the word with Assamese *haat* (Skt *hatta*). Sankaradeva used the term in the sense of a row of houses in his drama *Bali-Chalana*' (Neog, 1965: 324). At Barpeta there are 22 *hatis* where general people reside. An individual *hati* has got its own organization covering social, political as well as economic aspects. The relation of each *hati* with the *satra* is analogous with the relation of each state with the parliament, taking each *hati* as a state and the *satra* organization as the parliament. Now the details of *hati* system are discussed below-

a) *Hati System:* No clear account of the origin of *hatis* can be made out from the early group of *caritas*; but the idea of *cari hatis* has always been associated in the later detailed accounts with whatever institutions Sankara, Madhava and other saints established during their long stays in different places. The four were and still are referred to the east, west, north and south *hatis*.

These sets of cloisters are manned by ascetics and no house holders (married folks) who liked to stay in a *satra* are given place in a *hati* outside the inner *hati*. Such *hatis* are called *bahir hati*. When a widow seeks to serve a *satra*, she could be accommodated with somebody else in the householder's *hati*. There are raised barricades of bamboo between the inner and the outside *hati* (Neog, 1965: 325).

The number of *bhakatas* in the inner and outer *hatis* may vary from time to time. Madhvadeva had 180 *bhakatas* to work at Patbausi for Sankaradeva's wife (Neog, 1965: 325). As late as 1851, E.T. Dalton found 157 monks in the inner *hatis* of Barpeta *satra* (Neog, 1965: 325).

Residential houses at Barpeta are arranged along both sides of a road. Each area consisting of such rows of houses separated by narrow alleys is called a *hati*. *Hati* carries the same meaning as the Assamese words- *para*, *tola*, *kuchi* etc. It is to be noted that the *hati* system is not prevalent in other *satras* of Assam except Barpeta. These *hatis* of Barpeta carry on their activities as per guidelines of the *kirtanghar*. Mathuradas Burha Ata the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra* was credited with the creation of the *hati* system of residence (Nath, 2001: 33). Barpeta *satra* is situated almost at the middle of Barpeta town. The *hatis* covered almost one and half square kms from the *kirtanghar*. *Hatis* were named taking into consideration of the *sewait* (dedicated) activities performed in different *hatis*, profession, direction as well as *Janasruti*. Disciples of the *satra* coming from outside are provided with lodging facilities in houses adjoining the *kirtanghar*. This way later on named as *kewoliya* (celibate) *hati* and this was the first *hati* of Barpeta (Pathak, 1959: 4).

It seems that Mathuradas Burha Ata planned the *hati* system of residence of the householder devotees, for which he arranged the houses along both sides of a road in line with the cloistral design of the *satra* compound. Mathuradas Burha Ata in order to smooth running of the various activities of the *satra* the three adjoining *hatis*- Dakshin *hati*, Uttar *hati* and Na-*hati* made *thul hatis* (principal *hati*), the other *hatis* were named as *sakha hatis* (branch *hati*) (Pathak, 1959: 71-72). Apart from these another such *hatis* are- Da *hati*, Isswapur *hati*, Kewaliya *hati*, Galiya *hati*, Mukhi *hati*, Bilortari *hati*, Khataniyar *hati*, Joganiyar *hati*, Bar *hati*, Pathak *hati*, Rangpur *hati*, Major *hati*, Fata *hati*, Gayan *hati*, Palangdi *hati*, Kumar *hati*, Dola *hati*, Ghoramara *hati*, and Ambari *hati* (Pathak, 1959: 72).

The names of the *hatis* are given on the basis of topography of the place or direction from the *satra* or the functions of the inhabitants to be performed in the *satra* etc. (Pathak, 1959: 73). Although the topography of the place has changed in course of time, the old name of the *hatis* is still continuing. For example- the present Bilortari *hati* is situated along the bank of a *beel*, so it was named Bilortari *hati*. Galiya *hati* represents the old Galaya *beel*. The *hati* where the *pathak* (reciter) live was named Pathak *hati*; the *hati* where the *gayan* (singers) and *bayan* (drummers) live is known as Gayan *hati*; the *hati* where *Kumar* (potters) live was known as Kumar *hati*; the name Ambari *hati* was because of abundance of mango trees; Isswapur *hati* was named because it was a center of prayers of God; Ghoramara *hati* was named as such because people of that place were derived to *vaisnava* thought. The place where the

dola (palanquin) bearers of God live was named as *Dola hati*; the area to the west of *Chinpora Bhithi*, where Sankaradeva had lived for six months was known as *Palangdi hati*. The place where the traders paid their taxes was known as *Fata hati*; the *hati* where the theatre hall of the *satra* situated was known as *Rongpur hati*. Where celibates were lived was named as *Kewaliya hati*: where lime worker are reside named as *Mukhi hati*.

These 22 *hatis* are not caste units as these are not formed on the basis of caste alone. People of different castes and creed live in the same *hati*. These *hatis* may be considered as organized system on the basis of division of labour. Each *hati* having its own share of works to be perform in the *satra* context. An individual *hati* has got its own organization covering social, political as well as economic aspects. The relation of each *hati* with the *satra* is analogous with the relation of each state with the parliament, taking each *hati* as a state and the *satra* organization as the parliament.

In each *hati* there is a common conference hall for all the members of the *hati* is known as *haitar-ghar* (community hall), located at a central place. The *haitar-ghar* is generally a two roofed Assam type building with C.I sheeted roofs. It is kept open without side walls but with wooden railings. In many of the *hati's haitar-ghar*, recitation of certain religious books like- Bhagawata, Mahabharata, Ramayana etc. are held in the evening and some elderly men and women assembled there to listen to it and also to take part in the religious discussions which go on along with recitation.

Habitational Pattern in a Hati: Resident in *hatis* lives in compact blocks. Very often the individual houses are constructed in such a manner that the roofs of one house touch the roofs of another house. In a row, one single wall separating two families. Two such rows of houses are arranged on two rows of houses serves as passage to individual houses as well as common courtyard for household works. Due to thickness of population and scarcity of space the atmosphere within the *hati* is noisy. Occasional quarrels among co-inhabitants take place leading severance of relationship. Such atmosphere is also uncongenial to the development of personality. Due to dearth of residential space people originally living in the *hatis* prefer to shift their residents to such areas where they can construct their houses in a spacious plot of land. It is now a general tendency of the people to shift their residences towards the town from the villages for various amenities. Generally people living in joint families prefer to have new establishment for their own families. Due to such tendencies of the

people, new localities have grown up on the outskirts of the township. People having new establishments on these localities also maintain their allegiance to the *hatis* where they originally lived.

b) Description of three Thul (principal) Hatis: My field area is Barpeta and I selected the three *thul hatis*, eg- Dakshin *hati*, Na *hati* and Uttar (Brinavan) *hati* for survey. Mathuradas Burha Ata in order to smooth running of the various activities of the *satra* made these *thul hatis* first and these *hatis* bear close relation with the ecclesiastical affairs of *satra*. All the people of these *hatis* are Assamese and they follow *vaisnavism*. Mathuradas Burha Ata the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra* divided Barpeta into different suburbs called *hati*. The other *hatis* were established by the people of these three principal *hatis* in course of time.

Dakshin Hati: Dakshin *hati* is situated in the southern part of Barpeta *satra*. In Assamese, *dakshin* means south. So this *hati* is called dakshin *hati*.

Location of the place: The area Barpeta is situated 90 kms North West of Guwahati. Dakshin *hati* is about 1 km. away from main market place of Barpeta. This *hati* begins from the southern compound wall of the *kirtanghar*. Some houses are situated by the side of the main road and some are found on the by lanes.

Communication: The means of communication from Barpeta to other place is basically road. Most of the local people use bicycles. Rickshaws are also a popular means of communication. Most of the householders have T.V sets, radio, tape recorder, cable connection or dish T.V, motor cycles and cars.

Physical Layout: On the eastern side of the *hati* stands Kujirda *hati*. To the west of Dakshin *hati* is situated Da-*hati*. To the southern part of the *hati*, Iswapur *hati* is situated and on the northern side, there stands the *kirtanghar*.

Settlement pattern: Most of families have Assam type houses. Some of the families have two houses. One is on the front side of the courtyard followed by main house. These types of houses are very congested. Houses are tin roofed. There is no thatched roofed house. A few families have RCC building also.

Source of water supply: The problem of water is solved by constructing tube wells and some families connect it with motor. Some families get water from municipality.

Health and sanitation: Most of the families have good sanitation system. Most of the householders have sanitary latrines. The municipal authority has now taken to care to see that every household has a sanitary latrine.

Flora and fauna: As the *hati* is situated in the urban area and as it is very congested. The number of plants is very few. Coconut trees and betel nut trees are found. Some households have fruit trees, like mango, jack fruit, guava etc. Many of them have domestic animals, like cow, goat etc.

Various establishments of the hati: One auditorium named- Milan Mandir is located here in this *hati*. Two public libraries-Banikanta Kakati Library and Tarun Samaj Library is situated here. Two primary schools named- Dakshin hati nimna buniadi bidyalaya (1907) and Axom keshari jatiya bidyalaya and two high schools named- Dakshin Barpeta bidyamandir high school (1950) and Jiban Lata School (1958) are situated here. Five grocery shops and 8 stationary shops and two furniture houses and two tent houses are found in this *hati*. Club house named Sankar Madhab naam samaj is located here. A SBI ATM is also established here. *Haitar ghar* (community hall) of this *hati* is situated on the southern part of this *hati*.

People of the Hati: The people of the *hati* are Assamese Hindu. People speak Assamese language. Many of them know Hindi, Bengali and English. The *hati* possesses an intermixture of different caste groups, such as- Brahmins, Kalitas, Keots, Kayastas and Mukhi.

Dress and Ornaments: Most of the married women wear *mekhela-chadar* and *sarees*. The girl folks use *churidar-kamiz*, frock, skirt, pant etc. Due to busy schedule of present day situation some married women also use to wear *churidar-kamiz* etc. Male folk wear long pant and shirt. Aged people wear dhoti-Punjabi.

Economic life: Business is the main occupation of the people of this *hati*. Most of the people have their own shop in front of their houses or in the market. Some are government officials and teachers. Now days the new generation are willing to do government job or other services.

Uttar Hati (Brindavan Hati): This *hati* is named after the direction from the *kirtanghar*. It is situated on the northern side of the *kirtanghar*. In Assamese, *uttar* means north. This *hati* is commonly known as Brindavan *hati*. When Sankaradeva

first came to Barpeta, He resembled this place with Brindavan. He thought that the scenery of Brindavan and this place was the same. That's why this *hati* was named as Brindavan *Hati* (Pathak, 1959: 71).

Location of the Hati: Uttar *hati* is ½ Km. away from the main market place of Barpeta town. This place is on the northern side of the *kirtanghar*. Houses are situated on the link road, branched off from the main road. There is no house on the main road.

Communication: Communication is very good. The local people use bicycles, motorcycles, rickshaws and some people use their own car also. All the path of the *hati* is *pucca*. Almost all the households have T.V sets and other electronic amenities.

Physical layout: To the east of the *hati* are situated Fata *hati* and Major *hati*. To the west of the *hati* is situated Goliya *hati*. On the southern part of the *hati* lies Rangpur *hati* and on the southern side there is another *hati* named Palangdi *hati*.

Settlement pattern: Some families have two houses. One is found in front and the other is found in the backyard. Some have only one house. There is a vacant place where a small garden is found. Most of the houses are tin roofed and the walls of the houses are made of bricks. Some houses are R.C.C also.

Sources of water supply: The source of water is tube well and most of the households fit motor on it. Municipal authority also provides drinking water through pipelines.

Health and sanitation: All the households have good sanitation system.

Flora and Fauna: Coconut trees, betel nut trees, guava trees, Mango trees etc. are some of the trees that are found in the compounds of the households.

Various establishments of the Hati: Two primary schools named- Sankardeb sishu nicketan (1990) and 5 no. Brindaban *hati* Balak Prathamik Bidyalaya are situated here in this *hati*. 3 black smith industries are also found here. Two grocery shops and four stationary shops are found here. Two club houses named Tarun sangha and Barpeta sngheet sevak sangha are found here. One brunch *satra* of Barpeta *satra* named Ketekibari *satra* is located here. The *haitarghar* of this *hati* is situated at the middle part of the *hati*.

People of the Hati: All the people of the *hati* are Assamese Hindu. They speak a dialect of Assamese language. The clans of the *hati* are Brahmin, Kayastha, Kalita, Keot, Koch, Mukhi, Hira and Bania.

Dress and Ornaments: Most of the married women wear *mekhela-chadar* and *sarees*. The girl folks use *churidar-kamiz*, frock, skirt, pant etc. Due to busy schedule of present day situation some married women also use to wear *churidar-kamiz* etc. Male folk wear long pant and shirt. Aged people wear *dhoti-punjabi*.

Economic Life: Most of the people are service holders. Some are businessmen. They have shop in the market place or a few have in their local area. The economic condition of most of the people of the *Hati* is good.

Na Hati: After these two *thul hatis* Mathuradas Burha Ata established another *hati* named *Na hati*. In Assamese language *na* means new. This *hati* was newly established after *Dakshin hati* and *Uttar hati*. So it was called *Na hati*.

Location of the place: *Na hati* is ½ km away from the main market place of the town. This *hati* is situated in front of the *kirtanghar*. Some houses are situated by the side of the main road and some are on the link road.

Communication: The means of communication from Barpeta to other place is basically road. Most of the local people use bicycles. Rickshaws are also a popular means of communication. Most of the householders have T.V sets, radio, tape recorder, cable connection or dish T.V, motor cycles and cars.

Physical layout: To the east of the *hati* stands the *kirtanghar*. *Da hati*, *Dakshin hati* and eastern part of *Goliya hati* are situated to the west south and north respectively.

Settlement pattern: Most of families have Assam type houses. Some of the families have two houses. One is on the front side of the courtyard followed by main house. These types of houses are very congested. Houses are tin roofed. There is no thatched roofed house. A few families have RCC building also.

Sources of water: The source of water is tube well. At present municipal authority provides the drinking water facilities to the people.

Health and Sanitation: All most all the houses have sanitary latrine.

Flora and Fauna: The *hati* has the same flora and fauna as found in the other two *hatis*.

Various Establishments of the Hati: One ME school named Sadar Balika Majalia Bidyalay (1914) is situated here. Six grocery shops, ten stationary shops, five cloth

shops three pharmacies, five tea stalls, two furniture houses, two jewelry shops are found here. Mathuradas Burha Ata resided in this *hati* and his beautiful house is beautifully preserved. *Haitarghar* is situated in the middle part of this *hati*.

People of the Hati: All the people of the *hati* are Assamese Hindu. They speak a dialect of Assamese language. The clans of the *hati* are kalita, keot, Hira, Kaibarta, Saud and Baniya.

Economic life of the people: Business is the main occupation of the people. Most of them have their own shops. Some have other business also. A few people are service holder. Rickshaw pullers are also found in the *hati*.

C. Demography of three Hatis: Barpeta *satra* is the earliest and most influential *satra* of *mahapurushiya* sect (Sarma, 1999: 177) as well as the chief monasteries of Assam (Neog 1965 reprint 2008: 137) which was established by Madhavadeva the chief disciple and apostle of Sankaradeva with proper help to Mathuradas Burha Ata (one of the chief followers of Madhavadeva and the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra*) in 1504 *sakaabda* (Pathak, 1959 reprint 2006: 12). Barpeta *satra* is situated at Barpeta town at a distance of about 100 K.Ms to the north west of Guwahati city. Barpeta town is the head quarter of the district of the same name. Residential houses at Barpeta are arranged along both sides of a road. Each area consisting of such rows of houses separated by narrow alleys is called a *hati*. Mathuradas Burha Ata in order to smooth running of the various activities of the *satra* the three adjoining *hatis*-Dakshin *hati*, Uttar *hati* and Na-*hati* made *thul hatis* (principal *hati*), the other *hatis* were named as *sakha hatis* (branch *hati*) (Pathak, 1959: 71-72). I have done my survey in these three *thul hatis* and selected 100 families from each *hati*. The demographic outline of these *hatis* are given below-

Table 3.1: Community of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

<i>Hati</i> Community	No of Household	Per cent (%)
Assamese Hindu of Dakshin <i>hati</i>	100	33.3
Assamese Hindu Brindaban <i>hati</i>	100	33.3
Assamese Hindu Na <i>hati</i>	100	33.3
Total	300	100.00

Amongst the three *thul hatis* one hundred households of each *hatis* were selected by random sampling method. All total three hundred family's demographic data were collected.

Table 3.2: Distribution of population by sex among the people of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Sex	Dakshin <i>hati</i>		Brindaban <i>hati</i>		Na <i>hati</i>		Total	
Male	253	47.91	285	56.43	243	48.31	781	50.84
Female	275	52.08	220	43.56	260	51.68	755	49.15
Total	528	34.37	505	32.88	503	32.75	1536	100.00

Table 3.2 shows the population pattern by sex among the people of the studied three *hatis*. It is evident that the highest number of population lived at Dakshin *hati* (34.37%). It is interesting that the percentage of female population was more in Dakshin *hati* (52.08%) and in Na *hati* (51.68%).

Table 3.3: Distribution of population by age and sex among the people of Dakshin *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age Group	Male		Female		Total	
0-4	8	3.16	25	9.09	33	6.25
5-9	20	7.91	25	9.09	45	8.52
15-19	30	11.86	50	18.18	80	15.15
20-24	33	13.04	25	9.09	58	10.98
25-29	35	13.83	38	13.82	73	13.83
30-34	15	5.93	13	4.73	28	5.30
35-39	18	7.11	8	2.91	26	4.92
40-44	15	5.93	13	4.73	28	5.30
45-49	15	5.93	9	3.27	24	4.55
50-54	10	3.95	20	7.27	30	5.68
55-59	8	3.16	12	4.36	20	3.79
60-64	5	1.98	2	0.73	7	1.33
65-69	8	3.16	8	2.91	16	3.03
70 and above	3	1.19	4	1.45	7	1.33
Total	253	47.91	275	52.08	528	100.00

Table 3.3 shows that in Dakshin *hati* among the total population, the females were more than the males and the sex ratio was 187. Data reveals that the highest percentage (54.73%) of population was observed in 0-29 years of age group and

lowest (1.33%) was found in 60-64 and 70 and above age group. Around 55% population was in 0-29 years of age group.

Table 3.4: Distribution of population by age and sex among the people of Brindaban *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age Group	Male		Female		Total	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
0-4	3	1.05	10	4.55	13	2.57
5-9	17	5.96	10	4.55	27	5.35
10-14	23	8.07	20	9.09	43	8.51
15-19	35	12.28	25	11.36	60	11.88
20-24	45	15.79	35	15.91	80	15.84
25-29	60	21.05	20	9.09	80	15.84
30-34	13	4.56	18	8.18	31	6.14
35-39	8	2.81	19	8.64	27	5.35
40-44	17	5.96	17	7.73	34	6.73
45-49	25	8.77	17	7.73	42	8.32
50-54	20	7.02	14	6.36	34	6.73
55-59	3	1.05	2	0.91	5	0.99
60-64	6	2.11	5	2.27	11	2.18
65-69	7	2.46	5	2.27	12	2.38
70 and above	3	1.05	3	1.36	6	1.19
Total	285	56.43	220	43.56	505	100.00

Table 3.4 shows that in Brindaban *hati* among the total population, the males were more than the females. Data reveals that the highest percentage (60.17%) of population was observed in 0-29 years of age group and lowest (1.19%) was found in 70 and above age group. Highest percentage of male population (21.05%) was observed in the age group 25-29.

Table 3.5: Distribution of population by age and sex among the people of Na *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age Group	Male		Female		Total	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
0-4	13	5.35	20	7.69	33	6.56
5-9	30	12.35	23	8.85	53	10.54
10-14	32	13.17	25	9.62	57	11.33
15-19	32	13.17	35	13.46	67	13.32
20-24	35	14.40	35	13.46	70	13.92
25-29	15	6.17	22	8.46	37	7.36
30-34	15	6.17	20	7.69	35	6.96
35-39	12	4.94	18	6.92	30	5.96
40-44	15	6.17	13	5.00	28	5.57
45-49	5	2.06	16	6.15	21	4.17

50-54	21	8.64	9	3.46	30	5.96
55-59	5	2.06	11	4.23	16	3.18
60-64	3	1.23	2	0.77	5	0.99
65-69	6	2.47	7	2.69	13	2.58
70 and above	4	1.65	4	1.54	8	1.59
Total	243	48.31	260	51.68	503	100.00

Table 3.5 shows that like Dakshin *hati* in Na *hati* also among the total population, the females were more than the males. Data reveals that the highest percentage (55.67%) of population was observed in 0-24 years of age group and lowest (0.99%) was found in age group 60-64. Highest percentage of population (13.92%) was observed in the age group 20-24.

Table 3.6: Educational status of the male and female of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Sex	Dakshin <i>hati</i>						Brindaban <i>hati</i>						Na <i>hati</i>					
	Illiterate		Literate		Total		Illiterate		Literate		Total		Illiterate		Literate		Total	
Male	14	5.53	239	94.47	253	100.00	8	2.80	277	97.19	285	100.00	14	5.76	229	94.24	243	100.00
Female	29	10.54	246	88.45	275	100.00	11	5.00	209	95.00	220	100.00	18	6.92	242	93.08	260	100.00
Total	42	7.95	485	92.05	528	100.00	19	3.91	486	96.24	505	100.00	32	6.36	471	93.64	503	100.00

N.B. Included 07 boys and 14 girls of 3-6 age group in Dakshin *hati*, 03 boys and 8 girls of age group 3-6 in Brindaban *hati* and 08 boys and 14 girls of age group 3-6 in Na *hati* because they went to school.

Data reveals that in table 3.6, out of three *hatis* highest percentage of literacy was found in Brindaban *hati* (96.24%), while the lowest is found in Dakshin *hati*. Female literacy was highest in Brindaban *hati* (95.00%), while it was lowest in Dakshin *hati* (88.45%). Highest number of illiterate male population was found same in Dakshin *hati* and Na *hati*, while highest number of illiterate female population was found in Dakshin *hati*.

Table 3.7: Distribution of Age group wise Male Population based on Educational Status of three *thul hatis*, January/ 2016

Age Group	Dakshin <i>hati</i>						Brindaban <i>hati</i>						Na <i>hati</i>					
	Illiterate		Literate		Total		Illiterate		Literate		Total		Illiterate		Literate		Total	
7-9	1	7.69	19	8.19	20	8.16	-	-	17	6.20	17	6.028	1	11.11	29	13.12	30	13.04

10-14	-	-	30	12.93	30	12.24	-	-	23	8.39	23	8.156	-	-	32	14.48	32	13.91
15-19	-	-	30	12.93	30	12.24	-	-	35	12.77	35	12.411	-	-	32	14.48	32	13.91
20-24	-	-	33	15.09	33	14.29	-	-	47	17.15	47	16.667	-	-	34	15.38	34	14.78
25-29	-	-	35	14.22	35	13.47	-	-	60	21.90	60	21.277	-	-	15	6.79	15	6.52
30-34	-	-	15	6.47	15	6.12	1	12.50	12	4.38	13	4.610	-	-	15	6.79	15	6.52
35-39	1	7.69	17	7.33	18	7.35	-	-	8	2.92	8	2.837	1	11.11	11	4.98	12	5.22
40-44	1	7.69	14	6.03	15	6.12	1	12.50	16	5.84	17	6.028	-	-	15	6.79	15	6.52
45-49	2	15.38	13	5.60	15	6.12	2	25.00	23	8.39	25	8.865	-	-	5	2.26	5	2.17
50-54	3	23.08	7	3.02	10	4.08	1	12.50	19	6.93	20	7.092	2	22.22	19	8.60	21	9.13
55-59	1	7.69	7	3.02	8	3.27	-	-	3	1.09	3	1.064	1	11.11	4	1.81	5	2.17
60-64	1	7.69	4	1.72	5	2.04	1	12.50	5	1.82	6	2.128		-	3	1.36	3	1.30
65-69	2	15.38	6	2.59	8	3.27	1	12.50	6	2.19	7	2.482	2	22.22	4	1.81	6	2.61
70 and above	1	7.69	2	0.86	3	1.22	1	12.50	2	0.73	3	1.064	2	22.22	2	0.90	4	1.74
Total	13	5.31	232	94.69	245	100	8	2.84	274	97.16	282	100	9	3.91	221	96.09	230	100.00

N.B. Excluded 07 boys of 3-6 age group in Dakshin *hati*, 03 boys of age group 3-6 in Brindaban *hati* and 08 boys of age group 3-6 in Na *hati* though they went to school. 01 boy of age group 0-2 in Dakshin *hati* and 05 boys of age group 0-2 in Na *hati* are excluded as they did not go to school yet.

This table shows the distribution of age group wise male population based on educational status of three *hatis*. Data reveals that 100 per cent population belonged to age group 10-34 of age group of Dakshin *hati* and Na *hati* were literate, while for Brindaban *hati* it was 07-29 years of age group. The percentage of illiteracy was observed more among the seniors than the juniors.

Table 3.8: Distribution of Age group wise Female Population based on Educational Status of three *thul hatis*, January/ 2016

Age	Dakshin <i>hati</i>						Brindaban <i>hati</i>						Na <i>hati</i>					
Group	Illiterate		Literate		Total		Illiterate		Literate		Total		Illiterate		Literate		Total	
7-9	3	16.67	22	9.48	25	10.00	-		10	4.98	10	4.76	2	16.67	21	9.21	23	9.58
10-14	2	11.11	21	9.05	23	9.20	-		20	9.95	20	9.52	-		25	10.96	25	10.42
15-19	1	5.56	48	20.69	49	19.60	-		25	12.44	25	11.90	-		35	15.35	35	14.58
20-24	-		26	11.21	26	10.40	-		35	17.41	35	16.67	-		35	15.35	35	14.58
25-29	-		38	16.38	38	15.20	-		20	9.95	20	9.52	-		22	9.65	22	9.17
30-34	1	5.56	12	5.17	13	5.20	-		18	8.96	18	8.57	-		20	8.77	20	8.33
35-39	2	11.11	6	2.59	8	3.20	-		18	8.96	18	8.57	-		18	7.89	18	7.50
40-44	1	5.56	12	5.17	13	5.20	1	11.11	17	8.46	18	8.57	-		13	5.70	13	5.42
45-49	-		9	3.88	9	3.60	-		17	8.46	17	8.10	1	8.33	15	6.58	16	6.67
50-54	1	5.56	19	8.19	20	8.00	2	22.22	12	5.97	14	6.67	1	8.33	8	3.51	9	3.75
55-59	2	11.11	10	4.31	12	4.80	1	11.11	1	0.50	2	0.95	2	16.67	9	3.95	11	4.58
60-64	1	5.56	1	0.43	2	0.80	2	22.22	3	1.49	5	2.38	1	8.33	1	0.44	2	0.83
65-69	2	11.11	6	2.59	8	3.20	1	11.11	4	1.99	5	2.38	2	16.67	5	2.19	7	2.92
70 and above	2	11.11	2	0.86	4	1.60	2	22.22	1	0.50	3	1.43	3	25.00	1	0.44	5	2.08
Total	18	7.2	232	92.8	250	100	9	4.29	201	95.71	210	100	12	5.00	228	95	240	100.0

N.B. Excluded 14 girls of 3-6 age group in Dakshin *hati*, 08 girls of age group 3-6 in Brindaban *hati* and 14 girls of age group 3-6 in Na *hati* though they went to school. 11 girls of age group 0-2 in Dakshin *hati* and 02 girls of age group 0-2 in Brindaban *hati* and 06 girls of age group 0-2 are excluded as they did not go to school yet. This table shows the distribution of age group wise female population based on educational status of three *hatis*. Data reveals that 100 per cent population belonged to age group 20-29 of age group of Dakshin *hati* were literate, while for Brindaban *hati* it was 07-39 years of age group. In Na *hati* 100 per cent of literate population was found among the age group 10-44.

Table 3.9 *Hati* wise distribution of literate Male population based on Standard of Education of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Name of the <i>Hati</i>	Number and percentage of literate category														Total	
	I-V		VI-VIII		IX-X		XI-XII		Graduate		MA/M.SC		Others			
Dakshin <i>hati</i>	71	30.60	37	15.95	36	15.52	37	15.95	35	15.09	12	5.17	4	1.72	232	100.00
Brindaban <i>hati</i>	29	10.58	30	10.95	38	13.87	36	13.14	101	36.86	29	10.58	11	1100	274	100.00
Na <i>hati</i>	51	23.08	31	14.03	34	15.38	30	13.57	40	18.10	26	11.76	9	4.07	221	100.00
Total	151	20.77	98	13.48	108	14.86	103	14.17	176	24.21	67	9.216	24	3.30	727	100.00

N.B. Excluded 07 boys of 3-6 age group in Dakshin *hati*, 03 boys of age group 3-6 in Brindaban *hati* and 08 boys of age group 3-6 in Na *hati* though they went to school.

Table 3.9 shows that among the total literate male population, there was highest number of graduate (24.21%) males, while the lowest MA/M.SC (9.21%) males were found. It is important that among the literate male around half (47.59%) of the male population's standard of education were class XII. The highest number of graduate and master degree holder populations was in Brindaban *hati*, while it was quite low in other two *hatis*. In between class I-X, the highest number male students were in class I-V.

Table 3.10: Age group wise Distribution of Literate Male population of Dakshin *hati* based on Standard of Education, January/ 2016

age	Number and percentage of literate category														Total	
	I-V		Vi-Viii		IX-X		XI-XII		Graduate		MA/MSC		others			
7-9	19	26.76	-		-		-		-		-		-		19	8.19
10-14	20	28.17	6	16.22	4	11.11	-		-		-		-		30	12.93
15-19	8	11.27	4	10.81	6	16.67	9	24.32	2	5.71	-		1	25.00	30	12.93
20-24	6	8.45	5	13.51	5	13.89	9	24.32	6	17.14	2	16.67	2	50.00	35	15.09
25-29	5	7.04	2	5.41	7	19.44	8	21.62	8	22.86	3	25.00	-		33	14.22
30-34	1	1.41	1	2.70	2	5.56	2	5.41	5	14.29	3	25.00	1	25.00	15	6.47
35-39	1	1.41	2	5.41	1	2.78	3	8.11	8	22.86	2	16.67	-		17	7.33
40-44	2	2.82	3	8.11	2	5.56	2	5.41	4	11.43	1	8.33	-		14	6.03
45-49	2	2.82	5	13.51	3	8.33	2	5.41	1	2.86	-		-		13	5.60
50-54	2	2.82	2	5.41	1	2.78	1	2.70	1	2.86	-		-		7	3.02
55-59	-		3	8.11	2	5.56	1	2.70	-		1	8.33	-		7	3.02
60-64	-		2	5.41	2	5.56	-		-		-		-		4	1.72
65-69	3	4.23	2	5.41	1	2.78	-		-		-		-		6	2.59
70 and above	2	2.82	-		-		-		-		-		-		2	0.86
Total	71	30.60	37	15.95	36	15.52	37	15.95	35	15.09	12	5.17	4	1.72	232	100.00

Table 3.10 shows that among the total literate male population of Dakshin *hati*, the highest percentage (30.60%) was found in I-V, while the lowest (5.17%) were found in MA/MSC standard. It is important that in Dakshin *hati* (62.07%) of the literate male population's standard of education were class XII. The highest number of male students (28.17%) were found in the age group 10-14 reading up to I-V, while the lowest number was found in the age group 70 and above in the same standard.

Table 3.11: Age group wise Distribution of Literate Male population of Brindaban *hati* based on Standard of Education, January/ 2016

Age	Number and percentage of Literate category														Total	
	I-V		VI-VIII		IX-X		XI-XII		Graduate		MA/MSc		Others			
07-09	17	58.62	-		-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	6.20
10-14	1	3.45	16	53.33	6	15.79	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23	8.39
15-19	-	-	1	3.33	18	47.37	10	27.78	5	4.95	-	-	1	9.09	35	12.77
20-24	-	-	1	3.33	1	2.63	6	16.67	24	23.76	11	37.93	4	36.36	47	17.15
25-29	1	3.45	-		4	10.53	7	19.44	35	34.65	10	34.48	3	27.27	60	21.90
30-34	-	-	1	3.33	1	2.63	2	5.56	6	5.94	2	6.90	-		12	4.38
35-39	-	-	2	6.67	-	-	-	-	4	3.96	1	3.45	1	9.09	8	2.92
40-44	2	6.90	4	13.33	-	-	1	2.78	8	7.92	1	3.45	-		16	5.84
45-49	1	3.45	-		2	5.26	2	5.56	14	13.86	2	6.90	2	18.18	23	8.39
50-54	3	10.34	2	6.67	1	2.63	4	11.11	7	6.93	2	6.90	-	-	19	6.93
55-59	1	3.45	-		1	2.63	1	2.78	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1.09
60-64	-	-	1	3.33	1	2.63	3	8.33	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	1.82
65-69	3	10.34	1	3.33	2	5.26	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	2.19
70 and above	-	-	1	3.33	1	2.63	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.73
Total	29	10.58	30	10.95	38	13.87	36	13.14	101	36.86	29	10.58	11	4.01	274	100.00

Table 3.11 shows that among the total literate male population of Brindaban *hati*, the highest percentage (36.86%) was found in graduate standard, while the lowest (10.58%) were found in I-V standard. It is observed that in this *hati* the percentage of literate male population were highest than other two *hatis*. The highest number of male students (34.65%) was found in the age group 25-29 reading up to graduate standard. The lowest number was found in the age group 70 and above in VI-VIII standard.

Table 3.12: Age group wise Distribution of Literate Male population of Na *hati* based on Standard of Education, January/ 2016

Age	Number and percentage of Literate category														Total	
	I-V		VI-VIII		IX-X		XI-XII		Graduate		MA/		Others			
7-9	29	56.86	-		-		-	-	-		-	-	-	-	29	13.12
10-14	12	23.53	14	45.16	6	17.65	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	32	14.48
15-19	-	-	2	6.45	9	26.47	11	36.67	8	20.00	-	-	2	22.22	32	14.48
20-24	1	1.96	2	6.45	1	2.94	8	26.67	09		11	42.31	3	33.33	34	15.38
25-29	1	1.96	-		2	5.88	2	6.67	4	10.00	6	23.08		0.00	15	6.79
30-34	-	-	1	3.23	-		3	10.00	6	15.00	4	15.38	1	11.11	15	6.79
35-39	-	-	-		1	2.94	-	-	7	17.50	2	7.69	1	11.11	11	4.98
40-44	2	3.92	1	3.23	2	5.88	1	3.33	4	10.00	3	11.54	2	22.22	15	6.79
45-49	1	1.96	2	6.45	-		-	-	2	5.00	-	-	-	-	5	2.26
50-54	2	3.92	3	9.68	9	26.47	5	16.67	-	-	-	-	-	-	19	8.60
55-59	-	-	3	9.68	1	2.94	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	1.81
60-64	1	1.96	1	3.23	1	2.94	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1.36
65-69	1	1.96	1	3.23	2	5.88	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	1.81
70 and above	1	1.96	1	3.23	-		-	-	-	-	-				2	0.90
Total	51	23.08	31	14.03	34	15.38	30	13.57	40	18.10	26	11.76	9	4.07	221	100.00

Table 3.12 shows the total literate male population of Na *hati*. Among them the highest percentage (23.08%) was found in I-V, while the lowest (11.76%) were found in MA/MSC standard. It is important that in this *hati* (66.06%) of the literate male population's standard of education were up to class XII. The highest number of male students (56.86%) were found in the age group 7-09 reading up to I-V, while the lowest number was found in the age group 70 and above in class I-VIII.

Table 3.13: *Hati* wise distribution of literate Female population based on Standard of Education of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Name of the <i>hati</i>	Number and percentage of literate category														Total	
	I-V		VI-VIII		IX-X		XI-XII		Graduate		MA/M.SC		Others			
Dakshin <i>hati</i>	53	22.84	33	14.22	42	18.10	29	12.50	55	23.71	12	5.17	8	3.45	232	100.00
Brindab <i>hati</i>	17	8.46	25	12.44	28	13.93	25	12.44	69	34.33	30	14.93	7	3.48	201	100.00
Na <i>hati</i>	39	17.11	28	12.28	26	11.40	20	8.77	60	26.32	46	20.18	9	3.95	228	100.00
Total	109	16.49	86	13.01	96	14.52	74	11.20	184	27.84	88	13.31	24	3.63	661	100.00

N.B. Excluded 14 girls of 3-6 age group in Dakshin *hati*, 08 girls of age group 3-6 in Brindaban *hati* and 14 girls of age group 3-6 in Na *hati*, though they went to school.

Table 3.13 shows that among the total literate female population. Like male population, the highest number was found in graduate (27.84%) female population also, while the lowest (13.01%) were found in VI-VIII standard. The highest number of graduate populations was found in Brindaban *hati*, while the highest number of master degree holder was found in Na *hati*, while it was low in Dakshin *hati*.

Table 3.14: Age group wise Distribution of Literate Female population of Dakshin *hati* based on Standard of Education, January/ 2016

Age group	Number and percentage of Literate category														Total	
	I-V		VI-VIII		IX-X		XI-XII		Graduate		MA/		Others			
7-9	22	41.51	-		-		-		-	-	-		-	-	22	9.48
10-14	7	13.21	9	27.27	5	11.90	-		-	-	-		-	-	21	9.05
15-19	1	1.89	1	3.03	20	47.62	12	41.38	12	-	-		2	25.00	48	20.69

20-24	-		1	3.03	-		1	3.45	15	-	5	41.67	4	50.00	26	11.21
25-29	1	1.89	2	6.06	3	7.14	6	20.69	19	-	6	50.00	1	12.50	38	16.38
30-34	2	3.77	1	3.03	1	2.38	2	6.90	4	-	1	8.33	1	12.50	12	5.17
35-39	1	1.89	-		2	4.76	1	3.45	2	-	-	-	-	-	6	2.59
40-44	3	5.66	4	12.12	1	2.38	2	6.90	2	-	-	-	-	-	12	5.17
45-49	4	7.55	2	6.06	1	2.38	2	6.90	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	3.88
50-54	4	7.55	7	21.21	6	14.29	1	3.45	1	-	-	-	-	-	19	8.19
55-59	3	5.66	3	9.09	2	4.76	2	6.90	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	4.31
60-64	-		1	3.03	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.43
65-69	3	5.66	2	6.06	1	2.38	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	2.59
70 and above	2	3.77	-		-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.86
Total	53	22.84	33	14.22	42	18.10	29	12.50	55	23.71	12	5.17	8	3.45	232	100.00

Table 3.10 shows that among the total literate female population of Dakshin *hati*, the highest percentage (22.84%) was found in I-V, while the lowest (5.17%) were found in MA/MSc standard. It is interesting to find that the number of master degree holder was same in both male and female. The highest number of female population (41.51%) were found in the age group 7-9 reading up to I-V, while the lowest number was found in the age group 70 and above in the same standard.

Table 3.15: Age group wise Distribution of Literate Female population of Brindaban *hati* based on Standard of Education, January/ 2016

Age	Number and percentage of Literate category														Total	
	I-V		VI-VIII		IX-X		XI-XII		Graduate		MA/		Others			
7-9	10	58.82	-	-	-		-		-		-	-	-	-	10	4.98

10-14	2	11.76	12	48.00	6	21.43	-		-		-	-	-	-	20	9.95
15-19	-	-	-	-	8	28.57	10	40.00	6	8.70	-	-	1	14.29	25	12.44
20-24	-	-	-	-	1	3.57	1	4.00	24	34.78	7	23.33	2	28.57	35	17.41
25-29	-	-	1	4.00	1	3.57	-		11	15.94	5	16.67	2	28.57	20	9.95
30-34	-	-	-	-	-		1	4.00	8	11.59	9	30.00	-	-	18	8.96
35-39	-	-	1	4.00	2	7.14	3	12.00	6	8.70	6	20.00	-	-	18	8.96
40-44	-	-	2	8.00	4	14.29	5	20.00	3	4.35	2	6.67	1	14.29	17	8.46
45-49	2	11.76	3	12.00	1	3.57	2	8.00	7	10.14	1	3.33	1	14.29	17	8.46
50-54	-	-	4	16.00	3	10.71	2	8.00	3	4.35	-	-	-	-	12	5.97
55-59	-	-	-	-	1	3.57	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.50
60-64	-	-	-	-	1	3.57	1	4.00	1	1.45	-	-	-	-	3	1.49
65-69	2	11.76	2	8.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	1.99
70 and above	1	5.88	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	1	0.50
Total	17	8.46	25	12.44	28	13.93	25	12.44	69	34.33	30	14.93	7	3.48	201	100.00

Table 3.11 shows that among the total literate female population of Brindaban *hati*, the highest percentage (34.33%) was found in graduate standard, while the lowest (8.46%) were found in I-V standard. The highest number of female population (34.78%) was found in the age group 20-24 reading up to graduate standard. The lowest number was found in the age group 70 and above in I-V standard.

Table 3.16: Age group wise Distribution of Literate Female population of Na *hati* based on Standard of Education, January/ 2016

Age	Number and percentage of Literate category														Total	
	I-V		VI-VIII		IX-X		XI-XII		Graduate		MA/		Others			
7-9	21	53.85	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	9.21
10-14	8	20.51	10	35.71	7	26.92	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	10.96
15-19	-	-	3	10.71	5	19.23	7	35.00	17	28.33	-	-	3	33.33	35	15.35
20-24	-	-	-	-	3	11.54	6	30.00	8	13.33	16	34.78	2	22.22	35	15.35
25-29	-	-	-	-	1	3.85	1	5.00	6	10.00	12	26.09	2	22.22	22	9.65
30-34	-	-	-	-	2	7.69	1	5.00	8	13.33	9	19.57	-	-	20	8.77
35-39	-	-	2	7.14	1	3.85	1	5.00	9	15.00	4	8.70	1	11.11	18	7.89
40-44	1	2.56	1	3.57	1	3.85	2	10.00	6	10.00	2	4.35	-	-	13	5.70
45-49	1	2.56	1	3.57	2	7.69	1	5.00	6	10.00	3	6.52	1	-	15	6.58
50-54	3	7.69	3	10.71	2	7.69	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	3.51
55-59	2	5.13	4	14.29	2	7.69	1	5.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	3.95
60-64	-	-	1	3.57	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.44
65-69	3	7.69	2	7.14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	2.19
70 and above	-	-	1	3.57	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.44
Total	39	17.11	28	12.28	26	11.40	20	8.77	60	26.32	46	20.18	9	3.95	228	100.00

Table 3.12 shows the total literate female population of Na *hati*. Among them the highest percentage (26.32%) was found in graduate level, while the lowest (8.77%) were found in XI-XII standard. The highest number of female population (53.85%) were found in the age group 7-09 reading up to I-V, while the lowest number was found in the age group 70 and above in class VI-VIII.

3.17: Marital status of the Male population of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January, 2016

Name of the <i>hatis</i>	Unmarried		Married		Widower		Divorcee		Total	
Dakshin <i>hati</i>	175	69.17	78	30.83	-	-	-	-	253	100.00
Brindaban <i>hati</i>	185	64.91	94	32.98	4	1.4	2	0.70	285	100.00
Na <i>hati</i>	158	65.02	85	34.98	-	-	-	-	243	100.00
Total	518	66.32	257	32.91	4	0.5	2	0.26	781	100.00

Table shows that, the percentage of unmarried male population was higher than the married male population in all the three *hatis*. No widower and divorcee male population were found in Dakshin *hati* and Na *hati*, while 1.4 per cent of widower and 0.70 per cent of divorcee male population were found in Brindaban *hati*.

Table 3.18: Distribution of Male population based on Marital Status in Dakshin *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Unmarried		Married		Widower		Divorcee		Total	
0-4	8	4.57	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	3.16
5-9	20	11.43	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	7.91
10-14	30	17.14	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	11.86
15-19	30	17.14	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	11.86
20-24	32	18.29	1	1.28	-	-	-	-	33	13.04
25-29	33	18.86	2	2.56	-	-	-	-	35	13.83
30-34	10	5.71	5	6.41	-	-	-	-	15	5.93
35-39	6	3.43	12	15.38	-	-	-	-	18	7.11
40-44	5	2.86	10	12.82	-	-	-	-	15	5.93
45-49	-	-	15	19.23	-	-	-	-	15	5.93
50-54	-	-	10	12.82	-	-	-	-	10	3.95
55-59	-	-	8	10.26	-	-	-	-	8	3.16
60-64	-	-	5	6.41	-	-	-	-	5	1.98
65-69	-	-	8	10.26	-	-	-	-	8	3.16
70 and above	1	0.57	2	2.56	-	-	-	-	3	1.19
Total	175	69.17	78	30.83	-	-	-	-	253	100.00

According to this table in Dakshin *hati* the highest percentage (82.86%) of unmarried male population were found in the age group 05-29 while the lowest percentage (0.57%) were found in the age group 70 and above. Highest percentage (60.25%) of

married male population was found in the age group 35-54. The lowest percentage (10.25%) of married male population was found in the age group 0-34.

Table 3.19: Distribution of Male population based on Marital Status in Brindaban *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Unmarried		Married		Widower		Divorcee		Total	
0-4	3	1.62	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1.05
5-9	17	9.19	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	5.96
10-14	23	12.43	-	-	-	-	-	-	23	8.07
15-19	35	18.92	-	-	-	-	-	-	35	12.28
20-24	44	23.78	1	1.06	-	-	-	-	45	15.79
25-29	50	27.03	7	7.45	-	-	-	-	60	21.05
30-34	5	2.70	8	8.51	-	-	-	-	13	4.56
35-39	2	1.08	6	6.38	1	25.00	-	-	8	2.81
40-44	4	2.16	13	13.83		0.00	-	-	17	5.96
45-49	3	1.62	22	23.40	1	25.00	1	50.00	25	8.77
50-54	1	0.54	19	20.21	-	-	-	-	20	7.02
55-59	-	-	3	3.19	-	-	-	-	3	1.05
60-64	1	0.54	5	5.32	2	50.00	1	50.00	6	2.11
65-69	-	-	7	7.45	-	-	-	-	7	2.46
70 and above	-	-	3	3.19	-	-	-	-	3	1.05
Total	185	64.91	94	32.98	4	1.4	2	0.70	285	100.00

This table shows that, in Brindaban *hati* the highest percentage (91.35%) of unmarried male population were found in the age group 05-29, while the lowest percentage (1.08%) were found in the age group 50-54 and 60-64. Highest percentage (57.4%) of married male population was found in the age group 40-54, while the lowest percentage (19.1%) of married male population was found in the age group 55-70 and above.

Table 3.20: Distribution of Male population based on Marital Status in Na *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Unmarried		Married		Widower		Divorcee		Total	
0-4	13	8.23	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	5.35
5-9	30	18.99	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	12.35
10-14	32	20.25	-	-	-	-	-	-	32	13.17
15-19	32	20.25	-	-	-	-	-	-	32	13.17
20-24	33	20.89	2	2.35	-	-	-	-	35	14.40
25-29	11	6.96	4	4.71	-	-	-	-	15	6.17
30-34	3	1.90	12	14.12	-	-	-	-	15	6.17

35-39	2	1.27	10	11.76	-	-	-	-	12	4.94
40-44	2	1.27	13	15.29	-	-	-	-	15	6.17
45-49	-	-	5	5.88	-	-	-	-	5	2.06
50-54	-	-	21	24.71	-	-	-	-	21	8.64
55-59	-	-	5	5.88	-	-	-	-	5	2.06
60-64	-	-	3	3.53	-	-	-	-	3	1.23
65-69	-	-	6	7.06	-	-	-	-	6	2.47
70 and above	-	-	4	4.71	-	-	-	-	4	1.65
Total	158	65.02	85	34.98	-	-	-	-	243	100.00

According to this table in Na *hati* the highest percentage (80.38%) of unmarried male population were found in the age group 05-24 while the lowest percentage (4.44%) were found in the age group 30-44. Highest percentage (71.76%) of married male population was found in the age group 30-54. The lowest percentage (7.06%) of married male population was found in the age group 0-29.

3.21: Marital status of the female population of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Name of the <i>hatis</i>	Unmarried		Married		Widow		Divorcee		Total	
Dakshin <i>hati</i>	142	51.64	80	29.09	53	19.27	-	-	275	100.00
Brindaban <i>hati</i>	110	50.00	93	42.27	17	7.73	-	-	220	100.00
Na <i>hati</i>	140	53.85	85	32.69	35	13.46	-	-	260	100.00
Total	392	51.92	258	34.17	105	13.91	-	-	755	100.00

According to this table, the percentage of unmarried female population (51.92%) was little bit higher than the married female population (48.08%) in all the three *hatis*. Of these 13.91 per cent was widow. No divorcee female population was found in all the three *hatis*.

Table 3.22: Distribution of Female population based on Marital Status in Dakshin *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Unmarried		Married		Widower		Divorcee		Total	
0-04	25	17.61	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	9.09
05-09	25	17.61	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	9.09
10-14	23	16.20	-	-	-	-	-	-	23	8.36

15-19	43	30.28	7	8.75	-	-	-	-	50	18.18
20-24	18	12.68	5	6.25	2	3.77	-	-	25	9.09
25-29	6	4.23	26	32.5	4	7.55	-	-	38	13.82
30-34	-	-	10	12.5	3	5.66	-	-	13	4.73
35-39	-	-	6	7.5	2	3.77	-	-	8	2.91
40-44	-	-	8	10	5	9.43	-	-	13	4.73
45-49	-	-	5	6.25	4	7.55	-	-	9	3.27
50-54	-	-	8	10	12	22.64	-	-	20	7.27
55-59	-	-	4	5	8	15.09	-	-	12	4.36
60-64	-	-	-		2	3.77	-	-	2	0.73
65-69	-	-	1	1.25	7	13.21	-	-	8	2.91
70 and above	-	-	-		4	7.55	-	-	4	
Total	142	51.64	80	29.09	53	19.27	-	-	275	100.00

According to this table in Dakshin *hati* the highest percentage (94.38%) of unmarried female population were found in the age group 0-24 while the lowest percentage (4.23%) were found in the age group 25-29. Highest percentage (62.50%) of married female population was found in the age group 25-44. The lowest percentage (1.25%) of married female population was found in the age group 65-69. Highest number (22.64%) of widow was found in the age group 50-54.

Table 3.23: Distribution of Female population based on Marital Status in Brindaban *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Unmarried		Married		Widower		Divorcee		Total	
0-4	10	9.09	-		-	-	-	-	10	4.55
5-9	10	9.09	-		-	-	-	-	10	4.55
10-14	20	18.18	-		-	-	-	-	20	9.09
15-19	23	20.91	2	2.15	-	-	-	-	25	11.36
20-24	30	27.27	5	5.38	-	-	-	-	35	15.91
25-29	10	9.09	10	10.75	-	-	-	-	20	9.09
30-34	4	3.64	14	15.05	-	-	-	-	18	8.18
35-39	2	1.82	17	18.28	-	-	-	-	19	8.64
40-44	1	0.91	14	15.05	2	11.76	-	-	17	7.73
45-49	-	-	15	16.13	2	11.76	-	-	17	7.73
50-54	-	-	7	7.53	7	41.18	-	-	14	6.36
55-59	-	-	2	2.15			-	-	2	0.91
60-64	-	-	3	3.23	2	11.76	-	-	5	2.27
65-69	-	-	3	3.23	2	11.76	-	-	5	2.27
70 and above	-	-	1	1.08	2	11.76	-	-	3	1.36
Total	110	50.00	93	42.27	17	7.73	-		220	100.00

According to this table in Brindaban *hati* the highest percentage (66.36%) of unmarried female population were found in the age group 10-24 while the lowest percentage (6.37%) were found in the age group 30-44. Highest percentage (75.26%) of married female population was found in the age group 25-49. The lowest percentage (1.08%) of married female population was found in the age group 70 and above. Highest number (41.18%) of widow was found in the age group 50-54.

3.24: Distribution of Female population based on Marital Status in Na *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Unmarried		Married		Widower		Divorcee		Total	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
0-4	20	14.29	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	7.69
5-9	23	16.43	-	-	-	-	-	-	23	8.85
10-14	25	17.86	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	9.62
15-19	32	22.86	3	3.53	-	-	-	-	35	13.46
20-24	28	20.00	7	8.24	-	-	-	-	35	13.46
25-29	6	4.29	14	16.47	2	5.71	-	-	22	8.46
30-34	4	2.86	15	17.65	1	2.86	-	-	20	7.69
35-39	1	0.71	13	15.29	4	11.43	-	-	18	6.92
40-44	-	-	12	14.12	1	2.86	-	-	13	5.00
45-49	1	0.71	9	10.59	6	17.14	-	-	16	6.15
50-54	-	-	6	7.06	3	8.57	-	-	9	3.46
55-59	-	-	5	5.88	6	17.14	-	-	11	4.23
60-64	-	-	-	-	2	5.71	-	-	2	0.77
65-69	-	-	1	1.18	6	17.14	-	-	7	2.69
70 and above	-	-	-	-	4	11.43	-	-	4	1.54
Total	140	53.85	85	32.69	35	13.46	-	-	260	100.00

According to this table in Na *hati* the highest percentage (91.44%) of unmarried female population were found in the age group 0-24 while the lowest percentage (8.57%) were found in the age group 25-49. Highest percentage (74.12%) of married female population was found in the age group 25-44. The lowest percentage (1.18%) of married female population was found in the age group 65-69. Highest percentage (17.14%) of widow was found in the age group 45-49, 55-59 and 65-69.

Table 3.25: Distribution of Population by occupation among the people of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Hati	Male						Female				Total	
	Dependent		Independent		Total		Dependent		Independent			
Dakshin Hati	110	43.47	143	56.52	253	100.00	237	86.18	38	13.81	275	100.00
Brindaban Hati	120	42.10	165	57.89	285	100.00	186	84.54	34	15.45	220	100.00
Na hati	102	41.97	141	58.02	243	100.00	223	85.76	37	14.23	260	100.00
Total	332	42.50	449	57.49	781	100.00	646	85.56	109	14.43	755	100.00

According to this table, among male population the percentage (57.49%) of independent was higher than the dependent (42.50%), while among the female population the percentage (85.56%) of dependent is higher than the percentage (14.43%) of independent population. Highest number of independent male population (58.02%) was found in Na *hati*, while the number highest number of independent female population was found in Brindaban *hati*.

Table 3.26: Distribution of Age group wise Male Population based on Occupational Status of three *thul hatis*, January/ 2016

Age Group	Dakshin <i>hati</i>						Brindaban <i>hati</i>						Na <i>hati</i>					
	Dependent		Independent		Total		Dependent		Independent		Total		Dependent		Independent		Total	
0-04	8	7.27	-	-	8	3.16	3	2.50	-	-	3	1.05	13	12.75	-	-	13	5.35
05-09	20	18.18	-	-	20	7.91	17	14.17	-	-	17	5.96	30	29.41	-	-	30	12.35
10-14	28	25.45	2	1.40	30	11.86	23	19.17	-	-	23	8.07	29	28.43	3	2.13	32	13.17
15-19	24	21.82	6	4.20	30	11.86	30	25.00	5	3.03	35	12.28	21	20.59	11	7.80	32	13.17

20-24	12	10.91	21	14.69	33	13.04	27	22.50	19	11.52	45	15.79	7	6.86	28	19.86	35	14.40
25-29	3	2.73	32	22.38	35	13.83	10	8.33	49	29.70	58	20.35	1	0.98	14	9.93	15	6.17
30-34	2	1.82	13	9.09	15	5.93	-	-	13	7.88	13	4.56	-	-	15	10.64	15	6.17
35-39	2	1.82	16	11.19	18	7.11	-	-	8	4.85	8	2.81	-	-	12	8.51	12	4.94
40-44	-	-	15	10.49	15	5.93	-	-	17	10.30	17	5.96	-	-	15	10.64	15	6.17
45-49	1	0.91	14	9.79	15	5.93	-	-	25	15.15	25	8.77	-	-	5	3.55	5	2.06
50-54	-	-	10	6.99	10	3.95	1	0.83	19	11.52	20	7.02	-	-	21	14.89	21	8.64
55-59	-	-	8	5.59	8	3.16		0.00	3	1.82	3	1.05	-	-	5	3.55	5	2.06
60-64	2	1.82	3	2.10	5	1.98	3	2.50	3	1.82	6	2.11	-	-	3	2.13	3	1.23
65-69	5	4.55	3	2.10	8	3.16	4	3.33	3	1.82	7	2.46	-	-	6	4.26	6	2.47
70 and above	3	2.73	-		3	1.19	2	1.67	1	0.61	3	1.05	1	0.98	3	2.13	4	1.65
Total	110	43.47	143	56.52	253	100.00	120	42.10	165	57.89	285	100.00	102	41.97	141	58.02	243	100.00

According to this table in *Dakshin hati*, the highest number (76.36%) of dependent male population was found in the age group 5-24 and the lowest number was found in the age group 45-49. Highest number (77.63%) of independent male population was found in the age group 20-49. In *Brindaban hati*, the highest number (80.84%) of dependent male population was found in the age group 5-24 and the lowest number is found in the age group 50-54. Highest number (41.22%) of independent male population was found in the age group 20-29. In *Na hati*, the highest number (91.18%) of dependent male population was found in the age group 0-19 and the lowest number is found in the age group 70 and above.

Table 3.27: Distribution of Age group wise Female Population based on Occupational Status of three *thul hatis*, January/ 2016

Age Group	Dakshin hati						Brindaban hati						Na hati					
	Dependent		Independent		Total		Dependent		Independent		Total		Dependent		Independent		Total	
0-4	25	10.55	-		25	9.09	10	5.38	-		10	4.55	20	8.97	-		20	7.69
5-9	25	10.55	-		25	9.09	10	5.38	-		10	4.55	23	10.31	-		23	8.85

10-14	23	9.70	-		23	8.36	20	10.75	-		20	9.09	25	11.21	-		25	9.62
15-19	49	20.68	1	2.63	50	18.18	25	13.44	-		25	11.36	35	15.70	-		35	13.46
20-24	21	8.86	4	10.53	25	9.09	30	16.13	5	14.71	35	15.91	29	13.00	6	16.22	35	13.46
25-29	29	12.24	9	23.68	38	13.82	13	6.99	7	20.59	20	9.09	17	7.62	5	13.51	22	8.46
30-34	8	3.38	5	13.16	13	4.73	14	7.53	4	11.76	18	8.18	10	4.48	10	27.03	20	7.69
35-39	4	1.69	4	10.53	8	2.91	10	5.38	9	26.47	19	8.64	7	3.14	11	29.73	18	6.92
40-44	5	2.11	8	21.05	13	4.73	15	8.06	2	5.88	17	7.73	10	4.48	3	8.11	13	5.00
45-49	6	2.53	3	7.89	9	3.27	13	6.99	4	11.76	17	7.73	15	6.73	1	2.70	16	6.15
50-54	17	7.17	3	7.89	20	7.27	11	5.91	3	8.82	14	6.36	8	3.59	1	2.70	9	3.46
55-59	11	4.64	1	2.63	12	4.36	2	1.08	-		2	0.91	11	4.93	-		11	4.23
60-64	2	0.84	-		2	0.73	5	2.69	-		5	2.27	2	0.90	-		2	0.77
65-69	8	3.38	-		8	2.91	5	2.69	-		5	2.27	7	3.14	-		7	2.69
70 and above	4	1.69	-		4	1.45	3	1.61	-		3	1.36	4	1.79	-		4	1.54
Total	237	86.18	38	13.81	275	100.00	186	84.54	34	15.45	220	100.00	223	85.76	37	14.23	260	100.00

According to this table in Dakshin *hati*, the highest number (72.58%) of dependent female population was found in the age group 0-29 and the lowest number (1.69%) was found in the age group 35-39 and 70and above. Highest number (78.95%) of independent f male population was found in the age group 20-44. In Brindaban *hati*, the highest number (54.84%) of dependent female population was found in the age group 10-34 and the lowest number is found in the age group 55-59. Highest number (26.47%) of independent female population was found in the age group 35-39. In Na *hati*, the highest number (58.98%) of dependent female population was found in the age group 0-24 and the lowest (0.90%) number is found in the age group 60-64.

Table 3.28 *Hati* wise distribution of Male population based on Occupation of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Hati	Types of Occupation													
	Service		Business		Student		Retired		Dependent		Others		Total	
Dakshin <i>Hati</i>	45	17.79	73	28.85	70	27.67	5	1.98	40	15.81	20	7.91	253	100.00
Brindaban <i>Hati</i>	85	29.82	60	21.05	72	25.26	8	2.81	48	16.84	12	4.21	285	100.00
Na <i>hati</i>	48	19.75	60	24.69	87	35.80	3	1.23	15	6.17	30	12.35	243	100.00
Total	178	22.79	193	25.35	229	29.32	16	2.05	103	13.19	62	7.94	781	100.00

This table shows that the percentage (29.32%) of male student is highest in total, while in Dakshin *hati* the percentage of business man was highest in all types of occupation. The highest percentage (35.80%) of student was found in Na *hati*. The highest percentage (29.82%) of male service holder was found in Brindaban *hati*.

Table 3.29 Distribution of Male population based on Types of Occupation of Dakshin *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Types of Occupation												Total	
	Service		Business		Student		Retired		Dependent		Others			
0-4	-	-	-	-	7	10.00	-	-	1	2.50	-	-	8	3.16
5-9	-	-	-	-	20	28.57	-	-		0.00	-	-	20	7.91
10-14	-	-	2	2.74	26	37.14	-	-	2	5.00	-	-	30	11.86
15-19	-	-	6	8.22	13	18.57	-	-	11	27.50	-	-	30	11.86
20-24	7	15.56	9	12.33	4	5.71	-	-	8	20.00	5	25.00	33	13.04
25-29	9	20.00	17	23.29	-	-	-	-	3	7.50	6	30.00	35	13.83
30-34	4	8.89	7	9.59	-	-	-	-	2	5.00	2	10.00	15	5.93
35-39	7	15.56	6	8.22	-	-	-	-	2	5.00	3	15.00	18	7.11
40-44	4	8.89	9	12.33	-	-	-	-	-		2	10.00	15	5.93
45-49	5	11.11	8	10.96		-	-	-	1	2.50	1	5.00	15	5.93
50-54	4	8.89	5	6.85	-	-	-	-	-		1	5.00	10	3.95
55-59	4	8.89	3	4.11	-	-	1	20.00	-		-	-	8	3.16
60-64	1	2.22	-	-	-	-	2	40.00	2	5.00	-	-	5	1.98
65-69	-	-	1	1.37	-	-	2	40.00	5	12.50	-	-	8	3.16
70 and above	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		3	7.50	-	-	3	1.19
Total	45	17.79	73	28.85	70	27.67	5	1.98	40	15.81	20	7.91	253	100.00

According to this table in Dakshin *hati*, highest percentage of service holder (20.00%) and businessman (23.29%) male population was found in the age group 25-29. Highest percentage of student (65.71) was found in the age group 5-14. In occupation the highest percentage (28.85%) was found in business sector.

Table 3.30: Distribution of Male population based on Types of Occupation of Brindaban *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Types of Occupation												Total	
	Service		Business		Student		Retired		Dependent		Others			
0-4	-		-		3	4.17	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1.05
5-9	-		-		17	23.61	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	5.96
10-14	-		-		21	29.17	-	-	2	4.17	-	-	23	8.07
15-19	1	1.18	2	3.33	17	23.61	-	-	13	27.08	2	16.67	35	12.28
20-24	7	8.24	10	16.67	13	18.06	-	-	14	29.17	2	16.67	45	15.79
25-29	26	30.59	18	30.00	1	1.39	-	-	9	18.75	5	41.67	58	20.35
30-34	7	8.24	5	8.33	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	8.33	13	4.56
35-39	5	5.88	2	3.33	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	8.33	8	2.81
40-44	10	11.76	7	11.67	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	5.96
45-49	18	21.18	7	11.67	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	8.77
50-54	10	11.76	8	13.33	-	-	-	-	1	2.08	1	8.33	20	7.02
55-59	1	1.18	-		-	-	2	25.00		0.00	-	-	3	1.05
60-64	-		1	1.67	-	-	2	25.00	3	6.25	-	-	6	2.11
65-69	-		-		-	-	3	37.50	4	8.33	-	-	7	2.46
70 and above	-		-	-	-	-	1	12.50	2	4.17	-	-	3	1.05
Total	85	29.82	60	21.05	72	25.26	8	2.81	48	16.84	12	4.21	285	100.00

According to this table highest percentage of service holder (44.70%) was found in the age group 40-54 and highest percentage of businessman (46.67%) male population was found in the age group 20-29. Highest percentage of student (94.45%) was found in the age group 5-24. In occupation the highest percentage (29.82%) was found in service sector.

Table 3.31 Distribution of Male population based on Types of Occupation of Na *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Types of Occupation												Total	
	Service		Business		Student		Retired		Dependent		Others			
0-4	-		-		8	9.20	-	-	5	33.33	-	-	13	5.35
5-9	-		-		30	34.48	-	-	-		-	-	30	12.35
10-14			1	1.67	27	31.03	-	-	2	13.33	2	6.67	32	13.17
15-19	2	4.17	5	8.33	17	19.54	-	-	4	26.67	4	13.33	32	13.17
20-24	14	29.17	9	15.00	5	5.75	-	-	2	13.33	5	16.67	35	14.40
25-29	6	12.50	4	6.67	-	-	-	-	1	6.67	4	13.33	15	6.17
30-34	7	14.58	5	8.33	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	10.00	15	6.17
35-39	4	8.33	7	11.67	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3.33	12	4.94
40-44	7	14.58	5	8.33	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	10.00	15	6.17
45-49	2	4.17	2	3.33	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3.33	5	2.06
50-54	5	10.42	12	20.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	13.33	21	8.64
55-59	1	2.08	2	3.33	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	6.67	5	2.06
60-64	-	-	1	1.67	-	-	2	66.67	-	-	-	-	3	1.23
65-69	-	-	5	8.33	-	-	1	33.33	-	-	-	-	6	2.47
70 and above	-	-	2	3.33	-	-	-		-	-	1	3.33	4	1.65
Total	48	19.75	60	24.69	87	35.80	3	1.23	15	6.17	30	12.35	243	100.00

According to this table highest percentage of service holder (56.25%) was found in the age group 20-34 and highest percentage of businessman (20.00%) male population was found in the age group 50-54. Highest percentage of student (85.05%) was found in the age group 5-19. In occupation the highest percentage (24.69%) was found in business sector.

Table 3.32 *Hati* wise distribution of Female population based on Occupation of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Hati	Types of Occupation														Total	
	Service		Business		Student		Retired		Dependent		House Wife		Others			
Dakshin <i>Hati</i>	10	3.64	11	4.00	75	27.27	-	-	55	20.00	107	38.91	17	6.18	275	100.00
Brindaban <i>Hati</i>	20	9.09	11	5.00	65	29.55	-	-	26	11.82	95	43.18	3	1.36	220	100.00
Na <i>hati</i>	10	3.85	12	4.62	105	40.38	-	-	30	11.54	88	33.85	15	5.77	260	100.00
Total	40	5.30	34	4.50	245	32.45	-	-	111	14.70	290	38.41	35	4.64	755	100.00

Data reveals that the percentage (32.45%) of female student is highest in total. The highest percentage (40.38%) of student was found in Na *hati*. The highest percentage (9.09%) of female service holder and (5.00%) of businesswoman were found in Brindaban *hati*. The number of housewife was also highest in the same *hati*.

Table 3.33 Distribution of Female population based on Types of Occupation of Dakshin *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Types of Occupation														Total	
	Service		Business		Student		Retired		Dependent		House Wife		Others			
0-4	-		-	-	14	18.67	-	-	11	20.00	-	-	-	-	25	9.09
5-9	-		-	-	25	33.33	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	25	9.09
10-14	-		-	-	20	26.67	-	-	3	5.45	-	-	-	-	23	8.36

15-19	-		-	-	11	14.67	-	-	30	54.55	8	7.48	1	5.88	50	18.18
20-24	2	20.00	1	9.09	5	6.67	-	-	5	9.09	11	10.28	1	5.88	25	9.09
25-29	3	30.00	2	18.18	-	-	-	-	6	10.91	29	27.10	4	23.53	38	13.82
30-34	2	20.00	1	9.09	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	7.48	2	11.76	13	4.73
35-39	2	20.00	1	9.09	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	3.74	1	5.88	8	2.91
40-44	1	10.00	3	27.27	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	4.67	4	23.53	13	4.73
45-49	-	-	1	9.09	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	5.61	2	11.76	9	3.27
50-54	-	-	1	9.09	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	15.89	2	11.76	20	7.27
55-59	-	-	1	9.09	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	10.28	-	-	12	4.36
60-64	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.87	-	-	2	0.73
65-69	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	7.48	-	-	8	2.91
70 and above	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	3.74	-	-	4	1.45
Total	10	3.64	11	4.00	75	27.27	-	-	55	20.00	107	38.91	17	6.18	275	100.00

According to this table highest percentage of service holder (30.00%) was found in the age group 25-29 and highest percentage of businesswoman (27.27%) male population was found in the age group 40-44. Highest percentage of student (93.34%) was found in the age group 0-19. Highest number (37.38%) of housewife was found in the age group 20-29. In occupation the highest percentage (4.00%) was found in service sector. Here dependent women were found highest in number.

Table 3.34: Distribution of Female population based on Types of Occupation of Brindaban *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Types of Occupation														Total	
	Service		Business		Student		Retired		Dependent		House Wife		Others			
0-4	-		-	-	8	12.31	-	-	2	7.69	-	-	-	-	10	4.55

5-9	-		-	-	10	15.38	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	4.55
10-14	-		-	-	20	30.77	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	9.09
15-19	-		-	-	17	26.15	-	-	6	23.08	2	2.11	-	-	25	11.36
20-24	1	5.00	3	27.27	8	12.31	-	-	10	38.46	12	12.63	1	33.33	35	15.91
25-29	2	10.00	4	36.36	2	3.08	-	-	3	11.54	8	8.42	1	33.33	20	9.09
30-34	4	20.00	-		-	-	-	-	1	3.85	13	13.68	-		14	6.36
35-39	6	30.00	2	18.18	-	-	-	-	3	11.54	7	7.37	1	33.33	19	8.64
40-44	1	5.00	1	9.09	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	15.79	-	-	17	7.73
45-49	3	15.00	1	9.09	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	13.68	-	-	17	7.73
50-54	3	15.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3.85	10	10.53	-	-	14	6.36
55-59	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2.11	-	-	2	0.91
60-64	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	5.26	-	-	5	2.27
65-69	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	5.26	-	-	5	2.27
70 and above	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3.16	-	-	3	1.36
Total	20	9.09	11	5.00	65	29.55	-	-	26	11.82	95	43.18	3	1.36	220	100.00

According to this table highest percentage of service holder (60.00%) was found in the age group 25-39 and highest percentage of businesswoman (63.63%) was found in the age group 20-29. Highest percentage of student (72.3%) was found in the age group 5-19. Highest number (40.00%) of housewife was found in the age group 40-54. In occupation the highest percentage (9.09%) was found in service sector. Here also dependent women were found highest in number.

Table 3.35: Distribution of Female population based on Types of Occupation of Na *hati* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Age group	Types of Occupation														Total	
	Service		Business		Student		Retired		Dependent		House Wife		Others			
0-4	-		-		14	13.33	-		6	20.00	-		-		20	7.69
5-9	-		-		23	21.90	-				-		-		23	8.85
10-14	-		-		22	20.95	-		3	10.00	-		-		25	9.62
15-19	-		-		29	27.62	-		4	13.33	2	2.27	-		35	13.46
20-24	2	20.00	1	8.33	17	16.19	-		7	23.33	5	5.68	3	20.00	35	13.46
25-29	3	30.00	-		-		-		6	20.00	11	12.50	2	13.33	22	8.46
30-34	2	20.00	4	33.33	-		-		2	6.67	8	9.09	4	26.67	20	7.69
35-39	1	10.00	6	50.00	-		-		1	3.33	6	6.82	4	26.67	18	6.92
40-44	2	20.00	-		-		-		1	3.33	9	10.23	1	6.67	13	5.00
45-49			1	8.33	-		-		-		15	17.05		0.00	16	6.15
50-54			-		-		-		-		8	9.09	1	6.67	9	3.46
55-59	-		-		-		-		-		11	12.50	-		11	4.23
60-64	-		-		-		-		-		2	2.27	-		2	0.77
65-69	-		-		-		-		-		7	7.95	-		7	2.69
70 and above	-		-		-		-		-		4	4.55	-		4	1.54
Total	10	3.85	12	4.62	105	40.38	-	-	30	11.54	88	33.85	15	5.77	260	100.00

According to this table highest percentage of service holder (60.00%) was found in the age group 25-39 and highest percentage of businesswoman (63.63%) was found in the age group 20-29. Highest percentage of student (72.3%) was found in the age group 5-19. Highest number (40.00%) of housewife was found in the age group 40-54. In occupation the highest percentage (9.09%) was found in service sector. Here also dependent women were found highest in number.

3.36: Distribution of Family of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta on the basis of number of Family member January/ 2016

Name of <i>hati</i>	Number of Family Member										Total	
	1-2		3-4		5-6		7-8		9-10			
Dakshin <i>Hati</i>	10	10.00	23	23.00	40	40.00	17	17.00	10	10.00	100	100.00
Brindaban <i>Hati</i>	03	3.00	22	22.00	52	52.00	17	17.00	06	6.00	100	100.00
Na <i>hati</i>	03	3.00	33	33.00	50	50.00	11	11.00	03	3.00	100	100.00
Total	16	5.33	78	26.00	142	47.42	45	15.00	19	6.33	300	100.00

Data show that the highest percentage population according to the number of family member was found in the category 5-6 while the lowest was found in the category 1-2. Most of the families were found nuclear family.

3.37: Distribution of Population by caste of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Name of <i>hati</i>	Castes										Total
	Brahmin	Kayastha	Kalita	Keot	Saud	Koch	Mukhi	Kaibarta	Hira	Baniya	
Dakshin <i>Hati</i>	09 1.70	11 2.08	58 10.98	229 43.37	-	-	157 29.73	64 12.12	-	-	528 100.00
Brindaban <i>Hati</i>	33 6.53	54 10.69	151 31.48	159 31.48	-	70 13.86	13 2.57	-	11 2.17	14 2.77	505 100.00
Na <i>hati</i>	-	-	120 23.85	183 36.38	75 14.91	-	-	57 11.33	50 9.94	18 3.57	503 100.00

Total	42 2.73	65 4.23	329 21.41	571 37.17	75 4.88	70 4.55	170 11.06	121 7.87	61 3.97	32 2.08	1536 100.00
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This table shows that the percentage of Kalita and Keot caste was above fifty percent (58.58%) of total population. Baniyas were found lowest in number of total population. Brahmins were also found lower in number in all three *hatis*. Highest number of Kalita caste was found Brindaban *hati*, while it was lowest in Dakshin *hati*. The percentage of Keot caste was highest in Na *hati*.

3.38 Distribution of population by daily and occasional visit to the *kirtanghar* of three *thul hatis* of Barpeta, January/ 2016

Sex	Dakshin <i>hati</i>			Brindaban <i>hati</i>			Na <i>hati</i>		
	Daily Visitor	Occasional Visitor	Total	Daily Visitor	Occasional Visitor	Total	Daily Visitor	Occasional Visitor	Total
Male	25 9.88	228 90.11	253 100.00	08 2.80	277 97.19	285 100.00	25 10.28	218 89.71	243 100.00
Female	39 14.18	236 85.81	275 100.00	09 4.26	211 95.90	220 100.00	35 13.46	225 86.53	260 100.00
Total	64 12.12	464 87.87	528 100.00	17 3.36	488 96.63	505 100.00	60 11.92	443 88.07	503 100.00

According to this table 9.17 per cent of total of population were visiting daily to the *kirtanghar*. Female percentage is higher in visiting *kirtanghar* daily. It is found that due to distance the number of daily visitor from Brindaban *hati* was lower than other two *hatis*.



Figure 1: Scene of Dakshin *hati*



Figure 2: Scene of Brindaban *hati*



Figure 3: Scene of Na *hati*



Figure 4: *Haitarghar, Dakshin hati*



Figure 5: *Haitarghar, Brindaban hati*



Figure 6: *Haitarghar, Na hati*

The old name of Barpeta was Tantikuchi. It suggests that it was the abodes of weavers. Once a group of weavers came from Sibsagar district and settled here. Barpeta was once in the middle of the Brahmaputra River. Hence the name was Barpet or Barpeta. Again to one opinion, it was the center of learning (*barpith*). The word Barpeta is a corrupt form of *Barpith*. Barpeta is a center of religious activities. Barpeta is one of the most ancient *satras* of Assam. Barpeta town was declared district head quarter of Barpeta district of Assam in the year 1983. The mighty Brahmaputra is flowing along the southern side of the district. The land of the district is gradually sloping from north to south. The distance from the Bhutan Hills to the bank of the Brahmaputra is about 40 feet. The distant is a vast plain area except for a small hillock on the south named Baghbar hills. The Brahmaputra has a number of tributaries namely Pohumara, Kaldia, Nakhanda, Beki, Palla and Chaulkhowa. Historically, Barpeta was a part of old Kamrupa Kingdom. The king of the Barman dynasty ruled over this part. That was also the time when different tribes like the Dravidians, Mongoloids, Ausrtians etc. Later on hordes of the Aryans began to penetrate this region through its western boundary and settled here. Thus population of ancient tribes and communities took place and a mixed race evolved in course of time. A mixed language also developed incorporating liberally a vast array of words belonging to different non Aryan languages into the main lingua-franca which belong to the Indo Aryan group of language known as Assamese language in course of time. The religious history of Barpeta is related with the coming of Sankardeva to this place and staying permanently at Patboushi near Barpeta. People of different caste and communities are living here. Hindu community is the majority community. Among the Hindus, majority of the people follow *vaisnavite* religion. Inter-marriage between castes, communities etc are also quite common now. With changes in time, there have been considerable changes in the nature and composition of population. In the past most of the people were petty traders; but today the no. of office goers, teachers, pleaders etc have increased. Barpeta *satra* was established by the grant of land given by Ahom monarch Siva Singha. After wards during the British rule, Barpeta was declared a township by amalgamating 22 *hatis* of the *satra* and the town dwellers led their life according to the rules and regulations of the *satra* organizations. The main objective of *hati* formation was to streamline the activities of the people and to assign different *satra* related works among different people. Studied area is a unique distinction for smooth running of various activities of the *satra* particularly with the

ecclesiastical affairs of the *satra*. All the people of the *hatris* are Assamese and they follow *vaisnavism*. They have good water supply facilities, good sanitation system, good communication facilities for which the settlement is definitely an urban settlement. In regards of the dress and ornaments as well as the food habit of the people is purely depend upon the Assamese culture and traditions. All the *hatris* have the place of popular gathering which is very significant in the socio-cultural and socio-religious life of the people of Barpeta. Now the town has been extended and due to dearth of residential space people originally living in the *hatris* prefer to shift their residences to such areas where they can construct their houses in a spacious plot of land. It is now a general tendency of the people to shift their residences towards the town from villages for various amenities. Generally people living in joint families prefer to have new establishments for their own families. Due to such tendencies of the people, new localities have grown up on the outskirts of the township. People having new establishments on these localities also maintain their allegiance to the *hatris*, where they originally lived. In this way there has been a necessity for organizational change of the *satra*. In this respect the *satra* authority as well as the public should come forward to take necessary steps.

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CHAPTER IV

VAISNAVISM AND SATRA INSTITUTION IN ASSAM

The *vaisnavite* movement of Assam initiated by Shri Sankaradeva during the last part of fifteenth century of Christian era is remarkable for the religious and social life of medieval Assam. Its impact on religion, literature, fine arts and social life of Assam, particularly on the Brahmaputra valley is indeed great. Now the details of *vaisnavism* are discussed below-

Vaisnavism

“*Vaisnavism* is the cult of worshipping *Vishnu* as the supreme deity in any one of his several forms. Later on *vaisnavism* was known as neo-*vaisnavism*, which had been propagated in the 15th 16th centuries onwards, stress was laid on *bhakti* and on the singing of prayer songs than on other priestly rituals” (Sarma, 1990: 327). The *bhakti* movement or the *ekasharaniya-naam-dharma* (religion to supreme devotion to one God) initiated by Sankaradeva towards the end of the 15th century reflects the religious, social and cultural history of the population of Assam (Nath, 1988: 306). *Bhakti* (a way to attain Holy Communion with God through devotion) movement was started by Sankaradeva at Bardowa which is situated at the middle of Assam. There after it spread throughout Assam, particularly in the Brahmaputra valley. Sankaradeva the father of this movement had to travel from one place to another place to avoid complexities that developed in the society in the course of his movement. This indirectly helped in the spread of his religion. This movement bred new ideas and institutions which upsurge religion, culture and other parameters.

a) *Vaisnavism in India:* A social reform movement swept across India between the 12th and 15th century A.D and it was the *bhakti* movement based on the liberal doctrine of *bhakti* (Nath ed, 1989: 15). It initiated new ideas even as it gave birth to new faiths, which at some places of the country took the shape of a revolution. The context of the new trend is rooted in the societal degradation and cultural distortion that plagued many parts of India at that time. Under the corrupting influences of power and wealth and the incipient ritualism that had taken hold of the priestly and

ruling classes of the Hindu society, various malpractices were committed in the name of religion, which vitiated the social structure (Neog, 1965: 80). These factors impelled the Hindu thinkers and reformers of the day to evolve a simpler and liberal faith that would be acceptable to all alike. This set in motion what subsequently came to be known as the *vaisnava bhakti* movement, originally started by the Alvars of South India (Nath, 2001: 67) and which there after spread to northern India and then to the eastern region of India. The *vaisnava bhakti* movement thus encompassed the whole of India and thereby brought about a renaissance in the socio-religious life of Indian people. This type of religion is open to all classes and castes. To that extent the movement initiated structural changes in the socio-religious sphere of the Hindu society and consequential changes in its value system and equality of relationship.

b) Vaisnavism in North East India: North East India is the homeland of many Mongoloid tribes (Sarma, 2013: 5). The Kacharis, the Koches, the Ahoms are the tribes who ruled this part of India over long stretches of history. But they are soon reclaimed to Hinduism mainly through the door of *Bhakti*. This reclamation was a great gain to Indian nationhood and culture, for it brought about a sort of intellectual and spiritual and no less, political balance to this North Eastern region. It is to be noted that the integrating force of the Sankaradeva movement did not extend as far as the hills region which according to the Indian constitution was to have been ultimately integrated with the state of Assam became separated. Arunachal Pradesh was mainly spearheaded by a handful of Christianized educated youth of Pachighat. It is Naga tribe of Nagaland, the Nocte of frontier district of Tirap and Dafalas of the Subansiri district received their *vaisnavism* quite early; but that did not count positively in political matters. At one time *vaisnava* divine was fined by the area administration just for entering his disciple's hamlet. In the final analysis it would appear that there were difficulties of full Indianisation in the North East where this had not already happened under the aegis of the *bhakti* movement. It would thus appear how effectively Sankaradeva stood and stands as the sentinel of Indian nationality and culture on the Eastern front of India.

Sankaradeva's principal apostles Madhavadeva refers to the acceptance of the creed of *nama* by the tribes who were still then non Hindu. The Ahom, the Kachari, the Miri, the Garo, the Bhutiya and even Muslim, the last among non-tribes. All people were socially upgraded as no distinction was made among *bhakatas* (devotee of the

satras) and worked an upward social mobility which still obtains. It is significant that all the six followers of Sankaradeva namely Govinda belonging to Garo tribe, Paramananda belonging to Mishing tribe, Narahari a Ahom man, Narottama belonging to Naga tribe, Jayram a Bhutiya person including the Muslim Candsai are reverentially remembered when the *vaisnava* counts his beads on the rosary (Raychoudhury, 2000: 29)). Thus it may be noted that one of the chief characteristics of the *bhakti* faith all over India that *bhakatas* were to be rated from one consideration along that they are God's Men.

c) Vaisnavism in Assam: “*Bhakti* movement popularly known in Assam as the Neo-*Vaisnavite* movement and it entered this part of India in the 16th century” (Nath, 2011: 3). “As in the rest of India, the social, religious and political life in Assam was in shambles resulting in a society full of chaos and disorder. Since the beginning of the 13th century, the ancient kingdom of Kamrupa was slowly undergoing a process of disintegration. The whole of Assam, from the eastern most Dikkarvasini region to the river Karatoya in the west, disintegrated into several kingdoms. The eastern most tract of Assam was ruled by a line of Chutiya kings. To the west of Chutiya kingdom laid the *Ahom* principality. Further west, there was the Kachari kingdom to the south of river Brahmaputra. On both sides of the river Brahmaputra to the west of the Kachari kingdom of the south and Chutiya kingdom of the north east, were a number of landed chiefs known as Bhuyans. The western part of Assam comprising the modern districts of Kamarupa, Goalpara and parts of Kochbehar was ruled by a few dynasties during the course of the 14th and 15th centuries and the kingdom was known as Kamata Rajya. By the end of the 15th century A.D., however, a new power, viz., the Kochs, under the leadership of Bishwa Sinha, emerged as the dominant political power in Western Assam. Constant friction and Conflict for supremacy amongst the above powers was the order of the day, which severely affected the political condition of the region. The political instability brought about a chaotic condition in the religious sphere also” (Bhuyan, www.tributetosankaradeva.org/Sankaradeva_and_NVM doc). “Assam in the 15th century presented a motley picture of diverse shades and grades of culture. The majority of the people belonged to non-Aryan tribes having distinct manners, customs and religious beliefs. Those who professed Hinduism loosely adhered to *vaishnavism* or *saivism*; *saktism* bordering on extreme *tantricism*, was also widely prevalent. The followers of these cults were all found indulging in evil

practices like animal and sometimes even human sacrifices, magical rites, spells and the like. It was based on the philosophy of palate and sensual pleasures. The economically backward classes and the socially downtrodden became the victims of such ghastly practices. At the other end of the religious spectrum was the bulk of the indigenous tribal population who followed their indigenous tribal faiths. Bringing all these diverse communities and warring factions under a systematized religious code and conduct of life and to provide the masses with a mode of worship, which would be simple and at the same time accessible to all was what constituted the pressing need of the time. Against this backdrop, Sankaradeva appeared on the scene. A multi-faceted genius, Sankaradeva was at once a spiritual leader, a social reformer, a prolific writer and a master playwright and composer. He is credited with providing the bedrock of Assamese culture, and creating a religion that gave shape to a set of new values and social synthesis. He was born in the Assamese month *Ahin* (September-October) month in 1371 *Sakabda* (1449 AD) at Tembuani (Bordowa), in the present-day Nagaon district of Assam” (Bhuyan, www.tributetosankaradeva.org/Sankaradeva and NVM doc).

Sankara enjoyed a wild childhood up to his twelfth year. At that time his parents were dead. After his twelfth year his grandmother placed him under the care of a local *pandit* (proficient) named Mahendra Kandali. (Neog, 2004: 118). He came back home after a thorough education in grammar and Sanskrit lore and he was caught in the matrimonial tie and had to confine himself to the coarse duties of a Bhuyan chief. After three or four years his wife died and left him with a girl child. After the death of his first wife Sankaradeva began a long pilgrimage for 12 years covering such places as Brindavana, Puri and other holy places in the year 1481 A.D (Sarma, 1994: 231). His stay at Puri was particularly long. It was here at Puri that Sankaradeva received his illumination. He made a solemn vow that he would not bow his head to any other God except Jagannath. He returned home a saint carrying on an abiding impression on *vaisnavism*. He also intended to renounce the world, but on the insistence of his grandmother and other relatives, he married a second time (Lekharu, 1952: 34).

While staying at home, he received a copy of *Bhagavata Purana* from pair furnished with commentary of Sridhar Swami (Neog, 1965: 107 cited in Daityari 82-95). Sankaradeva who had profound knowledge and command over Sanskrit language set to render parts of this book into Assamese in practical form with the definite aim of propagating the *bhakti* cult. In order to propagate his religion, Sankaradeva adopted

attractive methods of holding *Kirtana* or mass prayer and dramatic performances and this form attracted many people to his religion (Neog, 2004: 119). He also made prayer house near his home. The hallmark of neo-*vaisnavite* movement initiated by him is reflected in two distinctively unique institutions like- *namghar* (prayer house in village level) and *satra* (a *vaisnavite* institution) and these two are associated with the social, cultural, as well as religious life of the Assamese society. These institutions became the nucleus of the *vaisnava* organization while later on spread throughout length and breadth of Assam.

Due to growing strife with the *Kacharis* at his native place (Bezbarua, 1914: 40) Sankaradeva along with his kinsmen and followers crossed the Brahmaputra to Dhuwahat or Belguri which was located in the Majuli island of Brahmaputra (Raychoudhry, 2000: 37). At Dhuwahat he met Madhava (1498-1596), a *Sakta Kaystha* (Lekharu, 1952: 249) who had firm faith in sacrifice of animals as a means of propitiating God. He came to have a serious dispute with Sankaradeva. Soon Madhavadeva was overwhelmed by the knowledge and sagacity of Sankaradeva and decided to renounce his *Sakta* cult. He became a disciple and associate of Sankaradeva. "He became Sankaradeva's dearest and closest disciple, supporting the guru in his proselytizing and literary activities, and greatest apostle of the new found faith, giving poise and strength to the organization of the *vaisnava* order in Assam" (Neog, 2004: 120).

The Brahman priests contemporary to Sankaradeva finding that the followers of the new religious order was swelling day by day at the cost of their religion based on worship of different Gods and animal sacrifice which went adverse to their economic interests complained before the *Ahom* monarch that Sankaradeva was polluting the Hindu Religion. The king was also skeptical about the new religion of Sankaradeva. King's policeman began to persecute the followers of the new religion. Sankaradeva's son-in-law was beheaded by the king after trial while Madhavadeva was let off after confinement for nine months (Nath, 2001: 83).

This incident filled Sankaradeva's mind with pain and disgust. He decided to leave the *Ahom* kingdom and set off westward to Koch Behar in about 1537 A.D. where king Naranarayana was ruling at that time (Baruah, 2009: 257). He and his younger brother Sukladvja who was the commander-in-chief were known to be learned men. Therefore Sankaradeva and his followers rowed down the Brahmaputra to Koch Kingdom. They settled at Barpeta which was at that time under Koch Kingdom. (Das,

2010: 75). There the new creed began to thrive and the no of followers began to swell. He met several important followers like Bhabananda (later Narayan Das Thakur Ata), Damodaradeva (a Brahmin) (Sarma, 1994: 239). Sankaradeva stayed at Patbausi near Barpeta with his followers for about 18 years (Nath, 2001: 84). This place became the center for dissemination of the new religion. He also wrote several religious books while he was staying at Patbausi. Thus it was the most fruitful period of his life. He also made a second pilgrimage for 6 months mainly to Puri (Neog, 1965: 115). Sankaradeva's writings comprised *Kirtan*, *Dasam*, several dramas, *bargeetas*, (a kind of devotional song) etc. He proved to be a very prolific writer judging by the time he thrived.

Sankaradeva nominated Madhavadeva, his successor to hold charge of the order. Madhavadeva, a celibate was also a scholar and contributed significantly to *vaisnavite* literature. He set up his *Satra* at Sundaridiya near Barpeta (Bezbarua, 1914 new print 2010: 153) His chief literary work was *namghosha* (Sarma, 1999: 30), (a book dealing with the *Bhakti* cult much valued by the followers of *vaisnavism*). Sankaradeva delegated to his Brahmin followers Damodaradeva the power of administering ordination as this was considered expedient particularly in the case of the Brahmin neophytes. Like Madhvadeva, Damodaradeva also set up *Satras* at different places of Assam (Patbausi *Satra*). Another Brahman Guru was Harideva who set up *vaisnava satras*, but his *satras* mainly confined to old Kamarupa district (Bahari *satra*, Bamundi *satra*, Maneri *satra* etc), (Sarma, 1999: 298-299).

Sankaradeva's chief apostles like Madhavadeva, Damodaradeva, and Harideva and their followers were instrumental in setting different *satras* covering upper Assam, Kamrupa and Kocbehar (Sarma, 1999: 93) so much so that the whole of Hindu population residing in these three regions were divided among them. Some of the *vaisnava* adherents made serious departures from the original tenets of faith into heterogeneous doctrines discarded by the Gurus. Others have carried the puritanical zeal of the new order very far indeed. Whatever may be the variation in creed, the neo-*vaisnavite* movement in Assam in this north-eastern part of India which is composed mostly of people belonging to Tibeto-Mongoloid races remains by and large free from extreme caste division, ritualistic extravaganza and animistic practices. The *vaisnava* religion has given the people a simple religion based on *bhakti* to one God. "The cultural renaissance which had its beginning in the activities of Sankaradeva has wrought itself into fulfillment in many ways and marked out a

definite place for Assam in the cultural map of India” (Neog, 2004: 124). It was revolutionary in the sense that neo-*vaisnavism* in Assam meant not only a religious faith but a way of life. neo-*vaisnavism* stands out among the different *bhakti* cults of India in terms of its unique and innovative character, which found expression in the move to create an egalitarian civil society based on the shared values of fraternity, equality, humanism and democracy.

“The new cult thus moulded according to the local circumstances, was popularly known as the *mahapurushiya dharma* and the real name of the cult was *ekasarana-nam-dharma* or the religion of supreme surrender to one God Viz-*Visnu_krishna*” (Sarma, 1999: introduction 1-2). Sankaradeva considered the *sravana* (listening) and *kirtana* (chanting in the praise of God) in the modes of *bhakti* or devotion as prescribed by the *Bhagavata Purana* to be sufficient (Neog, 2004: 126). Idol worship does not feature in Sankaradeva’s system (Sarma, 1999: 19). The four fundamental elements of neo-*vaisnavism* are – God, Guru (the religious preceptor), *bhaktas*, and *naam* (names and glories of God), (Sarma 1994 in Barpujari 1994: 236).

Spreading of the Movement in Assam: After the death of Sankaradeva, his Brahman disciple Damodaradeva remodeled his institution at Patbausi near Barpeta with the help of his own Brahmana disciple. Vaikunthanathdeva introduced many Brahmanical rites and ceremonies. In the place of a holy book he installed the image of Vishnu with other paraphernalia of worship (Nath, 2001: 29). Madhavadeva established another institution, with a gorgeously constructed *satra* at Barpeta, where he strictly followed the system of his master (Sarma, 1999: 29).

Vangshigopaladeva, a young Brahmana of North Lakhimpur in Upper Assam, who had once met Sankaradeva at Belguri during his childhood, came to Barpeta in search of a master. He was initiated by Damodaradeva and trained up by Madhavadeva. Then he was sent to Upper Assam to spread *vaisnavism*. Vangshigopaladeva succeeded in establishing a large *vaisnavite* institution first at Katabari and then Kuruabahi (Adhikary, 2010: 99), where he installed a stone image of *Govinda* (lord). Many *vaisnava* emissaries gradually went forth to Upper Assam side where Vangshiamegopaladeva had already prepared the way and they started separate institutions in different parts of the state within a short time. The common people became attracted to the new cult. Officials of *Ahom* kings also became attracted to this new religion. After the death of Vangshigopaladeva, the *Ahom* king Jayaddhaja Sinha

was initiated into *vaisnavism* in 1648 A.D. under the teaching of Niranjana Bapu, whom he established as the first *Satradhikara* of Auniati *satra* (Gait, 1905: 357).

Sankaradeva built his religious movement not with the help of great scholars or rich influential people, but built it up with simple folk round about them. Himself a sound scholar, having to place his faith four square on acknowledged authorities he propagated a simple religion- simple to understand and simple to practice. The *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Bhagavata Gita* and the *Sahasranama*, section of the *padma purana* are popularly held to be the sources from which Sankaradeva accepted the chief articles of his faith, namely *satsanga* (the company of *bhaktas* as a means to the culturing of *bhakti*), *Ekasarana* (spiritual shelter in one deity along with *Vishnu* or *Krishna*) and *Nama* (Adhikary, 2010: 155). The lord moreover has no other image than the holy, a word. The ideal *bhakta*, therefore worships the Lord within with but his heart can offer. Like a mystic, Sankaradeva realized that God lived broadcast in the general hearts of all beings and it is only when we miss this truth that we go to seek him outside. Idol worship does not play any important role in Sankaradeva's system and even this small bit of ritualism can very well be done away with if the devotees wish.

Contribution of Neo-Vaisnavite Movement in Assam: There are so many contributions of neo-*vaisnavite* movement in Assam. These are discussed below-

Social Mobility: People from all castes and walks of life were received by Sankaradeva as disciples and they could even act as teachers in his *vaisnava* order. A democratic outlook permeates the entire teachings and practices of the neo-*vaisnavite* faith in Assam. The missionary work started amongst the backward classes by the early reformers, was extensively carried out by their successors and followers during the succeeding periods. Members of such tribes soon took the new creed of *vaisnavism*. A great social mobility thus became the rule except in the institutions headed by Brahmans while Brahmanical influences in the Ahom capital saw to the branding of scavengers and fisherman with marks of a broom and a fish on the forehead. People of the so-called untouchables or lower castes came to live in fellowship with those of the highest castes in Assamese villages and they could take part in all functions of the villages. In fact when Mahatma Gandhi came to Assam in the later twenties in pursuance of his removal of untouchability campaign, he hardly

found any work here and paid a high tribute to the liberating activities of the 16th century *vaisnava* saint (Sarma, 1999: 217). Sankaradeva did what a whole regiment of British army could not have accomplished. This is indeed of much significance in a part of India, where the ethnology is so mixed and confused.

Literature: There was the efflorescence of a great literature in the wake of the Sankaradeva movement of Assam. Sankara and Madhava themselves composed a good number of songs, dramas, verse narratives and other types of literature, wherein they expounded and elaborated the teachings of the faith they sought to propagate (Nath, 1988: 308). “A host of poets, writers and scholars like- Ananta Kandali, Rama Saraswati, Vaikunthanatha Kaviratna, Sridhara Kandali, Gopaladeva, Ramacarana Tahkura, Daityari Thakura, Gopalacarana Dvija flocked under the banner of *bhakti* and formed into a vigorous literary movement” (Neog, 2004: 134). It was the age of one ideal, that of *bhakti* of one God, Vishnu-Krishna; of one leadership, that of Sankaradeva; of one book the *Bhagavata Purana* (Neog, 1965 rprint 2008: 107). The *vaisnava* writer’s adherence to the sanction of scriptural authority amounted to a limitation upon their creative ability and a curb upon their poetic genius. Nonetheless, the literary output of Sankara and Madhava alone is considerable, and is characterized by a rare power of reading the spirit of the original fights of creative imagination. Their literary works acted as the chief machinery of propaganda of the faith and afforded both enlightenment and pleasure of the people (Neog, 2004: 134-135). He translated in simple verse of the whole of the first, second, eleventh and twelfth books and portion of the third, sixth, eighth and tenth books of the *Bhagavata* (holy book) into the spoken dialect of local people (Baruah, 2009: 260).

In his early works, *Harischandra Upakhyaana* and *Rukmini Harana* (dramas) (Kakati, 1921 in Neog 1980: 173), Sankaradeva exhibit the same narrative zeal as was evident in the preceding period of Assamese poetry. Each of the 25 sections of the *Kirtana Ghosha* (the most popular and important of Sankaradeva’s works), contains several *kirtana* songs with refrains, goes to relate a story or expound a subject. *Gunamala* (a tiny work of six *Kirtanas* of jingling verses), is a remarkable feat of mental speed and brevity of expression (Kakati, 1921: 173).

Sankaradeva composed 34 songs, later known as *bargeeta*, Madhavadeva complementing them with 157 (Kakati, 1921 in Neog 1980: 173) of his composition. Sankaradeva’s songs sing of the futility of human efforts and urge upon listeners the

need for *bhakti*, some of them are prayer songs, pure and simple and didactic verses. Madhava's songs breathe an open air atmosphere and excel in the description of Krishna's child life and the bringing out of the eternal mother in Yoshoda (Neog, 2004: 135-136). Both of them wrote a number of songs called *bhatima* (panegyrics) in praise of the worshipful Lord. The dramas of both are a type by themselves and do not follow any model like Sanskrit, Prakrit or otherwise (Neog, 2004: 136). The dramas are in an artificial literary dialect, used in the *bargeeta* and *Bhatima* also, later called as *Brajawali Bhasa* or *Brajabuli Bhasa* (a literary medium used by the vaishnava poets of eastern India) (Kakati, 1971: 70) and this has a queer mixture of Assamese, Maithili, Hindi and other elements (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brajabuli).

Drama: "The Bhaona or neo-Vaisnava form of dramas owes its origin to the unique genera of plays evolved by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, which they themselves had called *Nata*, *Yatra* or *Anka*, and which later on came to be designated as *ankiya nata*" (Sarma, 1994: 419). The dramas are a type by themselves and there are no act or scene divisions within a play. The *sutradhara* (interlocutor of an Assamese drama) role originally taken from the classical Sanskrit drama is the central characters, conducting the whole action with songs, dances and narratives and explanatory commentary in prose. Dramas are normally performed at the common prayer hall both in the *satras* and in the village *namgharas*. Madhvadeva himself staged drama in open houses called *Rangghar* or *Rangiyalghar* (Neog, 1965: 267). Being religious in character, there is always the role of Krishna or Rama in the Assamese *vaisnava* dramas.

Music and Dance: In Assam neo-vaisnavism brought in its train a wide culture of music. The *vaisnava* music in Assam is rich and remarkable for its tone and variety. Among the different forms of this music, Sankaradeva himself composed a number of devotional songs (Nath, 2011: 58). Songs composed by Sankaradeva and Madhvadeva are still sung in the *satras* (Barpeta *satra*). The *bargeetas* are composed in *brajawali bhasha* although a good number of them are composed by his disciple Madhavadeva deviate from it (Neog, 1965: 278). The next class of songs is the *ankar geet*. These are the songs of dramas (Nath, 2011: 59). Another important song which is sung in the *satras* is *nama-kirtana* which is easy for all classes of singers as it is sung in chorus with a leader called *naam lagowa*. Being easy this form of music is popular both in the *satras* and in the villages. *naama-kirtana* is accompanied by use of musical

instruments like- *khol*, *mridanga*, *nagara* and *bar Tal* (cymbal). A different set of music known as *ojha pali* (a party of choreographers) is popular in all the *satras* of Majuli. It is a distinct form of dance and music performed in form of a chorus and similar to the *nam-kirtana* (Nath, 2011: 59-60). At Barpeta *satra*, type of *ojha-pali* is called *ghosha kirtaniya*. The *satra* dances mainly center round the *anka* dramas of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. The *sutrdhara*, the hero that is Rama and Krishna and the women roles, that are the *Vrindavana gopis*, provide the class types of the dance performance (Neog, 2004: 140). Of the various other forms of dances, important ones include- *gossai prabeshar nach* or *Krishna bhangi*, *gopi prabeshar nach* or *gopi bhangi*, *cali nach*, *jhumura* or *nritya bhangi*, *ras nritya*, varieties of dance forma associated with *bhaonas* etc (Nath, 2011: 60). At Barpeta *satra* One more dance type is found that is *bhor tal nritya* (group dance with cymbal).

Dances involve the use of various kinds of musical instruments like *khol*, *tal*, *mridanga* etc. *tals* are of three varieties- big or *bar tal*, *bhor tal* (cymbal originally imported from Bhutan by Sankaradeva), middle sized- *pati tal* and small sized- *khuti tal* (Nath, 2011: 61). *khol*, *mridanga* and *tals* are used in the performance of various kinds of dance, drama and devotional songs. A very large wooden and skinned drum called *daba* (kettle drum) is found in every *satra* and village *namghar*. It is used in congregational prayer and in the evening as a symbol of announcing the time for prayer. At Barpeta *satra* also *daba* is beaten in the morning and evening also (Das, 2010: 43). *Nagara* is another type of musical instrument.

Painting: One of the many forms in which the *vaisnava* Renaissance of India manifested itself is the art of painting. Like other states in Assam also *vaisnavism* brought in the practice of illuminating the holy books with small illustrative paintings. Sankaradeva is also believed to have been a painter (Gogoi, 1990: 86). On one occasion he is said to have painted on *tulapat* (ginned cotton paper) scenes of seven *vaikunthas* (abode of lord Vishnu). On another he painted with vermilion and yellow arsenic the picture of an elephant and pasted it on a wooden book-case to be presented to his royal patron, Naranarayana (Neog, 2004: 141). He had scenes of Krishna's life in Vrindavana woven with the help of the weavers of Tantikuchi (present Barpeta) into a sheet of cloth of 180 feet long with a caption for each miniature (Gogoi, 1990:117). He prepared this cloth for king Naranarayana (Khan Choudhry, 1936: 101). "The illustrations are a copy of Sankaradeva's rendering of the first half of 10th

Skandha of the *Bhagavata purana*, found in the Bali *Satra* of the Bardowa group have been reproduced in print in a recent publication, *Citra Bhagavata*. The original copy bore the date 1461 *saka*/1539 A.D. which seems to be too early; the work may suitably date from the late 17th century” (Neog, 2004: 141). It is evident that these paintings were done in some *satras*, most probably into Bali *satra*, where the original manuscript was preserved (Neog, 1949: 50). In some *satras* are to be seen mural paintings and wood carvings of some beauty and with folk-art elements in them. Barpeta *satra kirtanghars*, which has now been demolished, was decorated with many finely engraved and painted wooden panels, depicting scenes from religious texts (Pathak, 1959: 135). Barpeta *satra* also shows the art of ivory carving. Paintings also are provided on wooden posts and post plates, book rests, raised trays used for the purpose of making offerings (*Sarai*), and pleasure boat (Sarma, 1995: 277).

Satra Institution

The most notable characteristic of *vaisnavism* in Assam is the *satra* institution through which the faith is being propagated and established. It may be monastic as well as semi monastic in form. The *satra* institution is intimately connected with the Assamese society and it has become a part and parcel of Assamese life. Now the details of *satra* institution in Assam has been discussed below-

a) *Satra Institution in Assam*: The most notable characteristics of *vaisnavism* in Assam are the *satra* institution through which the faith was propagated and established. It may be monastic as well as semi-monastic in form (Sarma, 1999: introduction). The *satras* are established by Assamese *vaisnavite* monasteries for religious practices at the initiative of the Ahom kings of Assam in the middle of the 17th century (Nath, 2011: 37). The origin of the *satra* institution can be traced to the time when the neo-*vaisnavite* movement initiated by Sankaradeva was still at a nascent stage. Sankaradeva is said to have established his first *satra* at Bardowa, his birth place (Mahanta, 2004: 99). The importance of the institution lies in the fact that it is intimately connected with the Assamese society and it has become a part and parcel of Assamese life. Contributions of this institution towards the spread of *vaisnavism* in particular and the cultural development of Assam in general are indeed great. The high percentage of people professing *vaisnavism* in Assam is accountable to the activities of this institution during the last four centuries of the Christian era.

The District Gazetteers of Assam, 1905, have recorded two hundred eighty eight (288) *satras* excluding many branches of those *satras*, spreading over the entire Brahmaputra Valley. All of them are not uniform in size and affluence, but they are marked by the same fundamental characteristics (Sarma, 1999: introduction). Today the number of *satras* in Assam is well over five hundred with numerous *vaisnava* householders affiliated to one or the other *satra*.

www.tributosankaradeva.org/satra.htm).

The *satra* has been defined as-

(ekanta vaisnava yot nibasa karai

Jibaka sarana diye, tak Satra kai)

Meaning- Where the single minded *vaisnavas* reside, where they offer *sarana* (shelter) to the souls, that (place) is called a *satra*.

The history of *vaisnavism* in Assam cannot be treated without reference to the *satra* institution. In fact the origin and development of the institution is intimately connected with the growth and development of the neo- *vaisnavite* movement in Assam (Sarma, 1999: introduction). The religious activities of the *vaisnavite* householders are also conducted in accordance with the direction of *satras*. The Head of the *satra* is termed as *satradhikara* or *adhikara* traces his spiritual genealogy by hereditary succession or by the link of initiation through his predecessors and hence to the founder of his sub-sect who was one of the disciples initiated by Sankaradeva.

Sankaradeva established two types of religious institutions- *namghara* and *satra*. *Namghara* is a village level institution and while *satra* is more central institution (Nath, 2012: 11). The *namghara* or *satra* have a unique place in social life of the Assamese people. The building is usually a long open hall with dais at the eastern end. Sometimes it also contains a room. In some of the new *namgharas* the images of lord Krishna come to be installed. Some of the buildings maintained in the *satra* are quite impressive and have wooden pillars with carving on them and Barpeta *satra* is the best example for this. It would be seen that the *namghara* or *satra* are the nucleus around which has grown up the social fabric of the Assamese people, most of them being *vaisnavite*. The institution is apparently religious in origin, but it performs social and certain legal functions. The *satra* has religious, judicial and cultural functions (Nath, 2011 2011: 44). It is a judicial institution in a way but in the administration of the country it does not play any role.

Origin and Development of Satra Institution in Assam: The word *satra* is used in the sense of a *vaisnava* institution. It is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit word *sattra*. In Sanskrit literature the word has been used in two senses- i) in the sense of an alms house and ii) in the sense of a sacrifice lasting from a few days to a year or more (Sarma, 1999: 143). In the opening chapter of the *Bhagawata Purana* the word *satra* has been used to denote a long session of sacrifice of a thousand year's duration performed by the sages in the forest of Nimisa. In the course of the sacrificial session, Ugrsrava the sage, recited and explained the Sage, recited and explained the entire *Bhagawata Purana* in the assembly of the sages. The process of reciting the *Bhagawata*, in all probability gave currency to the word *satra* in Assam. Sankaradeva, the *vaisnava guru*, probably initiated his movement by reciting and expounding the stories from *Bhagawata_ Purana* to a band of his followers. Thus the word *satra* has come to be used in the sense of an assembly of devotees where the *Bhagawata* has been recited (Sarma, 1999: 143).

Development of the term Satra: In the initial stage of the neo-*vaisnavite* movement the word *satra* was used in the sense of a religious sitting or association and not in the sense of a systematized institution. According to Ananta Kandali, a contemporary of Sankaradeva, his father Ratna Pathak founded a *satra* at Hajo where *Bagawata Purana* was constantly recited (Baruah, 2009: 19). Bhattadeva, one of the foremost religious teachers of the 16th century, defined *satra* as an assembly of holy persons where *bhakti* in all its aspects is practiced. Thus in the initial stage of the *vaisnava* movement in Assam, the term *satra* came to mean a sitting or association where *Bhagawata* was recited or explained (Sarma, 1999: 157).

In course of time, this association of devotees began to develop on a distinct line and ultimately emerged as a well developed institution with distinct structural feature and elaborates paraphernalia and practices. Henceforth the term *satra* began to signify a distinct type of institution with characteristics of its own.

Stages of Development: The *satra* institution is passing through three stages of evolution-

First stage: The first stage began with Sankaradeva. The religious association organized by him did not take in shape of a regular institution of a permanent nature. That there was no *Satra* of a permanent type can be inferred from the fact that

Madhavadeva who succeeded Sankaradeva as the head of the sect did not become the head of a *Satra* left by Sankaradeva. He conducted the affairs of the *Satra* by staying at Ganakkuchi and there at Sundaridiya and not at Barpeta (Mahanta, 2004: 99)

It is also not known from contemporary literature of that period whether the *Satra* of Sankaradeva besides containing the prayer hall did really contain the system of *cari-hati* (four number of cluster of settlements) like that of latter *satras*.

Second stage: It was in the time of Damodaradeva and Madhavadeva both disciples of Sankaradeva that the *satra* institution attained the second phase of growth. Vaikunthapara *satra*, founded by Damodaradeva at Coach Behar consisted a shrine and a large prayer hall well decorated with various designs and surrounded by four rows of systematically conducted *hatis* (cluster of settlements). The boundary of the *satra* was decorated by high palisades. The *satra* also contained separate rows of huts outside the palisades for married disciples. There was also a guest house with a tower over it (Neog, 1965: 320-21). Madhavadeva planned and built the *satra* at Barpeta on the traces of *satra* of Damodaradeva at Patbausi. The *kirtanghar* (prayer hall) at Barpeta was tastefully decorated with various designs and carvings. The lines of huts for celibates were also properly arranged. The structural feature of the *satra* also received the final shape during this period. The prayer hall was modeled on the structural pattern of Hindu temple which consists of a *garbha grha* containing the image of deity and a *mandapa hall*. The apsidal prayer hall attached to the *manikuta* (sanctum sanctorum) exactly resembles an apsidal *mandapa* attached to *garbha grha* (Neog, 1965: 321)

Third or the final stage: This stage was attained with the extension of royal patronage to the *satras* during the second half of the 16th century (Sarma, 1999: 147). This placed the *satras* on a sound financial footing. Some of the *satras* became financially very strong. The royal power bestowed on the *satras* large tracts of land which the latter rented to the tenants. During this period, the headship of the *satras* began to develop on hereditary line. The royal court also began to exert its influence in the management of the *satras*.

b) Sub-sects of the Visnavite Religion of Sankaradeva and Expansion of Satras:
After the death of Sankaradeva, serious rift took place between Madhavadeva and Damodaradeva, two principal apostles of Sankaradeva. This rift ultimately led

Damodaradeva to secede from the orthodox *vaisnavite* or *mahapurushiya* (following the doctrine of Sankaradeva) cult of Madhavadeva. Damodaradeva initiated a new sect. Harideva, another contemporary and associate of Sankaradeva started a new sect distinct from the sect popularized by Madhavadeva, the principal apostle of Sankaradeva. But in spite of the profession of independence of this sect, it cannot call an independent sect in so far as the religious tenets and observances of this sub sect is almost identical with the Sankarite sect (Sarma, 1990: 239).

c) Division in the Vaisnavite or Mahapurushiya Order: Besides the two sub-sects of Damodaradeva and Harideva, there are three more sub-sects which originated after the death of Madhavadeva within the main body of *vaisnavite* order. These three sub-sects together with the two seceding sub-sects of Damodaradeva and Harideva are known as *samhati* (a sect of the vaisnavites of Assam). The sub-sects organized by Damodaradeva and Harideva are considered as one *samhati* and it is called the *brahma samhati* since both these *gurus* were Brahmins. The sub-sects founded by Gopala Ata and Purusottama Das are known as *kala samhati* and *purusa samhati* respectively. The sub-sect organized by Mathuradas Burha Ata and Padma Ata is called the *nika samhati*.

Brahma Samhati: *Brahma samhati* includes the sub-sects of Damodaradeva and Harideva. Both of them were inspired and influenced by Sankaradeva, the great *vaisnavite* reformer. The *brahma samhati* comprising the two sub-sects of Damodaradeva and Harideva and consisting of the most affluent *satras* of Assam is the most influential of the *samhatis*. Most of the *satras* affiliated to this *samhati* are headed by Brahmins. These *gurus* introduced compromise between Vedic and *puranic* (verse in the Puranas) rituals and the devotional practices of *vaisnavite* religion. There is no bar for a person to be a good *vaisnava* even performing the daily and occasional rites enjoined by the *dharmasastras* (religious books). The chalking out of the middle path between Vedic rites and rituals and devotional practices helped considerably to win over those people who did not like to give up the Vedic rites and rituals.

Kala Samhati: *Kala Samhati* owes its origin to Gopal Dev (Gopal Ata). He was one of the twelve apostles nominated by Madhavadeva to proselytize people to the new faith. The followers of this branch of vaisnavism claimed that Gopaldeva is the supreme religious head after Madhavadeva.

Purusa Samhati: According to this sub-sect, Purusottama, the grandson of Sankaradeva is the real successor to this headship of the order founded by his grandfather. The *purusa samhati* is often the name of Purusa, the religious head of this sub-sect.

Nika Samhati: The *nika samhati* took shape after the formation of the others three sub-sects appeared to gone astray from the strict principles of *vaisnavism*. Padma Ata, an apostle nominated by Madhavadeva was the head of this sect.

(Sarma, 1999: 97-135).

c) The layout of a Satra: *satras* are generally situated on quadrangles surrounded by palisades or walls. A full-fledged *satra* usually consists of a well laid out arrangement of the essential areas. Details of this layout are given below –

The Namghar- The centre of the main activities of a *satra* is the *namghar* and it faces the east. It is a large open hall with galled roof having an apsidal facade in the western side and over which is a top or the dome on the roof

(www.tributetosankarkeva.orgsatra.htm).

The *namghar* serves the purpose of a prayer hall as well as a hall for holding religious meetings and discussions (Sarma, 1999: 139). The interior is a simple nave and two aisles with pillars. These pillars are in the number of 5 and 7 usually, which divide the area loosely into chambers. They are erected with wooden beams supporting an architrave over which rests the roof. These wooden beams are known as the *chati* and either carved with motifs or painted (Neog, 1965: 314) from the level of the architecture, a nave is extended all around the pavilion to widen the shade. These from the veranda and devotees sit here. The walls of the *Namghar* are usually left with *jalis* or perforated wood carvings of devotional imagery, which embellish and allow light and air at the same time. The door towards the top is the main entrance call *mukh-duar*; the ones at the side are the *pet-duar*. Doors with carvings of lion motifs are called *simha-duar* and those with floral patterns are *phuljalikata-duar*. The area in a *namghar* is systematically arranged for its numerous functions. Space is determined by a host of ceremonial requirements places for offering, place for *ashana* (wooden pedestal with the sacred scripture). At festival time the area for performance of the drama is also marked out. Even the seat for the *adhikara* (abbot), who sits against the *laikhuta* (main pillar) of the hall the *deka-adhikara* (deputy), the *bhakat*s the

gayana-bayana (musicians) and the common people are all predetermined. The use of space is formal one and highly ordered (www.tributetosankarkeva.org/satra.htm). The existence of *namghar* is not confined to the *satra* alone. It is a common feature of Assamese villages also. In addition to serving as the common prayer hall in the villages it also serves as a stage for dramatic performance and a venue of village pancayets (Sarma, 1999: 139).

The Manikuta: The most sacred space is the *manikut* attached to the east of the *namghar*. The actual shrine where the idol of the deity on the sacred scripture is kept is called *manikuta* (Sarma, 1999: 139). It is the sanctum-sanctorum of the entire establishment and as all the valuables and jewels of the *satra* including the sacred idol are kept and preserved here. In this area and beyond a certain limit lay devotees are not allowed in.

The Hatis: Centering round the *manikuta* and the *namghar* exist four rows (sometimes two) of residential huts intended for clerical devotees. These four rows of huts are known as *cari-hati*. The word *hati* is derived from Sanskrit *Hatta* meaning a market or a fair. To each devotee is allotted a hut consisting one or more rooms according to his status and need (Sarma, 1999: 140). Most of the huts are equal in size, having a common veranda joining the length from one end to the other, except the ones on the eastern side which are much larger being the quarters of the *satradhikar* (www.tributetosankarkeva.org/satra.htm).

At Barpeta *satra* all four rows of huts are not found. Instead there are two such rows are found within *satra* campus known as the *kewlia hati* or *kewlar baha* (residence of celibate devotees). Residential houses at Barpeta are arranged along both sides of a road. Each area consisting of such rows of houses separated by narrow alleys is called a *hati* (Neog, 1965: 326).

Minor *satras*, where monastic life is not observed, could be identified as such only for the existence of the *namghar* and the *manikut*. The system of *cari hati* is rarely noticed there.

Batcora: The entrance leading to the interior of a *satra* is usually marked by a small open house known as *batcora* (Sarma, 1999: 140) or *karapat*. It functions as the entrance gate when a devotee enters the *satra* premises through the *batcora*, he received by the *bhakatas* who make arrangements accordingly for the devotees to be

guided inside. Distinguished guests are first received at the *batcora* and then they are escorted to the interior of the *satra*.

d) Description of a Modern Satra: The following account of the Garmur *satra* as given in the District Gazetteer of Sibsagar, 1905 may be taken as a representative description of the Principal monastic *satras* of Assam. “The building of the Satra is approached by good road which is constructed at some expense. The *namghar* is a huge structure, the roof of which supported on huge wooden pillars and the great floor-space is entirely bare save for one or two lecterns on which the sacred writings are reposing. The actual shrine is a separate building closely adjoining the eastern end of the *namghar*. The shrine is very different from the penetralia of the *sakta* temple. There is no trace of blood or greases; there is nothing disgusting or grotesque and the whole place is dominated by the note of decency and propriety which is so marked a characteristic of *vaisnavism* of Majuli. In a square around the gardens stand the lines of huts in which the resident monks live. They consist of well-built rows of rooms which are much more spacious than those ordinarily occupied by village folk and are kept scrupulously clean. There is singularly gracious and pleasing in the whole atmosphere. Everything is fresh, neat and well to-do. The well-groomed smiling monks are evidently at peace with themselves and with the world at large and even little boys that flock around them are unusually clean and well-behaved. The children are recruited from the villages and trained to be devotees, but if at any time they find the restraint of celibacy irksome they are at liberty to return to the outer world” (district gazetteers of Assam).

e) Parties Attached to the Satra: Each *satra* consists of four principal parties viz – (i) *adhikara*, (ii) *deka adhikara*, (iii) *bhakata* and (iv) *sishya*. The first two parties are generally resided within the four walls of the *satra* campus and the last the *sishya* live in *hatis* leading householder’s life. (Sarma, 1999: 141).

Adhikara: So long as Sankara was living, he was the head of the whole *vaisnava* order and anybody, who administered ordination, did so on the authority delegated to him by the Master. When Sankara died, Madhava succeeded to this supreme position in the order. But Damodaradeva for some reason or order did not recognize this succession and formed a schism. At a later date Harideva was succeeded from the order. Madhava, Damodaradeva and Harideva sent out different persons to proselytize

and these persons started *satras* of their own and they became their heads (Neog, 1965: 332-333). They came to be known as *adhikara* (Lekhuru, 1952 reprint 1964: 513), *adhikar* (Damodardeva Carita 530), *Satriya* (Lekhuru, 1952: 453). Although a *Sudra*, Sankara came to be called “Sankardeva”. Madhava calls him so in his *guru-bhatima*, recited by all who consider Sankara as the Guru of the order. He was addressed by Madhava and other disciples as *baap*, father (Lekhuru, 1952: 138) and referred to as *gurujan*, the master (Lekhuru, 1952: 137). When Madhava became the head of the order, these terms were applied to him and all through the Katha Guru Carita Sankara and Madhava have been referred to as *dujana guru* the two masters (Neog, 1965 rprnt 2008: 333). Possibly the two terms *Guru* and *Ata*, referred to Sankara and Madhava only till sometimes after Madhava had passed away (Lekhuru, 1952: 475). The latter word when an extended meaning had and the Katha Guru Carita refers to nine *Aatas*.

In the present day *satras* also there is an *adhikara*. The head of a *satra* is popularly known as *adhikara* (Sarma, 1999: 141). He is the religious head and spiritual guide of flock under his care. The formal initiation ceremony *sarana* and the confirmatory *bhajana* are conducted under his direct supervision (Sarma, 1999: 142).

Deka Adhikara: Next to *adhikara* in power and prestige is *deka adhikara* who usually becomes the head after the demise of the *adhikara*. When the *adhikara* remains absent or goes out on a tour the *deka-adhikara* performs the duties of the head (Sarma, 1999: 142).

Bhakata: Though the term *bhakata* means any devotee, yet it is popularly applied to mean those devotees who either hold ecclesiastical office of the *satra* or lead the life of a celibate within the *satra* Campus (Sarma, 1999: 142). In monastic *Satras* where celibacy is strictly observed, the number of such celibate devotees is more numerous than those of *grhasthi Satras*. Such unmarried devotees are called *kevaliya- bhakat*. The word *kevaliya* is derived from Sanskrit *kevala* (alone) (Lekhuru, 1952: 300). Celibate devotees are recruited in their early ears by elderly celibates and under the guidance and supervision of the later they remain as apprentices for a few years. When they are sufficiently acquainted with the religious tenets and practices they are formerly initiated to the religious order.

Sishya: Lay devotees or disciples of a *satra* are called *sisya*. They generally live in villages and towns or *Hatis* leading house holder’s life. Every *vaisnava* householder

in Assam belonging to the Assamese community is invariably affiliated to one or the other of the *satras* of Assam. Customarily every Assamese young man of the *vaisnava* families must have his initiation before he gets himself married (Sarma, 1999: 142).

f) Management of the Satra: “The management of the *satra* is run by the *adhikara* with the help of a number of functionaries attached to different departments of the *satra*. At the initial stage of the movement when the *satra* institution was in its formative stage, the office of the *adhikara* or of a set of functionaries with various duties in the *satra* and in village could not be expected to have existed. The organizational side of the *satra* institution improved a lot during the time of Madhavdeva and Damodardeva. Madhavdeva for the first time introduced the system of *sidha-bhojani* (uncooked articles of ration, vegetables etc. offered to guest). Madhavdeva appointed three *bhagavatis* to recite the *bhagavata* at morning, afternoon and evening.” (Sarma, 1999: 148-149).

For the efficient management of the *satras* and for conduct of religious services regularly, the *adhikara* appoints from among his devotees several functionaries to hold different departments under his control. The number of functionaries to hold different departments is under his control. The number of functionaries may vary according to the size and nature of each *satra* (Sarma, 1999: 153).

For the efficient management of the *satra* and for conduction religious services regularly, several officers or functionaries are appointed to hold different branches of *satra*. The number of these functionaries varies in number according to the size of the *satra*. In big *satras* like Barpeta *satra* and Garmur *satra* etc. the following functionaries are found –

Bar Bhagavati or *Bhagati*: The chief recite of the *Bhagavata*.

Bar Sravani: The chief listener.

Bar Pathak: The chief recite of the vernacular scriptures.

Bar Nam lagowa: The leader of *nama-kirtana*.

Bar Gayan: The chief singer.

Bar Bayan: The chief player of musical instruments.

Bar Bhandari: The chief treasury officer.

Caul Bharali: The Granary keeper.

Gua Bhandari: In charge of betel-nuts.

Bar Aldhara: The head attendant.

Bar Kakati: The chief clerical officer.

Bar Medhi: Represents the *Satra* in the village.

Bar Khataniyar: Representative in the royal court or abroad.

(www.tributetosankarkeva.orgsatra.htm).

Most of the above functionaries are held in the highest honour. Besides the above functionaries of the highest order, there are hosts of other officers of the second, third and fourth grades working in different branches. The Officers of the lower orders though immediately responsible to their respective heads are ultimately responsible to their respective heads are ultimately responsible to the *adhikar* who can appoint or discharge them.

g) Income: “The present income of the *satra* is mainly derived from two sources. These two sources are – (i) Lands originally granted by the kings of the Pre-British days and subsequently confirmed and recognized by the British Government (ii) Religious tithes contributed by disciples’ (District Gazetteers of Assam, Sivsagar Page 98). In addition to these regular sources of income, occasional presents or offerings from devotees and patrons and special subscription raised from disciples to meet expenses of important functions.” (Sarma, 1999: 158).

h) Ownership and Property: There are three types of ownership – (i) Ownership vested in the idol of a *satra*, (ii) Ownership vested in the community of devotees (iii) family ownership (Sarma, 1999: 159). In the first case the *satra* theoretically belongs to the Chief idol of the deity to whose name the entire property of the *satra* is dedicated. The second mode is the ownership is sometimes collectively vested in the community of devotees with the *adhikara* as the formal head. Under this system the *adhikara* is nothing but a figure head. This mode of ownership is in vogue since early times in Barpeta and a few other *satras* of western Assam (RayChoudhry, 2011: 83). The third mode of ownership is ownership vested in the family is prevalent in most of the hereditary *satras*. The *adhikaraship* of this type of *satras* has been traditionally and invariably held by one particular family and all movable and immovable properties are held in the name of the family. This type of ownership of property of *satra* is found in *Satras* like Aauniati, Dakshinpat, Garamur etc. (Nath, 2011 40-41).

i) Prayer Services: The worship of image is usually conducted by a single individual; the entire group of devotees cannot take part in it. Therefore different types of congregational services were introduced daily continue from morning till the early hours of night (Sarma, 1999: 175). 'The Chief features of these services constitute the singing of prayers to the accompaniment of musical instruments and the reading and explaining of the *Bhagavata* and the *Gita*. The whole programme is called *namprasanga* (singing of prayers with musical instruments in *satras*). Each prasanga, consisting of several units, should depict four sentiments. Viz- (1) Sthapana, (2) Vandana, (3) Ananda (4) Khela' (Lekharu, 1952: 521).

The total number of items of services is fourteen in the three *mahapurusiya* sub-sects and twelve in the sub-sects of Damodaradeva and Harideva (Sarma, 1999: 176). These services are grouped into three categories viz-morning prayer service, afternoon prayer service and evening prayer service. The order of items in each service is not uniform in all *satras*. But the principal items of each service are approximately the same. At the initial stage of the movement the number of units was not fixed and the order of performance of different items was not determined. After the death of Sankaradeva, his successor Madhavadeva who lived at Sundaridiya installed the *guru-aasana* there, systematized the *prasangas* into fourteen, fixed up the order in which they were to be performed and also fixed up lines for the no of devotees to sit, as prior to this they possibly sat pell-mell (Lekharu, 1952 reprint 1964: 331, 584).

Later on, every *satra* made certain alterations in the procedure of conducting daily services originally prepared by Madhavadeva and Damodaradeva. The detailed programme of services observed in Barpeta *satra*, the earliest and the most influential *satra* of the mahapurusiya sects has been recorded below as a specimen (Neog, 2008: 342).

Nitya Prasanga (daily rites): The daily rites of the *satras* of Assam as a whole are given below-

Matins (puwar prasanga):

- i) Morning raga songs (*Gita*).
- ii) Morning *bhatima*
- iii) Morning *nama-kirtana*.

- iv) Morning verse readings from the *bhagavata*.
- v) Morning verse readings (*paath*).

Afternoon services (biyalir prasanga):

- vi) Afternoon *paath*.
- vii) Afternoon *nama prasangas*.
- viii) Afternoon readings from the *bhagavata*.

Evening services (ratir prasanga):

- ix) Evening recitations of the *guna-mala*.
- x) Evening recitations of the *lila-mala*.
- xi) Evening *bhatimas*.
- xii) Evening raga-songs.
- xiii) Evening *nama prasanga* and
- xiv) Evening *path* (reading)

This fourteen *prasangas* are performed even to-day at Barpeta. Damodaradeva also observed the three *prasangas*, which included twelve sub-divisions in their fold. “The *Bhagavata-Purana* was regularly read and expounded in every morning afternoon and evening services” (Neog, 1965: 344 cited in Gurulila, 274, 282, 284). “Bhatta Deva and Arjunadeva of the *Loca-Satra* also saw the observance of the twelve *prasangas*” (Neog, 1965: 344 cited in Guru Lila, 496). It thus became customary for the *satras*, claiming evolution from Damodara, to put the total number of *prasangas* at twelve. “There are three major divisions of *prasangas* in which *nama-kirtana*, *pada paath*, *ojha kirtana* and readings from the *Bhagavata Purana* featured” (Neog, 1965: 344 cited in Vamsigopaladevar Carita 356). “In the *Aauniati Satra*, established by Vamsigopala’s Pathak, Niranjana, the ceremonials performed daily are fourteen in number.” (Neog, 1965 reprint 2008: 344 cited in Aauniati-Satradhikara’s Statement 1904, art 3). It is particularly be noted here that whatever the enumeration, the *prasangas* did not include the worship of image (Neog, 1965 reprint 2008 in 344). Besides the daily services there are some particular occasions when *naimittika prasanga* has to be gone through (Neog, 1965: 344).

Naimittika Prasanga (occasional rites): “The annual or *naimittika* agenda of the *satra* include various types of observances like religious and secular festivals,

ceremonies connected with birth and death anniversaries of the earlier Gurus and *adhikaras*, special devotional functions and fastings” (Nath, 2012: 179). Excepting the last one, the other observances are held in the *satra* in a gorgeous manner. The festivals of the *vaisnava* sects of Assam are mainly related to some incidents or episodes of Krishna’s life. These festivals are mostly identical with similar festivals held in other parts of India. In addition to those, the *vaisnavas* of Assam observe the three *bihus*¹ which are considered as the national festival of Assamese people. The following *vaisnava* festivals are observed in the *satras* of Assam.

i) Janmastami: *Janmastami* or birth anniversary of Lord Krishna is observed on the 8th lunar day of dark fort night in the Assamese month *Bhada* (August-September). It is celebrated with great festivity in all the *satras* of Assam. The festival stands in the evening on that day with illumination of earthen lamp. “It is marked by *puja* (worship), *naam prasanga*, *brata* (fasting) and performance of drama depicting the birth of Lord Krishna” (Nath, 2012: 186). The next day is known as *nandotsav*² Illumination of earthen lamps takes place as on the previous day and devotional services consisting of prayers recitation and music continue throughout the day. Devotees smear mud on their bodies and recite in merriment. One person acts as sage Guru who makes astrological calculation of Lord Krishna. Another festival known as *pachati* (Sanskrit Pancha) is observed on the 5th day of the birth of Lord Krishna (Nath, 2001: 165)

ii) Doul: This festival is celebrated on the full moon day in the Assamese month *Chaitra* (March-April) also. This festival is connected with the marriage ceremony of Lord Krishna. It lasts for two or three days. In the evening of the first day, *adhivasa* (purificatory rites) connected with the worship of the deity takes place. During the whole period of the festival, different daily functions like chanting of prayers, *ojah pali*, recitation from the holy books etc take place. Last day of the festival is marked by great merriment where the common people come out of their houses and play with *faku* (coloured powder), (Nath, 2001: 160).

iii) Rasa Yatra: This festival takes place on the full moon day of the Assamese month *Kartika* (October-November). In some *satras* of upper Assam notably in the

¹ *Bihu*: It is the prime festival of Assam.

² *Nandotsav*: The festival observed at Nanda’s house celebrating the birth of Krishna. It is observed at Barpeta *Satra* the day after the *Janmastami*.

Dakshinpat *satra*, this festival draws a large number of people (Sarma, 1999: 185). This festival deals with the amorous relationship of Lord Krishna with the *gopinis* (milk maids) of Braja³. This festival lasts for three or four days. But in *satras* belonging to the *nika samhati*, particularly in Barpeta *satra*, this festival is not celebrated.

There are some festivals, like *ratha-yatra*, *snana yatra* and *jhulan yatra* which are not observed in all *satras* (Sarma, 1999: 185). These are mainly observed in the *satras* belonging to the *brahma samhati*.

iv) *The Bihus*: The word *bihu* is connected with the Sanskrit word *visuva*. Although it originally meant the festival connected with the approach of the Assamese month *Bahag* (April-May), it is extended to mean the two other *bihu* festivals namely the *kati-bihu* and the *magh-bihu* because they are all peasant festivals. The *bihus* are secular festivals observed by all the communities of Assam. However because of their mass observance and intimate connection with the present society of Assam, these are observed in the *satras* with religious fervour.

The three *Bihus* observed on the last day of Assamese month *Ahin*, *Pooh* and *Chaitra* are respectively known as *kangali bihu*, *bhogali bihu* and *rongali bihu*. On the day of *kongali bihu*, the *tulasi* (basil plant) is ceremoniously planted in the courtyard and light is offered to the plant. *Naam prasangas* are also held. Light is also offered in the agricultural field. On the day of *bhogali bihu*, the peasant communities celebrate it with bon fires and feasts and the *satras* observed it with congregational prayers and music. *Rongali bihu* is observed for 7 days. It is observed just before the harvesting season with a lot of merriment. In the *satras*, special devotional programmes continue for the whole period. At Barpeta *satra*, on the second day or the New Year's Day, according to Indian calendar, astrological reading of the New Year is made known to everybody present in the *satra* (Raychoudhury, 2012:177).

v) *Tithi (death anniversary)*: Death anniversaries of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva are observed with all solemnity of *mahapurushiya* order. Death anniversaries of the founder of different *samhatis* as well as different *satras* are also observed with pomp and honour. *Satras* officials to the *brahma samhati* observe the death anniversaries of Damodaradeva, Harideva and Bhattadeva.

³ Braja: A place, where Krishna was brought up.

vi) *Investiture*: It is the ceremony in which the junior is formally raised to the headship of a *satra* (Sarma, 1999: 187).

k) *Special Devotional functions*: Apart from the occasional observances mentioned above, there are a few more devotional functions which do not fall under the category mentioned above. These are discussed below-

Bar Sabah: The word Sabah is derived from the Sanskrit word *sabha* which means assembly. It means a great religious congregation where devotional functions of various natures make the proceedings of the ceremony.

Pal naam: The word *pal* is derived from the Sanskrit word *parjay* (one after another). *Pal naam* continues from 3 to 7 days at a time without break. People recite from various scriptures such as *Kiratan, Dasham and Bhagavata* etc. In popular parlance, the religious function is held in high esteem.

Bhakat-seva: It is function which is observed by the household and not by the *satras* where devotees are invited by a household to be served with food.

Fasting: Fasting in the *satras* of Assam are accorded great importance as means of attaining salvation. Devotees observe fast on the occasion of death and birth anniversaries of Sankaradev, Madhavadeva and other religious Gurus. They also observe fasting every month on *ekadashisi* (eleventh day of the dark or bright fortnight) *puernimas* (full moon) and *amabashyas* (dark moon).

l) *Customs and Manners evolved in Vaisnavite Satras of Assam*: There are so many customs and manners seen in *satras* of Assam and are discussed below-

Customs: The *vaisnavite* Gurus like Sankaradeva, Madhvadeva, Damdaradeva, Harideva and their apostles established a large number of *satras* in upper Assam, Kamarupa and Koch Behar. These *satras* have in course of time evolved certain customs, tradition and manners which were being observed by both celibate devotees and householder devotees. These customs and traditions were comprehensive covering religious and temporal lives of the devotees, dos and do nots, customs and duties in their daily lives. Following are some of the customs and manners observed in *vaisnavite satras*.

Celibacy: Some devotees observe celibacy, however it is not a general practice observed in all *satras*. This practice has been in vogue in a few *satras* situated in Majuli⁴, like Auniati, Daakshinpat, and Garmur etc and in *satras* like Barpeta, devotees living permanently within the four walls of a *satra* must be celibate. However any celibate devotee can marry at any time of his life. Married devotees can reside in the proximity of a monastic *satra* and can participate in religious discourses and prayers.

Women are allowed to have initiation and can enter a *satra* at any time, but they are not allowed to stay at night. The life in a purely monastic *satra* where celibate devotees are only allowed to stay is not however absolutely coenobitical. The celibates live in separate house where they live and dine accordingly to their own way. Caste distinction is scrupulously maintained in the matter of dinning and social practices. A Brahman does not take food cooked by people belonging to other castes. Brahmins have the right to worship idols in *satras* where they are kept. However “all devotees irrespective of their caste meet together in prayer services and take their positions according to their ecclesiastical order” (Sarma, 1999: 196).

Maintenance: The celibates living within the *satra* campus are required to work with their own hands such work as cooking, washing clothes etc. However they often manage such works with the help of juniors attached to them. They utilize their spare time in different handicrafts.

In the formative stage of *satra* institution, regular incomes derived from tithes and grants from kings were not sufficient for maintenance of the celibate devotees living within the *satra* campus. (Sarma, 1999: 197) So they maintained themselves partly by begging and partly from gifts offered by visitors to the *satra*. These devotees also constructed their huts within the *satra* campus. They also lent their services for the construction of the shrines and prayer halls. They husked paddy, collected wood from the forest and washed their utensils and worked for the sanitation of their camps.

With the attainment of material prosperity consequent upon the prevalence of the system of paying tithes to the *satra* and of grants from the kings, the problem of maintenance of celibate devotees was solved. At the same time, there was no necessity for begging. But still the celibate devotees cooked for themselves washed

⁴ Majuli: River Island in the River Brahmaputra

their clothes and performed other day to day works. They were also in pursuit of some useful crafts.

Food: The *vaisnavas* are scrupulously careful in taking food. One does not take food cooked by another person if the latter does not belong to one's own caste. Again a person does not take food from another person if he is not initiated. Therefore, there is a practice still prevalent among the *vaisnavas* to initiate a newly married wife soon after her marriage so that she could enter the kitchen to cook food.

Fish and meat with a certain exception are not taboos. The *vaisnavas* are generally non-vegetarian. However *vaisnavas* should not indulge in killing animals, but they can take meat of animals provided they are killed by others. Mutton was generally accepted as food. However fish was the most common food item in view of its abundance in Assam during those days. Both self indulgence and self deprivation must be avoided. A middle path should be taken. "A celibate devotee should be a light rope walker balancing his way between the two abysses of laxity and excessive austerity" (Lekhuru, 1952 reprint 1964: 42). Chewing of betel nut with betel leaf, lime and tobacco is in practice.

Worship: The *vaisnavas* except those belonging to the *brahma samhati* do not observe brahmanical rites of worship. They follow *panchopachara* (Gandha, Puspa, Dhupa, Dwipa and Naibedya) are sufficient enough for an ordinary devotional rites. Of these *upacharas* (things) the offering of *naibedya* (an offering to God) is considered to be the most important. *naibedya* usually consist of softened gram, moong pulse, rice, fruits betel nut and betel leaf etc. But these should be offered uncooked.

Dress and other articles of use: A celibate devotee attached to a *satra* uses three pieces of white cloth- a dhoti, a *chadar* (wrapper) and a *gamocha* (towel). On ceremonial occasions the devotees wear a bodice or waist coat or a *chapkan* (long flowing garment). The rich devotees are often found to wear silk garments. However religious Gurus like Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva advised the devotees to be simple and humble in the dresses and manners.

Wooden furniture is rarely used in *satras*. Instead rough blankets, mattresses made of grass, bamboo, slits or withered plantain leaves are in use. Foot wares made of hide and skin was not used, instead of wooden foot wares were in use. Male devotees like

women used to keep long hair which they keep trailing their back. They do not keep beard or moustaches. They remained clean shaven.

Sacramental relationship: There are two types sacramental relationship, namely (a) between the *adhikara* and the devotees (b) among devotees. The *adhikara* as the head of the religious community naturally commands respect and obedience. It is the duty of the devotees to serve the *adhikara*. The *adhikara* is regarded as the representative of God. The *adhikara* initiates his devotees. After initiation, the devotee must show unconditional loyalty to his Guru. He cannot change his Guru in any circumstances. The relationship between one devotee and another is more divinely than between the Guru and the devotee. “According to *vaisnava* scriptures, an offence against deity or Guru is redeemable in certain circumstances, but an offence against a devotee, no matter how insignificant position he might hold is unpardonable (Sarma, 1999: 204). Madhavadeva once expelled from his sect two of his disciples for abusing and assaulting devotees.

Manners: Persons living within the boundary of a *satra* are a very polite and highly polished. A *satriya* devotee never speaks in terms of first person because that would mean egoism. For instance, if a *satriya* devotee is asked “Have you done it”, he will say “Yes, by the grace of God, it is done.” Uttering the names of Visnu once or twice, such as Ram, Hari or Krishna in the midst of every sentence is a kind of mannerism with the devotees. The devotees remain neat and clean. They never eat anything in the morning before main bath. After bath, they will wear only clean cloths washed on the previous day.

Offence and Punishment: Certain offences such as adultery, theft, assault and moral turpitude are considered very serious and any person who commits such crime is liable for expulsion. Similarly telling a lie is also considered a serious offence. Devotees found to be indulging in the practice of magic, charms and sorcery are also considered as offence and severely deals with addiction and gambling are considered serious vices and accordingly dealt with.

Marriage and Obsequies rite: A celibate devotee, if he so desires can marry and become a householder devotee. During the days of Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva or other Gurus, marriage was strictly within the caste. For example, a *Brahmin* bridegroom must take a *Brahmin* Bride. Marriage was solemnized accordingly to

brahmanical rites. (Sarma, 1999: 199) But now a lot of changes have taken place and inter-caste marriage is not considered a taboo. Moreover, apart from *brahmanical* rites, today marriages are taking place with the chanting of *naam* and binding of the nuptial chord by a priest (not necessarily *Brahmin*) around the bridegroom and the bride.

n) Types of Satra: There are two types of *satra* establishment found in different parts of Assam, (a) Monastic with 1st celibate inmate (*Kewalia/ Udasin Bhakat*) and the celibate pontiff (*Udasin Adhikara*) or celibate pontiff with house holding inmates (*Grihi/Grihasthi/Udasin Bhakata*) and (b) Semi monastic or house holding inmates and house holding pontiff (*grihasthi/ vishagee adhikara*). (Nath, 2011 in Nath 2011: 40). *satras* like Aauniati Dakhinpat, Garamur etc. are the monastic *satras* and *satras* like Barpeta, Patbaushi, Sundaridiya are the example of semi monastic *staras*.

Vaisnavism is the cult of worshipping Vishnu as the supreme deity. The *bhakti* movement in Assam reflects the religious, social and cultural history of the population of Assam. *Bhakti* movement swept across India as a social reform movement. Due to popularity of this new religion, many people belonging to different castes and creed espoused the new religion. The new faith built its basis first in lower Assam. But after the death of Sankardeva, his followers carried the new religion to upper Assam where people of different tribes espoused it quickly. Apart from lower and upper Assam, the movement even spread to some parts of Arunachal Pradesh. People of different tribes like the Ahom, Kachari, Mising, Garo, Bhutiya and even the Muslims were proselytized into the new faith. All people were equally regarded and there was no distinction as between caste and creed. A democratic outlook prevailed, which increased social mobility. This new atmosphere paved the way for growth of Assamese nationality. It has contributed immensely to the formation and development of the Assamese society and its culture. He aimed at elevating the so called lower castes and the tribal people of Assam to higher social position. According to him there is no distinction between higher and lower castes in the temple of God. Because of this communistic ideal in the spiritual sphere, caste distinction and animosities in the Assamese society are minimum. The complex philosophical ideas of the religious scriptures which the common un-lettered people cannot understand have been made simple and comprehensible through his writings. As a corollary to his religious

mission of spreading *vaisnavism*, he developed mass communication media like-drama, dance, song and painting which were gladly accepted by the people. As a result common people were attracted to his religion. In this way he built up the neo-*vaisnavite* religion on a solid foundation. This movement gives a new lease of life to Assamese society and its culture.

The special feature of Assamese neo-*vaisnavism* is the *satra* institution. Due to popularity of this new religion, many people belonging to different castes and creed espoused the new religion *satra* institution helped in the unity of the Assamese society. It is also a chord linking Assam with the rest of India. *Satra* is the main institution around which all religious and cultural activities move. There are three parties attached to the *satra*, namely- *adhikara* and *deka-adhikara*, *bhakata* and *sisya*. *Adhikara* is the head of the whole *vaisnava* order. For efficient management of the *satra*, several functionaries are appointed. Income of the *satra* consists of two sources- (i) Land granted by the kings which were later on confirmed by the British Govt. (ii) Religious tithes contributed by the disciples. There are also different types of congregational services. These are called *naam-prasanga*. These services are grouped into 3 categories- (i) Morning Prayer Service (ii) Afternoon Prayer Service and (iii) Evening Prayer Service. Certain customs and manners are observed by both celibate devotees and householder devotees. Some devotees observe celibacy. They cook their own food and wash their clothes. Fish and meat with a certain exceptions are not taboos. Persons living within the four walls of the *satra* are required to be very polite in their behaviour. Certain offences of the devotees such as- adultery, theft, assault are considered very serious and anyone involving in such crimes is expelled. *Satra* institution helped in the unity of the Assamese society. It is also chord linking in Assam with the rest of India. *Satra* is the main institution around which all religious and cultural activities move. One of the most important contributions of the *satra* institution is the upliftment of the backward classes and minimization of caste distinction. *satras* are also centers of imparting education. The *satras* enriched the Assamese society with songs, dramas and dances. However, the *satras* have undergone significant changes in the post-independent period. The changes induced by modern technology in attitude and opportunity for the common masses have reduced the effectiveness of the *satra* institution to influence their life style. The *satras* could not respond in time to expand their areas to retain the faith of the people in matters of education, performing art, health etc. The growing scientific temper also

played a role to distance the common man from guidance of the *satra*. It must also be admitted that the rites and rituals observed in the *satras* all over Assam helped the new faith to place it on a systematic foundation, gave it a dignified appearance and finally tended to bring about discipline and order in religious life.

Despite the changes, the institution of the *satra* is still a great force of the composite society in Assam with certain distinct characteristics reflected in entire value system. It is through the *satras* that the people of Brahmaputra valley have attained a common identity, despite the great diversity and difference among various groups of people in their culture, economy, education and social status. Classical Assamese culture owes much to the *satras* of the land.

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CHAPTER V

VAISNAVISM AND SATRA INSTITUTION AT BARPETA

Introduction

Barpeta *satra* is situated at Barpeta town which is the head quarter of Barpeta, a district of the province of Assam. Geographically the position of Barpeta town is 26° 19.01.62" North and 91° 00.19.74" East (Patra, 2012 in Gogoi 2012: 15). The *satra* is situated 26° 19.01.62" North and 91° 00.19.74" East. Barpeta *satra* is the earliest and most influential *satra* of the *mahapurusiya* sect (Sarma, 1999: 177) as well as the chief monastery of Assam (Neog, 1965 reprint 2008: 137), which was established by Madhavdeva the chief disciple and apostle of Sankardeva with proper help of Mathuradas Burha Aata¹ in 1504 sakabda (1582-1583 of Christian era). According to some biographies of the medieval age, after passing away of Sankardeva, Madhavdeva took the responsibility of the spiritual instructor of *vaisnava* religion in Assam and later on he established some *satras* including Barpeta *satra* (Das, 2005 cited in Barthakur 2005: 36-37).

a) Establishment of Barpeta Satra: "It was 1504 *sakabda* (1582-83 AD) when Madhavadeva was at Sundaridiya continuing his mission most earnestly. One day two of his disciples come to him with the message that they had been severely humiliated by a farmer as they came crossing his paddy field Madhavadev was utterly moved by this news and soon he made preparation to leave the place to go to Bhawanipur *satra* of Gopal Aata, Gopal Tanti (later on known as Mathuradas Burha Ata), however came to Madhavdeva at that time. He soon knew all about Madhava's plan and requested him to go to Tantikuchi (old name of Barpeta) instead of Bhawanipur. Madhavadeva found it hard to go against the wishes of his favorite disciple and therefore started for Tantikuchi. At Tantikuchi his disciple Gopal Tanti made a hut of three rooms for his master, one of these rooms was to be used for daily *prasanga* (worshipping). But when Madhava found the room very narrow and therefore unsuitable for that purpose, he called Gopal and said- 'I found it very narrow here, Gopal we will have to make a *harigriha* for the purpose'. Gopal responded

¹ One of the chief followers of Madhavdeva and the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra*.

immediately – ‘But it will be very hard to find out open spaces. But I know my uncle and aunt. They had no children of their own but possess a very wide, large home garden. I will introduce you to them and you may ask them for land’, Madhava did accordingly. At first Gopal’s uncle Ram Laruwa Burha was not ready to provide land, but he agreed at last. Soon the land which was actually a jungle was cleared under the leadership of Gopal himself. Gopal enacted the *Kotora Yatra* (drama written by Sankaradeva) there in the open space beneath a tent. People came in groups. They were deeply attracted by Sankaradeva’s doctrines. Madhava got more inspiration than before. They arranged for more land from Ram Laruwa Burha and decided to build a large *kirtanghar*. Within a few days basic requirements of *chati-marali* (a long piece of timber to support the roof) were made ready by the group efforts of Parbatiya Krishnai Aatoi, his son Ram and one Bidhisha Aatoi. Other requirements like – *kharimati* and *reinejpata* (Chalk and tin foil) were brought by Harikrishna Aatoi and Madhai Aatoi, as imported by Heren Doloi. Bamboos were brought from Bajali locality². In this way, at the enterprise of Madhavadeva and his follower devotees, the first *kirtanghar* of Barpeta *satra* was constructed. As the *charita puthi* (biographies of saints) says, it was unique example of wood-sculpture and bamboo. The same architecture was also to be found in the *rangiyalgriha* (the holy sportive house), the residence of Madhavadeva which was constructed in 1585 AD. The first *kirtanghar* was placed just at the place where *Kotora Yatra* was enacted and at that very place lightening for worshipping was also done, the *charita* says” (Pathak, 1959: 5-10).

Actually it took many days to arrange for all the necessary materials required for construction of the large *kirtanghar*. In this connection the sentiments of the local people were also given a preference and it was on the basis of their enthusiastic advice that the *kirtanghar* was designed to be 120 hands (180 ft.) length and 60 hands (90 ft.) breadth (Khan Choudhury, 1936: 101). The *brindavani bastra* is also of same measure Sankaradeva prepared this *bastra* for King Nara-Narayana of the Koch kingdom in the year of 1455 to 1509 *sakabda* 1533-34 to 1588 A.D. (Khan Choudhury, 1936: 101) by the weavers of Tantikuchi and it is now preserved at London museum³.

After completion of the construction of the *kirtanghar*, Madhavadeva on specified date prescribed by the astrologer opened its door by lightening the *akkhay banti* (ever

² Bajali locality: Nowadays it is a sub-division of Barpeta district of Assam.

³ Brindavani Bastra Documentary by Surya Hazarika

burning sacred lamp) and by installing the sacred Bhagavata at the altar. Within a very short time span, this *satra* became the centre place for spiritual upliftment on the one hand and also a unique institution for practicing art and culture on the other hand. Sessions of *prasanga* (prayer services), *patha* (text from religious books), *byakhya* (explanation of devotional verses) etc. were arranged for spiritual uplifting, while training session in varied *satriya* dances songs and instruments etc were arranged for cultural or artistic uplifting. Gopal Tanti under special favour of Madhavadeva learnt all these things attentively and soon he became the learned person of the *Satriya* Culture itself. Many people were christened in *vaisnava* doctrine and Madhavdeva's popularity spread far and wide (Raychoudhry, 2012: 109).

During this time Madhavadeva, was summoned to appear in the court of Roghu Ray⁴ on some false allegation. Though he was set free as found innocent, it was almost tough for him to live peacefully due to one untiring conspirators. In 1592, therefore, he gave total responsibility of Barpeta *satra* over Gopal and went to Hajo Ramdiya⁵. After some years, he left that place also and went to Koch Bihar at the earnest request of Aai Dhaai, wife of the late king Naranarayana. Of course, he now decided to spend the rest of his life at Bheladoba *satra*, Koch Bihar, for it was hard for him to leave ever caring Aai Dhaai (Khan Choudhury, 1936: 121).

In 1594, Barpeta *satra* house was reduced to ashes by the forest fire suddenly. At that time Gopal Tanti was at Bhawanipur. When he came back and learnt what had happened he went almost dumb because of grief and sorrow at the loss of his dearest *satra* at Barpeta. At last on the advice of his wife, Gopal went to Madhavdeva at Bhela Doba. Madhavdeva inspired Gopal and Changed his name as Mathura Das made him the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra* providing him two *nageri-takas*⁶ (Sri Sri Sankara Charita Puthi, 223). Gopal alias Mathuradas Burha Ata returned to Barpeta and revived the *satra* on its burnt foundation again. In 1595 A.D. he was coronated as the *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra* on the *tithi* (death anniversary) of Sankardeva.

Mathuradas Burha Aata's attention was also directed towards social organization. He was the man who introduced the *hati* system (Pathak, 1959: 71). It was a unique system suited to the conditions of the medieval time. The main objectives of introduction of the *hati* system were –

16 Koch kingdom of 1581-1627 century A.D.

⁵ Presently situated in Kamrup district.

⁶ *Nageri-Taka*: Coins in the name of king Naranarayana.

1. To bring unity and cohesion.
2. To create a sense of attachment to the *kirtanghar*.
3. To bring economic viability.

There are all together 22 *hatis*. In each *hati* a *haitarghar* (community hall) was established. The *haitarghar* is still being used as the venue for disposal of petty disputes and for decision making in connection with all matters both temporal and religious. Moreover a treasury in each *hati* was established so that people could take loans at nominal rate of interest. He also introduced the religious tax. Every resident of the *satra* has to pay the tax; in return he receives a share of the offerings made in the *kirtanghar* by the devotees at the time of the death anniversary of the *gurus* (Pathak, 1959: 72-77). This system still prevails.

Barpeta *satra* received favour from the royal house for two times. When Mathuradas Burha Aata was still alive Koch King Naranarayana (1627-1632 AD) sent many people from his own state to serve the *satra* (Khan Choudhury, 1936: 123). On the other hand the Ahom King Sivasingha (1735 AD) donated land to the *satra* inscribing the act on copper plate (Gait, 2008: 183). Accordingly, there is no *myadi* land in the *hatis* around Barpeta *satra*. The land owner is the *satra* itself and hence this land under the *satra* cannot be sold out to anybody (Adhikary, 2010: 49).

The *kirtanghar* reconstructed by Mathuradas Burha Aata was again burnt by fire and it was built again in 1828 AD. During the earthquake in 1897 AD it was again destroyed. In 1908-09 AD, it was rebuilt and the present construction was completed in 1962 AD. The *akhay banti* has been lightning till date for 427 years (Das, 1996: 04).

b) Barpeta Satra Complex: The areas and various buildings inside *satra* premises -

Satra Premises: *satra* premises start with 3 *batchoras* (entry gate), where as main complex is surrounded by wall, these are –

- I) Na-*hati batchara* (West side entry).
- II) Uttar *hati batchara* (North side entry).
- III) Dakshin *hati batchara* (South side entry).

There is no entry from east side because a canal named Hari Jaan is flowing from the east side. People are not allowed to enter beyond these *batchoras* on any vehicles (as a respect and honour towards the *kirtanghar*).

Entry Gate: Like *batchora*, there are 3 entry gates to enter the main complex, i.e. –

I) *Uttar Duwar* (North Gate).

II) *Dakshin Duwar* (South Gate).

I) *Dalan* (On the West Side).

Dalan is considered as the main entry gate to the complex.

Kirtan Ghar: *Kirtanghar* is situated almost at the centre of the *satra* complex. Main entrance of the *kirtanghar* is on the west; *bhajghar* is to the east and an entry gate on the north. Inside near the main west gate, there are two wooden pillars (traditionally known as *tulashi khuta*) supporting the main building. There are three *guru-aashanas* (sacred pedestals) in the *kirtanghar*. These three *guruaashana* in the *kirtanghar* are associated with the name of Sri Sankaradeva and Sri Madhavadeva and Mathuradas Burha Aata, which are followed by a table and two big *gacha* (traditionally designed earthen lamp stand). There are two seats behind the *guruaashana* for *adhikara* and *deka adhikara* from where they do their day to day activities. There are seven *barsarais* (big plates to offer pulses to God) kept in a line before the *guru-ashana*. Inside the *kirtanghar* there is no statue of any God and Goddess. The three outside walls of the *kirtanghar* are decorated with different idols describing stories of the Bhagawata and Purana (North and South) and with the idols of *dashavatara* of Vishnu (ten incarnations of God) on the west.

Manikuta: The *manikuta* is situated on the eastern side of the *kirtanghar*. In local language it is called *bhaj-ghar*. It has two parts – 1) where valuable ornaments of gold and silver are kept along with the valuable belongings of the *Satra* is called *Ghai Bharal* (main store). 2) The other part of the *Bhaj Ghar* is known as *Manikut* – where the idol of Kalia Thakur (Lord Krishna) though there is no place for idols in Mahapurushiya religion but the idol of Lord Krishna is kept in order to avoid royal wrath or to gain royal favour. Moreover the king's gifted land to the monasteries in the name of the idols (Nath, 2001: 114) is kept here. The *Akkhay Banti* is lightening up more than 450 hundred years in front of the idol of Kalia Thakur.

Pat-Chang: *Pat Chang* was constructed parallel the *bhaj-ghar*. It is 8 feet away from the *bhaj-ghar*. It is made of wood and tin. When the earlier *chang-ghar* (made of bamboo and thatch) was destroyed by the earthquake held in the year 1897, one woman named Sonpahi (Das, 2010: 217) constructed the new one. It carries a special

architectural style. The floor of the *pat-chang* is 5 feet above from the ground. In the lower portion of this *Chang* some peacocks and rabbits are found only. In the upper portion of this house some special meetings are held. Basically religious and administrative issues of *satra* are discussed here. It is honoured as pure as the *pat-chang* of King Kangsha⁷.

Khatkhati: A canal named Hari Jaan is running from the east side of *satra* complex. The bank of the canal which is touching the *satra* Complex on east side is known as *khatkhati* (stair case). The canal was later on blocked on two sides and converted to a pool named Madhab Sarovar, but it now again runs as a canal. In earlier days Madhab Deva and other Bhakats used it to take bath in (Das, 2010: 218). All the steps of the stair case are made of stone. A statue of Child Krishna is constructed in the middle of this canal. A modern guest house is also constructed on the east bank of the canal.

Math: *Math* (cylindrical shaped structure) is situated on the north side of the *kirtanghar*. As the people say this *Math* was constructed on the platform of the house where Madhavdeva lived (Nath, 2001: 117). *Math* was constructed in the similar architectural style of the Ahom Kingdom. The glittering golden pitcher on the pinhole of the *math* can be seen from a distance. People make lots of religious activities in front of the *math* and in the open space which is called *mathar chotal* (courtyard of the *Math*). The construction of this *math* was completed in the leadership of Kinaram Satriya, one of the *adhikara* of the *satra*.

Ram Ata's Bhithi (house of Sri Ram Ata): The house of Sri Ram Aata disciple of Sankardeva was established opposite to the house of Madhavdeva (nowadays *math*). Presently a well is constructed here, the water of this well is assumed as pure and water from this well is used in all the works of the *satra*.

⁷ King Kangsha: Maternal uncle of Krishna.



Figure 7: Main *kirtanghar*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 8: *Math*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 9: *Doul*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 10: Brindaban *hati batsora*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 11: Na *hati batsora*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 12: Dakshin *hati batsora*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 13: *Guruasana* of *kirtanghar*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 14: Southern verandah of the *kirtanghar*, Barpeta *satra*

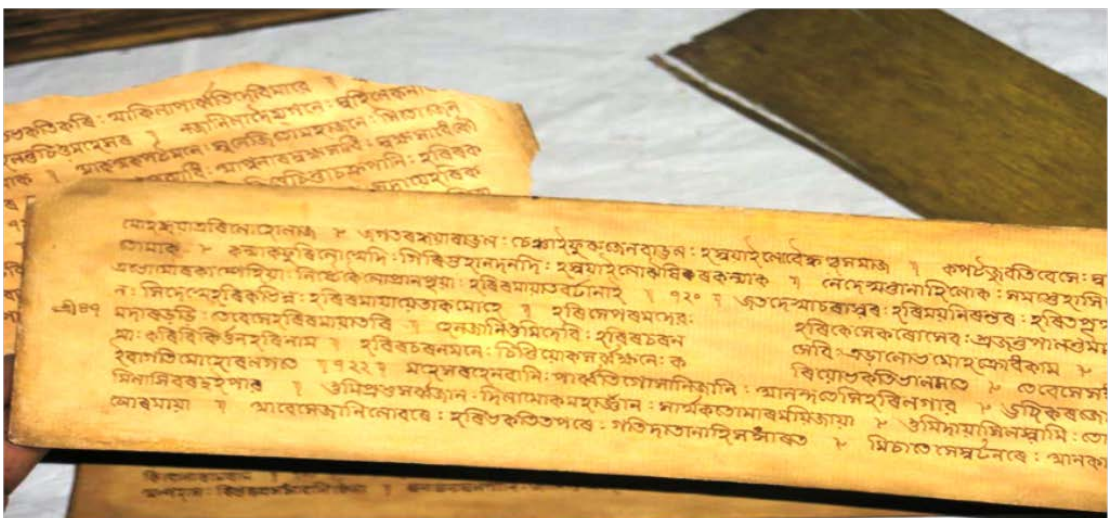


Figure 15: Books of *sanchi* leave, Barpeta *satra*

Burha Aata's Bhithi (house of Mathuradas Burha Ata): In the north-east position of the *satra* a small beautiful house is reconstructed where 1st *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra* Mathuradas Burha Aata lived.

Padma Aata's Bhithi (house of Padma Ata): A beautiful house is reconstructed on the place, where one of the best disciples of Sankardeva lived on the southern portion of the *kirtanghar*.

Bhagavata Griha (house where Bhagavata is recited): There is an open (without wall) shaped house on the southern part of the *kirtanghar*. This house is named *bhagavatgriha*. The *pathak* (reciter) recites the Bhagavata in this house twice a day. Every morning and evening people come and sit here to listen the Bhagawat. At the time of any festival there is no Bhagawat *path* conducted in the evening. There is another house to the west of *bhagavat griha* which is used for treatment during the days of festivals.

Atithi Griha (guest house): There is a dormitory guest house inside the complex, where people can stay there any time. *Satra* normally provides the grocery to cook any tourist come there to stay and the devotees have to prepare the meal by themselves.

Satriya Sangeet Bidyalaya (Satriya Music School): A *satriya* cultural music school is situated inside the *Satra* premises. It is in east-south corner on the bank of the Hari jaan. Lots of trainings are given to the boys and girls who want to study Sankari Culture.

Sabha Ghar (seminar hall): It is also an open house situated in the north-west position of the *kirtanghar*. General meeting of the *samuha bhakat* (Community devotee) are held here. There is a small house in the north side of the *sabha ghar* and it is known as *jagmohan griha*.

Doul: There is a uniquely designed with 7 stairs building on north-west corner (near north entry gate), which is used mainly for keeping the idol of *kolia thakur* (Lord Krishna) at the time of *doul* festival. The design of the structure just represents that after crossing seven steps one can reach the heaven where God resides

Ranga Mancha (stage): In *satra* premises a *ranga-mancha* (stage) is found. It is a modern stage for performing art and cultural activities from time to time.

Mathura Das Burha Aata Puthibharal (Library): There is a library of books and journals. Anybody can get books written about Sankari culture from here.

c) Rites and Rituals of Barpeta Satra: Sankardevas neo-*vaisnavite* movement is known as *ekasarana-nam-dharma*. It is called *nam-dharma* in short. In *nam-dharma*, the celebration of God's names and activities in songs, verse recitations and narration of the holy lore would occupy the widest place requires little emphasis. From the earliest times the devotees used to assemble in the *namghars*, hold discussions with the *Guru* and sing prayers. These small concourses were known as *prasangas* and as the talks and songs centered on God they were also known as *hari-prasangas* (Neog, 1965 reprint 2008: 341 cited in Gurulila, 447, Vamsigopaladevar Charita: 918). In *nam-dharma* there are two main religious services observed by the devotees. These are known as *nitya* (daily rites) and *naimittika* (occasional rites), (Nath, 2012: 60). The services which are observed by the devotees either in the *satra kirtanghar* or in the village *namghar* from dawn to dusk are known as *nitya* or Daily prayer service. The services which are observed on special occasions are called *naimittika* or occasional rites.

Nitya Prasanga (Daily Rites): The daily prayer services were divided into three different programs like the *puwar prasanga* (matins), *biyalir prasanga* (afternoon prayer services) and *ratir prasanga* (evening prayer services) (Neog, 1965: 341 cited in Gurulila: 254). The *Katha Gurucharita* (Lekharu: 331 & 584) tells us that when Madhaba lived at Sundaridia after his master had passed away he installed the *guru-ashana* there and systematized the *prasangas* into fourteen fixed up the order in which they were to be performed. At Barpeta *satra* Mathuradas Burha Ata developed the three times daily prayer services into fourteen units (Roy Choudhury, 2011: 110). This program is followed even today at Barpeta. *Sewait bangsara* (dedicated devotees) performing the daily rites in the *satra* as per shifting system. Different *bangsaras* of Barpeta *satra* are- *pathak* (public reader or reciter of religious book), *gayan* (singer of devotional music like- *bargeet*, *bhatima*, *geet*, *pada*, *ghosa*), *bayan* (an instrumentalist, especially *khol*), *ojah* (choral singer), *ghosha kirtaniya* (a group of religious singer of devotional music). The detailed program of services observed at Barpeta *satra* are given below –

The *nitya prasangas* are divided into three shifts –

1st shift- Morning Prayer service.

2nd shift- Afternoon Prayer service.

3rd shift- Evening Prayer service.

The three shifts are divided into fourteen *prasangas*.

1st shift – 5 *prasangas*.

2nd shift –3 *prasangas*.

3rd shift – 6 *prasangas*.

Puwar Prasanga (Morning Prayer service): Rituals of *puwar prasanga* at Barpeta *satra* are given below-

The first shift of *prasanga* starts at dawn. The *pathak* sits in front of *guru-ashana* and sings two *bargeets* (holy song composed by Madhavdeva, one is called *jagaranar puwar geet* and other is called *colanar puwar geet*).

The 2nd item of *puwar prasanga* is started with a devotional song called *puwar bhatima*. This *bhatima* describes the story of sending Krishna to tend the cows at Brindabana daily with necessary supply of food, milk, butter and clothes.

After recitation of *bhatima*, the reader devotees sit in their specific *ashana* (sit) to begin the *jugal kirtana* (one type of prayer). But it is worth mentioning that before starting of the *kirtana*, the Chief *deuri* lights the mustard oil lamp in front of the *guru-ashana* and garland is placed on the *ashana*. Apart from this the Sri Madbhagavat Gita is placed on the chapels and then the reader devotees utter the name of God and the *jugal kirtana* starts. After that the first two *ghosha* from *Sishulila* (a part of the verses from holy book Kirtan written by Sankardeva) are sung by the reader devotees and his companion. This program concludes with a *ghosha*.

The 4th *prasanga* of morning shift is started by the *bhagavati* with recitation and explanation of *slokas* (metrical Sanskrit verse) from the Gita or Bhagavata on the basis of *ahira raga* (one type of *raga*).

The 5th *prasanga* consists of three *ghoshas* read by the reader devotees. About 15 holy books, which bear of *vaisnava* ideology and written by *vaisnava* poets Sankardeva, Madhavdeva and Sri Chandra Bharali. These looks are Harichandra Upakhyan, Kirtan Ghosha, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, (Anadi Patan), 6th (Ajamil Upakhyan), 8th, 10th (First part) 11th

and 12th Skandh Bhagavata, the Kavya Rukmini Harana and Kurukhsetra of Sankardeva. Rajsuya Kavya of Madhavadeva and Britrasur Badha of Sri Chandra Bharali.

The daily *prasanga* is observed for the whole year or in 365 days. So, after completion of the verses from all these books, the Harichandra Upakhyan is to be begun again (Aatoi Burha Bhakat, 1932: 44-45).

Biyalir Prasanga (Afternoon prayer service): Rituals of *biyalir prasanga* at Barpeta *satra* are given below-

In the afternoon, between 2.00-3.00 P.M., the *deuri* installs Bhagavata and texts in front of *guru-aashana*. The *pathak* starts his selected text (*Bhakti Ratnawali, Bhakti Ratnakara, Nam Malika, Bhakti Pradip, Janma Rahaishya* etc.) as sixth *prasanga*.

The 7th *prasanga* is started after recitation of text. The reader devotee sits on his specific *ashana* to begin the *jugal kirtan* with a petal of *namchanda*.

The 8th *prasanga* is started with some *slokas* of Bhagavata or Gita on the basis of *raga saranga*.

Ratir Prasanga (Evening prayer service): Rituals of *ratir prasanga* at Barpeta *satra* are given below-

The *deuri* and helper devotees light the mustered oil lamp inside the *kirtanghar* according to their jurisdiction. At that time the reader devotee sits in front of the *guru-ashana* and starts ninth *prasanga* with the verses from *gunamala* (substance of the Bhagavata written by Sankaradeva).

The 10th *prasanga* begins with the two verses of *Lila-Mala*.

The 11th *pransanga* begins with *guru-bhatima* (a series of prayer to Sankardeva, which is written by his disciple Madhavdeva) and ended with *totaya* (A hymn, composed by Sankardeva).

The 12th *prasanga* is *sewar kirtan* where the *gayans* and *bayans* sing two *Bargeets* on the basis of two *ragas* like *sowary* or *nat mallar* or *bhairabi* or *kedar*.

The 13th *prasanga* is *jugal kirtan*. The reader devotee utters the name of God and sings one verse each from *nam chanda* and *sarana chanda*.

The 14th or the Last *prasanga* is text. The text begins on the basis of *raga ramgiri* while it ends with the *raga saranga*. (Burha Bhakat, 2008: 1-45).

Naimittika Prasanga (Occasional Prayer Service): The occasional observances of the *Satra* may be divided into two categories- primary and secondary (38). The primary observances of Barpeta *satra* are *kirtana*, two main *bihus* (*bihu* in the month of *magh* and *bihu* in the month of *bahag*), *doul utsav*, *janmastomi*, etc.

The secondary observances are death anniversary of *adhikaras* and *aatois*. *kati bihu* which is observed in the Assamese month *kati*.

Kirtana or Tithi Mahotsav (death anniversaries of Gurus): The death anniversaries of the three *vaisnava* saints Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and Mathuradas Burha Aata are the days of three *kirtanas*. In the colloquial language of Barpeta it is called *kitan* (San.-*kitan*, Pkt. – *kitan*, Kam.-*kitan*, and Bar.-*kitan*)

The death anniversary of Sankaradeva is known as *guru kirtan*. It is celebrated on the second bright lunar day of the Assamese month *bhada* (August-September). This festival is celebrated for about 07 days. After the passing away of Sankaradeva his disciple Madhavadeva observed his death anniversary at Patbaushi *than* it was observed at Barpeta *satra* also. The death anniversary of Madhavadeva is celebrated for about 10 days and that of Mathuradas Burha Ata is celebrated for 5 days. Madhavadeva's *kirtan* falls on the fifth day of the dark moon in the Assamese month *bhada* (August-September). Accordingly *kirtan* is started on the eleventh day of the bright moon in the month of *bhada*. The death anniversary of Mathuradas Burha Ata falls on the fourth day of the dark moon in the month of *ahin* (September-October). So the *kirtan* is started on the fourteenth day of the bright moon of the same month. On the day when the *kirtana* is ceremonially started, the *gayan* and *bayan* after the morning *prasanga* additionally sing one *bargeet* and one devotional verse. Ablation of green pulses and betel nuts are kept separately in front of the *guru-ashana*. It is customary that ablations are offered inside the *kirtanghar* on the occasion of the *kirtana* of Sankaradeva, at the residential quarter of Madhvadeva.

On the day before the main celebration of *kirtan* festival *gandh* is celebrated. Though the occasional *prasngas* continues from the first day to last day *ankiya-naat* or *yatra* is performed on the day of *gandh*. Now a day *yatras* are not performed on this occasion. Of course the devotees conclude their functions by singing the songs of some dramas.

The day of the death anniversaries are called the day of *kirtan*. On this day people assemble in the *kirtanghar* from the morning. According to *satriya* tradition 7 *ghoshas* of Sankaradeva, 10 *ghoshas* of Madhvadeva, and 5 *ghoshas* of Burha Ata's

kirtan are sung respectively from *kirtanghosh*a composed by Sankaradeva (Burha Bhakat, 2008: 50-60). After the *prasanga*, the drama- *bhojan vyavahara* is staged. It is customary to stage at least one drama after three *prasangas* at night shift. Now a days instead of the drama shows, only songs of the drama are sung. This day is also called *sabha* (meeting) day. On this day, it is customary to offer duties consisting of articles like- *ou* (a kind of acid fruit), *komora* (white gourd melon), and raw banana etc. are carried to the courtyard of the *math* in slings by the devotees and this ritual is known as *karbhar*. People of Brindaban *hati* on the occasion of *kirtan* of Sankaradeva, people of Dakshin *hati* on the occasion of *kirtan* of Madhavadeva and the people of Na *hati* on the occasion of the *kirtan* of Mathura Das Burha Ata offer the *karbhar* to the *kirtanghar* respectively. Apart from the three main *karbhars*, some other *karbhars* are also offered by other *hatis*, which are not mandatory. People of Kanara *satra* offer *karbhar* to Barpeta *satra* on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Madhavadeva. The exception is that on the occasion of the *kirtan* of Sankaradeva, *karbhar* is offered to Patbaushi *satra* from the side of Barpeta *satra*.

There is a custom of offering *guru-kar* (religious tithes) within the *kirtana* festival. This custom continues from the time of the death of Madhavadeva and this rule was established by Mathura Das Burha Ata (Raychoudhury, 2010: 27) According to that custom on the eighth day from the beginning of the *kirtan* the *adhikara* and other compatriots would offer *gur-kar*. On the ninth day the celibate devotees would offer *guru-kar* while on the tenth day it would be offered by all.

Doulotsava (Doul festival): *Doul* festival is originally based on folk culture (Chugh, 2008: 01) but later on transformed into a religious festival. The *doul* festival is narrated as a religious festival in the holy book *kirtan-ghosha* of Sankaradeva (*Kirtan-Ghosha*, 1986: 535). At Barpeta *satra* *doul utsav* is celebrated with religious farvour. According to some writers, the festival was observed during the last part of 16th century AD and it has continued till date (Pathak, 1959: 20).

The first day of *doul* festival is called *gandh* or *bahnutsav*. The word *gandh* actually means the *adhibasha* or the beginning of a festival (Nath, 2001: 161). On the eve of this day, the idols of the two deities (*Kaliya Thakur* and *Doul Gobinda*) are accompanied by priest and *gayan bayan* from the *kirtanghar* to the court yard of the *math*. The idols are kept on the big platter and *raj-medhi* (the priest of the *satra*) starts worshipping the idols, while *gayans* and *bayans* sing eight songs on the basis of eight

ragas simultaneously. This ritual is over after completion of the songs of *gayans* and *bayans* and the recitation of hymn of the priest. After completion of the rituals the priest sprinkles sacred water on the devotees who accompany the priest on two separate sedans from the courtyard of the *math* to the Court yard of the *tupa* with a cultural procession, where a huge heap is made of *nal*, *khagari*, *ikara* (some kind of reed) by the devotees. The heap is called *meji* (bon fire), while it is called *bhela mag* in local language. After that the idols are moved around the burning *meji* in the presence of *gayan* and *bayan*.

The idols of two Gods then entered the *jagmohan griha* after completion of moving around the fire and then the idols taking rest in the *griha* till the time of the position of the *magha nakshatra* (tenth lunar asterism). This ritual is locally called *gahe jirani lowa* (God is taking rest). The idols are there after placed in the chapels of *doul-griha*. That time different fireworks are shown and after that the *gandh* Festival is over.

Next day is called *bhar doul*. It may be one or two days, when the *doul* festival is observed in the Assamese month *fagoon* it continue to two days and locally called *deka deul* and when it is observed in the month of *chat* it is one day and called *burha deul* (Roychoudhury, 2011: 89). On the day of *bhar doul* the morning *prasanga* of women and male devotees begin from about 7 am while the priest undertakes ceremonial bathing of the idols and the *gayans* and *bayans* sing eight songs on the basis of eight *ragas* simultaneously after completion of morning *prasanga*. There are some rites and rituals related to *bhar doul*, viz – *phakuwa geet* (holi song based on holi festival), *Bhojan Vyavahara* (A drama of Madhavdeva) *ghosha-kirtan*, *ojhapali*, *yatra nat*.

The last day of *doul* festival is called *fakuwa* (*holi* – the festival of colour) and at Barpeta this day is called *sueri*. *sueri* begins from early morning on the next day of the *bhar doul*. In the evening time of this day the idols of God go for a journey to Kanariya Para⁸ When the idol of God has been taken to Kanariya Para by the devotees with a cultural procession, some devotees brought *heketa* (hurdle) from the open field and offered by the devotees to the idol of Lord Krishna. After completion of the ritual, the sedan of idol Krishna is taken back to the *kirtanghar*. The devotees on the side of Lakshmi obstruct the entry of Lord Krishna at main gate by fastening a bamboo turnpike horizontally and demand a tax. There a mock altercation take place

⁸ One of the small *satra* situated about 2 kms away from the southern side of Barpeta *Satra*.

between the devotees on the side of Lakshmi and those on the side of Lord Krishna, the bamboo bar is broken with a thud and the devotees on the side of Lakshmi make way for the entry of sedan of Lord Krishna. The sedan of Lord Krishna along with the devotees revolves seven rounds along the boundary of *kirtanghar* and after that the idols of Gods are return back to the *bhaj-ghar*. It is to be noted that all the Hindus of Barpeta and its surrounding areas smear *faku* on one another from morning time on that day and make merriment. Peoples from different parts of Assam and even outside Assam also come and participate in this festival every year.

Janmastami (birth anniversary of Lord Krishna): The specific date of the birth of Lord Krishna is called *janmastami*. The specific day is the eight day of the dark Moon in the month of *bhada* according to Assamese calendar (Sarma, 1995: 62). At Barpeta *satra*, *janmastami* is being observed in a *satriya* tradition. This festival according to *satriya* tradition begins with casual *prasanga*. On the day of *janmastami*, Morning Prayer and *bhatima* are performed as per practices followed at the time of morning *prasanga*. Other *prasanga* are same as daily *prasanga*, but on the occasion of *janmastami* performance of the *Nat-Dhemali* and *Janma-Yatra* (A drama, written by Gopal Aata) are mandatory. Now a day the drama is acted and recited only, but the songs of the drama sung by *gayan* and *bayan* on the basis of distinct *raga* (a melody of music) and *tala* (a rhythm in music or dance). Fasting is observed by the women folk on this day. Young girls of different age groups are seen to be very much interested in observing fast on this day

Smearing of clay is a festival observed in the morning on the next day of *janmastami*. It is also called *nandotsav*. This festival is started from 9 am in the morning on the court yard of *tupa*, where water and mustard oil sprinkled to make a paste of mud. The youth adolescent, young boys make merriment by smearing mud all over their bodies.

An important ritual of *nandotsav* is the *jata-karma* of newly born Sri Krishna (Nath, 2001: 188). The name giving ceremony is observed behind *guru-ashana* of *kirtanghar*. A person acts the role of saint Garg (An Astrologer). In the presence of two *adhikaras* and other devotees with *gayan* and *bayan* saint Garga begins the name giving ceremony. The women folk also sit on the two *varandas*. The whole atmosphere becomes festive with the beating of *khol*, singing songs by *gayan* and

bayan. The saint Garga keeps the name of Sri Krishna after going through the zodiac carefully.

Domahi (confluence of two months): *Bihu* is the main festival of Assam. In Assam it is also called *domahi* (confluence of two months). *Domahi* implies the conjunction of two months. It is the time at which the sun passes from one sign of zodiac to another. In lower Assam *domahi* is called *dahmi*. At Barpeta also it is called *dahmi*. At Barpeta *satra* two *domahis* are observed as *satriya* festivals. One is the *bahagar domahi (bahag bihu)* which falls on the last day of the month of Chat of preceding year. The other is the *maghor domahi (magh bihu)* which falls on the last day of the month of *puh* (Sarma, 1995: 63). In colloquial language of Barpeta these are called *boihagar dahmi* and *maghar dahmi* respectively.

Bahag Bihu is observed throughout Assam to welcome the Assamese New Year. This New Year festival is more or less observed by all the people of India. The socio-cultural life of the people of Barpeta centered round the *satra*. Therefore the *dahmi (bihu)* is strictly confined to *satriya* customs. *Baihagar dahmi (bahag bihu)* is observed for seven days. Therefore all these seven days, some special *prasangas* are observed by the different *bangsara* (dynasty). Some rites and rituals are observed at Barpeta *satra* on the occasion of *baihagar dahmi*. These are as follows –

On the previous day of the 1st *dahmi*, one more *ghosha* is mandatory and is recited in the regular *prasanga* at night where the chief of the *bangsara* briefly tells the congregation about how the coming *dahmi* is to be celebrated for seven days.

On the first day of *dahmi* the chief *deuri* is to arrange *naibedyas*⁹ at several places considered to be sacred inside the *satra* campus at dawn. This item is to be touched after beginning of the afternoon *prasanga*. This *prasanga* is started in between 2.30 pm to 3 pm with *ghosha-kirtan*. As per determination of the *satra* the cultural unit (*gayan, bayan, ojahpali, ghosha kirtaniya* etc.) is taking their ablation and distribute the *naibedyas* amongst themselves.

The *naimittika prasanga* continues from the first day to the sixth day of the *dahmi* inside the *kirtanghar* premise with alternation of different *ghosha* on different days.

On the first day of *dahmi* the women devotees recite one or two more *ghoshas* in their *prasanga* at southern veranda of the *kirtanghar*. It should be noted here that women are debarred from entering the *kirtanghar* and are allowed to perform their religious

⁹ *Naibedyas*: Oblations Containing Pulses, banana and betel nut.

duties by sitting on the Veranda of the *kirtanghar*. In the male dominated society, the religious rights of women are sought to be curtailed by such measures. Although reformists raise protest from time to time, the anti-women sentiment is so strong that this anachronic practice is still continuing.

The *prasanga* of male devotees is started inside the *kirtanghar* after conclusion of women devotees' *prasanga*. The *pathak* and others are sitting in U pattern in front of the *guru-ashan*. After finishing this *prasanga*, *pathak* goes to 1st room (Immediately back side of *guru-ashan*) of *kirtanghar* and sits on the allotted seat where he recites a stanza of *sanchipatiya* Bhagavata (The Bhagavata written on the bark of sanchi tree). The priest offers blessing to *pathak* and others after completion of morning *prasangas*. On the other hand simultaneously *sewar kitaniya* start their cultural item with *bargeets* in front of the *guru-ashan* and conclude it by *gurughata* (a musical prelude). Thus the morning shift *prasanga* is concluded. *Ghosh-kirtan* is started in room no. 06 of the *kirtanghar* at around 2.30 -3.00 pm as occasional *prasanga* of afternoon shift. When *kirtaniya's* item is over the *ojah-pali* begins their program (the occasional *prasanga* of afternoon shift are the same from first day to sixth day of *dahmi*).

The occasional *prasanga* of night shift commences at around 6 pm. This is also a cultural item where 8 to 10 or more artists of *gayan* and *bayan* participate.

At first *bayans* play *khol* with *gurughata* and *gayans* sing *bargeet*. Finally the *gayan* and *bayan* come to the room no. 3 by singing *bargeet*. After that they return again to the place where from they start to recite some verses from the *namghosha* (holy book) and prostrating themselves in devotion before God. Thus comes to conclusion of *sewaite* (dedicated) rituals of this are continuing up to 6th *damhi*.

The 1st day of *bahag* is the second day of *domahi* and is locally called *bar-dahmi*. From dawn, the *ghai-deuri*, *paladharis* (attendant) *kewalias* (celibates) and others busy themselves in different works in arranging ceremonial offerings on the raised platter, lightening of the earthen lamp etc. are completed as per tradition before 6 am. Women devotees congregate at the southern veranda of the *kirtanghar* like the previous day they perform the *prasangas* with the singing of one or two more *ghoshas*, after the performance of the female devotees, male devotees begin their performance inside the *kirtanghar* (occasional morning *prasanga* is same upto 6th *dahmi*). On the occasion of *bar dahmi* the *adhikar* and *deka adhikar* sit on their allotted seats inside the *kirtanghar*.

After the *prasangas* of morning shift, annual astrological forecasting is made on this day and it is locally called *bihu ganowa*. This forecasting is made twice-one-inside the *kirtanghar* and the other at the courtyard of the *math*.

Corit Tola (oration of experts from biographies of *Mahapurusa*) is one of the rituals related to *bahagar dahmi* which starts from 3rd *Bahag* and concludes on 6th *Bahag*. Old women devotees go to the different *bahas* (holy residences of unmarried devotees) and *than* (Holy place for *vaisnavas* to worship) nearby to hear the biographies of *mahapurushas* in religious procession singing *bat bulanir ghosha* (a kind of religious verse sung by devotees while walking). During the days of *dahmi* in *Bahag*, it is the practice of different *hatis* to stage religious dramas and *ankiya bhaona* (a kind of theatrical performance).

The 7th day of *Bahag* is an important day for the inhabitants of Barpeta. Three platters and three numbers of large vessels of brass metal are kept in different directions like North, South and Western side of the gate of *satra*. Secretaries, treasurers and some senior members of the *hati* sit on the carpet. Devotees of the 22 number of *hatis* come to the pre-determined place of recitation of holy songs in chorus in standing posture with cymbals and *nagaras* (a small kettle like drum) in their hands. Three groups of devotees perform their programs on three sides of the gateway as well as in front of the *kirtanghar* simultaneously and it is locally known as *thiyanam* (recitation of holy songs in chorus in standing posture). This program comes to an end around 8 pm. After this one or two rituals are observed on the courtyard of *math*. With this the rituals accompanying the *bahagar dahmi* are completed. Jaggery and anise seed is the main offerings of this *thiyanam*. It is the practice of the people to take cooked mixture of different vegetables during these days known as *saat-saak* (seven vegetables), although the number of vegetables may be more than seven.

Another *bihu* named *bhogali bihu* or *Maghor domahi* is also observed in two different ways in Assam, one is *satra* centric and the other is folk centric “The neo-*vaisnavite* religion of Assam has brought about many changes in the socio-cultural life of Assam. Formerly, young and old irrespective of sex rejoiced by feasting on the *uruka* night (the night before *Maghar domahi*) and in the morning next day, worshiping *meji*. After being initiated to *vaisnava* religion, when monotheism is practiced, fire worshiping has been abandoned. In some places, the devotees after bathing and warming themselves in fire go to the *namghar* or *kirtanghar* to perform *nam-prasangas*” (Gogoi, 1990: 52)

Some senior devotees and *sewait bangsharas* tell that *Maghar dahmi* has been observed in full *satriya* tradition at the time when the *satra* was first established. *Magh bihu* is observed in the *satra* for five days from *sankranti* to 4th day of the month *Magh*.

Occasional *prasangas* are begun from the morning of the last day of the month of *Puh* (January 14), (Gogoi, 1990: 60). The *paladhara* beats the drum the morning song and prayer are performed. At occasional *prasangas* one song/ *Raga* is additionally sung. *Pathak* or Chief *Deuri* sings the morning song. After this the women devotees perform their *prasangas* on the southern *varanda* of *kirtanghar*. At this time they additionally sing two or more *ghoshas*. The male devotees begin their morning *prasangas* after the women devotee's *prasanga*. The *pathak* recites four *ghoshas* and then again recite four *slokas* from the Gita. After this *gayan bayan* start their *gurughata* in front of the *guru-ashana* and after this the drum beating starts. Simultaneously conch is blown and bell is sounded inside the *manikut*. As soon as the final stroke falls on the drum, the *gayan* and *bayan* sing songs.

On the first day of the month of *Magh* a platter is ceremonially kept in the first room of the *kirtanghar*. The *adhikara* recites the Gita and then four betel nuts along with betel leaves are distributed among the devotees present. Those devotees who participate as audience during the recitation of the Gita can leave their places only when the pedestal where the Gita was kept is removed from its place.

Other Kirtan: Apart from the three *kirtan*, there are other *vaisnavite* saints like Narayan Das Thakur Ata, Barbishnu Ata, Bhawanipuriya Gopal Ata and Badula Padma Ata whose death anniversaries are also observed as one day function in the *satra* premises. Besides the other *vaisnavite* saints such as Keshab charan Ata, Sriram Ata, Hari Har Ata and Beherua Bishnu Ata whose death anniversaries are also observed as *kirtan* in a small way (Misra, 2010: 223).

d) Other Satras of Barpeta: Great saints like Madhavdeva, Damodaradeva and Harideva and others etc. established a numbers of *satras* at Barpeta (Adhikary, 2010: 19). These *satras* are considered as religeo-cultural institutions or monasteries that

পৰ্ব, তিথ আদিৰ তালিকা আৰু সময়পূৰ্ণ

- ১। বহাগৰ দেমাহি (বহাগবিহ)- চ'ত মাহৰ সংক্ৰান্তিৰ পৰা -
বহাগ মাহৰ ৬ তাৰিখলৈ।
 - ২। শ্ৰীশ্ৰীমথুৰা দাস বুঢ়া আতাৰ- (আবিৰ্ভাৱ)- জ্যৈষ্ঠ মাহৰ-
শুক্লা দশমী তিথি।
 - ৩। শ্ৰীশ্ৰীমাধৱ দেৱৰ জন্ম (আবিৰ্ভাৱ)- জ্যৈষ্ঠ মাহৰ কৃষ্ণা প্ৰতিপদ।
 - ৪। ভাটোকুছি ৩ কেশৱ চৰণ আতাৰ- (তিৰোভাৱ) আহাৰ মাহৰ-
কৃষ্ণা চতুৰ্থী তিথি।
 - ৫। শ্ৰীশ্ৰী শঙ্কৰ দেৱৰ (কীৰ্ত্তন)- ভাদ মাহৰ শুক্লা দ্বিতীয়া তিথি।
 - ৬। শ্ৰীশ্ৰীমাধৱ দেৱৰ (কীৰ্ত্তন) ভাদ মাহৰ কৃষ্ণা পঞ্চমী তিথি।
 - ৭। শ্ৰীকৃষ্ণৰ জন্মাষ্টমী- ভাদ মাহৰ কৃষ্ণা অষ্টমী তিথি।
 - ৮। বদুলা পদ্ম আতাৰ (কীৰ্ত্তন) ভাদ মাহৰ শুক্লা একাদশী তিথি।
 - ৯। শ্ৰীশ্ৰী শঙ্কৰ দেৱৰ জন্ম (আবিৰ্ভাৱ)- আহিন মাহৰ শুক্লা-
দশমী তিথি।
 - ১০। শ্ৰীশ্ৰীমথুৰা দাস বুঢ়া আতাৰ- (কীৰ্ত্তন)- আহিন মাহৰ
কৃষ্ণা চতুৰ্থী তিথি।
 - ১১। কাৱৈমাৰী বুঢ়া ৩ বলৰাম আতাৰ (তিৰোভাৱ)- কাতি মাহৰ
শুক্লা মহোদশী তিথি।
 - ১২। নাৰায়ন দাস ঠাকুৰ আতাৰ (কীৰ্ত্তন)- পুহ মাহৰ কৃষ্ণা-
পঞ্চমী তিথি।
 - ১৩। মাঘৰ দেমাহি (মাঘবিহ)- পুহ মাহৰ সংক্ৰান্তিৰ পৰা
৪ মাঘলৈ।
 - ১৪। শ্ৰীৰাম আতাৰ (আবিৰ্ভাৱ)- মাঘ নাইবা ফাগুন মাঘী
পূৰ্ণিমা তিথি।
 - ১৫। দক্ষিণ কুলিয়া বৰবিষ্ণু আতাৰ (কীৰ্ত্তন)- ফাগুন মাহৰ-
শুক্লা দ্বিতীয়া তিথি।
 - ১৬। শ্ৰীকৃষ্ণৰ দৌল উৎসৱ- নক্ষত্ৰ গণনা মতে ফাগুন
বা চ'ত মাহৰ পূৰ্ণিমা।
 - ১৭। হৰি চৰণ আতাৰ (তিৰোভাৱ)- চ'ত মাহৰ অমাবস্যা।
- ‘বৰপেটা সত্ৰৰ কাৰ্য্যালয়’

Figure 16: List of various festivals observed in Barpeta *satra*



Figure 17: First day of *doul* festival, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 18: Common people, playing *holi*



Figure 19: *Holi* in Barpeta *satra*



Figure 20: *Pachati* festival, Barpeta satra



Figure 21: Occasional prayer service in *kirtan* festival Barpeta satra



Figure 22: Religious procession on the day of *kirtan* festival



Figure 23: *Karbhar*



Figure 24: Devotees from different dynasties involve in preparing *prasada* in *kirtan*



Figure 25: Daily prayer by *gayan-bayan* inside the *kirtanghar*



Figure 26: Map of Barpeta satra and surrounding satras

had a deep impact on the social, political, economy etc. of the region (Neog, 1965: 9). Although these *satras* were established for the propagation of *vaisnavite* faith, but with passage of time these institutions gradually transformed themselves into open universities to become all embracing socio-cultural centers covering numerous subject including education, music, dance, sculpture, drama, fine-art, ivory-works etc. .

The other *satras* of Barpeta are described below-

Patbaushi Satra: After the entry into Koch-Kamrup Sankaradeva and his followers had changed their abode several times and ultimately they went to Baralchung or Baraljar later known as Patbaushi (Gurulila – 24) where Sankardeva finally settled and established a *satra* there. From this *satra* Sankardeva spread his faith, literature, music, art-forms, culture and work-culture to their fullest form (Nath, 2001: 40). Here he spent 14 to 15 years (Guru Charit) of his life with remarkable achievement including completion of the *Kirtan-Ghosha* and composition of 20 numbers of invaluable *bargeets* (Nath, 2001: 43). Some important items used by him and *sanchipat puthis* are preserved here. This *satra* is located about 2 KM south of Barpeta *satra*.

Sundaridia Satra: This *satra* was established by Sri Madhavadeva after leaving Patbaushi *satra* (Guru Charit – 195). The first *Adhikar* of Barpeta *Satra* Mathura Das Burha Aata initially come to this *Satra* and became a disciple of Madhavdeva. From this place Paal Nam (prayer sessions continued over a long period by groups in turn) and Beer Nam was created by Madhavadeva. Large number of items used by Madhavdeva including *Sanchipat- puthis* is preserved here. It is located about 2 kms. North from Barpeta *satra*.

Ganakkuchi Satra: Ganakkuchi *satra* was the 2 no. *Satra* established by Madhavdeva. Perhaps it was established in the year 1550 (Neog, 2006: 81). When Sankardeva was at Patbaushi *Satra* Madhavdeva created most of his literature. Even he composed 191 No. of *Bargeet* on the direction of Sankardeva (Lekhuru, 1952 reprint 1964: 178) in this *satra*. While coming to this place Madhavdeva resided in a newly constructed house of Ganakkuchi, it came to be known as Ganakkuchi *satra*. Some items like *Sanchipaat puthi* and others used by Madhavdeva are well preserved here. It is located about 1 KM south from Barpeta *satra*.

Janiya Satra: This is one of the famous centers of neo-*vaisnavism* of this region (Nath, 2001: 57). There are two *satras* at Janiya- Sri Narayan Das Thakur Ata *satra* and Purushottam Thakur Ata *satra*. With reference it is known that Madhavadeva went to Janiya at least three times in a year with Sri Ram Ata. Purushottam Thakur was the grandson of Sankaradeva. This *satra* is located at a distance of 8 kms. from Barpeta *satra*.

Baradi Satra: This *satra* was established by Madhavadeva. He stayed here for a very short period. The Sankarite culture spread far and wide from Baradi making it a center for learning. This *satra* is located about 2kms.east of Barpeta *satra*. This *satra* is managed by local committee (Lekharu, 1952 reprint 1964: 182).

Bamuna Satra: This *satra* is situated 4 kms.towards the north east of Barpeta *satra*. It is said that there were a few Brahmin families at this place and that is why this place is called Bamuna (Raychoudhury, 2012: 57). The founder of this *satra* is Daityari Thakur who wrote Sri Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva Chorit. This *satra* was established in the year 1625 (Nath, 2001: 59). Bamuna is the first and only *satra* established by him. There are the images of Radha Krishna well preserved here in the *satra*.

e) Management System of Barpeta Satra: Management system of Barpeta *satra* has under-gone considerable changes over time. Hence, for the purpose of discussion the administrative system has been divided into 1) Old management system and 2) New Management System.

Old Management system: At the time of establishment of *satras*, there was no such office of the *adhikara* (religious head of the *satra*). During the time of Madhvadeva, the *satra* movement spread far and wide both in the Ahom Kingdom and the Koch kingdom. The number of disciple also multiplied. According to Gurucharita, at Barpetta *satra* alone, there were more than thirty disciples (Nath, 2001: 122). Mathuradas Burha Ata divided the activities of the *satra* into fourteen *prasangas* and assigned them among different faithful devotees. He also introduced the system of attendant to the important devotees. He also introduced the system of religious tax among the devotees.

New Management system: The rules and regulations came into existence in written form in 1935. Before that, there were no written regulations. So, this period can be divided into- a) Period before implementation of written laws b) Period after implementation of written laws.

Period before implementation of written laws: It was Madhavadeva who introduced democratic system in the administration of the *satra*. The first *adhikara* of the *satra* was Mathuradas Burha Ata. He appointed a number of officers from among his disciples in order to smoothen the functions of the *satra* (Raychoudhry, 2012: 121). These officers are still relevant. These officers are described below-

Bhagavati: The main book of *vaisnavite* religion is the Bhagavata Purana and it was found necessary that the work in its original form should be recited and expounded repeatedly in a *satra* (Neog 335 cited in Vamsigopala Devar Charita 807). Madhavdeva appointed a Brahman named Karnapur as a Bhagavati at Barpeta *satra* (Nath, 2001: 124). From Mathuradas Burha Aata's times this post is getting importance at Barpeta *satra*.

Pathak: The reader of Assamese religious books is known as *pathak*. This portfolio was introduced for the first time by Madhavdeva at Sundaridiya *satra*. He appointed Yadumanideva alias Adhalia as *pathak* at Sundaridiya *satra* (Lekharu, 1952 reprint 1964: 310) and was succeeded to that office by Ramacarana Thakur.

Gayan and Bayan: Music is the part and parcel of *satra* institution. So *gayan* and *bayan* are getting importance in the *satras* till now. At Barpeta *satra* also this type of portfolios were introduced. Mathuradas Burha Aata accommodated the Gayans and Bayans to stay at two separate *hatis* (Nath, 2001: 125). From that time the *gayans* and *bayans* are appointed from the specific *hatis*. Some of this famous *gayans* and *bayans* of Barpeta are – Bhima Bayan, Kamala Gayan and Jagannath Gayan.

Sutradhara: The head of the dance performer of *satra* is called *sutradhara* and the others are called *natuwa*. At Barpeta *satra* the *sutradhara* and *natuwas* are performing dance and drama from Madhavdeva's time (Nath, 2001: 125). At Barpeta *satra* the role of *sutradhara*, the Chief *natuwa*, became confined to one or more families from the time of Mathuradas Burha Aat. The *natuwas* also used to make effigies required for such representations (Lekharu, 1952: 355).

Deuri: One of the most important officials of Barpeta *satra* is the *deuri* or *bilaniya*.

They distribute the *prasadas* (offerings made by man for the propitiation of God)) after the religious festivals of the *satra*. Mathuradas Burha Aata engaged the Chief *Deuri* of Barpeta *satra* in the management of the lamp to be lighted every evening (Mahanta, 2004: 115).

Kirtaniya or Ojha-Pali: Sankardeva's *Kirtan Ghosha* are performed by a chorus known as *kirtaniya* or *ojha-Pali*¹⁰ (Nath, 2001: 125) Mathuradas Burha Aata and his eighteen weaver companions were *ojha-pali* singers, singing non-neo vaisnavite songs before their ordination. After their conversion they applied their musical art to neo-*vaisnava* performances, and their group became known as *kirtaniya* (group of *Kirtana* singers) (Neog, 1965 reprint 2008: 337). One man named Laksmana was the *daina-pali*¹¹ and Mathuradas worked as an ordinary *pali* (Neog, 1965: 337 cited in Lekharu ed: 351- 512).

Bharali: when general store-houses were to be maintained in the *satras*, *bharali* (store keeper) were appointed. According to *Katha Guru Charita*, Madhavdeva gave the responsibility of the store of Barpeta to a person named, Manpur (Lekharu, 1952: 412). From the time Mathuradas one permanent store house was constructed and from that time the store house of Barpeta *satra* is working. The number of storekeepers was also increased. They were in charge all materials that have to be stored for a time and then given for consumption (Nath, 2001: 126).

Lakhak: This was an important function. The writers collected the manuscripts of different religious books and systematically wrote them down in *sanchi* leaves (Neog, 1965: 339).

Majumdar: The duty of the *majumdar* is to maintain all accounts of income and expenditure of the *satra*. Mathuradas Burha Aata appointed Sivananda as *mazumdar* (registrar) at Barpeta *satra* (Mahanta, 2004 in Goswami ed 2004: 116). His duty was to keep the accounts and issue general orders in the name of the *samuha* (Das, 2010: 149).

Hatimata: A *hatimalta*'s duty is to summon the clerics in the *hatis* to prayer services or to some meeting for discussing things of general import. At present day they

¹⁰ Neog in his SNBT quoted that "Oja is the master musician or instructor of music in the Satras" 337.

¹¹ *Daina-Pali*: the main supporting singer and dancer of an *Ojha Pali* chorus very often marked by jest

arrange the furniture of the *satra*. So they are also known as *barbhella* at Barpeta *satra*. For this purpose they are paid now a day.

Joganiar: During festivals like *doul*, *kirtan* etc, the number of pilgrims rises abnormally. The *satra* takes upon itself the responsibility of providing rations like rice, mustered oil, daal etc to such pilgrims. Joganiyars were appointed to distribute rations to such pilgrims (Nath, 2001: 60). This system is still continuing.

Paladhariya: *Paladhariyas* were those persons who keep watch over the property of the *satra* day and night. Formerly, it was a wholly honourary duty (Pathak, 1969: 54). Now arrangements are made to pay money to such persons.

Bora: *Boras* are officials who supervise distribution of *prasada* of the *satra* among the devotees. They also collect taxes from the devotees for the *satra*. (Nath, 2001: 60).

Burha Bhakat: The honour of conferring the epithet *burhabhakat* is bestowed upon a very senior and experienced devotee who has sufficient influence among the devotees. Such honour is bestowed upon only bachelor devotees (Nath, 2001: 61).

Dhan Bharali: *Dhan Bharalis* are appointed in different *hatis* to control and operate the *hati* Bank. The *hati* bank was an ingenious device evolved by Mathuradas Burha Ata. Every *hati* has its own bank from which the people of the *hati* can take loans at nominal rates of interest (Nath, 2001: 61).

Period after the implementation of written Laws: In 1935, written laws were enacted in order to systematize the functions of Barpeta *satra* and it is known as *satrar sangbidhan* (constitution of *satra*).

Satrar Sangbidhan (constitution of *satra*): It was void through the magistrate of Assam valley District dated 19-08-1935 to manage the Satra institute. Responsibility and works are remaining same, but amount/ fund and banking policies are changed time to time.

“Chapter I

Unit I

1. **Samuh:** The constitution of voter is calling ‘Samuh’.
2. **Mahapurushia** : The devotees and followers of vaishnavate faith of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev is call “Mahapurushia”

3. Any person, whose father was a Mahapurushia, he remain a Mahapurushia until and unless he change his religion. Similarly a person is a Mahapurushia but his father is not Mahapurushia, he can't be Mahapurushia until and unless he takes the "Naam" of Mahapurushia.
4. **'Kar'**: (The Tax) All the member give annual fees to central treasury is called 'Kar'. Managing committee has rights to decide the annual fees rate.
5. **'Dar'**: if any person break the rule of Mahapurushia follows, he would be punished and fined for his activity. The fine imposed is call "Dar".
6. **'Bhag'**: The all tax payer of Satra give donation or fees to Satra, that is called "Bhag". All members have to give 'Bhag' two times in a year. Once in the time of Kirtan and once in the time of Deul Mohotsav.
7. Process to take "Bhag": all the Mahapurushia people can take 'Bhag' in the Satra. They have to pay nominal admission fees to Managing committee. Majumder (The accountant) give receipt to the person as a member of the Satra as well as he is eligible for giving vote on Satra election. If someone missed or not paying the annual fees he loses his 'Bhag'. The said person can again take the 'Bhag' with repay all his dues with a new admission fees.
8. **'Bhag'** will be followed hierarchy of family. After death of father /husband, 'Bhag' will continue with the Son or wife of the person. Any person/ member of the family can take 'Bhag'.
9. **'Pala'**: All the members are responsible to do work in the Satra or Satra premises. That responsibility is call "Pala". The responsibility to do on "Pala's are follow
 - i) Cleaning of Kirtan Ghar Sotal (Field)
 - ii) Collection of flower and Tulasi for daily prayer.
 - iii) Beating of Drum (Doba) and bell
 - iv) Collecting of Bokul for daily uses.
 - v) Preserve of all goods, which are giving by people on the name of Satra
 - vi) Give security to Satra surrounding (day and night)
10. If someone fail to do above 'Pala' or fail to give fees as decide, he will discard as a member of the Satra. The Member of the Satra working (managing) Committees and office bearer responsibility. The responsibility of the Managing Committee is to manage Satras day to day activities and

administrating all Satra related works. Below are the list of office bearer and responsibility of each.

- i) **President** (always Burha Satria will be president)
- ii) **Secretary:** he will be the main responsible person for all administrative work.
- iii) **Register** : responsible for taking care of membership
- iv) **Majumder** : responsible for maintaining daily account.
- v) **Ghai Bharali:** the treasurer, who is responsible for all goods of Satra.
- vi) **Burha Satria:** he is the chief guru or administrator of the Satra.
- vii) **Deka Satria** : assistant to Burha Satria and responsible for all activities in absence of Burha Satria
- viii) **Chaul Bharali:** he is responsible for maintain rice which are collecting from the member of the Satra.
- ix) **Choru Bharali:** he is responsible for maintaining the teracota utensil of the Satra.
- x) **Mass Bharali:** he is responsible for collecting fish and distribute it in between the pilgrimage (yatri)
- xi) **Hishap rakshak:** he is the chief accountant of the Satra. Accountant is not a professional qualified accountant. He is nominated by the executive member of the committee.

Chapter II

Rights of disciple and works

Unit II

1. All the units of Satra (Hati) are the owner of the Satra and they are the main deciding authority to Satra.
2. For Managing the Satra there will be a Managing Committee.
3. All member of the Satra elected Deka and Burha Satria as well as Managing Committee members.
4. All people have the rights to terminate of Satria and member of the Managing Committee. If they found any illegal activity of any member or Satria and if they are not capable to handle his responsibility due to age factor or so on.

Unit III

1. All member have rights to give vote

2. All Mahapurushia (above the age of 18 years) men and women will be member and voter of the Satra.
3. Member has no residential barrier but a voter should be reside within Barpeta municipal board.
4. If someone reside outside of Satra barrier but they want to keep membership of the Satra they have to follow the following criteria.
 - i) He or she have to pay “Kar”
 - ii) He/she have to pay “Dar”
 - iii) He have to work something for the Satra Exception:
 - a) All the ‘Kowarta’ community who supply annual fish to Satra, if they don’t have membership, still they have rights to vote.
 - b) All the ‘Hira’ community people can be member with the name of their community.

Unit IV

Preparation of voter List:

1. All voter list will be prepared on the form provided by District Judge appointed commissioner (Now election commissioner)
2. On the time General election of the Managing Committee, Deka and Burha Satria, voter list be re-consider/re-scan. Need to give notice in Kirtan Ghar and Assamese newspaper before 2 month. if someone have any objection, that can be rectified within that period.
3. There will be a register book for voter and name should be ascending order of alphabet. Every constituency have separate register book. In every register have separate coloum for men and women.

Unit V

Membership: as per unit III

Unit VI

If someone declined any of rules of Unit III, their membership will be terminated.

Unit VII

Procedure of election

1. For betterment of election, Satra would be divided in some constituency.
2. Every constituency have a polling booth with an election polling office in presence of agent of every contestant.
3. Male people vote can be taken in a single day
4. Female vote can be taken on single day with male or may be taken separately.
5. If possible for female voter will be conducted by female polling officer and contestant agent also is a female.
6. Male & female vote can be taken in vote-box. (It was implemented by order from District Judge in 5th January , 1977, before that male vote taken in box and women vote taken openly).

Chapter 3

Election of Burha Satria and Deka Satria and their discontinuity

Unit VIII

1. Burha Satria and Deka Satria will be elected by general election, but there should be minimum 500 votes to be poll.
2. If Burha Satria post laying vacant, than Managing Committee approach District Judge(now election commission officer) for election and election commission fixed a date for general election.
3. Election date should be published in Assam gadget, Assamese newspaper and locality.
4. Publication should be before 21 days of general election date.
5. Election can't be cancel showing issue of publishing.
6. If Deka Satria post is laying vacant, Managing Committee can fixed a date for general election without informing District Judge (Election commission) and publish the date in all applicable manner.

Unit IX

Discontinuity of Deka and Burha Satria

1. At least minimum 300 voters can approach Managing Committee with written application for dismiss of a Burha or Deka Satria , reasoning their

bad/ill character, physical or mental situation/ stability to continue their responsibility.

2. Managing Committee asked all the respective member of the Committee before 15 days and call for an emergency meeting for voters approach. If Satria have to say something about allegation about him, he get scope to speak before them. If 2/3 of the member of Managing Committee agrees with allegation against Satria and its proof as a truth, then it will produce before “‘Samuh’”. If there would be minimum 750 voters and if they vote against Satria, than Managing Committee will consider the Satria as dismissed. After that Managing Committee have to inform District Judge (EC) about the situation. A general election would be happen for new selection of Satria, but if ‘Samuh’ not found any guilty about Satria and not dismiss them, they can be lifelong on their position.

Chapter 4

Managing Committee

Unit X

1. Duty of Satra is for religious activity only and that duty will be managing by 28 representatives, who are elected by the people of ‘Samuh’. Burha Satria and Deka Satria will be president and vice-president of the Committee respectively

Unit XI

Qualification of the member of Managing Committee

1. Every voter can be member of the Committee if they are elected by voters.

Unit XII

1. Election of the member of the Managing Committee : on the time of election for the member of Managing Committee will being elected as per guidance of election commissioner and elected from all cast to maintain equality. The entire devotee also wishes that representative should be from all community.
2. If a member position is lying vacant, than that post will be filling up by re-election.

Unit XIII

1. If a member of Managing Committee death on his tenor, if the member loses his voting power or if he resigns from the said post, than that post will be vacant.
2. If a member absent in 6th general meeting continuously and not taken any written approval from president, than that member will lose his post and a re-election will be happen on his post.

Unit XIV

Term of a Managing Committee is 3 years. After completion of terms, there will be election again as per Unit XII

Unit XV

Koram of Managing Committee and time for general meeting.

1. If 1/3 of member attend than they can continue their duty.
2. Every 15 days , in a specific time there will be a general meeting
3. If emergency than body meeting can be call with a 24 hour notice.

Unit XVI

Managing Committee and member of office bearer.

1. Managing Committee will be select one secretary, one assistant secretary, one register , one accountant , one treasurer from the member. Burha and Dekha Satria will be president and vice-president respectively.
2. On the process of office bearer selection: if both sides have equal vote, than president can't be vote either side. On that condition, conclusion will be getting through toss. (as per District Judge guidance, 20th April, 1977)
3. Every year in general meeting they will appoint an auditor for auditing the entire accounts. The auditor can't be a member of Managing Committee

Unit XVII

Responsibility of Managing Committee

1. Managing Committee will be managed all the responsibility and administration of the Satra in ideal manner.

2. They will arrange fund for any religious activity
3. They will collect the earnings of Satra.
4. They will be trying to preserve all the property of Satra as well as try to recover any lost item or property. They will represent 'Samuh' in any religious work and cases.
5. They will accounting the fund and earnings of Satra and deposit the same in any bank, who is recognise under Reserve bank of India or in post office.
6. If a Committee is irresponsible and they spend the fund in any illegal or unauthorized work, than the whole Committee will be responsible for the same. On that prospect individual also responsible for the same.
7. If the term of the Committee ends, the Committee will be responsible to make new Committee and after that dissolve the old Committee.
8. If any position lying vacant, than they will arrange a re-election for that post.
9. The Committee will be present a Budget of earn and expanses in the beginning of the year. General body can add or remove some point with member vote. For any emergency expense, the Committee can present a small Budget in front of general body before 15 days of expense. Majority of voter can accept or reject the same.
10. There need to give 15 days' notice before presenting annual Budget and 7 days required for any sub Budget. If anything not written on accepted Budget, than they can't spend anything.

Unit XVIII

Rights of Managing Committee

1. Managing Committee can appoint any person for religious activity and they can restricted any person if found guilty.
2. They can use stamp of Satra in any work related to Satra.
3. They can decide the amount of tax, admission fees for 'Bhag' quantity of rice for 'Bhag' and they have rights to fixed price of fish which gives by kowarta (a cast)
4. Responsible for maintaining property of Satra.
5. They can do any legal activity in favour of Satra and Bhakat. The expenditure will bear by Satra.

6. They can't be spending any amount if there is no involvement of Satra or interest of Satra. All the expenditure Budget should be accepted by vote.
7. They can spend amount for any festival with due permission from Bhakat.

Unit XIX

Economy and fund of Satra.

Amount collect for 'Kar' (tax), 'Dar' and 'Pala' should be deposit in the hand of Majumder. Rice, Saru, and Fish, all the goods need to be deposit in the hand of Bharali. For other purpose amount should be deposit by accountant. Amount collect on prayer will be collected by Ghai Deuri. On the time of deposited collector give a receipt to depositor. Everyday collection will be deposit to Majumder. Majumder will maintain ledger and cashbook. Later on he will show the details to accountant. If accountant find all the ledger and cash book ok, than he sign on the ledger and cash book. Accountant will be maintaining various account books for various activities. Accountant will be responsible for showing all voucher and receipt to auditor. Accountant will deposit the entire amount in bank passbook except emergency fund, which was passing on Budget.

Unit XX

Fund of Satra.

Treasurer can't keep more than Rs. 200 in Satra treasury. He can deposit up to RS. 2000 in his personal postal savings accounts for Satra. He has to give Rs.500 security deposit for the same. Other amount should be deposit in any nationalise bank under Reserve Bank of India guidelines. President and two other members will be authorising for withdrawal deposited amount. Gold, silver and any other valuable goods would be kept in the safety vault of Satra. Ornaments for daily use would be kept open.

Unit XXI

Expenditure

will be submitting and produce Budget in front of Managing Committee .Budget for next year would be prepared before Magh month. Budget would be produced by Managing Committee in general meeting. Expenditure would be divided as per Budget; nobody can take out any amount from treasury except accountant. As per

Managing Committee, they will elect 2 member along with president for authorising to withdraw amount from saving bank. Any person who expense any amount as per Budget and authorise by Managing Committee, he have to give all details to accountant without fail. In every month end treasurer and accountant would give detail about accounts in front of Managing Committee and they authorise the same.

Unit XXII

Accounts Audit

Auditor who has appointed by Managing Committee will be auditing all account within the year. He will give a audit report to secretary and secretary will be produce it in front of Managing Committee. In every 3 years, Satra will be request to government for auditing the fund of Satra. If a govt. auditor found anything wrong on audit report, he will submit the same to District Judge and Judge will ask clarification from Managing Committee.

Unit XXIII

Responsibility of office bearer

1. President will be head of every meeting of Managing Committee. In any meeting if there arise some dispute and raise up to vote and vote number is equal to each party than president have rights to give his vote to any party. Assistant President: he will be responsible for every work in absence of president including act as a head of the organisation. If both president and assistant president are absence, than member can select one from them to lead that days meeting.
2. Secretary would note all the procedure and works of Satra and every noted document should have sign of president.
3. He can accept and keep all the application, except application for re-voting. Secretary has rights to answer all those application and letter. If the matter is serious than he can discuss the same with the member. (it is mandatory that all application/letter should be address to president)
4. Secretary produces audit report in general meeting.
5. Register: Voter list would be in the hand of register. He will accept application for voter registration and evaluate the criteria of the voter and if found match the criteria, then register put the name of applicant name in voter register. If he

found any miss-match on that he will produce it in front of Managing Committee and Managing committees decision would be consider as a final decision. On the time of voter registration application, they have to pin up certificate of 'Bhag' or tax payer certificate (any of them). Receipt will be return back after voter registration. Register would checked if they have any due of tax, if they have any due than have to pay tax before registration.

Unit XXIV

Subject to religious activity

All the religious activity or function will maintain tradition and continue as per traditional way.

Unit XXV

If any person fined anything wrong on religious activity and that rule not beneficial for Satra, he would be question in front of Managing Committee. If Managing Committee find that rights but not able to justify or do any conclusion, then they can make appeal in front of District Judge. District Judge then supervise the matter and give Judgement on that. After Mathura Das Burha Ata, the selection of Satria have made through by raising hand in favour of some one. After 1935, that was done through giving vote in ballot box”

(<https://barpetasatra.org/satra-information/constitution-of-barpeta-satra/>).

f) Landed property of the Satra: Barpeta *satra* possesses lots of agricultural land and *beels* (lakes). These are auctioned every year. All lands belonging to the *satra* are *nisfkhiraj* (half rent) land. The total amount of land is 1804 *bighas* and 5 *lechas* while there are 648 *bighas* of land in the *beel*. The *satra* collects land revenue from the *rayatas* (tenant). However due to half hearted measures adopted by the *satra* authority, revenue collection is never up to expectation. There is large scale area in the collection of land revenue sometimes extending to even 48 years¹². Following areas of land are in the name of Barpeta *satra*-

¹² Proper documents are collected from Barpeta *Satra*.

Table: 5.1: Land of Barpeta Satra from where revenue is collected

Sl. No	Places	Amount of Land		
		<i>Bigha</i>	<i>Katha</i>	<i>Lecha</i>
1.	Barpeta Town	1027	4	09
2.	Baradi Satra	15	4	09
3.	Jati Gaon	22	3	10
4.	Madlijhar	20	2	12
5.	Khablar Bhitha	120	3	05
6.	North Bajali	35	-	19
7.	East Bajali	140	1	08
8.	Mandia	200	-	05
9.	Gopalpur	180	3	18
10.	No 3 Bardalani	23	4	09
11.	Ag Mandia	15	1	12
12.	Guwahati Panbajar	-	1	12
13.	Bhelengi Beel (lake)	648	-	-

g) Financial position of the Satra: The *satra* cannot run without adequate source of finance. The income of Barpeta *satra* comes from the following sources-

- i. Land belonging to *Satra*
- ii. Fisheries
- iii. River landing place
- iv. Offerings of money by the devotees & others
- v. Income during different festivals
- vi. House rent
- vii. Purchase of share
- viii. Sales of books
- ix. Sales of articles
- x. Penalties etc.

Major expenditure of the *Satra* consists of the following items

1. Bihu
2. Tithi of Ata Purusha (Death anniversaries)
3. Janmastami
4. Kirtan
5. Doulotsav
6. Printing
7. Electricity
8. Salaries of employees
9. Repairing
10. Office maintenance cost
11. Expenses on election
12. Up keeping of birds and animals
13. Law suits
14. Land rent
15. Miscellaneous

The total amount of income of the *satra* during 2014-15 was 19, 40,373.00. Total amount of expenditure during the same year was 19, 38, and 650.00. It appears that the *satra* has a little amount surplus. (Source- published accounts of the *satra*)

Moreover the *satra* has a total deposit of money in banks and post offices as under-

S/B Account-	641409.15
Fixed deposit-	153602.00
K V P-	170000.00

Total	Rs. 3888111.15

h) Satra centric market: There is a market of Barpeta *satra* entitled “Thakur Bazar” which has been surviving for the last 120 years. The market is located within the *satra* premises. There are several shops within the premises, which mainly cater to the needs of the pilgrims who visit the *satra*. These shops sell articles, like mustered oil, salt, earthen wicks, rice, sugar, fruits, incense, wick stand etc. Apart from these goods, all the necessary goods for a household are also found here. A great fair is held every year on the occasion of *doulotsav* outside the *satra* premises.

Barpeta *satra* is one of the biggest *satras* of Assam established at Barpeta by Madhabdeva, the chief disciple and apostle of Sankardeva with proper help from

Mathuradas Burha Ata. From the time of construction till completion and it became the center for spiritual upliftment of the devotees. Side by side arrangements were made for practicing art, culture, dance, drama and a host of other activities. *satra* complex is a well defined and dignified structure. One unique feature of Barpeta *satra* is that it is democratically managed. Rules and regulations for management of the *satra* came into existence. A number of functionaries also had been created for smooth running of the *kirtanghar* and it is continuing till date. Barpeta *satra* has a constitution of its own. *Adhikara* and *deka adhikara* are periodically elected by the voters who possess share in the *kirtanghar*. There shall be managing committee, who are directly elected by *samuha*. *Adhikara* and *deka adhikara* are the president and vice-president of the committee respectively. The managing committee can take action against the *adhikara* and *deka adhikara*. Barpeta *satra* is rich in every aspect, like- religious, social, economic and cultural. Apart from the religious aspect, Barpeta *satra* has tremendously influenced the social and cultural lives of the people. It has taught people to be love all castes and creed and behave all people equally. During the long courses of its existence, Barpeta *satra* has undergone various changes in all fields. Such changes are noticeable in structure, organization, management and so forth. Though the *satra* is maintaining its traditional character in religious activities very important changes have taken place in the management of the *satra*. It is noticed that there are some disregarded has developed for the *satra* among some young generations due to impact of modernity against at values and traditions. Changes are of course rapidly taking place in the culture, the way of life etc. but there is another side that some young stars are whole heartedly obeying this culture. Barpeta is a place of trade and commerce but now some people have done other services also. The participants in traditional functions of the *satra* say that when the older generation will die, the *satriya* culture which was introduced by Sankardeva and Madhabdeva will be vanished. As a result there will be a lack of skilled artists in various art forms in the *satra*. The schedule caste had no access to the *kirtanghar* run with cosmopolitan principles and liberal ideas. But due to the efforts of some liberal minded persons and public organizations, the *satra* authority granted permission to all the Hindu people to enter the *satra*. From that time the *satra* is running according to the principle. Till date females have been debarred from entering the *kirtanghar*. It is known that, women were given due importance in earlier times. But the position of woman later on degraded to a large extent in the male dominated society and they

were debarred from entering into the *kirtanghar*. Strong demand is being raised from time to time in favour of women's entry but inside the town there are strong groups who are dead against the entry of women. It is hoped that sooner or later, this attitude will get softened and all restrictions in the entry of women will be removed.

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CHAPTER VI

RELATIONS BETWEEN *HATIS* AND *SATRA*

Introduction

The building in which the holy book is kept on the pedestal or the image is installed for the purpose of worship is known as *manikuta* and the big house in front of it, where *kirtan* is held known as *kirtanghar* or the *namghar*. In this permanent institution, a large number of devotees stay within or near precincts of the *kirtanghar* in separate huts constructed in lanes on all the four sides. These lanes are known as *hatis*. The whole institution is known by the term *satra*. At Barpeta, the contribution of Mathuradas Burha Ata, the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra* in organizing the *hatis* is notable. He divided the town into three *thul hatis* namely Dakshin *hati*, Uttar *hati* and Na *hati*. With these *hatis* there are another 19 *sakha* (secondary) *hatis* (Pathak, 1959: 72). People of different castes and creed live in the same *hati*. These *hatis* may be considered to be organized on the basis of division of labour, each *hati* having its own share of works to be performed in the *satra* context.

Celibates are devotees. They lead on intensely devotional live. They have a close relation with the *satra*. They live usually within the four walls of *satra* compound and sometimes outside it. The celibates are indifferent to any worldly attraction and the sole object of their life is the absolute devotion to God. Such devotees are called *keula* (celibates living in *satra* campus) in the Barpeta *satra* circle.

People in Barpeta *satra* living in different *hatis* are closely related with the *satra* in various aspects. There are a number of functionaries in Barpeta *satra* who are attached with the traditional functions since earlier times in regard to daily activities and also in times of various festivals. It can be gathered that various persons were closely related with the affairs of the *satra* in the early stage, the descendents of whom are still continuing such duties. Mathuradas Burha Ata, who by way of giving recognition to the *satra*, brought from various places persons proficient in different activities of the *satra* and settled at Barpeta. Their activities were fixed by Maturadas Burha Ata for smooth running of the *satra* (Pathak, 1959: 72). Their Specific duties are related to daily prayer services and can also be noticed at the time of annual festivals, such as *doul* Festivals, *domahi* or *bihu*, *kirtan* festival, *janmastami* etc.

Some of the members of these families working as teacher, government jobs or business activities also join as functionaries in the *satra*.

Another bigger group of society related to the *satra* is the community of devotees of Barpeta known as *samuaha bhakata*¹. They are the resident disciple of the *satra*.

In this Chapter, I have tried to describe some of the relationships of *hatis* with the *satra*. I have divided these relations into formal and informal relation, regular and occasional relation, economic relation, socio-political relation and social relation. Besides these I have described some other relations also.

A person who is initiated to the *mahapurushiya*² faith and wishes to take a *bhag*³ may be able to enlist him as a member of *samuha*. He is entitled to vote in the election of the *satra*. Moreover he is bound by the norms of the *vaisnava* fold and must have to pay *gurukar*⁴ to the *satra* in order to continue his membership twice a year. A member of *samuha* is also required to render certain services to the *satra*, which is known as *pala*. There are certain professional castes at Barpeta. These are Hira, Kumars, Banias and kaibartas etc. These caste groups are related to the *satra* through their professions.

a) Formal and Informal Relations: People have formal as well as informal linkages with the *satra*. Formal linkages are those linkages which are established through formal contact with the *satra*. Such formal contacts are both religious and secular. Similarly people have variety of contact with the *satra*.

Formal Relations: There are some activities related to *kirtanghar* which are formal. These are *adhikara*, *deka-Adhikara*, *ghai deuri* other *deuries*, *chaul bharali*, *charu bharali*, *mas bharali*. Off these, *adhikara* is the principal person in the *kirtanghar*. He decides all the matters of the *kirtanghar*. In the absence of *adhikara* all the duties vested in him are performed by the *deka adhikara*. Otherwise he is the secondary person of the *satra*. There are other *deuries* also. *Chaul bharali* is the accountant of rice. *Charu bharali* is the custodian of the earthen pots. At Barpeta there are certain

¹ *Samuaha Bhakata*: Community of devotee which is a bigger group of the society related to the *Satra*

² *Mahapurusiya*: Followers of the doctrine of Sankardeva.

³ *Bhag*: Share in the offerings in the *Satra* by paying a definite fee.

⁴ *Gurukar*: Religious tithes given by the people to the *Satra*

castes groups which are formally related to the *satra*. These are *Hira*⁵, *Mukhi*⁶, *Dhoba*⁷, *Bania*⁸, *Kiabarta*⁹ etc.

Adhikara: The supreme ecclesiastical authority of the *satra* is the *adhikara*. He is the religious head of the *satra* sect. He decides all matters relating to any dispute on religious matters. He presides over the meetings of the managing committee of the *satra*. He holds the religious discourses with the people. He also receives the dignitaries, who visit the *satra*. Occasionally he visits the branch *satras*. It is his duty to initiate people into the *mahapurushiya* religion. By virtue of his status and dignity he exerts spiritual influence on all disciples of the *mahapurushiya* religion.

The first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra* was Mathuradas Burha Ata (Pathak, 1959,: 71). It was through his outstanding personality, organizing ability and skill and spiritual authority over the people that the *satra* became a premier religious institution of Assam. The post of *adhikara* has never been hereditary. It is a sign of the lofty ideals and far sightedness of Mahapurush Sankaradev and Madhavadev and Mathuradas Burha Ata that they could realize that if the post of the *adhikara* was made hereditary all kinds of corruption and greed would creep into the day to day works of the *satra* which would ultimately defile the purity of the religion (Das, 214: 6). Nor was the post of the *adhikara* made the exclusive preserve of a particular caste. In fact any Hindu who follows the *mahapurushiya* religion can become the *adhikara*.

Deka Adhikara: Apart from the *adhikara* there is also a *deka adhikara*. He is allotted no particular function, but if the *adhikara* is absent or if the post of *adhikara* becomes vacant due to death or discharge from duty, the *deka adhikara* performs all the functions of the *adhikara*.

Ghai Deuri: The post of the *deuri* is very important. In so far as daily religious functions of the *satra* are concerned there is one principal *deuri*. It is his duty to see that all the daily functions of the *satra* are performed regularly. He is the in-charge of the *akkhyay banti* (permanent lamp) of the sanctum sanctorum. He also prepares *prasad* (an offering to the God; an oblation) for the deity. He also lights the other lamps within the temple. He prepares the flowers and *tulsi* leaves for use by the

⁵ People who make earthen pots.

⁶ People who are engaged in the preparation of lime.

⁷ Washerman.

⁸ Goldsmith.

⁹ Fisherman.

pilgrims who visit the *satra* daily. He also receives the offerings of rice salt and other goods that are made by the devotees. In view of the nature of the work, the post of the *ghai deuri* is assigned to a celibate devotee. There are two *ghai deuris* in the *satra*, each of whom is required to perform his duty for two months at a stretch.

Other *deuris* are also there whose tasks are to assist the *ghai deuri* in his works.

The *satra* traditionally does not do the act of cleaning and sweeping the *kitranghar* with the help of hired labour. To ensure cooperation from the people these acts are performed by devotees' families by turns.

Functionaries Attached to the Religious Functions of the Satra: The following functionaries are also attached to the religious functions of the *satra*-

Mazumdar: *Mazumdar* is the accountant who keeps the daily accounts of the *satra*.

Chaul Bharali: *Chaul bharali* is the accountant of rice.

Charu Bharali: *Charu bharali* is the custodian and accountant who keeps the account of *charu* (earthen pots), *chati* (small earthen lights), *ghots* (earthen jars) and other earthen wares offered by persons who have responsibility to give them.

Mas Bharali: *Mas bharali* is the person who takes charge of the fish of the *satra* and arrange for its distribution among the pilgrims in accordance with the prevailing custom.

Professional Castes of Barpeta: At Barpeta *satra* different caste groups are related to the *satra* in different profession. The professional castes at Barpeta are Suri, Hira, Kumar, Kaibarta, Bania, Mukhi and Dhoba. They are differently related to the *satra* through their professions.

Hira: The Hiras are potters. They make earthen pots with the help of hand. They are to supply earthen pots to the *satra* and these pots are distributed to the guests as cooking vessels together with *sidhas* (uncooked articles of ration, vegetables etc. offered to guest). At the time of festivals the Hiras perform such type of duties.

Kumars: The Kumars are also potters. They make pots with the help of wheels. They are to supply various pots. Of these *chati* are special. These burners are necessary during the whole period.

Baniya: The Baniyas are gold smiths. They make gold ornaments. Now a day's most of them have abandoned their traditional work and taken up some other

occupations. Their services are requisitioned to clean the gold ornaments of the deity before the *doul* festival.

Kaibrata: The Kaibratas used to supply definite quantity of fish to the *satra* on the occasion of *doul* festival which are distributed among the guest. By supplying the definite amount of fish, the Kaibratas earn the voting rights in *satra* election.

Mukhi: The Mukhis are the dealers of lime. Their duty in the *satra* is to white wash the *kirtanghar* and other houses including the brick walls around the *satra* compound. At the time of festival they mainly perform such type of duties.

Another formal relation is the secular relation. Secular relations are those relations who are not related to ecclesiastical affairs, but to the management of the *satra*. In this context mention might be made to the prolonged litigation over the question of management of the *satra*. In other *mahapurusiya satras* of Assam the post of the *adhikara* has already become hereditary in character (Nath, 2012: 10). In order to prevent the management of the *satra* from the falling into hand of the hereditary religious leaders some well meaning persons of the town framed a constitution for the democratic management of the *satra*. Among these persons mention must particularly be made of

1. Late- Jagadish Ch. Das, M.A. , B.L
2. Late- Ramen Ch. Das, M.A., B.L.
3. Late- Mahendra Nath Mahanta, B.L.

The long litigation in connection with the constitution is known as scheme case.

The constitution of the *satra* made detailed provisions for the democratic management of the *satra* through an elected body. The constitution also clearly defined the rights and duties of the managing committee as well as other devotees of the *satra*.

Managing Committee of the Satra: As per the provision of the constitution of Barpeta *satra* the day to day management of the *satra* is vested with an elected body known as the managing committee comprising 28 members (Raychoudhury, 2012: 44). The *adhikara* is to preside over the meetings of the managing committee, but the supreme authority of the *satra* is vested with the *samuha* that is all the devotees who pay *kar* to the *satra*. For the purpose of election of the members to the managing committee, there is a separate electorate and each *hati* can elect one member to the managing committee. The tenure of the managing committee is 3 years. There shall be one

secretary, one assistant secretary, one registrar, one treasurer and one accountant in the managing committee who are to be elected by the managing committee (Raychoudhury, 2012: 46).

The Secretary: The secretary shall write and keep the proceedings of the managing committee which is to be countersigned by the president and confirmed in the next meeting of the committee. The secretary shall receive all applications and correspondence and letters on behalf of the managing committee with authority to reply all letters addressed to the committee in consultation with the majority of the members in urgent cases but under normal circumstances the secretary will reply to the best of his judgment and discretion not in matters seriously affecting the *satra*. He shall publish the account of the *satra* fund every year with the abstract of the auditor's report in the local Assamese News paper in the locality. Mahananda Pathak is elected secretary for this current session.

The President: The President shall preside over all the meetings of the managing committee and shall have a casting vote in case the members present are equally divided.

The Vice President: The Vice President shall represent the President in his absence and discharge all duties of President.

The Accountant: The Accountant shall maintain separate account books for such major heads of the accounts. After taking daily accounts, he shall enter the accounts in proper books. He shall take charge of all vouchers and the counterfoils of the receipts which he shall submit to the auditor for the inspection.

The Treasurer: The treasurer shall be in charge of the treasury of the *satra*, shall receive all sums deposited by the accountant by passbook.

The Registrar: The Registrar shall maintain voters' register. He shall receive all applications for registration of the voter and after being satisfied that all requisite qualifications have been fulfilled, shall register the name of application in the general register as well as register of the particular constituency, in case of any dispute the matters will be referred to a general meeting of the *samuaha* and its decision will be final.

Samuaha: The bigger group of the society related with the *Satra* is the community of devotees of Barpeta known as *samuaha bhakat*. They are the resident disciples of the

satra. *Samuaha* is the elective body of resident disciples, the religious brother-hood. *Samuaha bhakata* conveys the sense of the *bhakatas* in assembly or the *bhakatas* who are entitled to vote in the assembly.

A person who is initiated to the *mahapurusiya* faith and wishes to take a *bhag* may be able to enlist him as a member of the *samuaha*; thereby he is entitled to vote in the election of the *satra*. Moreover he is bound by the norms of the *vaisnava* fold and first has to pay *gurukar* to the *satra* in order to continue his membership, twice in a year. A member of the *samuaha* is also required to render certain services to the *satra* which are known as *pala*.

Incidence of *pala* is given below-

1. *Pala* includes the services of washing the floor of the temple in the *kirtanghar*.
2. Collecting tulsi leaves and flower for daily worship.
3. Beating the drums and playing other Musical instruments.
4. Collecting plantain leaves for daily use.
5. Collecting offerings.
6. Keeping day and night vigil over the *kirtanghar* and its property.

The institution of *samuha bhakata* in the past took the greater responsibilities of the management and supervision of daily activities including religious activities. For this purpose there were regular sitting of the *samuaha* in front of the *math* twice a day just after the morning prayers and also in the afternoon. Such sitting is known as *samuaha bhakatar mel* (sitting of the *samuha bhakata*).

Informal Relations: Devotees of the *mahapurusiya* sect and non devotees as well have a variety of contacts with the *satra*. These are given below-

There are some relations of the people living outside the *satra* campus and *satra*. The *satra* premise is very large surrounded by walls and arches. Within the campus rows of coconut trees present beautiful and picturesque scenery. So the campus as well as the street outside the campus is a suitable place for gossiping. During the summer season, people can sit behind the tall trees. Again during the winter season it is comfortable to sit on the pavements and gossip. The topic of such gossips may be anything ranging from religious discourses to national and international politics, economic problems, price rise or the elopement of the local girl. The campus is also a very favorite place for local brats for playing and marry making. As the surroundings

area is thickly populated and as there is no open space for games and sports, the campus provides the ideal spot for them for outdoor activities.

The daily visitors to the *satra* come for different purposes; some come to the *satra* to listen to the Bhagawata recitation in the evening. Some come to just have a *darshan* (viewing) of the *satra*. But there are also people both male and female who come for solace. The poverty stricken people dejected by different trials and tribulations come to pray before god to get relief from their troubles. Some celibates living inside the campus are consulted by people in different matters, such as fixing up auspicious dates for marriage of children, naming newly born etc.

On all auspicious occasions like marriage, first appearances of puberty of girl etc. people go to the *satra* to make obeisance to the God. A bride groom on his marriage day would invariably visit the *satra* before leaving for the bride's house. Similarly after marriage the newlywed husband and wife visit the *satra*. A girl after attaining puberty also visits the *satra* after observance of the period of isolation and ceremonial bathing. Whenever a person buys a motor vehicle, he would take the vehicle to the front of the main portal of the *satra* for ceremonial blessings and naming. Devotees also go to the *satra* to order different goods like salt, mustard oil, sugar, coconut, gold and silver flowers, sacred pedestal, wick stand, a variety of other things as *manas* (Sacred intention made by the people to have god's favour). The occasion of such names may be serious illness of sons and daughters, a service for the son, or promotion in examination or marriage of a daughter etc.

Devotees on different occasions come from outside, particularly during the *doul* festival. A large number of such devotees are very large indeed. The *satra* has the longstanding custom of offering hospitality to such devotees in the form of rice, pulses, salt, mustered oil, firewood and earthen pots to cook their means. At present people from different places comes to have a visit to the *satra*.

With the western influence gradually creeping into our society, a section of people of the town observe marriage anniversary, birth day of children etc. On such occasions also the concerned people visit the *satra*.

b) Regular and Occasional Relations: Tradition goes that it was Mathura Das Ata, the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra* who by way of recognizing the *satra*, brought from various places persons proficient in different activities of the *satra* and settled them at Barpeta. Their activities were fixed by Mathuradas Burha Ata for smooth running of

the *satra*. Their specific duties are related to the daily prayer services and can also be noted at the time of annual festivals such as *doul* festivals, *domahi*, *kirtan* festival, *janmastami* etc. They are very sincere in performing these duties and that is why the *satra* is running without any fault. Some of the members of such families work as teachers doing government jobs or business activities also join as functionaries in the *satra*. They feel proud of joining such works and taking it to be their noble duties. There are close relationship between different dynasties of Barpeta with the *satra*. In the *kirtanghar* regularly 14 prayers are held. Different dynasties from different *hatis* perform their functions everyday in the *satra*. Every festival of Barpeta different dynasties performs their duties. During the festival, people come there from different places. The local people living at different places for their services come during the festival.

There are a number of functionaries at Barpeta *satra* who are accustomed with the traditional functions since early times in regard to daily activities as well as at the time of occasional festivals. It can be gathered that various dynasties of Barpeta who were closely associated with the affairs of the *satra* in the early stage are still continuing these duties.

The regular relationships and occasional relationships between the different dynasties in different *hatis* are discussed below-

Regular Relations: The daily prayer services are divided into three different programs like the *puwar prasanga* (matins), *biyalir prasanga* (afternoon prayer service) and *ratir prasanga* (evening prayer services) (Neog -341 cited in Gurulila - 254). The *Katha Gurucharita* (Reference Pate – 01, 331 & 584) tells us that when Madhava lived at Sundaridia after his master had passed away, he installed the *guru-asana* there, systematized the *prasangas* into fourteen fixed up the order in which they were to be performed. At Barpeta *satra* Mathuradas Burha Aata developed the three times daily prayer services into fourteen units (Roy Choudhury, 2012: 110). This programme is followed even today at Barpeta. *Sewait bangsara* (dedicated devotees) performing the daily rites in the *satra* as per shifting system. Different *bangsaras* are *pathak* (public reader or reciter of religious book). *Gayan* (Singer of devotional music like, *bargeet*, *bhatima*, *geet*, *pada*, *ghosa*), *Bayan* (an instrumentalist, specially *khol*), *ojah* (choral singer), *ghosha kirtaniya* (a group of religious singer of devotional music).

The morning *prasanga* constitutes of 5 units. The first unit consists of singing of two *bargeetas* by the *pathaka* dynasty in front of the *guru asana* facing towards it. It is called *jagaran geet*¹⁰. The second unit is known as *calanar geet*¹¹.

The second unit consists of singing the *bhatima*. At the end of the singing of a *bargeeta* and a *bhatima* the *pathaka* comes out for presenting similar performance inside the *matha*. At 7 A.M. the Brahmin *purohit* (priest) arrives and opens the lock of the door enclosing *Kaliya Thakur* (lord Krishna). He took his seat inside the enclosure and arranged the articles necessary for giving ceremonial bath of the deity and begins to worship. The *pala dhariya* kept ready all the materials necessary for the daily worship.

At this time, women devotees begin to assemble for offering Morning Prayer to be held at the stipulated place on the southern *varanda* of the *kritanghar*¹². The Prayer services of the women devotee start before that of the male devotees.

The third unit is the morning *prasanga* consists of different parts. a) The *Pathaka* takes his definite seat and begins recitation by calling the names of God. This part is known as *nam-daka* (calling the name of God) b) Next item consist of reciting a portion of the combined section of Madhavadeva's *Namghosa*, c) One or two chapters of Sankaradeva's *Kirtanghosa* are then recited, d) Closing of the *prasanga* with repetition of God's names in rhythm. Elderly persons generally attend the prayer services.

The fourth unit of the Morning Prayer starts with reading a few chapters from the *Bhagavata*. The *Bhagavata* is read by persons of Ramray Guru Dynasty.

The fifth unit starts with the *pathaka* reading a few chapters of the *Kirtanghoshha*. From other religious books also one or two chapters are to be read. Thus the morning session of the prayer comes to an end. At that time the *daba*, *borkah* (gong), *sankha* (conch shell) *joyghanta* (bell) etc. are sounded to mark the end of the morning session of prayer in the *satra*.

¹⁰ *Jagaran Geet*: It depicts the scene of rising Krishna from his sleep.

¹¹ *Calanar Geet*: Songs associated with Krishna's preparation for starting towards Vrindavana to tend cows.

¹² Women are not allowed now to enter the main prayer hall where the idol of Lord Krishna is worshipped. It is alleged that women proper cleanliness and may enter the holy place even during the days of menstruation. Hence women are debarred.

The next prayer service is called *biyalir prasanga*. This *prasanga* is started at about 3 pm. The afternoon *prasanga* consist of reading one section from a number of selected works to be taken one after another by the *samuaha bhakat*.

The next item of the afternoon prayer consists of recitation of one section of *nama chanda* by the Sutradhar dynasty.

On the single sitting the *Pathaka* complete the afternoon prayer by reading one chapter from the *Namghosa*. The *paladhariya* sounded the big drum indicating the time for evening prayer.

By this time the reading of the religious books in the *bhagavatagriha* starts. Listeners both males and females take their seats covering the southern *varandah* of the *kirtanghar*. The *pathaka* can make nearly one thousand strong devotees audience spell bound through his melodious loud voices. Side by side with such recitation the evening prayer services also starts. The ninth item of daily *prasanga* or the first item of the evening service consists of reciting one section of *Gunamala*. In the next item one section from *lilamala* is recited. Recitation of *Guru Bhatima* is performed.

These 3 items are performed by the Sutradhar dynasty for 6 months. These Assamese months are *phagun, chot, bohag, jeth, ahar* and *saon*. Pathak dynasty performs these 3 items for other 6 months –*bhada, ahin, kati, aghon, puh* and *magh*. The gathering of the *bhagavata-griha* breaks up at nearly 6.30 p.m. in the evening.

The next item of prayer service is called *sewar kirtan* in which the *gayan, bayan* presents two *bargeetas* in specified *Ragas* to the accompaniment of *khol*s and *tal*s in front of *guru asana*. This program is performed by different dynasties in different period – Sutradhar dynasty performs for 3 months viz. *jeth, ahar and saon*. People of Dakhin *hati* perform another 3 months- *phagun, chot and bahag*. Bhima Bayan dynasty performs it for 2 months- *bhado* and *ahin*. Sarbajya Atoi dynasty performs for 2 months- *kati* and *aghon* and Galia *hati* Bayan dynasty performs it for 2 months- *puh* and *magh*. The *pathak* comes again to perform the last two *prasangas*. He recites one section each of *Nama Chanda* and *Sarana Chanda* along with playing cymbals. The Final item of the prayer is called *ratir path*, reading of sacred book at night.

As the *pathaka* completes his reading, the *paladhariya* sounds the *daba* indicating the end of the day's prayer services at 8 p.m. The prayer services being over, the *paladhariya* begins to clean the *kirtanghar* by sweeping. After completion of sweeping the floor, he again sounded the *daba* to mark the end of the day's religious activities of the *satra*.

Apart from this, people of various ages always go to the *satra*. Every morning, the elderly persons go to the *satra*. There is a special place for women where they pray to God. In the evening two hundreds to three hundreds of people go to the *satra* for listening to the recitation of different epics and *Puranas*.

Occasional Relations: In each of these functions religious performance are held in minute details. These functions are divided among different dynasties of disciple of the *satra*. These are also meticulously observed by functionaries. The roles of the Sutradhara dynasty, Pathak dynasty, and the Gayan and Bayan dynasty are particularly significant in all these functions. Barpeta *satra* performs the following occasional functions-

Bahag Bihu: In lower Assam particularly in Barpeta District, *bihu* is known as *domhi*. The *bahag bihu* is observed in the *satra* every year. The usual folk favour in the form of songs and dances. But amorous songs and dances are forbidden and it is observed strictly on religious line. The *domhi* is observed for seven days from the day of the *sankranti* (last day of the month of *chaitra*). On the day before *sankranti*, the *gayan* and the *bayan* who sing *Gunamala*, *lilamala* and *Bhatima* accompanied by *khol* and *tal* at night. Then two *bargeets* and one *ghosa* are recited. These duties are performed by *Gayan* and *Bayan* of the dynasties appointed for this purposes for that particular period of the year.

Magh Bihu: The rituals observed in the *magh bihu* are exactly the same as those of the *bahag bihu*. There is only one addition in the form of making of a *mejji* (a bonfire) in the courtyard of the *satra*. The devotees in the morning of the *sankranti* go in large number to the nearby river for holy bath. They return to the *kirtanghar* and light the *mejji*.

Death anniversary of Sankaradeva: The death anniversary of Sankaradeva falls on the second day of the month of *bhada*. Locally it is called *kirtan*. It continues for seven days. On the first day the sacred pedestal containing the *Bhagawata* is placed and the same is kept for seven days. On the preceding day of the *kirtan*, the *adikara* delivers a religious speech. Then the *kakati* announces the names of the devotees in presence of *samuah*. In the morning of the *kirtan* songs are recited, followed by *namprasanga* and *Bhagawat* recitation. Then the *Bayans* and *Gayans* of the dynasties of Gandhiya Bayan and Bhima Bayan recite devotional songs and *Nam-Ghosa*. In the Afternoon

the devotees sing two *bargeets*. At night the Gayans and Bayans of the Sutradhara dynasty recite devotional songs from the *kirtanghosh* composed by Sankaradeva. The religious duties for the rest of the days are also arranged meticulously and observed to the minutest details.

Death anniversary of Madhavadeva: The Death anniversary of Madhavadeva falls on the fourth and fifth day of the dark moon in the month of bhada. It continues for seven days. The sacred pedestal with *Bhagawat* is placed in the sanctum sanctorum of the *kirtanghar*. Enumeration of devotees by the *kakati* is done as in the case of the *kirtan* of Sankardev.

On the first day in the morning one song from the *Gunamala* and two songs from the *lilamala* are sung. Then the *bhatima* is recited followed by *namprasanga* and the recitation of the *Bhagawat*. Then Gayans and Bayans of the dynasties of Bhima Bayan and Gandhiya Bayan take part in the recitation of the song. In the afternoon *ghoshakritan* is recited. At night some parts from the *Gunamala* and *Lilamala* are recited. The next six days are also observed in accordance with strict routine.

Death Anniversary of Mathuradas Burha Ata: Death anniversary of Mathuradas Burha Ata falls on the 4th day of the dark moon in the month of *ahin*. The religious paraphernalia observed in the death anniversary of Mathuradas Burha Ata is the same as that of Sankaradeva. On the preceding day of the *kirtan*, someone from the Kakati dynasty enumerate the *baras* instead of the devotees. The *namprasanga* at night is performed by the dynasties of Bhima Bayan and Gandhiya Bayan. During the days of the *kirtan*, *namprasanga*, *Bhagwat* recitation and other religious duties are performed as usual. The festival runs for 5 days.

Karbhar (Payment of Tithe): The system of Tithe was perhaps initiated by Madhavadeva. He paid the tithe to Mathuradas Burha Ata when the later was made *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra*. Following this other devotees like Narayandas Thakur Ata, Barbisnu Ata, Nanda Gopal Ata also paid tithe to the *satra*. It has now become a tradition to pay tithe on the days of the three *kirtans* mentioned above. The three *thul hatis* have been performing this sacred duty, Uttar *hati* (Brindabhati) on Sankardev's *kirtan*, Dakhin *hati* on Madhavadeva's *kirtan* and Na-*hati* on the *kirtan* of Mathuradas Burha Ata. On these days the *karbhar* is ceremonially carried on the shoulders by the devotees accompanied by the thousands of people in procession. Singing devotional

songs to the *satra*, the procession ends at the courtyard of the *kirtanghar*. Then it is distributed among the devotees who have shares in the *satra*.

Janmastami (The birth anniversary of Lord Krishna): Another festival observed in the *Satra* falls on the eight day of the dark moon in the month of *bhada*. At night the *Gayans* and *Bayans* recite the *naat-dhemali* before the sacred pedestal. The following dynasties and/or *hatis* take part in the performance-

- 1) Sutradhar dynasty
- 2) Bhima bayan dynasty
- 3) Dakshin hati
- 4) Gandhiya dynasty

On the following day again recitation of devotional songs takes place. Then the drama *nandotsava* composed by Gopal Ata is read out. Thereafter *namprasanga* is held before the sacred pedestal. The devotees then traverse seven times around the *kirtanghar* singing devotional songs.

Pachati festival: The *pashati* festival is held on the following day of *janmastami*. It is observed as a day of rejoice at the birth of Lord Krishna.

Doul festival: The grandest festival observed in the *satra* is the *doul* festival. It begins on the day of full moon in the month of *phagun*. The first day is called *gandh*. On this day all religious functions are held as per strict formalities. In the morning *namprasanga* is held. In the afternoon the idol of Doul Govinda and Kolia Thakur (both are the idols of Lord Krishna) are taken out with religious festivities to the courtyard near the *matha*. Eight *bargeets* are sung at night. The *gayans* and *bayans* from the dynasty of Bhima Bayan, Gandhiya Bayan dynasty, Sutradhar dynasty and the Bayan dynasty of Galiya *hati* according to predetermined schedule take part.

On the day of the actual *doul* the singers and drummers of the dynasty and or the *hati* sing the *bargeets*. On the day of the *sueri* similarly devotional morning songs, recitation of *bhatima* and *namprasanga* and *Bhagwata* recitation are observed strictly as per the schedule. In the afternoon on that day of the *gayan* and *bayan* accompanied by devotees to take out the idol to nearby Kalabari *satra*. On return, the devotees make seven rounds around the *kirtanghar* singing devotional songs.

It should be noted that particular *hatis* and dynasties of *Gayan* and *Bayan* are assigned the duty of songs and the recitation in different festivals mentioned above at different periods of the day, and these are still in vogue.

At different times of festival people meet each other in the *kirtanghar*. Such moments are so good. The people of Barpeta who hold services at different places come home at the time of different festivals. The special function of Barpeta *satra* is *doul* festival. In this festival every household has guests. At that time the women folk remain busy in preparing different types of foods. But they go to *kirtanghar* also. There they meet old friends.

c) Economic Relations: For the day-to-day management of the *satra* like Barpeta huge amount of money is necessary. For this purpose the *satra* must have some perennial sources of income. During the initial period of establishment of the *satra*, there were no significant sources of income of the *satra*. The daily rituals and the maintenance of the celibate devotees were managed through generous gifts and donation from devotees. The celibates' devotees lived very simple lives and their daily living was mainly based on alms. During the initial period, royal dynasties showed no favour to the *satra*. Even the land on which the *satra* is now established was granted by Ram Laruah Burha, a devotee of the *satra*. But in course of time when the influence of the *satra* expanded considerably and the number of devotees swelled, the kings began to pay interest in the management of the *satra*. Cooper plates revealed that king Siva Singha granted land to Barpeta *satra*. The boundary of the *satra* land as per the copper plate was the Barpeta *beel* on the east, Galaya *beel* on the west, Hari *Jaan* on the South and Chinpora *Bhithi* on the north. The copper plate also mentioned the attachment of 150 families of devotees and 17 families of *paiks*. Similar hand grants were also made to other *vaishnava satras*.

The Economy of the *satra* depends on its source of income. The income of the *satra* is mainly derived from two sources-

- i) Religious tithes contributed by disciples,
- ii) Land originally granted by the Ahom kings and subsequently confirmed and recognize by the British Government. The religious tithes yield income according to the number of disciples. Every disciple is expected to make a small contribution to the *satra* annually by cash.

With the introduction of system *gurukar* and *sidha* in the late Sixteenth century by Madhabdeva the institution of *satra* come to be associated with the permanent and regular sources of income. *Bhakats* of Barpeta *satra* and also the *samuah* have to pay

the required *gurukar* consisting of a little cash and definite amount of rice twice in a year.

There are other Economic means of the *satra*, such as *pranami*¹³. Besides these sources, *sidha* is a source of income of the *satra*. Religious obligation of people was strong enough to induce them to offer such things. But in the present day context, these are irregular.

Other sources of income of the *satra* are land and land ownership, are the major sources of income since the middle of the 17 the century A.D. The various types of grants especially land grants made by the Ahom kings helped the *satra* in making a sound economic footing. Land grants to the religious institutions were of different categories.

There is fishing swamps of Barpeta *satra*. These are given on lease for a year. 15 percent of the total income being taken away by the government of Assam and the remaining being the *satras* share.

The other heads from which the *satra* acquires income are sale proceeds of various articles, rents from the houses on the *satra* land, taking of new shares, donations of various forms and so forth.

The main item of expenditure of the *satra* under study revolves round the performance of annual festivals of which major portion is spent on *prasada*. There is also the monthly payment made to various office bearers of the *satra*.

Religious Taxes: Any person professing *mahapurushiya* faith shall be entitled to get a *bhag* or more on payment of certain amount of admission fee fixed by the managing committee. The *bhag* is taken through *Bora* who serves definite number of share holders under him. In *kirtan* festival he is to receive the share of the goods offered in *karbhar*.

Every member who has a *bhag* in the *satra* shall have the responsibility of performing the *pala* or to pay the amount in lieu of it.

Payment of *gurukar* is open to all. A man not being a direct disciple of the *satra* may pay any amount as *gurukar*. There is no maximum amount of *gurukar* but the

¹³ *Pranami*: voluntary contribution especially in cash made by the visitors during the festivals and other occasions.

minimum limit of it is fixed at Rs.5/. Anybody who pays *gurukar* is entitled to get *nirmali*¹⁴

Specific Professional duties of various groups in Barpeta Satra: Barpeta is a place where a number of crafts are concentrated. Almost all of them maintain some relation with the *satra* institution. It may be recorded that some of these craftsmen were settled in Barpeta in the seventeenth century for the purpose of temple service by king Viranarayana of Cooch Behar. The king endowed the Barpeta *satra* with 18 families of *paiks* for various petty works of the establishment which include such artisans as blacksmith, potters and players of drums, pipes and cymbals (Das, 1991: 221-222). Descendants of these men are continuing their services even today. In course of time some other crafts were also established in Barpeta. The *satra* institution at Barpeta helps in flourishing these crafts.

The specialized crafts once flourished at Barpeta and the artisans could show their proficiency. But now they are somehow maintaining the tradition. These small industries are pottery, black smithy, gold smithy, fireworks, Ivory works etc.

Pottery carried on by the people of Hira community of Barpeta is an important cottage industry. It is one of the oldest crafts of this locality. There are nearly three hundred and fifty Hira families at Barpeta and its adjoining area consisting of Sundaridiya, Bamuna and Budarurtup (Sarma and Goswami 2016: 109). The engaged families engaged in these crafts are somehow maintaining their livelihood by selling their finished products and are upholding the tradition. The female folk are engaged in preparing different items; the male folk help their counterpart by collecting the raw materials. The items of this industry consist of *kalah* (pitcher), *paila* (vessels for keeping curd), *charu* (cooking vessels), *maale* (offering plate) and many others.

The Hiras as professional castes are attached to the *satra*. They have to supply a definite quota of earthen pots. They offer it to the *kirtanghar* during the *doul* festival. Against these pots the Hiras are honoured by with areca nuts and betel leaves at the close of the festivals from the *kirtanghar*. During the time of *doul* festival different people come to the *satra*. There is a guest house for these visitors. They are given *sidhas* in these pots by the *satra*.

Another potter caste of Barpeta engaged in making earthen pots is the Kumars. They make pots with the help of wheels. Their pots differ from those of the Hiras. *Kumar*

¹⁴ *Nirmali*: Consecrated flowers etc.given to devotees as holy token of blessings from deity

make pots like *chaaki* (oil burner), *dhuna daani* (handled pots for offering scent of powder), *ghat*, used in the different religious works etc. Over and above supplying these earthen pots, they have got their stipulated duties in the *satra*. The Kumars are to take on their shoulders the chariot on which *Doul Govinda*, the deity of colour festival, moves in a procession. The Kumars are also given areca nuts and betel nuts for their help by the *satra* managing committee.

The people associated with gold smithy are called Baniya at Barpeta as in some as in some other parts of Assam. There are nearly 200 families of this caste at Barpeta who mainly live in Ghoramora *hati*, Brindaban *hati* and Na *hati*. The Baniyas of Barpeta show their excellence in this craft and gained applause in various places in making gold and silver ornaments. Of this *keru* (earring), *haar* (chain), *kharu* (Bangles), *dhol maduli* (drum shaped neck ornaments) made of gold or silver are worth mentioning.

The Baniyas are also associated with annual performance of the *satra*. They are to clean the gold ornaments of Doul Govinda, and Kaliya Thakur (the deity of *doul* festival). Their services are recognized by honouring them with areca nut and betel nut leaves at the end of the festival.

The one famous blacksmith industry of Barpeta is now somehow surviving and confined only to very limited families. There are nearly hundred Kamar families in Barpeta. Like other small industries, this industry is also facing scarcity of raw materials. There was time when articles made by local blacksmiths of Barpeta had a good market. They could sell sufficient quantity of their articles in front of the *kirtanghar* during *doul* festival and *kirtan* festival. The *bargacha* (gigantic lamp stands) kept inside the *kirtanghar* which can accommodate a thousand oil burners, occasionally lighted, are the examples of excellent craftsmanship of the Kamars of Barpeta. Such lamp stands of various sizes are sent to different religious centers, outside the state and to various museum of Assam from Barpeta.

The association of the blacksmiths with the *satra* as a professional group can be seen at the time of *doul* festival. Each Kamar family is to supply one knife to the *satra* during the festival. In return each family gets 10 areca nuts and a bundles of betel leaves. Nowadays at the time of festival the *Kumars* sell their production inside the *kirtanghar*.

On ceremonial occasions at Barpeta, fireworks are essential. On the day of marriage ceremony it is treated as customary for a groom party to pay a visit to the *kirtanghar* on way to the bride's house. A show of fireworks is held in front of the *kirtanghar*,

when more than one groom parties meet there on a particular day some sort of competition of fireworks is held there. Similarly on the occasion of the festival of colour a grand show of fireworks is a routine activity on the first day of the festival.

The items of fire work are-

1. *Tarabaji* (which goes up after firing)
2. *Motar gach* (burns very bright)
3. *Phool Jari* (Flower pot)
4. Colour *baji* (rotates on a wheel)

The craft is associated with the *satra*. On the first day of *doul* festival a show of fireworks is held in the *satra* compound. For this performance payment is made in cash.

Apart from these specialized crafts, there are some other caste based occupations such as those of kaibartas, Mukhi, Dhoba etc. The Kaibartas form a scheduled caste community of Assam. Their primary occupation is fishing. But the Kaibartas of Barpeta are found to have taken to purchase and sale of fishes in the market itself and also from other sources.

The Kaibartas take a prominent role in the economy and day-to-day life of the people of this *satra* town. There are nearly six hundred Kaibartas families (Pathak, 1959: 111) concentrated in Bhakatpara and Rayatpara of Barpeta town.

The Kaibartas of Barpeta were associated with the *satra* activities through their professions. They supply a definite quantity of fish to the *satra* at the time of *doul* festival. They are treated as share holders without paying the annual fees in the form of rice and cash. But this practice is not in vogue now due to economic reasons. During mid-thirties of this century, there were objections that the Kaibartas were not supplying the required quantity of fish to the *satra* or were paying much less than the stipulated quantity (Pathak, 1959: 112).

There is another caste group called Mukhi. Their occupation was declining in time. With this traditional occupation that are related with the *satra*. People of this caste group are to do white washing the *satra*, before the *doul* festival. But now though old profession has been changed in the course of time, still they have maintained the traditional link with the *satra*.

Though these indigenous and traditional crafts and caste based occupations have suffered a lot, never the less they maintain relations with the *satra*. Their pattern of association may be shown below-

Table: 6.1 Association of the crafts and caste based occupation with the *satra*

Sl.No.	Crafts/caste based occupation	Pattern of Association	Occasion	Payment/Reward honour
1	Potters	Offer various earthen pots	<i>Doul</i> festival	Honoured with areca nuts and betel leaves at the close of the festival
2	Goldsmiths	Cleanse the Gold ornaments of the deity	Do	Do
3	Blacksmiths	Offer knives for using in the <i>Satra</i>	Do	Do
4	Kaibartas	Supply definite quota of fish	Do	Paid in cash
5	Mukhi	White washing the walls of the <i>Satra</i>	Do	Honour after the festival

Satra Centric Market: There is a market of Barpetta *satra* entitled “Thakur Bazar” which has been surviving for the last 120 years. The market is located within the *satra* premises. Inside the *satra* various shops are found. Their owners are local people. These shops are intimately involved with the *satra*. There are 21 grocery shops, 11 sweets shops and 15 stationary shops 09 vegetable shops, 07 fish vendors and 11 others. There is a traditional rule that when a man comes to *kirtanghar*, he brings an amount of salt and incense in an earthen pot. Some bring mustard oil also. In these grocery shops such type of things are available. The local people as well as the guest who occasionally come to the *satra* bring these things. When guests come to *satra* most of them buy some things from these shops. Apart from these things, sugar is also used as *prasada*. Local people buy sugar from these shops for the *kirtanghar*. *Magu*

(green gram) and *boot* (gram) are also available here in these shops. At the time of *Satra* festival these shops make good profit.

Besides these grocery shops there are some sweet shops. Some kinds of sweets and snacks are prepared regularly. The people living inside the *satra* are also benefited by these shops. At the time of festivals these shops keepers are busy with their activities. At that time all kinds of people buy such food from these shops, which are considered as *nirmali*. Stationary shops are also busy at the time of festival, mainly in the *doul* festival. During *doul* festival people come to Barpeta from different places. They buy such goods during the time of festivals.

The Hati Bank: The economic organization of the *hati* was planned by Mathuradas Burha Ata. He introduced the system of giving shares to the members of the *hati* on payment of definite fee and thereby raises a common fund. At a time when nobody could imagine about the necessity and usefulness of such a fund, Burha Ata planned it of his own. Individual families of a particular *hati* are benefitted because they can get loans from this fund. Persons taking loans from this fund also do not default as they believe that the money has got a sacred touch being collected from *bhakat*s of Barpeta *satra*.

Present sources of *hati* fund are-

- i) Tax realized from *dasturi*. At the time of marriage of each girl of the *hati*, a minimal amount is received from the groom's side. This called *dasturi*.
- ii) Interest on loan principal- The *hati* fund realizes interest from the loanees. The rate of interest for the loan may vary from *hati* to *hati*.
- iii) New shares- Another source of income of the *hati* fund is from new shares.

The *hati* fund is named after the name of a *hati*. The fund of the Pathak *hati* is known as Pathak *hatir puji*. People of Barpeta are benefitted by this fund to some extent. This is utilized for the purpose of welfare of the society particularly at the time of natural calamities.

Now and then the occasion of the *magh bihu* fish purchased and distributed among the families of the *hati*, fire woods are purchased in times of *magh bihu* spending money from the fund which are burnt at road side. The main function of the *hati* fund is to offer help to any member of the *hati* to tide over any unforeseen circumstances or to discharge such moral duties as marriage, performance or death.

To get a loan from the *hati* fund one is to mortgage gold ornaments of approximately equal value to the loan amount. In the annual meeting of the *hati* fund, which is held in the *haitarghar* in the first week of the month of *bahag*, interests on loans are to be paid.

Thus people of Barpeta are related with the *satra* in economic aspects. In the context of economic system of Barpeta *satra* the contribution of Mathuradas Burha Ata is remarkable. He established the *hati* treasury when the idea of bank was absent. All *satriya* people of Barpeta are economically related with the *satra*. In the *satra* there are different sources of income of these people. People living inside the *kirtanghar*, who have shops here, are closely related to the *kirtanghar*.

d) Socio-political Relations: When the *mahapurushia* religion was propagated by Sankaradeva and other apostles of the cult the kings regarded it with an eye of suspicion, because they feared that it might endanger their rule. This happened in case of all new ideas. Quite naturally the ruling class is always in favour of status quo. Moreover the Brahmins of that time spread false rumours against *mahapurushia* religion and maligned the kings against Sankaradeva and his apostles, saying that Sankaradeva and his disciples were against Vedic rites. There were examples of persecution and even death of *vaisnava* devotees at the hands of the kings. In Sankaradeva had to fly from Nagaon in apprehension of royal persecution. Even in Coch Behar also he had to face royal wrath from king Narnarayans. His life was saved by the timely intervention of Sukladdhwaj the royal brother. Of course Sankaradeva received royal patronage after the king could know about his depth of knowledge, clarity of vision and understanding (Khan, 2008: 57).

When the *vaisnava* religion got a foot-hold and large number of people embraced it and the king also realised that it was not against their rule, the hostility turned into favour. From the time of Rudra Singha onwards the kings began to donate land liberally to different *satras*. Such a friendly attitude was also shown by the Koch Kings (Khan, 2008: 58).

During the British days the rulers maintained the policy of non interference in religious and cultural matters of the Indian people. The queen's proclamation of 1858 clearly demonstrated this attitude of the British rulers. The British government in Assam made comprehensive records of land and other resources. It did not alienate *satra* property donated by the Ahom Kings. Moreover it classified lands into

*dharmottarra*¹⁵ (Land gifted for the purpose of religious rites) and *devottara*¹⁶ (Land gifted for the purpose of the idol). Such lands are made either *lakhiraj* (rent free) or *nisfkhiraj* (Barua, 2009: 134).

The *samuha bhakat* of the *satra* is concerned with preserving social norms among the people of Barpeta. It is such an organization through which Barpeta *satra* could ensure justice in case of any social offence. The *samuha* can discontinue one's *bhag* if he is guilty or if the person was reported to have indulged in trade of liquor, opium etc. He had to pay the imposed fine to the *satra* in order to revive his own lost of *bhag*.

The Method of Initiation of the Trial of any Offence: The *samuha bhakat* sit in front of the *matha* after the daily *prasanga* in the morning and afternoon. Someone will have to report in the sitting of *samuah* about commitment of such an offence. The traditional mode of reporting is with the knees touching the ground and with folded hands. The guilty person would then be called in through the messenger of the *satra*. As the accused person presents himself in front of such a holy gathering of elderly *bhakats* with the *adhikara* and the *deka adhikara* in their respective seats, he could not but confess his guilt. The judgment thus pronounced is obeyed by all sections of people. Participants of such a sitting say that there is no written law of such a community of elders. There are traditionally specified rates of fine to be imposed on the guilty persons for different cases. Such offences, viz. drinking of liquor, taking of chicken or breach of the code of performance of daily *nama kirtana* are brought into the trial by the *samuha bhakata*.

Election of the Satra: The election of *adhikara* is a rare occasion. As it is the highest religious post, people of Barpeta get involved in some way or the other. The study of the *adhikara* election and in case of the managing committee election show the cohesive influence of the *satra* on the society.

In order to have their chosen candidates, a voluntary group was formed consisting of local advocate, teacher, social workers etc.

e) ***Other Relations:*** From the above description, we have found that the *hatis* have different types of relations with the Barpeta *satra*, like formal and informal relation,

¹⁵ *Dharmottarra*: Land gifted for the purpose of religious rites.

¹⁶ *Devottara*¹⁶ (Land gifted for the purpose of the idol)

regular and occasional relation, political relation, economic relation, cultural relation etc. Apart from this the *hatīs* have some other relations with *satra*. There are given below-

Sarana (Initiation): To be a rightful member of the *ekasarana-naam-dharma* and to take on active part in the religious activities, a person must go through a formal process of initiation through the medium of a *Guru*. This formal process of initiation is called- *saran lowa* (taking initiation), which means to take refuge to Lord Krishna. Of course it is noticed that the character and conduct of the persons seeking initiation must be tested before he is finally initiated through the medium of some senior devotee.

The first initiation is called *sarana* which literally means shelter. In theory every *vaisnava* is required to take *Saran* before marriage. In theory he is free to become a disciple of any *Satra* he chooses but in fact he is almost always initiated into his father's *satra* so that *satra* membership originally determined by individual choice is now a matter of hereditary status. The idea however, of choice remains, on the deity who is the subject of devotion is one's *ista devata* (chosen God), so the *Guru* is one's *ista Guru* (chosen *Guru*).

The content of initiation is secret. The *Guru* imports to the initiate the mysteries of the cult through esoteric mantras which he swears never to reveal. Initiation usually takes place in the *namghar*, before an image or scripture representing Krishna to whom the initiate dedicate all his possessions. He fasts prior to the rite, baths and puts on two pieces of ritually pure clothing. The *Guru* on a mat, the initiate on the ground is symbolizing their unequal status. During initiation the disciples is instructed to consider his *Guru* as the representative of the founders of the sect and through them of Lord Krishna. The *Guru* says 'the *atman* of *hari* and *hara* (God and devotees) are the same (*hari hara atmar adhin*). Therefore, through the mediation of the *Guru* the devotee becomes identified with God. Traditionally in Barpeta *satra* every *vaisnavite* takes initiation. Some proceed when they are elderly to move to advanced stages of initiation. The main rites of initiation consist of an oath of surrender to the *cari vastu* (four principles) which together constitute *bhakti* and form the core of the religion *guru, deva nama bhakat*. The initiate surrenders himself to each of the four principles in turn taking a few steps and saying three times "I take shelter in *nama*, I take shelter in the devotees". After initiation, the disciple is expected to lead a life in which his daily action assumes significance through dedication to God. The *Guru* instructs him

in the conduct of life proper to a *vaisnava* and imparts to him a set of mantras which convert the ordinary routine of daily life into a series of religious acts. He must rise before dawn with the name of God on his lips. He should place his right foot first on the ground. Before eating himself afterwards in the prescribed manner with soil and water, he takes his bath, after which he repeats four times the four secret names of God (Ram Krisna Narayana Hari) termed the worship of name *nama sabha*. The proper method of bathing, dressing, praying and eating are set out in details by Guru together with the *Mantras* appropriate to these acts, whatever a disciple does, he vows in the name of God. In this way he delivers the things of their world to God while continuing to live in the world.

The laity makes for practical purposes a division between *saraniya* and *bhajaniya*. *Saraniya* has taken the first stage of initiation only.

At Barpeta *satra*, women are initiated after marriage. After her first menstruation a Brahmin girl becomes impure and no senior widow will accept food prepared by her. After initiation her husband's senior relatives may take food prepared by her.

Bhajana (confirmation): The highest stage of initiation ceremony is called *bhajana*, because *sarana* indicates only the formal entry of a person into the *vaisnavite* order in the nature of an oath, promising to lead a life of a true *vaisnava* under the guidance of the *Guru*. But through the *bhajana* the *Guru* imparts higher institution to those devotees who are spiritually advanced. In case of ordinary *bhajana* there must not be less than two persons as customs goes in a body seeking *bhajana*. It is said that the persons seeking instruction on *bhajana* from the *Guru* would have been under the tie *sakhitva* (friendship) throughout their lives. A *bhajaniya* bath at least twice daily and have a prayer room in their house for daily worship. As a man only accepts cooked food from those who have taken equal mantra to himself, *bhajaniya* usually form a separate group at village ceremonies distinguished by the fact that they are given uncooked food, while the rest of the guests are eating various sweet meals.

f) Social Relations: *Vaisnavite satras* of Assam are the social facts and cultural realities. Assamese society cannot be represented without referring to the *satra* institutions. Barpeta *satra* is one of biggest *satras* of Assam. Being intricality related with the people of Barpeta and culture, the *satra* performs certain social functions.

Most of the performing art forms of India including Assam are evolved out of religious institutions. The *satra* has been working as a centre of various art forms such as *bhaona*, *thiya naam*, *ojahpali*, *ghosa kirtan* etc. At Barpeta *satra* also such programs are held. The social context of these art forms cannot be ignored as the performing arts certainly emerged out of men and society. The *bhaonas* and the dramatic shows with mythological themes that are enacted in the *satra* compound depict stories showing the success of goodness over evil. In the other art forms such as *ojah-pali* and *ghosa-kirtan* the names of God are sung in chorus.

Barpeta *satra* also serves as centre of learning and playing an important role in imparting informal education. At Barpeta *satra* various episodes of Ramayana, Mahabharata and Purana are recited in every evening. Thousands of people come here for listening to such type of epics.

The educative role of Barpeta *satra* may also be seen in its day to day activities. Barpeta *satra* besides being a religious institution also serves as center of recreation and amusement. Sankaradeva introduced *bhaona* performance as it can serve as the medium of religious propaganda but also came to be a source of pleasure, and recreation.

The performing art forms of the Barpeta *satra* comprising *ojha-pali*, *bhaona* etc., are important and powerful propaganda of media to direct the attention of the people towards a particular program. Barpeta *satra* with the performance of these art forms contributes immensely in enriching the social cohesion and social integration. The two epics and the Purana have been serving as instruments for national cohesion. *Bhaona* and *ojha-pali* are performed by the local people at Barpeta. Barpeta *satra* takes part in national integration. During the time of national distress due to Chinese aggression in 1962 the *satra* donated 1 Kg of gold from the *satra*, treasury for the defense of the country (Nath, 2001: 188). From time to time, devotees of Barpeta *satra* including the *aaisakal* (women devotee in collective) have expressed solidarity with the general people. They joined in various protest rallies and processions during the time of Assam movement for the deportation of illegal foreign nations (Nath, 2001: 186).

The organization of Barpeta *satra* tries to attract the people towards every aspect of the *satra* affairs. One such affair is maintenance of social justice amongst all. The *samuaha bhakat* of the *satra* is concerned with preserving social norms among the people of Barpeta. It should be noted that particular *hatis* and different dynasties of



Figure 27: Cultural school at Barpeta *satra* compound



Figure 28: Boys from Bayan dynasty playing *khol* in *kirtan*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 29: *Bhaona* at Barpeta *satra*



Figure 30: *Samuhar mel* in front of the *math*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 31: Yearly forecasting in the first day of Assamese calendar, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 32: Common people cleaning the *kirtanghar*



Figure 33: Women devotee in southern verandah of the *kirtanghar*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 34: Devotees, listening the recitation of holy book in *bhagawatgriha*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 35: Mass gathering in the holy month Magha in front of the *kirtanghar*, Barpeta *satra*



Figure 36: Shops of various goods which are used as offerings to the *kirtanghar*,
Barpeta *satra*



Figure 37: Grocery shops in front of Barpeta *satra*



Figure 38: Vegetable vendors in the first day of the Assamese month Bahag in front
of Barpeta *satra*

Barpeta are assigned with the duties in different *satra* centric rites and rituals in different periods of time and these are still in vogue. At different times of festivals people meet one another in the *kirtanghar*. The people of Barpeta who have service in different places come home during different festivals, specially in *doul* festival. People from various places also come to Barpeta *satra* and it makes communal harmony and universal brotherhood among the masses. Barpeta *satra* was established by the grant of land given by Ahom monarch Siva Singha. Afterwards during the British rule, Barpeta was declared as a township by amalgamating 22 *hatis* of the *satra* and town dwellers lead their life according to the rules and regulations of the *satra* organization. Now the town has been extended. Most of the people are involved in *satra* organization. In this way there has been a necessity for organizational change of the *satra*. In this respect the *satra* authority as well as the public should come forward to take necessary steps. From the days of Mathuradas Burha Ata, trade and commerce expanded to new areas. Traders of Barpeta expounded their trade even Dhaka, Rongpur and Moimansing. As the time passed, the number of trading communities has increased and their trades become hereditary. But as time passes on, the professions of most of the communities have come to the verge of extinction. We can take the example of lime worker, which have already abounded their profession because of non availability raw materials. Blacksmiths, goldsmiths and other caste based professions have abounded their professions at least partially. A large number of people have also changed their professions. Modern education is one of the reasons for this large scale change in professions.

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CHAPTER VII

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE OF THE SATRA INSTITUTION OF ASSAM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BARPETA SATRA

Introduction

One of the most important sects of Hinduism is *vaisnavism*. Evidence of *vaisnavism* was found in the rock inscriptions of Mahabuthi Barman (554 A.D) which referred to the king as Param Bhagavati. But the neo- *vaisnavite* movement essentially began with the advent of Sankaradeva. The main emphasis of the neo-*vaisnavite* movement was on *bhakti* or devotion (Gait, 1905: 321).

The *satra* is a unique socio-religious and cultural institution of Assam and originated in the medieval times. It is a heritage institution of neo-*vaisnavite* movement of the state. Almost eight hundred *satras* are scattered all over Assam. The *satra* institution in Assam has produced deep impact on the socio-religious life and also the socio-cultural and socio-economic life of the people of Assam. People from different walks of life-scholars, businessmen and traders, peasants and different craftsmen who form the common mass and are linked with the process of production not only listen to the liberal and universal appeal of the neo-*vaisnavite* religion of Sankaradeva, but also come in large number to embrace this religion and become its astute devotees. The appeal of the religion is simple which can be understood even by unlettered people. If one wants salvation from this mundane existence, it is only through *bhakti* or devotion that he or she can attain it through *naam-kirtana*. *Satras* have become the centers where the devotees congregation in large number and join in the prayer to God. This has imparted a sense of unity or oneness among the people (Rajguru, 1988: 54)

a) History of Development of Satra Institution: The process of evolution of the *satra* as an institution forms a long course of History. For understanding this, the background knowledge of the *satra* institution is necessary. Sankaradevas's main emphasis was not on preaching a philosophy or dogma, but on teaching the people the simple way of living, equality of man irrespective of caste or community, practicing non-violence, discarding sacrifice of birds and animals in the name of religion, right

of entrance of all people to the *kirtanghar* etc. During Sankaradeva's time, the society was marked by the complicated and elaborate system of rituals and practices associated with the propitiation of various Gods and Goddesses and exploitation of the common people in all possible ways by the practices of elaborate ritualism and the caste system. Sankaradeva attempted to simplify the ritualism through single way of congregational progress, recitation of religious scriptures and devotion to Vishnu or Krishna (Sarma, 1990: 327).

The two aspects of this teachings namely submission to one God and rejection of caste distinction in the religious sphere is an attempt to create universal brotherhood. But that was not in consonance with the ideals of the ruling feudal king. So the monarch looked at the new religion with suspicion. At-times the enmity to the new religion become so intense that Sankaradeva had to flee away from the Ahom Kingdom and took shelter at Barpeta which was at that time under the rule of Koch king. Sankaradeva did most of his creative work by living at Patbaushi near Barpeta for about 16 years. *satras* also expounded gradually from Barpeta. After the expiry of Sankaradeva, the duty of proselytizing the devotees fell on his principal devotee Madhavadeva. He made Mathuradas Burha Ata the first *adhikara* of Barpeta Satra (Pathak, 1959: 14).

Apart from Madhavadeva, there were two other apostle of Sankaradeva, namely Damodaradeva and Harideva. During the time of Sankaradeva, there were no differences among the principal devotees. But after the death of Sankaradeva, differences began to surface among the principal devotees. It was Damodaradeva who first seceded. Although there were no formal differences between Harideva and Sankaradeva, in course of time, he also established his own sect. Accordingly there were three *samhatis* namely *brahma samhati*, *purusa samhati*, *kala samhati* and *nika samhati*. The term *samhati* is synonym of the term *sangha* which means an association.

Brahma Samhati: *Brahma samhati* includes the sub-sects of Damodaradeva and Harideva. Both of them were inspired and influenced by Sankaradeva, the great *vaisnavite* reformer. The *brahma samhati* comprising the two sub-sects of Damodaradeva and Harideva and consisting of the most affluent *satras* of Assam is the most influential of the *samhatis*. Most of the *satras* affiliated to this *samhati* are headed by Brahmins. These Gurus introduced compromise between Vedic and

puranic rituals and the devotional practices of *vaisnavite* religion. There is no bar for a person to be a good *vaisnava* even performing the daily and occasional rites enjoined by the *dharmasastras*. The chalking out of the middle path between Vedic rites and rituals and devotional practices helped considerably to win over those people who did not like to give up the Vedic rites and rituals.

Kala Samhati: *Kala samhati* owes its origin to Gopal Dev (Gopal Ata). He was one of the twelve apostles nominated by Madhavadeva to proselytize people to the new faith. The followers of this branch of *vaisnavism* claimed that Gopaldeva is the supreme religious head after Madhavadeva.

Purusa Samhati: According to this sub-sect, Purusottama, the grandson of Sankaradeva is the real successor to this headship of the order founded by his grandfather. The *purusa samhati* is often the name of *purusa* (man) the religious head of this sub-sect.

Nika Samhati: The *nika samhati* took shape after the formation of the others three sub-sects appeared to have gone astray from the strict principles of *vaisnavism*. Padma Ata, an apostle nominated by Madhavadeva was the head of this sect.

Taking into account all the *satras* belonging to different sub sects the total no of *satras* would be more than 700. While some of them are very powerful with large income, most of these are poor, maintaining their existence with meagre resources. Some of them have already ceased their functions (Sarma, 1999: 93-138).

‘Under the umbrella of the four *samhatas*, *satras* grew abundantly as a class of socio-religious institutions in the 17th century in the post-Sankardev times. *Satras* soon flourished throughout the Brahmaputra valley to engage the masses in the developmental activities with a devotional bend of mind’ (Nath, 2013: 250).

B) Relation of the Satras with the State: The neo- *vaisnavite* movement and the *satra* institution of Assam did not have a smooth sailing in the earlier years. The monarch looked at the activities of the *satras* with suspicion. The Brahmin priests of that time alleged before the king that the neo-*vaisnavite* religion did not have any respect for the established religious rites and practices. As a result the king at various times arrested the *vaisnava* devotees and subjected them to persecution and even to death. Even Sankaradeva’s son was beheaded by the king while Madhavadeva was put to imprisonment for about 6 months. Owing to the hostile attitude of the king

Sankaradeva with his followers had to move from one place to another place and finally sheltered in the Koch Kingdom (Sarma, 2014: 7).

But with the progress of time, the act of proselytizing increased and no of *satras* as well as no of devotees swelled both in the eastern and western part of the Brahmaputra valley. The monarchs began to look kindly at the *vaisnavite* movement. The king also favoured many of the *Satras* with land grant and money. The bigger *satras* of Majuli such as Garmur, Dakhinpat etc were given land grant of several thousand *bighas*¹ of land (Nath, 2012: 33). Moreover, *paiks* (bonded labour) were also attached with the land. As a result the position of the *adhikaras* of those *satras* was considerably high in the society and they wielded considerable power. The Mayamaria revolt was a clear proof of the money and military power of the Mayamaria Mahantas (Guha, 1993: 17).

The effects of royal influence were found to be salutary for the *satras* on all spheres. The royal patronage gave the *satras* prestige and honour and brought about stability and progress of the society.

c) *Satra Institution and Socio-Economic Development:* After initial uncertainty the *satras* were established on a firm and secure footing. The Ahom monarch on the east and the Koch monarch on the west made land grant to almost all the *satras*. Such lands are *debottar* or *dharmottar* or *brahmottar* which were gifted to the *satras* without payment of any rent on their part to the government (Guha, 1993: 44). One of the reasons for which the *satras* received royal patronage was that. Social stability and peace were established in them which had a salutary effect on agriculture and other economic activities. *Satras* encouraged agriculture and other economic activities by bringing social unity. Once people settled under a *satra*, they did not want to move out from it. Along with agriculture, other economic activities also developed. The *charit puthis*² gave us an idea of how different trades grew up within the *satras*. The copper plates through which land grant was made to the *satras* mentioned the names of different craftsman. The subjects paid tax to the king in terms of money instead of

¹ Bigha: A local unit for measuring land. It varies from one third of an acre to almost one acre. The standardized *bigha* in Assam is 14,400 square feet, which equals 1,333.33 square meters or roughly one third of an acre.

² *Charita puthis*: Biographies of religious leaders

the earlier practice of compulsory labour service. The *charit puthis* mentioned the names of different taxes such as *kar, katal, panchak, begas, gulkar* etc.

The vast tract of land gifted to the *satras* became in course of time private property on a hereditary basis of the *adhikaras* who cultivated such land with the help of *paiks*. Once a person becomes disciple of a *satra*, he need not have to do other compulsory duties, outside the *satra*. This helped in the increase of devotees within the *satras*. The *satras* also encouraged in the development of different crafts such as blacksmithy, coppersmithy, goldsmithy, carpentry, weaving and a host of other activities. A part of these products paid by the subjects to the *adhikaras* found their way to the market. The economic position of the *adhikaras* improved considerably and with it political power and affluence. "According to Gazetteer of Eastern Bengal and Assam Garmur *satra* (in Majuli) received about 40,000 acres of revenue free land for the Ahom kings (Nath, 2012: 238). With the direct patronage from the Ahom and Koch kings the economy of the *satras* becomes self sustaining. "The powerful *satras* developed a kind of peculiar socio economic progress as early as the late 17th century. With large areas of revenue free lands at their disposal and sufficient no of tenants to work there on their own terms and conditions, the *satras* created a kind of feudal relationship" (Nath, 2012: 239). The British government did not take away the land granted by the previous Govt. but revenue free nature of the *satra* land was curtailed. Instead *satra* lands were mostly made *nisf-khiraj* (half rent).

The *satras* in course of time have become the only organization through which *vaisnavism* is propagated. But the role played by *satras* in other spheres of life is also commendable. During the last few years of its existence, it has been enriching the social life morally, socially and educationally and contributed a great deal in the realm of art and literature. These cultural effects are not altogether independent of the religious movement.

d) Moral and Social Effects: Assam is the land where people of various ethnic groups with different culture and beliefs are living together. But this foundation of the society was weak and there was no bond of unity. The monotheistic *vaisnava* movement of Sankaradeva gradually prevailed over polytheism, tantrism and animism of the former religion and created a kind of unity among the people. The *vaisnavite* movement (since it is all-India in character) also brought about emotional unity of the people of Assam with the rest of the country. The state also acted as a kind of guardian of

morality by keeping close vigilance over its disciples. The *satras* also acted as self governing institutions. All disputes among the disciples were tried and solved through the *satra* institution.

e) Elevation of Backward Classes: According to *vaisnava* faith, there is no distinction among the disciple on the basis of castes and creed. In the *kirtanghar* men belonging to the schedule caste can freely mix with a Brahmin. This has considerably minimized caste rigour and caste distinction. Even Muslims were allowed to become disciple of the new religion (Baruah, 2009: 45). Through free intermingling and interaction of different caste and communities, the basis of the Assamese nation was built up.

f) Contribution of Satra Institution: For the *vaisnavite* movement in Assam the *satra* institution acted as an aid in making the Assamese society united. During the last few centuries of its existence it has been enriching the Assamese life morally, socially, educationally, culturally and contributed a great deal to the realm of literature and art (Sarma, 1999: 213). But these contributions are not altogether independent of religion; rather these may be termed as the products of the same religious movement I have divided these contributions into 4 divisions – Social Contribution, Educational Contribution, Cultural Contribution and Literary Contribution.

Social Contribution: The social life of the people is related with religion. The moral and ethical basis of the society is derived from religion. *Satra* is the main institution around which all cultural and religious activities move. The *satra* acts more or less as the guardians of morality by keeping close vigilance over their disciples. By maintaining regular agents at different localities and by personal visits, the heads of the *satra* try to tone up the moral of the people.

Existence of a *namghar*, big or small, is noticed in every Assamese village. All cultural activities of Assamese village move around the *namghar*. A village *namghar* is nothing but an extended wing of the *satra* institution. The *namghar* is the gift of *satra* institution. It is at once a village prayer hall, a village court and a village theatre (Sarma, 1999: 215). The villagers assemble here on various occasions to discuss matters concerning their village.

But one of the most important social contributions of the *satra* institution is the upliftment of the backward classes and minimization of the rigor of the caste distinction. So called untouchable and backward classes were freely taken into the religious fold, and the portals to a better mode of living and higher conduct of life were opened to them. In this respect *satras* functioned more or less on the line of modern Christian missionaries in India.

Another notable social contribution is its services to the tribes during its long history of more than four centuries. The earliest attempt to bring the backward tribes into the fold of *vaisnavism* was made by Sankaradeva himself who accepted a Garo tribes man named Govinda, a Miri named Jayahari, and a Muslim named Chand Sai as his disciple. In Sankaradeva's translation the fourth chapter of book II of the *Bhagavata-Purana* we find a significant stanza where in the tribes of Assam have been mentioned as getting themselves sanctified by the influence of *vaisnavism* (Sarma, 1999: 217).

Educational Contribution: In the educational sphere the *satra* institution contributed a lot. In medieval times, the education was not a concern of the state. Some *Tols* and *Pathshalas* (schools) manned privately by some individual, but it was not sufficient. With the development of the *satra* institution the responsibility of imparting education came under its domain. The *satra* institution voluntarily took upon itself the noble responsibility of enlightening the people through their own tools. The monks receive education not only in *vaisnavite* texts but also in Vedic and *puranic* lore (www.tributetosankarkeva.org/satra.htm). The *adhikara* and other functionaries also impart instruction to the monks through discussions. Further the monks are given written exercises not only in copying out manuscripts but also translating Sanskrit scripture and composing original works in Assamese. After years of education and rigorous training in *vaisnava* faith and discipline, these monks are deputed to various parts of the province for the purpose of preaching and propagating their faith. In this way, the *satra* produced successful teachers and missionaries as well as eminent philosophers, scholars and poets.

Cultural Contribution: In the cultural sphere the *satra* institution contributes a lot. Dramatic performance known as *bhaona*, introduced for the first time by Sankaradeva as the medium of religious propaganda continued up to the present time. The *ankiya naats* written by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva are playing a great role. The *satra*

institution also contributes to the Assamese society with songs, paintings and dance. The various forms of music, dance and dramas are also the means of attracting people towards the faith and establish a sort of articulation between the *satra* and community and *satras* become intimately related with Assamese society and culture.

Literary Contribution: There was the efflorescence of a great literature in the wake of the Sankaradeva's movement in Assam. Sankara and Madhava themselves composed a good number of songs, dramas, verse narratives and other types of literature, wherein they expounded and elaborated the teachings of the faith they sought to propagate (Nath, 1988: 308). "A host of poets, writers and scholars like- Ananta Kandali, Rama Saraswati, Vaikunthanatha Kaviratna, Sridhara Kandali, Gopaladeva, Ramacarana Tahkura, Daityari Thakura, Gopalacarana Dvija flocked under the banner of *bhakti* and formed into a vigorous literary movement" (Neog, 2004: 134). It was the age of one ideal, that of *bhakti* of one God, Vishnu-Krishna; of one leadership, that of Sankaradeva; of one book the *Bhagavata Purana* (Neog, 1965: 107). The *vaisnava* writers' adherence to the sanction of scriptural authority amounted to a limitation upon their creative ability and a curb upon their poetic genius. Nonetheless, the literary output of Sankara and Madhava alone is considerable, and is characterized by a rare power of reading the spirit of the original fights of creative imagination. Their literary works acted as the chief machinery of propaganda of the faith and afforded both enlightenment and pleasure of the people (Neog, 2004: 134-135). He translated in simple verse of the whole of the first, second, eleventh and twelfth books and portion of the third, sixth, eighth and tenth books of the *Bhagavata* into the spoken dialect of local people (Baruah, 2009: 260).

In his early works, *Harischandra Upakhyaana* and *Rukmini Harana* (Kakati, 1921 in Neog 1980: 173), Sankaradeva exhibited the same narrative zeal as was evident in the preceding period of Assamese poetry. Each of the 25 sections of the *Kirtanaghosha*, the most popular and important of Sankaradeva's works, contains several *kirtana* songs with refrains, goes to relate a story or expound a subject. *Gunamala*, a tiny work of six *kirtanas* of jingling verses, is a remarkable feat of mental speed and brevity of expression (Kakati, 1921: 173).

Sankaradeva composed 34 songs, later known as *bargeeta*, Madhavadeva complementing them with 157 (Kakati, 1921: 173) of his composition. Sankaradeva's songs sing of the futility of human efforts and urge upon listeners the need for *bhakti*,

some of them are prayer songs, pure and simple and didactic verses. Madhava's songs breathe an open air atmosphere and excel in the description of Krishna's child life and the bringing out of the eternal mother in Yoshoda (Neog, 2004: 135-136). Both of them wrote a number of songs called *bhatima* (panegyrics) in praise of the worshipful Lord. The dramas of both are a type by themselves and do not follow any model like Sanskrit, Prakrit or otherwise (Neog, 2004: 136). The dramas are in an artificial literary dialect, used in the *bargeeta* and *bhatima* also, later called as *brajawali bhasa* or *brajabuli bhasa* (Kakati, 1971: 70) and this has a queer mixture of Assamese, Maithili, Hindi and other elements (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brajabuli). "The *bhaona* or neo-*vaisnava* form of dramas owes its origin to the unique genera of plays evolved by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, which they themselves had called *Nata*, *Yatra* or *Anka*, and which later on came to be designated as *ankiya nata*" (Sarma, 1994: 419). The dramas are a type by themselves and there are no act or scene divisions within a play. The *sutradhara* role originally taken from the classical Sanskrit drama is the central characters, conducting the whole action with songs, dances and narratives and explanatory commentary in prose.. Dramas are normally performed at the common prayer hall both in the *satras* and in the village *namgharas*. Madhvadeva himself staged drama in open houses called *rangghar* or *rangiyalghar* (Neog, 1965: 267). Being religious in character, there is always the role of Krishna or Rama in the Assamese *vaisnava* dramas.

In Assam neo-*vaisnavism* brought in its train a wide culture of music. The *vaisnava* music in Assam is rich and remarkable for its tone and variety. Among the different forms of this music, Sankaradeva himself composed a number of devotional songs (Nath, 2011: 58). Songs composed by Sankaradeva and Madhvadeva are still sung in the *satras* (Barpeta Satra). The *bargeetas* are composed in *brajawali bhasha* although a good number of them are composed by his disciple Madhavadeva deviate from it (Neog, 1965 rprnt 2008: 278). The next class of songs is the *ankar geet*. These are the songs of dramas (Nath, 2011: 59). Another important song which is sung in the *satras* is *nama-kirtana* which is easy for all classes of singers as it is sung in chorus with a leader called *naam lagowa*. Being easy this form of music is popular both in the *satras* and in the villages. *naama-kirtana* is accompanied by use of musical instruments like- *khol*, *mridanga*, *nagara* and cymbal called *bar tal*. A different set of music known as *ojha_pali* is popular in all the *satras* of Majuli. It is a distinct form of dance and music performed in form of a chorus and similar to the *nam-kirtana* (Nath,

2011: 59-60). At Barpeta *satra*, type of *ojha-pali* is called *ghosha kirtana*. The *satra* dances mainly center round the *anka* dramas of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. The *sutrdhara* (master of the show), the hero that is Rama and Krishna and the women roles, that are the *Vrindavana gopis*, provide the class types of the dance performance (Neog, 2004: 140). Of the various other forms of dances, important ones include- *gossai prabeshar nach* or *krishna bhangi*, *gopi prabeshar nach* or *gopi bhangi*, *cali nach*, *jhumura* or *nritya bhangi*, *ras nritya*, varieties of dance forma associated with *bhaonas* etc (Nath, 2011 in Nath 2011: 60). At Barpeta *satra* One more dance type is found that is *bhor tal nritya*.

Dances involve the use of various kinds of musical instruments like *khol*, *tal*, *mridanga* etc. *Tals* are of three varieties- big or *bar tal*, *bhor tal* (cymbal originally imported from Bhutan by Sankaradeva), middle sized- *pati tal* and small sized- *khuti tal* (Nath, 2011: 61). *khol*, *mridanga* and *tals* are used in the performance of various kinds of dance, drama and devotional songs. A very large wooden and skinned drum called *daba* is found in every *satra* and village *namghar*. It is used in congregational prayer and in the evening as a symbol of announcing the time for prayer. At Barpeta *satra* also *daba* is beaten in the morning and evening also (Das, 2010: 43). *Nagara* is another type of musical instrument.

One of the many forms in which the *vaisnava* Renaissance of India manifested itself is the art of painting. Like other states in Assam also *vaisnavism* brought in the practice of illuminating the holy books with small illustrative paintings. Sankaradeva is also believed to have been a painter (Gogoi, 1990: 86). On one occasion he is said to have painted on *tulapat* scenes of seven *vaikunthas*. On another he painted with vermilion and yellow arsenic the picture of an elephant and pasted it on a wooden book-case to be presented to his royal patron, Naranarayana (Neog, 2004: 141). He had scenes of Krishna's life in Vrindavana woven with the help of the weavers of Tantikuchi (present Barpeta) into a sheet of cloth of 180 feet long with a caption for each miniature (Gogoi, 1990:117). He prepared this cloth for king Naranarayana (Khan Choudhry, 1936: 101). "The illustrations in a copy of Sankaradeva's rendering of the first half of 10th *Skandha* of the *Bhagavata purana*, found in the Bali *satra* of the Bardowa group, have been reproduced in print in a recent publication, *Citra Bhagavata*. The original copy bore the date 1461 *Saka*/1539 A.D. which seems to be too early; the work may suitably date from the late 17th century" (Neog, 2004: 141). It is evident that these paintings were done in some *satras*, most probably in Bali *satra*,

where the original manuscript was preserved (Neog, 1949: 32). In some *satras* are to be seen mural paintings and wood carvings of some beauty and with folk-art elements in them. Barpeta *satra kirtanghars*, which has now been demolished, was decorated with many finely engraved and painted wooden panels, depicting scenes from religious texts (Pathak, 1959: 135). Barpeta *satra* also shows the art of ivory carving. Paintings also are provided on wooden posts and post plates, book rests, raised trays used for the purpose of making offerings (*sarai*), and pleasure boat (Sarma, 1995: 277).

Socio-religious study of Barpeta Satra

Barpeta *satra* was established by Madhavadeva as a center of neo-*vaisnavite* religion and culture based on the cult of *bhakti*. The leaders of neo-*vaisnavite* movement like-Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva, Harideva, Damodardeva and their apostles established more than 800 *satras* throughout the length and breadth of Assam in the medieval period (Sarma, 1999: Introduction). Many of them are now extinct while a large number of them are still functioning. Till now they are a potent force to reckon with and cannot be adequately known without knowing the neo-*vaisnavite* movement to the functioning of the *satra*. Barpeta *satra* is one of the earliest *satras* of Assam. It was established in the year 1570 A. D. Mathuradas Burha Ata was the first *adhikara* of Barpeta *satra*. Barpeta *satra* is older in age than most of the *satras* established in Upper Assam. In order to streamline the activities of the *satra*, Mathuradas Bura Ata constituted altogether 22 *hatis*. But there are three *thul* (principal) *hatis* such as- Uttar *hati*, Dakhin *hati* and Na *hati* (Pathak, 1959: 71). Each of the 22 *hatis* have one *haitarghar*³, where from the activities of the *hati* are managed. Persons living in a particular *hati* take all the decisions concerning the *hati* by holding meetings in that house. Minor offences are also tried by holding meetings in that house. Barpeta *satra* does not only cater to the religious needs of the people. It has multi pronged influence on different aspects of the people. The *satra* has tremendously influenced the social and cultural life of the people of the town as well as the surrounding territories. By unfolding spirit of one God, it has demonstrated the path of simple living and high thinking. The *satra* has also focused on how to lead a simple life to the devotees, most

³ *Haitar Ghar*: Community hall which are present in each and every Hatis of Barpeta, which were constituted by Mathuradas Burha Ata.

of whom are poor and illiterate people. The philosophy of the *mahapurushiya* religion has also moderated to a great extent the rigid caste system by establishing equality among different caste group. The motto of the religion is that all are equal in the eye of law and everyone has access to the *kirtanghar*. Thanks to such philanthropic attitude, the rigidity of caste system which is observed in other places is not experienced here in Assam. It has also patronized different cottage industries among the residents of the *satra*. People residing in *satra* become mild and gentle in behaviour. Following discussion deals with the impacts of *satra* situated at Barpeta on the socio-religious life of the people of Barpeta town.

a) Influence of the Bhakti Movement among the people: Barpeta *satra* has contributed a lot by propagating monotheism, showing the path of how to lead a life of spiritual happiness, equality and equal status for all, dilution of castism and caste destination among people, creation of employment opportunities for all development of handicrafts and trade. People living under the atmosphere of the *satra* become gentle by nature and of good behavior. Barpeta *satra*, like other *satras* of Assam helping in the promotion of songs and dances, art and culture, education and thus help Formation of Assamese Nationality.

The neo- *vaisnivate* religion of Sankaradeva does not recognize caste distinction at least in the religious places. All are equal in the eyes of God and all whether a Brahman or a cobbler can participate equally in the religious activities. Because of this extremely liberal view, people of lower caste and even Muslims were attracted to this religion. This kind of atmosphere helped in the dilution of different castes and paved its way for nation building. Barpeta *satra* does not only cater to the religious needs of the people. It has multi prolonged influence on different aspects of the people. The *satra* has tremendously influenced the social and cultural life of the people of the town as well as the surrounding territories. By unfolding spirit of one God, it has demonstrated the path of simple living and high thinking. The *satra* has also focused on how to lead a simple life to the devotees, most of whom are poor and illiterate people. The philosophy of the *mahapurushiya* religion has also moderated to a great extent the rigid caste system by establishing equality among different caste groups. The motto of the religion is that all are equal in the eye of law and everyone has access to the *kirtanghar*. Thanks to such philanthropic attitude, the rigidity of caste system which is observed in other places is not experienced here in Assam. It

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So far art and culture are concerned, the *satra* becomes the place where these are patronized and people are concerned to take them up. *Satriya* dance which was declared as classical dance form a few years back is regularly practiced. Moreover, drawing of art in hand written manuscripts, dresses for artists acting in different characters, making of ornaments etc are some other forms of art which are encouraged in the *satra*. People also become expert in different cottage industries like pottery, carpentry, gold smithy, black smithy etc. In older times there were people who were specially engaged in lime making from a special kind of snail. In short, till some years back, Barpeta was full of hectic activities. Goods produced in different cottage industries were sold both inside and outside Barpeta town. Through this process a class of traders grew up in the town.

In Sankaradeva's religion there is no difference on the basis of castes and creed. Everybody is equal in the eyes of God. People of all castes and creed have the same right to enter the *kirtanghar*. Because of this philanthropic attitude, people of lower castes and tribes came in large number to embrace the *mahapurushiya* religion. Sankaradeva even allowed the Muslims to become disciples. But in course of time, his followers gave up this philanthropic philosophy. Caste distinction began to surface. The hardliner began to restrict the lower caste groups from entering into the *Kirtanghar*. However such restriction were completely removed when Mahatma Gandhi came to Barpeta in the year 1934 (Raychoudhury, 2010: 235)

b) Impacts of Barpeta Satra on the Religious Life of the People: The society of Barpeta is fully *satra* centric. Within the periphery of the *satra*, influence of the *satra* on the people either directly or indirectly is immense. People of Barpeta are votaries of the deity of Krishna in their day to day life and pro *vaisnavite* in their culture and tradition. But it does not mean that they are engaged in hari-kirtana all the time. In this context Uday Nath wrote- "Although simplicity, detachment to worldly pursuit and worshipping of God are hallmark of *satra* institution, yet it is not fully engaged in religious activities alone. It has contributed irreproachably to the social and cultural progress of the people of Assam in general and the people of Barpeta in particular. Some other contributions of the *satra* are demonstration of simple and comfortable life to the socially backward people, to open the door of monotheism for all caste and

creed, dilution of the rigid caste system by admitting human values and equality for all and helping in the growth of handicrafts and inspiration to the people for works etc. are the contribution of this *satra* to open some essential way of work” (Nath, 2001: 147).

The commitment of the devotees to the *satra* arises concomitantly with establishment of the *satra* itself “At that time specifically Gopal Tanti with his associate devotees tried to develop the *satra* as an ideal *satras* of Assam and also succeeded in their endeavor. So, the popularity of Madhabdeva fame goes to full of brim during stays for about seven and half years after establishing the *satra* and were influenced by the rites and rituals of the *satra*” (Das, 2003: 15). This is still lightening the cultural horizon of Barpeta like akkhay banti of Bapeta *satra*. According to some devotees, the rites and rituals of the *satra* are being carried on from 16th century in whose shape was founded by Madhabeva.

People of Barpeta society are involved on a mass scale in the rites and rituals attached with different *satriya* festivals like *janmastami*, *tithis*, *domahi* and *doul utsav*. These impart a sense of cohesion and oneness among the people and they belong to a family. Mass participation in rituals like holy, *pek yatra*, *karbhar* to the *satra*, fasting in different festivals of *satra* like *tithis*, *domahi* etc. produce a sense of catharsis in the mind of the devotees.

Rites and rituals produce deep spiritual impact in the minds of the people. They come to believe in the oneness of the self with his creator. He becomes a firm devotee who dedicates everything at the feet of the God.

Different *sewait bangsaras* (dynasties service to the *kirtanghar*) are attached to different generations of the *bangsaras* to become part and parcel of *satriya* religious activities. These activities imbibe in them deep spiritual sense and moderate to a great extent their mundane activities.

The underlying spirit of the rites and rituals observed in the ‘*Satra* is service to God is service to man.’

Religious activities have great educative value. They teach people how to lead a good life with good thought and actions. These help in wiping off hatred, animosity, greed and other vices.

Mass participation in rites and rituals by the devotees dilute racial and caste prejudices. The underlying notion is ‘Ram’ resides in every soul. So offer your

obeisance to everybody. There is no distinction between high and low among the devotees.

Devotees living within the territorial boundaries of the *satra* come to offer obeisance to lord Krishna in the *kirtanghar* on important occasions like completion of *shradha* ceremony on the occasion of death of a person, the ceremonial purification of a girl after attaining puberty and in this connection after completion of the fasting of the girl, on the day of marriage by both of bride groom and bride, on the birth of a child, after proselytisation or salvation, birth day of children or adults etc. These rites bring a sense of order in the society.

Religious activities observed by the people inculcate in them a sense of cleanliness in their daily chores like cooking, cleaning, washing etc.

c) Impacts of Barpeta Satra on the Social Life of the People: The *satra* institution has produced deep impact on the socio-cultural and economic life of the people of Assam in general and the people of Barpeta in particular. People from different castes who form the common mass and are linked with the process of production not only listen to the liberal and universal appeal of the neo-*vaisnavite* religion of Sankardeva, but also come in large number to embrace this religion and become its astute devotees. The appeal of the religion is simple which can be understood even by unlettered people. *Satras* became not only centers of spiritual activities but also centers of socio-cultural and economic activities. In the earlier period, most of the people of Assam lived almost a nomadic life moving from one place to another place when they were disturbed by natural calamities like flood or epidemics like cholera, small pox etc or due to depredations of wild animals like tiger or elephants, because during those days the forests were infested with wild animals. Often people fled to deep forests to protect themselves from royal wrath or depredations of neighbouring community like Bhutiyas, the kacharies etc. Even Sankardeva and his community had to move from one place to another place before finally coming to Barpeta (Lekhuru, 1952: 256). Formation of *satras* helped in creating permanent settlements of the toiling masses in different places of Assam and Barpeta also. Once people began to live within a *satra*, they did not generally try to move to other places, they formed a new *satra* owing allegiance to the original *satra*. Thus the *satras* helped in creating permanent settlements, which was very much necessary to carry on economic activities on a continuing basis. The *satras* contributed in a big way in boosting the

agricultural economy of Assam, which would have been impossible without a permanent population sitting at a particular place. Side by side with agriculture, other occupations also developed like carpentry, weaving, making of different agricultural economy thrived under the fostering care of the *satras* like Barpeta and others (Rajguru, 1988: 67). The neo-vaisnavite religion had to face royal wrath of the Ahom kings initially since they thought that the particular religious movement might to be directed against the royalty. The new religion was also maligned by the priests who approached king Suhungmung Dihingiya (1497-1539) and alleged that the religion propagated by Sankardeva did not believe in the Hindu rites of worship (Neog, 1965: 121). The royal attitude which was initially belligerent against the new religion got mellowed down in course of time, as the rulers found that the intention of the new religion was not to spread disaffection against monarchy, but one of help and co-operation. In fact from time of the Ahom King Siva Singha onwards the royalty began to patronize the new religion as it did in the case of other religion also by offering land grants were made either in the name of the presiding deity in the name of the priests (Sarmadaloi, 2003: 76). This provided an economic footing to Barpeta *satra* to carry on their religious activities. Barpeta *satra* was organised on the basis of division of labour. The *sewaits* were allotted *pattas* of land to carry on cultivation. Apart from peasant families in the *satra*, there were artisans carrying on different productive activities like carpentry, blacksmithy, goldsmithy, coppersmithy, weaving etc. All were considered as devotees owing allegiance to the presiding deity of the *satra*. Thus Barpeta *satra* offers unity and cohesion among different castes and communities as never before people in Assam who had been semi-nomad shifting from one area to another, none become permanently settled under the *satra*. The monarchy needed a permanent population clutching to the earth for economic prosperity and political cohesion. The *satra* provide this platform.

Vaisnavite satras of Assam are the social facts and cultural realities. Assamese society cannot be represented without referring to the *satra* institutions. Most of the performing art forms of India including Assam are evolved out of religious institutions. The *satra* has been working as a centre of various art forms such as *bhaona*, *thiya naam*, *ojahpali*, *ghosa kirtan* etc. At Barpeta *satra* also such programs are held. The social context of these art forms cannot be ignored as the performing arts certainly emerged out of men and society. The *bhaonas* and the dramatic shows with mythological themes that are enacted in the *satra* compound depict stories

showing the success of goodness over the evil. In the other art forms such as *ojha-pali* and *ghosa-kirtan* the names of God are sung in chorus.

Barpeta *satra* also serves as centre of learning and play an important role in imparting informal education. At Barpeta *satra* various episodes of Ramayana, Mahabharata and Purana are recited in every evening. Thousands of people come here for listening to such type of epics.

The educative role of Barpeta *satra* may also be seen in its day to day activities. Barpeta *satra* besides being a religious institution also serves as center of recreation and amusement. Sankaradeva introduced *bhaona* performance as it can serve as the medium of religious propaganda but also came to be a source of pleasure, and recreation. Barpeta *satra* has its own administrative and economic structure. It is administered by the assembly of the inmates called *samuha*. Barpeta *satra* influences the economic life of the people. In this context the formation of the *hati* fund bears great significance. Gokul Pathak wrote in this context thus “Shrewd Burha Ata (Mathura Das Burha Ata) not only divided the whole *satra* in to 22 *hatis* but also established a treasury in every *hati* for improvement of economic condition. People began to take advantage of the treasury established in each *hati*. Burha Ata formulated certain laws and regulation for smooth running of these treasuries, which are still in vogue. Even today the poor people living in the *hatis* get benefit from the *hati* fund. These treasuries enlivened the economy of Barpeta helping the traders and craftsmen.”(Pathak, 1959: 75).

The performing art forms of Barpeta *satra* comprising *ojha-pali*, *bhaona* etc. are important and powerful propaganda media to direct the attention of the people towards a particular program. Barpeta *satra* with the performance of these art forms contributes immensely in enriching the social cohesion and social integration. The two epics and the Purana have been serving as instruments for national cohesion. *Bhaona* and *ojha-pali* are performed by the local people at Barpeta. Barpeta *satra* takes part in national integration. During the time of national distress due to Chinese aggression in 1962 the *satra* donated 1 Kg of gold from the *satra*, treasury for the defense of the country (Nath, 2001: 188). From time to time, devotees of Barpeta *satra* including the *aaisakal* (women devotee in collective) have expressed solidarity with the general people. They joined in various protest rallies and processions during the time of Assam movement for the deportation of illegal foreign nations (Nath, 2001: 186).

The Hati Fund: The social organization of Barpeta is *satra* centric and different castes and communities are connected with the *satra* and they provide different specific services to the *satra*. This is found in the case of some other *satras* as well. This cemented the bond of unity between the devotees and the *satra* on a firm footing. Thus the *satra* institution influences not only the religious and cultural lives of the people, but their economic lives as well. In this context the formation of the *hati* fund bears great significance. Gokul Pathak wrote in this context thus “Shrewd Burha Ata (Mathura Das Burha Ata) not only divided the whole *satra* in to 22 *hatis* but also established a treasury in every *hati* for improvement of economic condition. People began to take advantage of the treasury established in each *hati*. Burha Ata formulated certain laws and regulation for smooth running of these treasuries, which are still in vogue. Even today the poor people living in the *hatis* get benefit from the *hati* fund. These treasuries enlivened the economy of Barpeta help the traders and craftsmen” (Pathak, 1959: 75). Anil Raychoudhury wrote in this context that, “In 1930 and thereabout the total sum of money in all the *hati* treasuries stood approximately at Rs/ 89,000/-. *Hati* funds were the common treasuries managed democratically by the people” (Raychoudhury, 2000: 168). The funds are sometimes lent to people living outside the *hati* but at a higher rate of interests (Raychoudhury, 2000: 168).

c) Place of Woman: The status of women appears to be different in different societies. Generally in patriarchal society the status of women is lower than that of man. Yet highly learned women were respected even in old patriarchal societies. Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva accorded high place to women. Women were given their due honour in the neo-Vaisnavite society. Madhavadeva allowed women to participate in *nam-prasanga* (recitation of holy songs) inside the *kirtanghar*. When the *kirtanghar* was burnt down by forest fire during Mathuradas Burha Ata’s time, he allowed his wife to keep the *banti* (ever burning wick) before God. From that time, the wick before the sanctum- sanctorum is never allowed to extinguish. Harideva, another *vaisnava* Guru and a contemporary of Sankaradeva appointed his daughter Bhbaneswari as *adhikara* of Maneri *satra* (Sarma, 1999: 82). Another name worth mentioning was that of Padmapriya, daughter of Gopal Ata of Bhawanipur. She was an erudite scholar who composed many devotional songs of *vaisnavite* faith. Dr. Maheswar Neog commented on the position of power and prestige of women of Barpeta that ‘Women were given due honour in the *vaisnava* society’ (Raychoudhury,

2012: 132). It can be mentioned in this respect that Madhabdeva told women like mother of all and other women to attend the Morning Prayer at *kirtanghar* regularly. From this it is known that women took active part in the religious affairs of the *satra*. But of late, the position of women within the male dominated society of Barpeta appears to be downgraded and women are being looked down upon. They are not allowed now to enter the main prayer hall where the idol of Lord Krishna is worshipped. It is alleged that women without proper cleanliness may enter the holy place even during the days of menstruation. Hence women are debarred. However on close scrutiny, such contention seems to have been baseless because women are more aware of cleanliness and purity than man folk. The same changes may also be levelled against man folk who may enter the holy place without proper cleanliness.

The importance of *satra* institution does not lie alone on its religious activities. It has contributed much to the cultural development of the Assamese people. It gave a rich religious literature, revived and popularized the art of classical music and dance, introduced dramatic performance, encouraged handicrafts and introduced the art of manuscript painting. The elevation of socially backward people by presenting before them monotheistic religions to all alike irrespective of caste and sex, the loosening of the spiritual level, the spread of learning through Assamese versions of Sanskrit scriptures, the popularization of ethical virtues like kindness, non-violence, obedience etc amongst the villagers, and above all the fostering of a spirit of fellow-feeling or a bond of unity amongst persons of different parts of the country, are some of the notable social contributions of the *vaisnava* movement and the *satra* institution. But no institution can claim perfection and the *satra* is not an exception. The unusual multiplication of *satras* during the later part of the seventeenth century and after cannot be ascribed solely to the evangelical motive. Brothers and other members of the same family are frequently seen founding different *satras* instead of devoting themselves to the cause of the ancestral *satra*. The chronicles of several *satras* contained accounts of friction among members of the same family on the question of succession to the headship, and establishment of separate *satras* consequently.

Although detachment from material pleasure and attainment of salvation are the hallmarks of *satra* institution, yet its activities are not solely confined to religion alone. It has made immense contribution to social and cultural life of the Assamese society at large and to this *satra* centric town in particular. This *satra* has unfolded

some essential aspects of social and cultural life. Such as projecting the way of how to lead a sound life before the socially backward people, emphasizing the belief of one religion, one God before the people irrespective of caste or creed, relaxation of harsh caste system through admittance of values and equality of status, encouragement of cottage industries and such other essential aspects of life. The *satra* has influenced in different ways not only the residents of Barpeta, but also the people of the neighbouring *satras*. Barpeta has been acting as the symbol of morality and truth by focusing close attention of its disciple. It is a common knowledge that people living under the influence of the *satra* sober and gentle. In conversation among themselves they use passive voice as a mark politeness. The influence of the *satra* in the case of different art and culture is worth special mention. The *satra* has specialized in classical songs and dances. It has also introduced acting. Sankardeva, Madhbdeva and other religious heads wrote and popularized *ankiya-bhaona*. The staging of *bhaona* created a class of expert artists who were specialized in the art of preparation of dresses for the actors, manufacture of idols and their ornamentation, manufacture of furniture etc. The relics of these art forms are still evident at Barpeta *satra*. Every *hati* has a *haitar-ghar*, where the people of the *hati* can meet and discuss different religious and social matters. Every *hati* has also a *hati* treasury where the people can borrow loan to meet their needs. The *satra* has also encouraged the residents to engage themselves in different trade and commerce. In the neo-*vaisnavite* religion propagated by Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and others, there is no distinction among people on the basis of caste and creed. This is the principal theme in the *vaisnavite* religion. Sankaradeva initiated the people of low castes and even Muslims into the fold of his religion. It is a matter of regret that his followers after him have sided from his religious philosophy. As a result, people of the low caste categories have found it difficult to raise their social position.

In the matter of women's entry inside the *kirtanghar*, women organizations have now become vocal and more vociferous in their demand for entry into sanctum-sanctorum and accorded the same position as man folk in the matter of religious practice. However strong demand is being raised from time to time in favour of women's entry but inside the town there were strong groups who were dead against the entry of women. Even women devotees are against free entry of women into the *kirtanghar*. This is however an anachronistic superstitious attitude and quite unreasonable and it is

hoped that sooner or later, this attitude will get softened and all restrictions in the entry of women will be removed.

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CHAPTER VIII

GENERAL OBSERVATION

An attempt has been made in the foregoing pages to present a comprehensive study on “A Socio-Religious Study on the *Satra* Institution of Assam with special reference to Barpeta *Satra* and its relation with the *Hatis* (cluster of settlements).” *Vaisnavism* is one of the most important sects of Hinduism and neo-*vaisnavite* movement essentially began in Assam with the advent of Sankaradeva. The main emphasis of the neo-*vaisnavite* movement was on *bhakti* or devotion. The special feature of Assamese neo-*vaisnavism* is the *satra* institution. It is the heritage institution of neo-*vaisnavite* movement of the state. The *satra* is a unique socio-religious and cultural institution of Assam and originated in the medieval times. The *satra* institution acted as an aid in making the Assamese society united. During the last few centuries of its existence it has been enriching the Assamese life morally, socially, educationally, culturally and contributed a great deal to the realm of literature and art. Lots of *satras* were established in Assam by Sankaradeva and his disciples and among these Barpeta *satra* is one of the biggest *satras* of Assam established at Barpeta by Madhavadeva, the chief disciple and apostle of Sankaradeva with proper help from Mathuradas Burha Ata. From the time of construction till completion it became the center for spiritual uplift of the devotees. Side by side arrangements were made for practicing art, culture, dance, drama and a host of other activities. *Satra* complex is a well defined and dignified structure. One unique feature of Barpeta *satra* is that it is democratically managed. Rules and regulations for management of the *satra* came into existence. A number of functionaries also had been created for smooth running of the *kirtanghar* and it is continuing till date. The social life of the people of Barpeta is related with *satra*. The extent to which the beliefs and practices of religious rituals influence social life and relationship constitute the functional aspect of religion. At Barpeta almost all the local people follows *vaisnavism*.

This subject matter had attracted me when I was a student of Anthropology. From that time I have tried to know this and started to study some related books. Several times I observed the way of life of the people, living at Barpeta town that follow *vaisnavism*. It really appreciated me. Apart from the observation of their daily life, I had gone

through lots of books. I become interested to do more. Many of the persons did work which inspired me to do again. To know in details I took the decision for conducting the research work on this subject. A number of studies were made but none of these books dealt in depth about the socio religious study on the *satra* institution of Assam with special reference to Barpeta *satra* and its relations with the *hatis*. For that I felt that, there are scopes for research as many of the aspects have not been studied.

This work has been done for examining the issues, such as- Assam and its people, *vaisnavite* movement in Assam, origin and development of *satra* institution in Assam, *hati* structure of Barpeta, religious rites of the *satras* in Assam in general and Barpeta in particular, impact of Barpeta *satra* in the day to day life of the people of Barpeta, relations of the people of Barpeta with Barpeta *satra*, constitution of Barpeta *satra*, socio religious importance of *satra* institution in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular. Communal harmony and universal brotherhood as vouchsafed by the tenets of the *satra* institution and various activities of the *kirtanghar* in the promotion of art, literature and culture have also been discussed.

For conducting this research work Barpeta *satra* and Barpeta town in the district of Barpeta had been selected. For conducting this work primary data were collected from the field i.e. 22 *hatis* at Barpeta town, among these 3 are principal *hatis* and other 19 are secondary *hatis*. While the secondary sources of data were collected from published books, journals, official records, internet and news papers. For collecting primary data the necessary anthropological techniques as well as methods were adopted.

Assam is unique and splendid and is a composition of three racial elements, namely- the Australoids, the Mongoloids and the Caucasoids. The process has made Assam the most diversified state in the country, both ethnically and linguistically and one of the very few in the world. The mighty Brahmaputra flowing across Assam is fondly called the Luit by the Assamese. The Brahmaputra has moulded human civilization on both its banks. Its climatic atmosphere is good for plants and animals. The sun rises to awaken the land and her people and set beautifully in the evening, allowing the moon to shower beauty once a month by reflecting the sun rays. The emerging development perspective in terms of economically integrating the North East with the south east Asia holds out a great promise for the development of the region in general and Assam in particular. To achieve these goals, collective initiatives should be taken for developing a unified single market by resolving border disputes, removing barriers to

movement of goods, labour and capital, developing inter-state transport and communication, harmonizing policies and developing common strategy for research and development, utilizing water resources and developing tourism. Most of the people living in Assam follow Hinduism and two sects of Hinduism such as *sakta* and *vaisnava* are found among the Hindu People of Assam. Among them a majority of population follow *vaisnavism* because of its simplicity. The festivals of Assam serve a great cause by encouraging different communities to live in harmony, irrespective of belief, custom and level of development. Assamese food habits imply the food items consumed by the majority people of Assam. Because of the geographical characteristics of the area in the broader sense, both the tribal and the non-tribal people use particular food items as their principal food for lunch and dinner which are now becoming very popular among the people outside Assam and lots of such ethnic food hotels and restaurants are grown up through which Assam its people and their socio-cultural activities are automatically highlighted.

General descriptions of Barpeta town and *hatis* have been made. The *hatis* are mainly related to the *satra*. The demographic outline of the people of three principal *hatis* has been made. The old name of Barpeta was Tantikuchi. It suggests that it was the abode of weavers. Once a group of weavers came from Sibsagar district of Assam and settled here. Barpeta was once in the middle of the Brahmaputra River. Hence the name was *Barpet* or Barpeta. Again according to one opinion, it was the center of learning (*barpith*). The word Barpeta is a corrupt form of *Barpith*. Barpeta is a center of religious activities. Barpeta *satra* is one of the ancient *satras* of Assam. Barpeta town was declared a district head quarter of Barpeta district of Assam in the year 1983. The mighty Brahmaputra is flowing along the southern side of the district. The land of the district is gradually sloping from north to south. The difference of height level from the Bhutan Hills to the bank of the Brahmaputra is about 40 feet. The district is of a vast plain area except for a small hillock on the south, named Baghbar hills. The Brahmaputra has a number of tributaries namely Pohumara, Kaldia, Nakhanda, Beki, Palla and Chaulkhowa. Historically, Barpeta was a part of old Kamrupa Kingdom. The king of the Barman dynasty ruled over this part. That was also the time when different tribes like the Dravidians, Mongoloids, Ausrrians etc lived together. Later on hordes of the Aryans began to penetrate into this region through its western boundary and settled here. Thus interconnection of population of ancient tribes and communities came together and a mixed race evolved in course of

time. A mixed language also developed incorporating liberally a vast array of words belonging to different non Aryan languages into the main lingua-franca which belong to the Indo Aryan group of language known as Assamese language in course of time. The religious history of Barpeta is related with the coming of Sankaradeva to this place and staying permanently at Patboushi near Barpeta. People of different castes and communities are living here. Hindu community is the majority community. Among the Hindus, majority of the people follow *vaisnavite* religion. Inter-marriage between castes, communities etc are also quite common now. With changes in time, there have been considerable changes in the nature and composition of population. In the past most of the people were petty traders; but today the no. of office goers, teachers, pleaders etc have increased. Barpeta *satra* was established by the grant of land given by Ahom monarch Siva Singha. After wards during the British rule, Barpeta was declared a township by amalgamating 22 *hatis* of the *satra* and the town dwellers led their life according to the rules and regulations of the *satra* organizations. The main objective of *hati* formation was to streamline the activities of the people and to assign different *satra* related works among different people. Studied area is a unique distinction for smooth running of various activities of the *satra* particularly with the ecclesiastical affairs of the *satra*. All the people of the *hatis* are Assamese and they follow *vaisnavism*. They have good water supply facilities, good sanitation system, good communication facilities for which the settlement is definitely an urban settlement. In regard to the dress and ornaments as well as the food habit of the people purely depend upon the Assamese culture and traditions. All the *hatis* have a place of popular gathering which is very significant in the socio-cultural and socio-religious life of the people of Barpeta. Now the town has been extended and due to dearth of residential space people originally living in the *hatis* prefer to shift their residences to such areas where they can construct their houses in spacious plots of land. It is now a general tendency of the people to shift their residences towards the town from villages for various amenities enjoyed in towns. Generally people living in joint families prefer to have new establishments for their own families. Due to such tendencies of the people, new localities have grown up on the outskirts of the township. People having new establishments on these localities also maintain their allegiance to the *hatis*, where they originally lived. In this way there has been a necessity for organizational change of the *satra*. In this respect the *satra* authority as well as the public should come forward to take necessary steps.

Vaisnavism and *satra* institution of Assam have been broadly examined here. *Vaisnavism* was first propagated in the medieval Assam by Sankaradeva and the most notable characteristic of *vaisnavism* of Assam is the *satra* institution. Sankaradeva the great saint who established the neo-*vaisnavite* movement was born in Assam. He was one of the greatest reformers of mankind but tragedy is that he remained more or less unknown beyond the state. Sankaradeva wrote drama when Shakespeare was not even born. Sankaradeva owing to his inner mind set got the strength to elevate the lower caste people to a right status. He asserted that all people are having common identity and social standing and before the Supreme Being all such distinctions disappear. The main theme of Sankaradeva's neo-*vaisnavism* is *ek-sarana-naam-dharma*. It explains that God is only one and this religion is for all, irrespective of caste and sex. Both of these views are maintained by Barpeta *satra*. The special feature of Assamese neo-*vaisnavism* is the *satra* institution. Due to popularity of this new religion, many people belonging to different castes and creed espoused the new religion. *Satra* institution helped in the unity of the Assamese society. It is also a chord linking Assam with the rest of India. *Satra* is the main institution around which all religious and cultural activities move. In the initial stage of neo-*vaisnavite* movement by *satra*, it meant a religious sitting, some times in the open field or an association to hold religious discussion rather than a systematic institution. In the course of time this infant institution began to develop on a distinct line and ultimately with features and characters of its own. The importance of neo-*vaisnavite* movement in Assam does not lie in the religious aspect alone. It also contributes much to the social unity and reform the cultural development of the Assamese people. It gives new literature; introduce a new type of music, dance and drama. The *satra* influences on various arts is worth mentioning. The *satra* has been acting as the model of morality by keeping close vigilance over its disciples. The persons living in the atmosphere of these religious institutions are polite and highly polished in their behavior.

Barpeta *satra* popularizes the art of classical music in the form of *bargeet* and drama which is called *ankiya-bhaona* and others also. The performance of *bhaona* gives birth to a class of artisans who are specialized in the art of preparing masks, costumes and effigies. Besides the religious text written by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, some other religious texts like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are also discussed in the *satra*. One unique feature of Barpeta *satra* is that it is democratically managed. The constitution of Barpeta *satra* is still prevailing and all the people related to *satra*

obey it whole heartedly. Nowadays people are thinking about some modifications of the constitution but not yet have done it. Rules and regulations for management of the *satra* were framed. A number of functionaries also had been created for smooth running of the *kirtanghar* and it is continuing till date. Barpeta *satra* is rich in every aspect, like- religious, social, economic and cultural. Apart from the religious aspect, Barpeta *satra* has tremendously influenced the social and cultural lives of the people. It has taught people to love all castes and creed and behave with all people equally. During the long course of its existence, Barpeta *satra* has undergone various changes in all fields. Such changes are noticeable in structure, organization, management and so forth. Though the *satra* is maintaining its traditional character in religious activities, very important changes have taken place in the management of the *satra*. It is noticed that there are some disregard has developed for the *satra* among some young generations due to impact of modernity against all values and traditions. Changes are of course rapidly taking place in the culture, the way of life etc. but there is another side that some young stars are whole heartedly obeying the *satra* culture. Barpeta is a place of trade and commerce but now some people have done other services also. The participants in traditional functions of the *satra* say that when the older generation will die, the *satriya* culture which was introduced by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva will be vanished. As a result there will be a lack of skilled artists in various art forms in the *satra*. Though the neo-*vaisnavite* movement of Sankaradeva has given permission to follow this to all the people. Later on the lower caste people and the Muslims were not permitted to enter inside the *kirtanghar*. But due to the efforts of some liberal minded persons and public organizations, the *satra* authority granted permission to all the Hindu people to enter the *satra*. From that time the *satra* is running according to the principle. Till date females are debarred from entering the *kirtanghar*. It is known that, women were given due importance in earlier times. But the position of women later on degraded to a large extent in the male dominated society and they were debarred from entering into the *kirtanghar*. Strong demand is being raised from time to time in favour of women's entry but inside the town there are strong groups who are dead against the entry of women. It is hoped that sooner or later, this attitude will get softened and all restrictions in the entry of women will be removed. It is deplorable that Muslims have no entry into the whole *kirtanghar* campus.

There are several relations between the people residing in different *hatis* and the *satra*. *Vaisnavism* and *satra* institution of Assam have been broadly discussed here. *Vaisnavism* was first propagated in the medieval Assam by Sankaradeva and the most notable characteristic of the *vaisnavism* of Assam is the *satra* institution. The organization of Barpeta *satra* tries to attract the people towards every aspect of the *satra* affairs. One such affair is maintenance of social justice amongst all. The *samuaha bhakat* of the *satra* is concerned with preserving social norms among the people of Barpeta. It should be noted that particular *hatis* and different dynasties of Barpeta are assigned the duties in different *satra* centric rites and rituals at different periods of time and these are still in vogue. An individual *hati* has got its own organization covering social, political and economic aspects. In the daily prayer services people of different dynasties perform their own duties. In this service other people also perform their duties. During the time of *satra* festival people of different dynasties, different caste population and people from every *hati* perform their duties. A person who is initiated to the *mahapurushiya* faith and wishes to take a share may be able to enlist him as a member of the *samuha*. The institution of *samuha-bhakata* in the past took greater responsibilities of management and supervision of daily activities including religious activities. For this purpose, there were regular sittings of the *samuha* in front of the *math* twice a day just after the Morning Prayer and also after the afternoon prayer. Now such type of *samuha-bhakatar-mel* is not regular but occasionally such sitting is requisitioned. It is evident that the members of the *samuha* maintain their relation with the *satra* and involve themselves in such matters of the *satra* relating to the organization and management of the properties. From the days of Mathuradas Burha Ata, trade and commerce expanded to new areas. Traders of Barpeta expanded their trade even to Dhaka, Rongpur and Moimansing. As the time passes, the number of trading communities has increased and their trades become hereditary. But as time passes on, the professions of most of the communities have come to the verge of extinction. We can take the example of lime worker, who have already abandoned their profession because of non availability of raw materials. Blacksmiths, goldsmiths and other caste based professions have abandoned their professions at least partially. A large number of people have also changed their professions. Modern education is one of the reasons for this large scale changes in professions.

Special attentions have been made on socio-religious importance of the *satra* institution in Assam in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular. Although detachment from material pleasure and attainment of salvation are the hallmarks of *satra* institution, yet its activities are not solely confined to religion alone. It has made immense contribution to social and cultural life of the Assamese society at large and to this *satra* centric town in particular. This *satra* has unfolded some essential aspects of social and cultural life, such as projecting the way of how to lead a sound life before the socially backward people, emphasizing the belief of one religion, one God before the people irrespective of caste or creed, relaxation of harsh caste system through changes of values and equality of status, encouragement of cottage industries and such other essential aspects of life. The *satra* has influenced in different ways not only the residents of Barpeta, but also the people of the neighbouring *satras*. Barpeta has been acting as the symbol of morality and truth by focusing close attention on its disciple. It is a common knowledge that people living under the influence of the *satra* are sober and gentle. In conversation among themselves they use passive voice in order to mark politeness. The influence of the *satra* in the case of different art and culture is worth special mention. The *satras* are specialized in classical songs and dances and of course in acting. Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and other religious heads wrote and popularized *ankiya-bhaona*. The staging of *bhaona* created a class of expert artists who were specialized in the art of preparation of dresses for the actors, manufacture of idols and their ornamentation, manufacture of furniture etc. The relics of these art forms are still evident at Barpeta *satra*. Every *hati* has a *haitar-ghar*, where the people of the *hati* can meet and discuss different religious and social matters. Every *hati* has also a *hati* treasury where the people can borrow loan to meet their needs. The *satra* has also encouraged the residents to engage themselves in different trade and commerce. In the neo-*vaisnavite* religion propagated by Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and others, there is no distinction among people on the basis of caste and creed. This is the principal theme in the *vaisnavite* religion. Sankaradeva initiated the people of low castes and even Muslims into the fold of his religion. The people of Barpeta who have services in different places come home during different festivals, specially in *doul* festival. People from various places also come to Barpeta *satra* and it makes communal harmony and universal brotherhood among the masses possible.

Findings: Though Barpeta *satra* is a religious institution but it has great importance in socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political life of the people of adjoining areas. The impact of *satra* in the daily life cycle of the people of Barpeta town through formal and informal activities is an important aspect. Contribution towards the classical dance and cultural activities of Barpeta *satra* is a unique one. Barpeta *satra* is a platform for spreading *vaisnavite* movement in Assam. This *satra* is an institution patronizing unique *satra* based culture of devotion to Lord Vishnu. Barpeta *satra* has much significance and the *hati* system of Barpeta paved the way for promotion of socio-cultural and spiritual life of the people. One unique feature of Barpeta *satra* is that it is democratically managed. A number of functionaries also had been created for smooth running of the *satra* and it is continuing till date. The constitution of Barpeta *satra* is still prevailing and all the people related to *satra* obey it whole heartedly. Nowadays people thinking about some modifications of the constitution but not have done yet. There is no entry of women inside the *kirtanghar* and Muslims have not been given the permission to enter inside the *kirtanghar* campus till date. One interesting system found here is that there is a *hati* bank (fund) in every *hati* of Barpeta. To get a loan from the *hati* fund one has to mortgage gold ornaments of approximately equal value to the loan amount. In the annual meeting of the *hati* fund, which is held in the *haitar-ghar* in the first week of the month of *bahag*, interests on loans are to be paid. The *hatis* and the *satra* in Barpeta are platforms of communal harmony and universal brotherhood. Barpeta *satra* has discharged the duty of spreading the *vaisnavite* movement in Assam and the impact of *kirtanghar* and its religious and spiritual activities are helpful in the promotion of literature, art and culture. It is found that almost all the people of the *hati* were educated and the density of family in the *hatis* was very congested.

It is quite impossible to draw any inference based on a topic of great importance. The division of the study into chapters, it may be mentioned that it is simply a matter of convention rather than of convenience; the whole study should be treated as an integrated analysis rather than of loose fragments. The work is a humble attempt to fill up the gap to present an integrated study about ‘A Socio-Religious Study on the *Satra* Institution of Assam with special reference to Barpeta *Satra* and its relation with the *hatis* (cluster of settlements)’ based on the source materials so far.

It is very difficult to study a *satra* institution as a whole due to prevailing superstitions and introvert nature of the people, particularly amongst the women. So it has a great

scope to study the other nature like political, economic etc of the *satra* institution in general and Barpeta *satra* in particular in near future.

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GLOSSARY

<i>aaisakal</i>	: women devotee in collective
<i>adhikara</i>	: abbot
<i>ahira raga</i>	: one type of <i>raga</i>
<i>akhai</i>	: parched paddy
<i>akhyay banti</i>	: permanent lamp
<i>amoi</i>	: mother
<i>ankar geet</i>	: the songs of dramas
<i>bargeetas</i>	: a kind of devotional song
<i>ankiya bhaona</i>	: a kind of theatrical performance
<i>adhivasa</i>	: purificatory rites
<i>amabashyas</i>	: dark moon
<i>ashana</i>	: sit
<i>baap</i>	: father
<i>bahas</i>	: holy residences of unmarried devotees
<i>bangsa</i>	: the descent group
<i>bargacha</i>	: gigantic lamp stands
<i>bar Tal</i>	: cymbal
<i>bar-pet</i>	: big belly
<i>bar-pit</i>	: <i>big throne</i>
<i>bar-pith</i>	: a great sacred place
<i>bar-sarais</i>	: big plates to offer pulses to God
<i>bachowal</i>	: waist cover
<i>batchora</i>	: gate way
<i>batrisa alamkara</i>	: thirty two varieties of ornaments
<i>bayan</i>	: drummer
<i>benā</i>	: a necklace having a crescent-shape pendant
<i>beel</i>	: fishing swamp
<i>bhakatas</i>	: devotee of the <i>satras</i>
<i>bhagavata</i>	: holy book

<i>bhakti</i>	: a way to attain Holy Communion with God through devotion
<i>bharali</i>	: store keeper
<i>bhatima</i>	: panegyrics
<i>bhaona</i>	: neo- <i>vaisnava</i> form of dramas
<i>bhor tal</i>	: cymbal originally imported from Bhutan by Sankaradeva
<i>bhor tal nritya</i>	: group dance with cymbal
<i>biyalir prasanga</i>	: afternoon prayer service
<i>boot</i>	: gram
<i>brajawali bhasa</i> or <i>bajabuli bhasa</i>	: a literary medium used by the <i>vaisnava</i> poets of eastern India.
<i>brata</i>	: fasting
<i>bulanir ghosha</i>	: a kind of religious verse sung by devotees while walking
<i>byakhya</i>	: explanation of devotional verses
<i>cakali</i>	: a circular gold ornament of the neck
<i>cari- hati</i>	: four number of cluster of settlements
<i>charit puthis</i>	: biographies of saints
<i>chadar</i>	: wrapper
<i>chang-ghar</i>	: made of bamboo and thatch
<i>chapkan</i>	: long flowing garment
<i>chars</i>	: tiny river islands
<i>cari vastu</i>	: four principles
<i>charu</i>	: earthen pots
<i>charita puthi</i>	: biographies of saints
<i>chat</i>	: wooden beams supporting the roof of the house
<i>chati-marali</i>	: a long piece of timber to support the roof
<i>chauga</i> and <i>askan</i> or <i>chapkan</i>	: long flowing shirt

<i>cenī</i>	: sugar
<i>corit Tola</i>	: oration of experts from biographies of <i>Mahapurusa</i>
<i>chati</i>	: small earthen lights
<i>challeng</i>	: wrapper
<i>cira</i>	: flatted rice
<i>citalar kalathi</i>	: the lower thorn less part of the <i>cital</i> fish
<i>daba</i>	: kettle drum
<i>dadhi</i>	: curd
<i>dal</i>	: pulses
<i>dashavatara</i> of Bishnu	: ten incarnations of God
<i>darshan</i>	: viewing
<i>deka-adhikara</i>	: deputy
<i>deva</i>	: lord
<i>dharma</i>	: religion
<i>dharmasastras</i>	: :religious books
<i>dhol maduli</i>	: drum shaped neck ornaments
<i>dhuna daani</i>	: handled pots for offering scent powder
<i>dola</i>	: palanquin
<i>domahi</i>	: confluence of two months
<i>dugdha</i>	: milk
<i>dugdugi</i>	: a bejeweled pendant
<i>dujana guru</i>	: the two masters
<i>ekasarana</i>	: spiritual shelter in one deity along with <i>Vishnu</i> or <i>Krishna</i>
<i>faku</i>	: coloured powder
<i>fakuwa /holi</i>	: the festival of colour
<i>gamocha</i>	: towel
<i>gaon</i>	: village
<i>gacha</i>	: traditionally designed earthen lamp stand
<i>gahe jirani lowa</i>	: god is taking rest

<i>gayan</i>	: singer
<i>gayana-Bayana</i>	: musicians
<i>gejera</i>	: almost like a <i>bena</i> with a slight difference <i>sithipati</i>
<i>ghats</i>	: earthen jars
<i>ghosha kirtaniya</i>	: a group of religious singer of devotional music
<i>ghrita</i>	: clarified butter
<i>gopinis</i>	: milk maids
<i>gotra</i>	: clan
<i>gunamala</i>	: a tiny work of six <i>Kirtanas</i> of jingling verses
<i>guru-aashanas</i>	: sacred padestral
<i>guru-bhatima</i>	: a series of prayer to Sankardeva, which is written by his disciple Madhavdeva
<i>gurughata</i>	: a musical prelude
<i>gurujan</i>	: the master
<i>haar</i>	: chain
<i>hari and hara</i>	: God and devotes
<i>haitarghar</i>	: community hall
<i>haribhakata</i>	: fellow initiate
<i>harigriha</i>	: main place of worship)
<i>hashati</i>	: hand-towel
<i>hatis</i>	: cluster of settlements
<i>heketa</i>	: hurdle
<i>ijar</i>	: pant
<i>ista devata</i>	: chosen God
<i>ista guru</i>	: chosen Guru
<i>jali komora</i>	: tender pumpkin
<i>jama</i>	: coat
<i>japi</i>	: sun-shade
<i>jira-marichbata</i>	: pasted pepper and cumin seeds
<i>jugal kirtana</i>	: one type of prayer

<i>kacu-sak</i>	: edible arum shoots
<i>kach kaal</i>	: green banana
<i>kalah</i>	: pitcher
<i>kaliya thakur</i>	: lord Krishna
<i>kankana</i>	: wristlet or bangles
<i>keru</i>	: clove-shaped ornament
<i>kevaliya- bhakat</i>	: celibate devotee lives in <i>satra</i> campus
<i>kewlia hati</i> or <i>kewlar baha</i>	: residence of celibate devotees
<i>keyura</i>	: armlet
<i>kharimati</i> and <i>reinejpata</i>	: Chalk and tin foil
<i>khatkhati</i>	: stair case
<i>kharam</i>	: a wooden sandal
<i>kharu</i>	: bangles
<i>kirtana</i>	: chanting of the praise of God
<i>kirtanghar</i>	: prayer hall
<i>Kirtana Ghosha</i>	: the most popular and important of Sankaradeva's works
<i>kirtaniya</i>	: group of <i>Kirtana</i> singers
<i>komora</i>	: white gourd melon
<i>kumar</i>	: potters
<i>kundala</i>	: ear-ring
<i>ksira</i>	: condensed milk
<i>laikhuta</i>	: main pillar
<i>lavanu</i>	: butter
<i>mahajans</i>	: merchant
<i>mahapurushiya</i>	: following the doctrine of Sankardeva
<i>madhu</i>	: honey
<i>mala-mani</i>	: necklace of coral beads
<i>maale</i>	: offering plate
<i>magha nakshatra</i>	: tenth lunar asterism
<i>magu</i>	: green gram

<i>mahapurukhiya dharma</i>	: following the doctrine of Sankardeva
<i>manas</i>	: sacred intention made by the people to have God's favour
<i>manikuta</i>	: sanctum sanctorum
<i>math</i>	: cylindrical shaped structure
<i>mathar chotal</i>	: courtyard of the <i>Math</i>
<i>mazumdar</i>	: registrar
<i>mejji</i>	: a bone fire
<i>mitir-kutumba</i>	: kin groups
<i>mukh-duar</i>	: door in the main entrance of the prayer house
<i>mukuta</i>	: crown
<i>mula</i>	: radish
<i>muri, akhai, cira</i>	: preparation from fried paddy and rice
<i>naam</i>	: names and glories of God
<i>nal, khagari, ikara</i>	: some kind of reed
<i>nam-daka</i>	: calling the name of God
<i>naam lagowa</i>	: leader of the names and glories of God
<i>nagaras</i>	: a small kettle like drum
<i>naimittika prasanga</i>	: occasional rites
<i>namghar</i>	: place of worship
<i>namghosha</i>	: a book dealing with the <i>bhakti</i> cult
<i>namprasanga</i>	: singing of prayers with musical instruments in <i>satras</i>
<i>nisf-khiraj</i>	: half rent
<i>nitya prasanga</i>	: <i>daily rite</i>
<i>napura</i>	: anklet
<i>ou</i>	: a kind of acid fruit
<i>ojha pali</i>	: a party of choreographers
<i>pagari</i>	: probably tinkling bells

<i>paila</i>	: vessels for keeping curd
<i>paijar</i>	: a kind of shoe
<i>paladharia</i>	: attendant
<i>paleng-sak</i>	: garden spinach
<i>pandit</i>	: proficient
<i>panchopachara</i>	: <i>gandha, puspa, dhupa, dwipa</i> and <i>naibedya</i>
<i>paramanna</i>	: rice boiled in milk sugar
<i>parjay</i>	: one after another
<i>pacra or cellang</i>	: light wrapper
<i>palisadas</i>	: walls
<i>path</i>	: reading
<i>patha</i>	: text from religious books
<i>pathak</i>	: reciter
<i>pet-duar</i>	: Door in one side of the prayer house
<i>phakuwa geet</i>	: <i>holi</i> song based on <i>holi</i> festival
<i>phanti</i>	: a flat wooden slipper with Strap
<i>phuljalikata-duar</i>	: door of the prayer house with floral patterns
<i>pith</i>	: center of learning
<i>pitha</i>	: cakes prepared of rice powder
<i>pranami</i>	: voluntary contribution in cash cash or kind by visitors
<i>prasadas</i>	: offerings made by man for the propitiation of God
<i>puwar prasanga</i>	: matins
<i>puja</i>	: worship
<i>puranic</i>	: verse in the Puranas
<i>puri-luchi</i>	: wheat-cake fried in ghee
<i>purnimas</i>	: full moon
<i>purohit</i>	: priest

<i>purusa</i>	: man
<i>raga</i>	: a melody of music
<i>raj-medhi</i>	: the priest of the <i>satra</i>
<i>Rangghar</i> or <i>Rangiyalghar</i>	: drama staged in open houses
<i>rangiyalgriha</i>	: the holy sportive house
<i>ratnanguli</i>	: gold ring
<i>ratir prasanga</i>	: evening prayer services
<i>rau-machar gada</i>	: back portion of the carp fish
<i>sabha</i>	: meeting
<i>sakha</i>	: secondary
<i>sakhi</i>	: friend
<i>sakhitva</i>	: friendship
<i>samavartana</i>	: convocation
<i>samhati</i>	: a sect of the <i>vaisnavites</i> of Assam
<i>samuha</i>	: commoners
<i>samuaha bhakatar mel</i>	: sitting of the <i>samuha bhakata</i>
<i>sanchipatiya Bhagavata</i>	: the Bhagavata written on the bark of <i>sanchi</i> tree
<i>sankarnti</i>	: last day of the month of <i>Chaitra</i>
<i>saat-saak</i>	: seven vegetables
<i>satasani</i>	: seven stringed necklace
<i>satsanga</i>	: the company of <i>bhaktas</i> as a means to the culturing of <i>bhakti</i>
<i>satra</i>	: a vaisnavite institution
<i>satrar sangbidhan</i>	: constitution of <i>Satra</i>
<i>sewait</i>	: dedicated
<i>sewait bangsara</i>	: dedicated devotees
<i>sidha-bhojani</i>	: uncooked articles of ration, vegetables etc. offered to guest
<i>simha-duar</i>	: door with carvings of lion motifs in the prayer house
<i>sisya</i>	: lay devotees or disciples
<i>sithipati</i>	: an ornament worn on the parting of hair

<i>slokas</i>	: metrical Sanskrit verse
<i>sradhas</i>	: memorial
<i>sravana</i>	: listening
<i>sutradhara</i>	: interlocutor of an Assamese drama
<i>tala</i>	: a rhythm in music or dance
<i>tamol-pan</i>	: areca-nut and betel leaves
<i>tangali</i>	: waist band
<i>tavai</i>	: father
<i>than</i>	: holy place for <i>vaisnavas</i> to worship
<i>thiyanam</i>	: recitation of holy songs in chorus in standing posture
<i>thul</i>	: principal
<i>tithi</i>	: death anniversary
<i>totaya</i>	: a hymn, composed by Sankardeva
<i>tols and pathsalas</i>	: schools
<i>tulapat</i>	: ginned cotton paper
<i>tulasi</i>	: basil plant
<i>upacharas</i>	: things
<i>upanayana</i>	: initiation
<i>vaikunthas</i>	: abode of lord Vishnu
<i>vaisnavism</i>	: cult of worshipping Vishnu
<i>vaisnavite</i>	: those who are worshipping Vishnu

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A Study on Barpeta Satra and Hati of Barpeta Town in the District of Barpeta in Assam

Mridusmita Goswami*

ABSTRACT

The most notable characteristic of Vaisnavism in Assam is the Satra institution through which the faith is being propagated and established. It may be monastic as well as semi-monastic in form. The Satra institution is intimately connected with Assamese society and it has become a part and parcel of Assamese life. Barpeta Satra is one of the chief monasteries of Assam, which was established by Madhavadeva, the chief apostle of Sankaradeva in the later part of the sixteen century(1570-1590A.D.). It is intended to study the relation between the Hatist(cluster of settlements) and Barpeta Satra. Therefore, the growth and development of Hatias as well as the formal and informal relations, regular-occasional relations, spiritual, economic, political and other relations between the inhabitants of the Hatias and Barpeta Satra will be highlighted based on the source materials available so far. The study of relations between the Hatias and the Satra help us to understand the daily life cycle of the local people and their relation with the Satra.

Keywords: Satra, Hati, Relation

Introduction:

The most notable characteristic of Vaisnavism in Assam is the Satra institution through which the faith is being propagated and established. It may be

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monastic as well as semi monastic in form. The Satra institution is intimately connected with Assamese society and it has become a part and parcel of Assamese life. "The Satra Institution was established during the last part of the fifteenth century or first part of the sixteenth century by Sankaradeva. Satras are generally situated on quadrangles surrounded by palisades (walls). Each principal Satra is marked by the existence of a namghara (place of worship), a manikuta (shrine), a batchora (gateway) and two or four rows of Hatis (cluster of settlements). Each Satra consists of three principal parties, viz. (i) Adhikar (abbot) and Deka Adhikar (deputy) (ii) Bhakata (devotee) and (iii) Sisya (commoners). The first two parties generally reside within the four walls of the Satra campus and the last viz. the Samuha in the villages outside the Satra leading householders' life (Sarma, 1999: 139-140).

Barpeta Satra is one of the chief monasteries of Assam, which was established by Madhavadeva, the chief apostle of Sankaradeva in the later part of the sixteenth century (1570-1590 A.D.) (Sarma, 1999: 137). Barpeta Satra is situated at a place which is also a well known center of communication and business. The Satra is well planned. Probably there was wide publicity about its importance and as a result there are a large number of devotees of the Satra. The Kirtan Ghar (place of worship) of the Satra is also known for its magnificent construction and design. Originally, a Satra based community: Barpeta emerged as a dwelling place of non-peasant community in course of time. Due to the geographical condition of the place, the people of Barpeta have taken to petty business instead of agriculture. As the Satra institution itself is taken up for study, its ramification on the social organization and cultural life of the township is also covered to a very considerable extent.

At Barpeta, Mathura Das Burha Ata, the first Adhikara was the first to establish different "Hatis" (cluster of settlement). Later on, the municipal area included all the 22 "Hatis" of Barpeta (Adhikary, 2010: 15). Especially for Barpeta and Barpeta Satra, Mathura Das Burha Ata did many things of lasting effect, such as- formation of the committee to publish Vaisnavite literature, fourteen units of prayer system in the Satra, preservation of ancient rites, training facilities, introduction of fund collection on Hati basis, appointment of office bearers for the

management of the Satra etc (Pathak, 1959 rprnt 2006: 61-62). So, it is intend to study the Hati system at Barpeta, Satra institution at Barpeta, relations between the Hatis and Barpeta Satra, the functions of devotees formal and informal, regular and occasional, economic and social related to the Satra. The study of relation between the Hatis and the Satra help to understand the daily life cycle of local people in so far as their relation with the Satra.

Review of Literature:

It is a fact that the historical and religious literatures of Assam are very rich. The names of the following scholars who have contributed to different aspects of religion, culture, art and literature of Assam are worth mention. "The Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and Satra Institution of Assam" (1999) by Dr. S.N. Sarma is an attempt at systematic study of the Satra institution. "Cultural Heritage of Assam" (2004) by Maheswar Neog is the collection of a few important studies in Assamese culture by Dr. M. Neog which deals with various aspects of the society, culture and religion of Assam. Another important book is "Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Assam, Sankaradeva and His Times, (reprint 2008) by Maheswar Neog. This work gives a detailed account of Sankaradeva with his background and a resume and appraisal of his work. In this compact volume is presented almost all that we need to know about the Hindu culture of Assam as it expressed itself through Vaisnavism and the Eka-Saraniya faith which may be described as Assam's expression of the mediaeval pan Indian Bhakti movement. In this work Dr. Neog did not miss anything that is apropos to the study of Sankaradeva. He has treated all aspects of the subject in his twelve chapters. "Satra Society and Culture, Pitambardeva Goswami and History of Garmur Satra" (2012) by Dambarudhar Nath, mainly deals with the Bhakti movement and the Satra institution, its origin and evolution, historical retrospective of Garmur Satra, and state, Pitambardeva Goswami and social reforms, cultural activities, administration and economy of the Satras of Assam. The significance of this work lies in that it is a rational and analytical work and based on modern historical methodology. "Barpeta zilar janasanghat satrar prabhav" was prepared for the Doctorate Degree of Gauhati University in 2003 by

Phanidhar Adhikary and published in 2010 is a critical study on the topic of influences of Satra upon the people of Barpeta district of Assam. We are able to get much information from this work. "Barpeta Satrar Itihas" (1959 rprnt 2006) by Gokul Pathak dealt with the varied religious-cultural activities of the people in relation to the Satra.

From the above review it has been seen that the existing literature in the subject "Relations between Barpeta Satra and the Hatis (cluster of settlements) of Barpeta town in the district of Barpeta" are still scanty. Keeping in mind, the above trend of researches and studies this paper is a humble attempt to study the relation between the Hatis and Barpeta Satra.

Objectives:

- i) To know the relation between the Hatis and the Satra and the impact of Satra in the daily life cycle of the local people.
- ii) To knowledge about some formal and informal activities of the people related to the Satra as a whole may be obtained.
- iii) To know various activities of the Satra in the promotion of art, literature and culture.

Methodology:

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. For the collection of primary data, I have applied field study method on a self-prepared questionnaire and observation as well as participant observation method to collect information on the studied problem.

Area of the Study:

Barpeta Satra is one of the chief monasteries of Assam, which was established by Madhavadeva, the chief apostle of Sankaradeva in the later part of the sixteenth

century (1570-1590 A.D.). Barpeta Satra is situated at a distance of about 100 K.ms to the North-West of Guwahati city. Barpeta is the head quarter town of the district of the same name. It is said that, Sankaradeva, while travelling by boat westward from his abode in upper Assam, first set his foot at Barpeta and moved to the nearby village Patbaushi, where he established a Satra in 1546 A.D (Sarma, 1999:147).

Barpeta Satra and Hatis: An Overview

Mathura Das Burha Ata, the first Satradhikar Barpeta Satra was credited with the creation of the *Hati* system as residence of the house holder devotees for which he arranged the houses along both sides of a road in line with the cloistral design of the *Satra* compound. Each area consisting of such rows of houses separated by narrow alleys is called a *Hat* (Neog, 1965 rprnt 2008: 324). *Hati* carries the same meaning as the Assamese words-*Para, Tola, Kuchi* etc. Sets of cloisters for devotees within the main enclosure of a *Satra* have been known from the earliest times as *Hati* or *Bhakatar Hati*. In that sense a *Hati* may also be understood as a row of houses attached to a *Satra* or the residence of disciples. Centering round the *Manikuta* and the *Namghar* exist four rows (sometimes two) of residential huts intended for clerical devotees. These four rows of huts are known as *Sari (four) Hati*. To each devotee is allotted a hut consisting one or more rooms according to his status and need (Sarma, 1999: 140). The devotees are accommodated in rows of huts constructed on four sides of the prayer hall. At Barpeta *Satra* all the four rows of huts are not found. Instead there are two such rows are found within the *Satra* compound known as the *kewalia Hati* or *Keular Baha*, the residence of celibate devotee (Neog, 1965 rprnt 2008: 325).

At Barpeta three *Hatis* were established first. These are-*Dakkhin Hati, Na-Hati* and *Uttar Hati (Brindaban Hati)* and known as *Thul* (principal *Hati*). In course of time other *Hatis* came up from these three original *Hatis* (Pathak, 1959 rprnt 2006: 71-72). There are 22 *Hatis* at Barpeta. These 22 *Hatis* are not caste units as these are not formed on the basis of caste. An individual *Hati* has got its own organization covering social, political as well as economic aspects. The relation of each *Hati* with the *Satra* is analogous with the relation of each state with the

parliament, taking each *Hati* as a state and *Satra* as the parliament. In each *Hati*, a *Haitar Ghar* (community hall) was established (Pathak, 1959 rptnt 2006: 71). The *Haitar Ghar* is still being used as the venue for disposal of petty disputes and for decision making in connection with all matters relating to both temporal and religious problems. Moreover a treasury in each *Hati* was established so that people might take loans at nominal rate of interest. He also introduced a religious tax. Every resident of the *Satra* has to pay the tax (Pathak, 1959 rptnt 2006:77).

People of Barpeta *Satra* living in different *Hatis* are closely related with the *Satra* in various aspects. This paper is an attempt to describe some of the relations of *Hatis* with the *Satra*. It has divided these relations in to formal and informal relation, regular and occasional relation, economic relation, social relation etc.

i) Formal and Informal Relation:

People of different *Hatis* have formal as well as informal relations with the *Satra*. Formal relations are those relations which are established through formal contacts with the *Satra*. Some people are formally related with the *Satra*. They are *Burha Adhikar* (abbot), *Deka Adhikar* (deputi), *Ghai Deuri* (principal distributor), other *Deuris* (distributors), *Chaul Bharali* (store keeper of rice), *Soru Bharali* (store keeper of earthen pots) etc. Of these *Burha Adhikar* is the principal person of the *Satra*. He decides all the matters of the *Satra*. In the absence of him all the duties are performed by the *Deka Adhikar*. There are some *Deuris* also. The *Ghai Deuri* observes that all the daily functions of the *Satra* are performed regularly. He is in charge of the *Akkhay Banti* (permanent lamp), *Chaul Bharali* is the accountant of rice, *Soru Bharali* is the custodian of earthen pots. At Barpeta there are some caste populations who are formally related with the *Satra*. These are *Hira* (potter), *Mukhi* (producer of lime), *Dhoba*, (washer men), *Bania* (goldsmith) etc. Apart from these there are certain relationships of local people with the *Satra* which are informal. The people of the *Hatis* go to *Satra* informally for gossiping, for playing etc. The daily visitors come to the *Satra* for different purposes, some come to listening

Shravan recitation, and some come to have just a Darshana of the *Satra* (personal observation).

Regular and Occasional Relation:

There are a number of functionaries at Barpeta *Satra* who are accustomed to the traditional functions since early times in regard to daily activities (*Nitya*) as well as at the time of occasional festivals (*Naimittika*). It can be gathered that

functionaries from different *Hatis* were closely associated with the affairs of the *Satra* in the early stage; they are still continuing their duties. In the *Kirtan Ghar* 24 times prayers are held (Pathak, 1959 rprnt 2006: 61). Different dynasties of *Hatis* perform their functions everyday in the *Satra*. In every festivals of the *Satra*, such as-*Doul* festival, *Domahi*, *Kirtan* festival, *Janmastmi* etc they are performing their duties very sincerely and that is why the *Satra* is running without any fault. Some of the members of such families are working government jobs and other works also join such functionaries of the *Satra*. They feel proud of joining such works and taking it to be their noble duty.

Economic Relation:

People of Barpeta are related with the *Satra* in economic aspects. In the context of economic system of Barpeta *Satra* the contribution of Mathura Das Barua as the first *Adhikar* is unforgettable. He established the *Hati* treasury at that time when the idea of bank was absent. All the people living in different *Hatis* are economically related with the *Satra*. Any person professing Mahapurukhia faith shall be initiated to get a *Bhag* (share) or more on payment of certain amount of fee fixed by the managing committee. Every member who has a *Bhag* in the *Satra* shall have the responsibility of performing the *pala* (duty assigned) or to pay the amount in lieu of it (Pathak, 1959 rprnt 2006:62) Various craftsmen like *Hira* and *Kumar* (potters) *Kamar* (blacksmith) *Bania* (goldsmith) *Mukhi* (producer of lime) etc are economically related with the *Satra*. On ceremonial occasions of Barpeta, fireworks are essential. On the day of marriage ceremony it is treated as customary for a groom party to pay a visit to the *Kirtan Ghar* on way to the bride's house. A show of

fireworks is held in front of *Kirtan Ghar*. Similarly on the occasion of Holy festival of colour a grand show of fireworks is a routine activity on the first day of the festival. In that case local fire workers are involved. Besides these, the people who have different shops in front of the *Kirtan Ghar* are closely related with the *Satra* in economic aspects (personal observation).

iv) Social Relation:

There is no locus stand of the Assamese society without the *Satra* institution. Barpeta *Satra* is one of the biggest *Satras* of Assam. Being intractably related with the people and culture of Barpeta, the *Satra* perform certain social functions.

Most of the performing art forms of India including Assam are evolved out of religious institution. The *Satra* has been working as a center of various art forms such as-*Bhaona*, *Nam-prasanga*, (prayer) *Thianam*, (recitation of prayer in standing posture) *Ghosa kirtana* (prayer) etc. At Barpeta *Satra* also such programs are held. The Social context of these art forms cannot be ignored as the performing arts certainly emerged out of man and society. The *Bhaona* are the dramatic shows with mythological themes that are enacted in the *Satra* compound. In the other art forms such as- *Thianam*, *Ghosh kirtan* the names of God are sung in chorus (personal observation).

Barpeta *Satra* also served as center of learning and played an important role in imparting informal education. At Barpeta *Satra* various episodes of Ramayana, Mahabharata and purana are recited in every evening. Lots of people come here for listening to such type of epics. Barpeta *satra* being a religious institution also serve as center of recreation and amusement.

Barpeta *Satra* takes part in national integration. During the time of national distress due to Chinese aggression in 1962 the *Satra* donated 1 k.g. of gold from the *Satra* treasury for the defense of the country (Das, 1995:34). From time to time, devotees of Barpeta *Satra* including the *Ai-Sakal* (women in collective) expressed solidarity with the general people. They join in various protests rallies and processions, in

which case special mention may be made during the time of Assam movement for the deportation of illegal foreign nation.

Conclusion:

From the observations noted above, it is clear that Barpeta *Satra* and for that matter all the *Satras* of Assam play a prominent role in the religious, social, economic and intellectual life of the people residing in the *Satra* area. At Barpeta *Satra*, the *Satra* activities produce lasting effects on various aspects of life and living of the people and still continue to do so in the present time. It imparts stability to the society and gives a new meaning to the socio-economic life. The *Vaisnavite* philosophy of tolerance to other religious beliefs, secularist philosophy and belief in the God have created an atmosphere of peace and communal harmony. Moreover the *Hati* organization where different *Hatis* are assigned different duties in connection with *Satra* activities is something unique in character.

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