Festivals form an important aspect of all cultures of the world. Most of the societies either primitive or folk or elite have their own festivals and these are celebrated from time immemorial.

Hindu festivals which have religious background are cultural institutions having social significance. They also provide opportunities for individuals to gain release from tensions and anxieties through collective enjoyments.

In observing some festivals the sanctity of certain moments and periods of time are considered suitable. These periods of time are so considered by association with memorable events of religious history, holy persons and notable psychic experiences. Such moments are also considered auspicious for undertaking pilgrimage. All Hindu festivals are also characterised by the programme of devotions. The festivals held in Barpeta Satra offer scope for the people to come together across caste line. This community participation helps creating a feeling of coming to a common platform among various
categories of people. Thus the festivals show the ground of studying the cohesive influence of the satra on the community.

**Festival calendar of Barpeta Satra**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of the months</th>
<th>Names of the ceremonies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bahāg</strong> (April-May)</td>
<td>1. <strong>Bahāg Bihu</strong> (Seven day celebration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Death anniversary of Gopāl Ātā on the 6th day of the dark fortnight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jeth</strong> (May-June)</td>
<td>Birth anniversary of Mādhavadeva on the first day of the dark fortnight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Āhār</strong> (June-July)</td>
<td>Ambubāci nibṛtti and Death anniversary of Bhātokuchi (Keshab Charan) Ātai observed on the same day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bhādra</strong> (August-September)</td>
<td>1. Death anniversary of Śaṅkaradeva, on the 2nd day of the bright fortnight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Death anniversary of Mādhavadeva, on 5th day of the dark fortnight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Jamnāṣṭamī on the 8th day of the dark fortnight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Death anniversary of Padma Ātā (Badolā Ātā) on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Asvin (September-October)

1. Death anniversary of Mathurādās Burhā Ātā on the 4th day of the dark fortnight.

2. Birth anniversary of Śaṅkaradeva on the 10th day of the bright fortnight.

Puh (December-January)

1. Death anniversary of Nārāyaṇadās Thākur Ātā on the 5th day of the dark fortnight.

2. Death anniversary of Purośottama Thākur on the 14th day of the dark fortnight.

Māgh (January-February)

Māgh Bihu (Five day celebration)

Phagun (February-March)

1. Deul Yātrā on the full-moon day.

2. Death anniversary of Barūśṇu Ātai on the 2nd day of the bright fortnight.

Bihu Festival:

Transition of one month to another is called saṅkrānti or Ḟomāhī or Bihu. But all the transitional phases of twelve months in a year are not celebrated. Three such Bihus are celebrated in Assamese society, these are Māgh Bihu (January),
Bahāg Bihu (April) and Kāti Bihu (October). In the satra circle at Barpeta the Bihu is known as fromahi meaning coincidence of two months. It is interesting to note the coming of the elements of folk culture like Bihu into the sphere of a Vaiṣṇavite religious centre like the satra.

As observed by P. Goswami, it is the agricultural setting which still determines the social temper of the people, the festivals which are looked forward to and enjoyed widely in this part of India are those associated with the beginning and the end of the planting season. The festival associated with the beginning of the season is the Bahāg or spring time Bihu and that associated with the end is the Māgh or winter Bihu. Bahāg Bihu ushers in the new year while Māgh Bihu indicates the gathering in of the harvest. The spring time Bihu is Rāngālī Bihu or the Bihu that cheers, while Māgh Bihu is the Bhogālī Bihu or the Bihu that one enjoys with food and drink.¹

¹ Goswami, P.: Bohag Bihu of Assam and Bihu Songs, pp.4-5
Though Bahāg or Rangālī Bihu has the pride of place as the most important and colourful of the Assamese festivals, Māgh Bihu occupies a no less important place. It is primarily a harvest festival and the farmers celebrate it with gusto to mark their good crop. In some parts of the state, notably in lower Assam, the people evince more interest in this festival arranging feast and merrymaking. Māgh Bihu has, therefore, been rightly called Bhogālī Bihu or the Bihu of eating for it is a season of plenty. The round of feast and mirth continues for nearly a week.

Māgh Bihu may primarily be classified as an agricultural festival, still it occupies an important place in the Vaiṣṇavite satra of Barpeta. During this Bihu celebration, a noticeable change in the daily prayer services sets in with a number of additional items. From the first day of Bihu celebration, recitation of the Gītā in place of the Bhāgavata in the morning prasāṅga is started and continued everyday even after the Bihu to complete the whole of the Gītā. From the next day after the completion of the recitation of the Gītā the recitation of the Bhāgavata-purāṇa again is started.
Lighting of bonfire on the early morning of नोमाही or सामक्रंति day is another sphere of activity. A conical structure called मेजी is erected on the open space in front of the किर्तांग्घर with the help of bamboos and reeds collected by the young boys.

On the day of नोमाही after the morning प्रसांग, प्रसाद is distributed among the assembled devotees. The big trays placed in front of the आसन inside the किर्तांगघर are arranged on this (नोमाही) day with प्रसाद as special offering. Women devotees coming to offer their regards in the सत्रा outnumber the male devotees on the सामक्रंति day.

In the afternoon प्रसांग the गहोषकिर्तानिया and the व्याहकिर्तानिया or व्याह ओजपाली troupes present their performances consisting of songs and dances in front of the मथा. The गहोषकिर्तानिया troupe consists of men from various खातिस representing the समुहा भकात्स of the सत्रा, while the members of the व्याहकिर्तानिया or व्याह ओजपाली troupes are confined only to the ओजा family.
Carit-tolā or recitation of the biographies written in verses, of the Vaisnavite preachers by the senior celibate bhakats in their residences is a special feature of Māgh Bihu. There is a special tone of recitation peculiar to the occasion. Special religious significance is attached to such a recitation. Devout old men and women very earnestly join in such religious sittings. Generally it is held in the evening and continued till late, sometimes even for several days.

Originally the tradition of the dramatic performance was prevalent in the satra on all days in the evening of Magh-domāhi. But at present the drama performance (vārāvinay) is rarely held and the time schedule is honoured by reading out the dramas.

2. Carit-tolā recitation is arranged in the residences of Thānurām Ātai Burhābhakat in the satra campus and also in the residence of Mohan Ātai Burhābhakat who stays outside the satra.
instead of actually enacting them. Trays of dasturi already arranged for the troupes from the satra are received on behalf of the troupes.

Bahāg Bihu is a spring time festival of Assam. In its present form it is secular in spirit and universal in appeal. Bahāg Bihu is the joyest of the Bihu-trio market by singing, dancing and merrymaking and that is why it is also called Raṅgāli-Bihu. It can fulfil the demand of a new year's festival as well as a spring time festival. Furthermore it can be called a seed sowing festival which marks the beginning of the year's agricultural cycle.

3. In order to regenerate interest of the common people in the dramatic tradition of the satra, the Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Govt. of Assam and the Satra authority of Barpetā jointly organised a drama festival in the satra compound during Māgh bihu, 1991. According to Satrīyā tradition the dramas were based on religious themes. The schedule of drama show was 15th January, Trisankur Swargalāv by Daksin hātī, 16th January, Kula Barjan by Bhimā Bayan family, 17th January Jugāntar by Sutradhar family, 18th January, Sakunir Pratisodhī by Gandhīyā family, 19th January Rājā Harischandra by Bayan family of Galiyā hāti. The drama festival was widely acclaimed by the people.
Although Bahag Bihu is celebrated along with the singing of songs and performance of dance particularly in the upper Assam nevertheless in the context of satra it is observed to the association of religious practices. Prayer services are organised in an elaborated manner in addition to certain special features and continued for seven days. These are the performance by the gāyana-bāyana, the Sattrīyā music party after the morning and evening prasaṅgas and the two choral troupes of ghoṣā-kirtaniyā and vyāh-kirtaniyā in place of the afternoon prasaṅgas. Presentation of yātrār-pālā, i.e., the dramatic performance is another important aspect of Bahag Bihu. The schedule of presentation for six days is Āghona Bāyan family, Bāyan family of Galijā hāṭi, Dakṣin hāṭi, Bimā Bāyan family, Sūtradhār family and Gandhiyā family. It is to be noted here that in a dramatic performance men of other hāṭis may take active part but it is to be staged in the name of the particular family on whose turn (nātar pālā) it falls due according to the schedule.4

4. Drama presented by Sūtradhār family in 1980 was Śrī Kṛṣṇar Baikunṭha Prayān written by Śrī Keshab Chandra Das and directed by Śrī Caru Mohan Das in which persons from other hāṭis also took part. From Dakṣin hāṭi the drama staged was Prāyācitta.
For the presentation of dramatic performance a stage is made on the open space in front of the door on the western end of the Kirtanghar. It is noticed that for staging in the satra dramas that are selected are mostly translated ones from Bengali dramas. The themes of these dramas are also mostly similar in nature depicting the success of goodness over the evil. Young boys of the concerned hāti or the 'family' generally take initiative in organising and presenting the drama performances, the elderly section always extend their constructive suggestions and co-operations. The practice of young boys appearing in the roles of females is still maintained in the satra circle. Traditional dresses sometimes are hired from outside. A subsidiary grant of rupees four hundred is offered from the satra fund for holding a dramatic show. The performers of the dramatic troupe are shown honour by offering them dasturi of 80 betel nuts and twenty bundles of betel leaves.

5. Such dresses were hired for the drama of Dakṣin hāti for rupees seventy five per night.

6. It was rupees five only nearly fifty years ago when late Chandi Caran Kakati was the Secretary of the Satra Committee. Informant: Late Narayan Ch. Gayan. Data collected on 7.2.82.
each containing twenty by the satra management. On any postponement of the performance also they can accept the honorarium by performing the preliminary music with khol-tāl. If in any play, Kṛṣṇa role is performed, a piece of new cloth is offered from the satra fund in honour of Kṛṣṇa.

On the first day of the month of Bahāg, i.e., the Bardo-māhī day a calculation of the almanac is made to know the possible weather condition, production of crops etc. by an astrologer. Such calculations are read out in front of a large gathering of nearly a thousand men and women (women generally outnumbering the men) who assemble on the courtyard of the matha and the adjoining space. The gathering remains there for a considerable time under the hot sunshine of mid-April.

On the closing day of Bihu (6th day of the month of Bahāg) a big performance of thiyanām (congregational song, sung to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals with the clapping of hands) is held in the open space in front of the main gate of the Kīrtanghar. It is an added attraction of the Bihu festival in this satra which attracts thousands of visitors. Three separate stalls are arranged by the three
thul-hātīs, uttar-hāti, na-hāti and dakṣin hātī by placing three big trays (bar-sarāī) under three big canopies spread over them. Thiyanām troupes from individual hātīs perform their show in front of the altars. Senior members of the hātīs are engaged as custodians of the trays arranged in front of the stalls. They receive pranāmis (voluntary contributions of the visitors) offered in the form of pulses, sugar, salt and molasses with coins and offer blessings in return. This grand show begins at about 2 p.m. and continues up to nearly 6:30 p.m. For a final round they converse in front of the matha and ends at about 8 p.m.

Kīrtan festival:

The meaning of the word Kīrtan is reciting or discussing one's qualities and activities by way of remembering on the death anniversary. In that sense Kīrtans are the occasions on which thousands of people assemble to recollect with gratitude the contributions of the fore-runners of the neo-Vaiṣṇavites.

7. Such persons in the Na-hātī stall were Giridhari Das, Dharmakanta Das, Chandra Kanta Das, Cidananda Bayan, Laksman Ojah.
movement of Assam. In Barpeta Satra Kirtans are arranged in a larger plan with elaborate devotional programmes on the death anniversaries of Saṅkaradeva, the founding father of the movement; Mādhavadeva, the chief apostle of Saṅkaradeva and founder of Barpeta Satra and Mathurādās Burhā Ātā, the first Satriyā of Barpeta Satra. People of all the hātis of Barpeta take part in the Kirtan programmes of Barpeta Satra in one form or another. Taking part in these celebrations has been regarded as noble duty by the Vaiṣṇavite people of Barpeta. The tradition of the Kirtan festival was started by Mādhavadeva who arranged first the Kirtan performance in sweet memory of Saṅkaradeva in his (Saṅkaradeva) death anniversary at Pāṭbāusī Satra. The tradition is still continuing today.

Kirtans of Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are observed with due solemnity in all the satras and nāmghars of Assam. In Barpeta Satra the festival connected with the death anniversary of Saṅkaradeva is observed for seven days and that of Mādhavadeva for ten days. Mādhavadeva's death anniversary is considered more

Debbarua, L.: Śrī Saṅkaradeva Āru Śrī Mādhavadeva, p.135.
important. Similarly the Kirtan of Mathurādās Burhā Ātā is celebrated with equal sincerity and devotion which continues for five days.⁹

The Kirtan festival consists mainly of elaborate programme of prayer services which include reading and reciting of the various religious books composed by the preachers like Saṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and so forth.

The devotional programmes once started during these days continues without break even between two units of daily prasānga or during the night after the day's programmes end, till the next day's matin start. For this purpose one person is appointed who maintains the continuity of the programme by beating a pair of small cymbals at regular intervals.

The date of any Kirtan is calculated by counting the lunar days. In this calculation the date of the Kirtan of Saṅkaradeva falls on the second day of the bright fortnight in the month of Bhādra. The Kirtan of Mādhavadeva falls on the

⁹. Mādhavadeva was the founder of the Barpeta Satra and Mathurādās Burhā Ātā was the first Satrīya.
fifth day of the dark fortnight in the same month. Activities of Kirtan celebration are started seven days and ten day ahead of these dates respectively.

The Kirtan festival is started with bālandiyā, i.e., invitation. Various functionaries and devotees associated with the Kirtan festival are formally invited by the satra authority to their traditional duties to be performed during the course of the celebration. Bālandiyā consists of distributing one areca nut and one betel leaf to each of the shareholder devotees and arranging a number of brass metal trays with artistically curved stand called sarāi. These sarāis are arranged by placing soaked pulses, betel nuts and leaves, bananas etc. on these towards every functionary family who have got traditional functions to be performed. The representative persons of the concerned families towards whom the sarāis have been arranged would receive them, which signifies that they would participate in the activities connected with the Kirtana.

After bālandiyā the practice of taking attendance of all the devotees of the satra including the celibates is held in
the evening at the Kirtanghar. One senior man of the Kakati family of the satra with due permission takes the attendance. This is known as bhakat lekhā. The Satriyā and the Dekā Satriyā are not called by names but by the names of their posts. Others are called by names in the particular humble mode with due respect. The present devotees also respond in the particular style. The practice of bhakat lekhā in which attendance of all the devotees of Barpeta Satra is taken, signifies that it was the custom, in former days, for all the Vaiṣṇavites to take part in the celebration of the Kirtan of their gurus.

On the previous evening of the Kirtan festival commemorative meetings are arranged. In Saṅkaradeva's Kirtan such meetings were held in the satra campus and also in Vṛndāvan hāti and Cinpore bheti of Barpeta. There was profuse illumination at the Kirtanghar including the big iron stand (bar gachā). Lighting of these earthen lamps is assigned to the Kayastha families of Dakṣiṇ hāti. They never turn up for duty when observances of impurity due to birth or death is continued in any one of these families. If they turn up for this assigned duty they can leave the Kirtanghar after the lighting only when the gāyana-bāyanas arrive for their performance.
On the first day of Kārttana of Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, prasāda is distributed in the afternoon among all the shareholder devotees. During all the days of Kārttana festival the gāyana-bāyanas play the musical concert after the morning prasaṅga. In place of the afternoon prasaṅgas, vyākhārātana and ghoṣākārātana are performed in front of the āśāna inside the Kārttanghar. After the evening prasaṅga the gāyana-bāyanas recite the Bargitas which they call gītar pālā to the accompaniment of khol and cymbals. On the nights of Kārttana and also on the previous nights, Bhāonā performances are staged in the traditional manner. The schedule of Bhāonās on the three Kārttanas is as follows:

Śaṅkaradeva's Kārttana

On the previous night: Kālīyadaman nāt by Bhimā Bāyan family,

On the night of Kārttana: Rām Vijaynāt by Sūtradhār family.

Mādhavadeva's Kārttana

On the previous night: Rukmini harana nāt by Dakṣiṇ hāti,

On the night of Kārttana: Parijāt harana nāt by Gandhiyā family.
Mathurādāsa Burhā Ātā's Kīrtan

On the previous night: Nṛsiṁha nāṭ by Bāyan family of Galiyāhātī,
On the night of Kīrtan: Kaṁsavadha nāṭ by Sūtradhār family.

During the time of Kīrtan devotees from all categories take equal seats on the floor inside the Kīrtanghar while the prasaṅga is in progress. The prasāda prepared in the same vessel is distributed equally among all. For a handful of prasāda thousands of people remain in wait. The prasāda is considered to be a sacred thing and so little bits of it is taken on the head before eating. An account of Mādhavadeva's Kīrtan (1987) shows that for the prasāda 7 quintals of pulses together with 2 quintals 40 Kgs of unboiled rice were soaked overnight in big brass metal tubs (measuring nearly 6 feet in diameter) with water. For this purpose water from the covered well in front of the maṭha was used. Watering of the pulses were done only by the celibate bhakats on the previous evening. These were mixed with cocoanuts and ginger cut into small pieces to which salt were added accordingly. Only the celibate devotees are eligible for distribution of prasāda. There being only four celibates in the satra who can take up the work of distribution,
four such bhakats were invited from Kamalābārī Satra of Mājuli in Śaṅkaradeva's Kirtan (26th August, 1987) and stayed in the satra till the Kirtan of Mathurādā's Burhā Ātā (10th October, 1987). Eight celibate bhakats distributed the prasāda among nearly 4,000 people. Same procedure is adopted every year due to diminishing number of bhakats in the satra. Services of volunteers\(^{10}\) from different hātīs were requisitioned to help in smooth functioning of the act of distribution.

Payment of karbhār to the satra is an essential feature of Kirtan festivals. Three particular hātīs namely Vṛṇḍāvan hātī, Daksin hātī and Na-hātī are entrusted with paying karbhār to the satra in the time of Kirtanas of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and Mathurādās Burhā Ātā respectively.\(^{11}\) Articles to be given in the karbhār include definite amount of rice, mustard oil, a variety of banana, white gourd, black pepper, a kind of acid

\(^{10}\) They are called sevakas, who wear strips of red cloth hanged from the shoulder as mark of identification. At time the sevakas fail to control the young boys who engage in some sort of scuffle in trying to get a handful of prasāda, sometimes for the second time.

\(^{11}\) Any other hātī included in these thul-hātīs may also pay karbhār if they so desire. In 1991 Dā hātī paid karbhār in the name of Daksin hātī in Mādhavadeva's Kirtan festival.
fruit (outenga), arecanuts and betel leaves etc. People of the hātī express eagerness to carry the things irrespective of status and age and it becomes catching one's eyes to see small boys, dressed white similarly as the older ones and carrying the things by two. Such traditionally dressed boys also join the gāyana-bāyana troupe, each of them playing a small khol.

As the date of Kirtan festival draws nearer the particular hātī entrusted with karbhār becomes busy in preparing for it from nearly a week ahead. Particularly the mazumdār and bharālī of the hātī have a busy time in receiving the subscriptions of the share-holders of the particular hātī. All the articles to be presented are accumulated in the hāitāghar. Things like salt, black pepper etc. are made into packets with lotus leaves in the names of individual Barā. Some of the things to be given in the karbhār are subscribed by the people while the rest are to be purchased by the hātī fund. Of these articles rice is given by the share-holders, mustard oil, salt etc. are donated by individual persons. Other articles are collected locally.12

12. In Vṛndāvan hātī each family having a share in the hātī fund is to subscribe 2 Kgs of unboiled rice with a cash of fifty paise or a total cash of rupees four only in time of Saṅkaradeva's Kirtan.
The karbhar is carried by the people of the hāti on a procession to the kirtanghar on the day of kirtan in the afternoon accompanied by the devotional troupes. There is a definite sequence to be maintained by the participant groups. The procession of karbhār is led by a nāma-kirtana party (known as thiya nām) singing devotional songs, taken from selected extracts of religious books, with the clapping of hands. The ojāpāli chorus, i.e., Vyāh ojha goes next which is followed by the gāyana-bāyana or the traditional satriyā music party. The bharāli of the particular hāti moves next to the gāyana-bāyanas with a brass metal pitcher full of mustard oil taking on his head. The mouth of the pitcher of oil is covered with lotus leaves. This oil is meant for burning the lamp (i.e., the akṣay-banti). In case of any inconveniences of the bharāli a man of status of the hāti should take the pitcher for which he has to remain on fast. The Burhā Satriyā, Dekā Satriyā and the Samūha bhakats also accompany him in the procession. Next to them other things of the karbhār are carried by men of the hāti. Another nāma-kirtana party also follows them. At the end of the procession āisakal or the
female devotees of the satra join by singing devotional songs. As the procession moves slowly people offer obeisence at their gates and spread new cloths across the road to collect pada-dhūli (dust of the feet) of the bhakats which is considered sacred.

The articles offered in the karbhār are placed in front of the mātha. The articles are already systematically arranged and distributed among the Barās of various hātīs within a very short time. Equal number of packets of salt as those of the Barās are already made. Outengā (the acid fruit) is one for each share, while white gourd one or more for each Barā to be cut into equal number of pieces as he represents the shares. Rice is given with a bowl (by a man of Bharāli family) one for each share, while mustard oil is given with a behī (a small handled cup made of a hollow piece of bamboo), one for every five shares.13 The Barās generally come with baskets to collect the things and distribute them in the evening. All the devotees

13. Sri Mohan Ātai Burhābhakat distributed mustard oil to different Barās (Śaṅkaradeva's Kirtan, August 1987). Sri DharmaKanta Das, Sri Šaṅkar Carān Das were Barās among others.
of the satra also receive little bits of the offered things with due reverence. It is one of the specialities of the Kirtan festival of Barpeta Satra to eat the distributed thing in the same evening by all the people.

The following table shows the articles given by Vṛndāvan hāti in karbhār (Śankaradeva's Kirtan, 1980)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>10 quintals 60 Kgs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arecanuts</td>
<td>2 kaon 18 pons (numbering 4680)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betel leaves</td>
<td>22 gots (numbering 8800 leaves)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustard oil</td>
<td>2 tins (each containing 16 litres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>2 bags (each 100 Kgs.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banana</td>
<td>11 bunches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These things were distributed among 4208 shareholders of the satra at that time.

The Vṛndāvan hāti fund showed the following account under the head of Kirtan festival (for arranging karbhār).

Total deposit Rs. 10581.77
Total expenditure Rs. 5760.49
Total balance Rs. 4821.28

For the management of the Kirtan festival a sub-Committee known as Kirtan Sub-Committee is formed ahead consisting of five members of the Managing Committee. This Committee is to manage the three Kirtan festivals of the year. They are in-charge of overall management of the festivals including collection of the necessary things and make various expenditures.

An account of the three Kirtan festivals in the year 1986 which can show the various heads and the manner of expenditures of the satra in this connection.

Table showing the various heads of expenditure in connection with the Kirtan festivals (1986)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pulses</td>
<td>44 quintals 15 Kgs.</td>
<td>Rs. 15,575.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rice</td>
<td>47 quintals 29 Kgs.</td>
<td>Rs. 12,196.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Collected from the Accounts Khata of the Kirtan festivals
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Expenditures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Banana</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. 700.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Areca nuts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. 5,643.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Betel leaves</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. 2,074.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mollasses</td>
<td>60 Kgs.</td>
<td>Rs. 350.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sugar</td>
<td>14 Kgs.</td>
<td>Rs. 92.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Curd</td>
<td>36 Kgs. 500 gms</td>
<td>Rs. 336.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Milk</td>
<td>15 litres 500 gms</td>
<td>Rs. 77.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Ghee</td>
<td>4 Kgs.</td>
<td>Rs. 250.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Honey</td>
<td>1 Kg. 500 gms</td>
<td>Rs. 23.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Yarn for making handkerchiefs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. 1,801.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Remuneration for weaving 6622 pieces</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. 1,463.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Dhuti, chadar, white cloth etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. 471.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Ginger</td>
<td>15 Kgs. 800 gms</td>
<td>Rs. 260.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Earthen wares</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. 666.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Expenditure on T.A. of the bhakats (from Kamalabari gatra)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. 2,878.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Miscellaneous</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. 1,346.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: Rs. 46,183.45
Arrangement of boat race competition is also another attraction of the Kirtan festival. But due to the closing down of the rivulets including the one flowing beside the Kirtanghar, the venues for holding this competition is lost for ever.

After the Kirtan festivals of each year are over nirmāli or sewār bhāg from the Kirtanghar are sent to each hāti through the Barās. He distributes these nirmāli to all the families of the hāti to be received with utmost reverence.

Deul festival:

Of all the festivals held in Barpetā Satra Deul or the festival of colour is worth mentioning which is well known within and outside Assam. As a spring festival and related with the divine sports of Lord Kṛṣṇa this festival is observed in almost all the Vaishnavite satras of Assam. But the festivities associated with this festival in Barpetā Satra attract thousands of people. The images of the prevailing deities of the satra, Kaliyā Thākur and Deul Govinda, who are kept inside the shrine
at other times are taken out during this festival. Women devotees who are not allowed access into the prayer hall show much eagerness to see the deities from a close proximity once in a year. A grand show of indigenous fireworks on the previous evening of the festival day is an added attraction. On the final day of the festival a colourful procession with the image of Kṛṣṇa is taken out to a neighbouring satra Kanariyā-pārā, 1 km. to the south from Barpeta satra, in which jubilant men young and old, take part singing, dancing and sprinkling coloured powder. This is a representation of Ghunuchā yāṭrā of Lord Kṛṣṇa as narrated in Kīrtanaghoṣā of Saṅkaradeva.

Throwing colour at women is strictly prohibited unless voluntarily wished and it is also one of the specialities of this festival.

Nearly a month ahead of the festival the satra Managing Committee in its meeting finalises the modalities of celebration of the festival. In that meeting it is also decided whether a sub-committee is to be formed for the purpose or the satra Managing Committee itself take up the management of the festival including the collection of various necessary things.
As the preparations for the festival proceeds, the Kirtanghar and its compound is given a new look by white washing and clearing the garbages in its surrounding.\(^{16}\)

Beginning of this work is made with the cleaning and white washing of the deul, the dome shaped concrete structure meant for this festival, the matha and its compound. This is known as deul chachā.\(^{17}\) Just as the Kirtanghar and its surrounding is given a festive look so also the people of Barpeta make some preparations to observe and enjoy this festival. Any kind of decoration of their house with white washing or paint, taking new cloths for the family members are pushed back till the coming of this festival. Even in the families of lower income groups some changes come in their dietary menu.

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16. For giving a better cleaning the upper part of the main gate was flushed with water sprayed from the fire service vehicle in 1985.

17. Men of Mukhi caste of Barpeta is entrusted with the task of white washing the matha. Men of Hira communities do this work on the deul. Persons who climb up the matha and the deul for this work by way of cleaning by body and mind remain on fast the previous night. They begin the work offering pranāma in front of the matha after the morning prasānga. Two days ahead of Deul festival this white washing is done (as I observed on 16.3.92).
and in every family it is expected that there should be some guests during this festival. In order to entertain the guests various cakes and sweetmeats are prepared by indigenous methods in almost every household. It is the dearest festival for the people of Barpeta and that is why at the approach of the festival at certain hour of the day some people are heard crying at the memory of their dear ones, lost earlier.

At the coming of the festival all the groups having stipulated share of works[18] join hands. The festival is celebrated with three-day or four-day programmes according to the time bound practice. The local people term the celebration with a three-day programme as pekadeul (the young festival) and the four-day programme as Burhadeul (the old festival). The first day or the beginning of the festival is known as

18. potter castes -- the Hirās and the Kumārs supply the various earthen pots. The goldsmiths are to cleanse the gold ornaments of the deity, specially kept for this festival, few days ahead. The blacksmiths also are to supply knives to be used during this festival. The Kaibartas also, at one time, were to supply definite quantity of fish which were distributed among the guests along with the ration.
gondh or Vahnotsava (the festival of fire). The functions of the first day begin in the afternoon at about 2 P.M. The central figure of the day, the idol of Govinda along with the other idol of Kaliyā Thākur are taken out of the bhājghar to the accompaniment of playing of khol, dhol etc. and placed on a decorated brass metal tray, nearly 3 feet high and 2 feet in diameter at the top, kept on the floor in front of the matha. The whole courtyard of the matha is covered with a big canopy spread over. The idols are given a ceremonial bath by the Brahmin priest with the consecrated waters collected from seven different rivers. The mustard oil after smearing the idols are distributed among the assembled devotees (male and female) who remain in wait very eagerly watching the activities for a considerable length of time.

After the ceremonial bath being over, the idols of Deul Govinda and Kaliyā Thākur are adorned with gold ornaments, specially kept for this festival only, by worshipper Sri Manomohan Deva Mishra. The ornaments are tied with threads so that

19. Some of these ornaments are head ornaments like an umbrella, flute, wrist ornament, heavy made chain, ear ornament, chain with costly gems and ornament of the arms etc.
there are not separated from the bodies of the idols on jerk-
king movements during the procession on the final day. Deul
Govinda and Kalīyā Thākur are garlanded with the best flowers
of the season. After the decoration special worship is per-
formed by Śrī Manmohan Deva Mishra and Śrī Munidra Nath
Bhāgavatī and assisted by Śrī Naren Pūjārī, a teacher in a
local high school.

The next part of this evening’s programme is the fire
festival which is held on the open space in front of the main
doors on the western end of the Kārtanghar. A majī or a
conical structure is made there out of bundles of reeds offered
by the devotees. The majī takes shape by deposition of bundles
of reeds by the people including young boys from morning on
that day, collected from the jungles. The idols are taken in
a procession to this place led by a batch of drummers (hired
for this occasion), followed by a man taking on his head
a big copper dish (about 18 inches in diameter) on which
two mustard oil lamps burn. He is followed by a man taking
on his hand a bunch of purified animal fur. The Brahmin
worshipper moves then holding the idols of Deul Govinda
and Kaliyā Thākur by hand. Satriya gāyana-bāyana being attired with their traditional dress play khol-tāl. The movement of this procession is obstructed by the huge gathering consisting of jubilant youths and visitors and it takes nearly twenty minutes to cross this path (of little over 200 feet). By this time as it becomes dusk, a beautiful show of indigenous fireworks of Barpeta, another attraction of this evening is organised in the open space. The Kīrtanghar looks bright with the florescent light emitted by the fire works. Additional provision of lighting (generator set) is maintained for this time for unforeseen powerfailure.

As Deul Govinda reaches the place pushing through the crowd the meji is set on fire. The burning fire devours the meji and the crackers put inside the reeds produce sound. When the meji burns Deul Govinda is to move around the fire along with Kaliyā Thākur seven times. As the burning is completed within minutes some people start scrambling to have

20. Śrī Manoranjan Pāthak of Vṛndāvana hāti arranged these ahead of time on bamboo posts in rows according to the types of fireworks to show his skills in making them.
a little ash or half burnt reed sticks and have a mark drawn on the forehead with ash which is considered sacred.

After the fire festival is over Deul Govinda is taken through the sabhāghar or the meeting hall and ascended the seven steps of the deul moving around it each step. Till the idol is finally placed on the swinging seat inside the deul at an auspicious moment, Deul Govinda is kept inside the sabhāghar on a big tray.

Next day, the full-moon day, is the actual Deul festival known as bhar deul. Special worship is held on this day inside the deul. In case of four-day programme of Deul festival Bhar deul is held for two days. After the worship is over, phāku (the coloured powder) is offered first by the Burhā Satriyā along with the chanting of spells by the worshipper and then by other people. On this day people climb up the deul to offer phāku for which a big sized metal tray is kept.\(^{21}\)

A full sized bamboo is placed ensuring easy and safe movement.

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\(^{21}\) The worshipper was assisted by Śrī Naren Pūjārī, Śrī Dharmakānta Das, Śrī Laksman Ojā in receiving the offered things and they also offered blessings to the visitors.
of male and female visitors separately. People who climb up the steps and offer phāku are seen coming down with their foreheads smeared with the coloured powder. The special offering on this occasion is the floral designs of gold and silver. Devout persons offer such gold flowers annually for wellbeing of their family. In the Deul festival of 1985 there were 84 gold flowers and a small basket full of silver flowers (not counted).

Prayer services:

During the Bhar Deul when Deul Govinda and Kaliyā Thākur remain inside the deul, the daily prayer services by the male and female devotees are held inside the sabhāghar. The prayer services include recitation of Ḍargītas narrating the event of Lord Kṛṣṇa playing with colour. The gāyana-bāyanas present their performance by playing on khol-tāl. In place of afternoon pātha-ghoṣākirtana followed by Vyāhkirtana is performed. Dramatic shows are also performed in place of evening services. During two days of Bhar Deul in case of four-day programme identical performances are held in the satra. Local people
enjoy the festivities during these days, they even prefer to visit the satra at night.

The last day or the Suweri:

This day is particularly significant for the extensive use of Phaku by people of all age groups but the group specially engrossed in this merri-making is the young ones. Though the programme of festival is continued for three or four days in the satra, the playing of colour is restricted for this day only and that also till mid-day before taking bath. From early morning on this day batches of small children equip themselves with sprayers and coloured water and come out to the road-sides to spray at the passing travellers. Batches of people of various age groups come out and play among themselves smearing coloured powder at each other's face, throwing cheaper talcum powder on the heads, their white cloths and faces being all stained with red and yellow patches. Such groups of jubilant men sometimes visit houses of their close friends to play colours. It is a rare scene to see female batches coming out on this occasion and in such cases they
visit houses of their close circles and play among themselves. People on this day play up to their heart's content, even then the restriction on throwing colours at women is strictly maintained and they are seen moving on the roads without hesitation. Use of other materials in place of true colours, of course, cannot be controlled among jubilant youths. Stray cases of some untoward incidents also are not very uncommon which take place under power of intoxication by the use of liquor.

This day is characterised by the representation of the mythological visit of Lord Kṛṣṇa to the place of Ghunucha who was betrothed to Kṛṣṇa by the procession with the idol of Deul Govinda and Kaliyā Thākur to Kanariapārā Satra near Gaṅakkuchi 2 Kms. south of Barpeta Satra. The idols of Deul Govinda and Kaliyā Thākur kept so long on the swing inside the deul are taken down on an appropriate moment and placed on two different palanquins specially kept in the satra for this day. The palanquins are placed in front of the matha, Deul Govinda and Kaliyā Thākur then properly placed so that they are not tilted by the movement. People remain in wait to
participate in the procession, by that time the idol of Krṣṇa from Barāḍi Satra near Barpeta also come to join. After all the preparations are completed, one of the satriyas ceremonially touches the palanquins and the journey commences at about 2 P.M. When the satra compound reverberates with songs and slogans and the air becomes coloured with the throwing of the powder. Though it is a stipulated duty of the Kumar people of Barpeta to hold the palanquin of the deity, others joining the procession show much eagerness to hold it on the way. They feel proud of and take great pleasure in holding it by shoulder. It becomes almost evening when the processionists come back as the people move very slowly singing, dancing and playing with colour throwing at each other. It is seen that enthusiastic people generally take part in this procession and they seem to be fully engrossed in joy and merriment. Such persons in common parlance are heard to refer in pride that they are such energetic men who used to go ahead of the Deul Govinda in the procession pushing back others who are less so. In such hilarious joy, participants go on singing the particular songs called holir git selected from sacred scriptures and playing colours sometimes smearing each other or sometimes spraying or pouring coloured water. The road from Barpeta Satra to
Kanarapārā is decorated with the planting of banana trees and strips of coloured papers.

At Kanarapārā, Govinda is placed on the cemented raised platform made for this purpose. Govinda is offered a kind of wild gram (hektā khowā) collected by the young boys.

As in the mythological story of Ghunucā Kīrtan, Lakṣmī is narrated to have prevented Kṛṣṇa from re-entering after he came back from the place of Ghunucā similarly Deul Govinda's way is blocked by placing four big sized bamboos. Till the bamboos are broken away by the joyful youths Govinda has to be at the gate. After making their way Deul Govinda with Kaliyā Thākur move round the Kīrtanghar along with the beating of drums and cymbals. People remaining in wait throw coins at the moving palanquins and offer pranām, try to get a little phāku from the feet of the deity. Deul Govinda with Kaliyā Thākur are then taken to the courtyard of the matha to take rest. An interesting mock debate is held in imagination of

22. The bamboos are supplied — one from Dakṣin hāti, two from Uttar hāti and one from Na-hāti. They are later honoured with arecanuts and leaves from the satra.
two sides of Kṛṣṇa and Lākṣmī in which devotees take two sides. Just as Lākṣmī is narrated as refusing entry to Kṛṣṇa and allowed only after declaring guilty and payment, here also the bhakats of Govinda’s side are to pay the amount to get re-entry. Only then Deul Govinda and Kāliyā Ṭhākur are taken into the bhājghar and the festival brought to an end.

All the families of the hātis entertain guests during the festival days. Visitors from far off places are accommodated in the guest house of the satra. Visitor guests to the satra are given ration from the satra fund consisting of rice, dal, potato, fire-wood, etc. Services of the people of various hātis are sought for the distribution of the various items of the ration. Old people say that at one time fish was also supplied in ration to the visitors. In case of a three day Deul festival ration is distributed for two days (three meals) and in case of a four-day festival for three-days (five meals). The open space in front of the guest house and to the eastern

23. Some of the persons who worked for smooth distribution of the items are Śrī Deven Das, Śaṅkar Caran Das, Ratna Kānta Das, Rām Chandra Das from Vṛndāvan hāti.
side of the bhājghar is used for cooking by the visitor guests.

An idea of the Deul festival of Barpeta Satra can be had from the following account.²⁴

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total income</td>
<td>Rs. 35,704.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total expenditure</td>
<td>Rs. 27,320.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>Rs. 8,384.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Income in Deul festival is from -

i) Pranāmi

ii) Due from share-holders

iii) From new shares

iv) From donations

For offering ration to the visitors the quantity of articles necessary were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>30 quintals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dal</td>
<td>6 quintals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potato</td>
<td>9 quintals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>5 bags</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire-wood</td>
<td>15. quintals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²⁴ Data collected from Sri Kamaleswar Das, an ex-member of the Satra Managing Committee. Data collected on 17.6.88.
People of the various neighbouring Hindu villages come to Barpeta during the festival days. Visitors from distant places come by hired buses mostly in groups. For studying these pilgrims a random survey was undertaken in 1985. The data may be shown in a table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total groups</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>956</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total 60 groups were surveyed, out of which 472 were males, 362 females and 122 children totalling 956. Among the pilgrims there were people of almost all the caste groups who came to Barpeta from all directions. Moreover the surveyed sample also included tribal people mostly Boro-Kacharis (54), Bengalis (3) and Nepalis (6). At least one third of the pilgrims stayed in the satra for one night.

Pilgrims parties travelled such a long distance of 350 Kms. from Nārāyanpur in Lakhimpur district of eastern Assam. The purposes of visit of the pilgrims were to pay a visit to Barpeta Satra as a place pilgrimage on this auspicious
occasion, to see the Kirtanghar for themselves, to see the Deul festival of Barpeta Satra of which they heard so much, its specialities and to avail the facilities offered to visitors. To see the other neighbouring satras of Barpeta was also another purpose of visit.

Janmāstami:

The anniversary of Lord Kṛṣṇa's birth, also known as Janmāstami, falls on the eighth lunar day of the dark fortnight in the month of Bhādra every year. The festival is observed by the Hindus all over India.

Special programmes are arranged in the satra in connection with Janmāstami festival. In the morning and evening prayer services, verses from Śisulīlā of the Kirtanaghoṣā are recited. Gāyana-bāyanas from the Sūtradhār family arrange a performance. A Bhāonā performance depicting Kṛṣṇa's birth is also staged after the evening pātha.

Fasting is observed on this day, commemorating the fast of those who were anxious for Kṛṣṇa's safety, particularly by the womenfolk. Young girls of different age-groups seem
to be very much interested in observing fast on this day. They abstain from taking any food, even water. Being on fast small girls of 5 or 6 years of age go out in batches dressing like their seniors. From morning attired with their best and particularly with mekhalā and chādar move on the streets. Their fast continues till the auspicious moment of Kṛṣṇa's birth at mid-night. The girls of different localities, in different groups arranged mock marriages commemorating the marriage of Vasudeva and Daivakī. That evening they engage themselves in marry-making singing various marriage songs. Then the fasting girls take some softened grams or sweets etc. to end their fast or in some cases they take vegetarian diet. In other cases rice with vegetables are taken only on the next morning. It is a common belief that by observing this fast one can get a good husband like Kṛṣṇa.

Nandotsava is celebrated the next day of the Janmāstamī.

On that day prayer services are held as usual with the addition

25. Such type of mock marriage took place in my own locality in the house of Śrī Puranjit Barua in which girls of the neighbouring families took part.
of certain formalities. After the reading of the Bhāgavata in the morning prasāṅga, the gāyana-bāyana troupes play on khol and tāl and recite bārgītas. By this time an astrologer performs the astrological calculations just as sage Garga is said to have done in case of Kṛṣṇa's birth. Nandotsava comes to an end when after these formalities devotees arrange peka-yātrā, sprinkling mud on each other. This represents the sentiment of joy of the people, of Braja for the birth of Kṛṣṇa.

The participant functionaries (the worshipper, the astrologer, the gāyana-bāyana and the pāthaka) in connection with Janmāstamī festival are honoured with arecanuts and leaves. They are also offered new cloths. The worshipper and the astrologer are also given food items consisting of rice, dal, potato etc. The latter also gets an honorarium amounting to rupees fifteen.

26. Śrī Kāmākhyā Dev Sarma is the astrologer.