CHAPTER III

(A) BARPETA AS SETTING

Geographical location:

Barpeta Satra is one of the important Vaisnavite centres of Assam. The satra is situated within the Municipal area of Barpeta, which is the headquarter town of the District of same name. Barpeta is connected with Guwahati through three motorable routes and is 100 Kms by the shortest route to the north west from Guwahati. The National High Way No. 31 runs at a distance of about 10 Kms to the north from Barpeta. The nearest railway station is Barpeta Road, at a distance of about 20 Kms towards north.

Barpeta is situated in 26°-26.6° N. latitude and 90°30'-91°E longitude with an elevation of 172' above mean sea level. The area is composed of alluvial soil and fertile soil. Average temperature of the place during summer months is 30°C and average temperature of the winter season mainly in December and January is 19°C, with relative humidity between 62%-95%.
Barpeta is a low-lying area traversed by several tributaries of river Caulkhowa and surrounded by rivers and fishing swamps. This low-lying condition has hampered the growth and development of the township as any developmental work takes a better portion of the sanctioned money in its earth-filling. Still then, during the span of Municipal administration (since 1886 A.D.) many developmental works have been undertaken to meet the demands of modernity and succeeded in bringing a change to its past ecology.

**Historical aspects of Barpeta:**

Barpeta came into prominence in the religious history of Assam during Ahom period (Medieval period) with the advent of Śaṅkaradeva. It is a fact that Śaṅkaradeva had to flee away from the Ahom kingdom for fear of royal persecution.

During the sixteenth century Koch kings came to power. Biswasimha was the first Koch king. His son Naranārāyana

1. Earth filling with the help of bullock carts has become an occupation of some people, each full loaded cart with clods of earth casting र. 10.00 to र. 12.00 at the present rate. In certain cases country boats are also used to carry the clods cut under water with the help of a short-handled spade.
ascended in the year 1540 A.D. and his brother Cilārāi was made the Commander-in-Chief of the Koch army. Cilārāi died in 1571 and his son Raghudeva revolted against Naranārāyana whereupon king Naranārāyana divided his kingdom along the river Sonkos. The king assigned the portion to the east of the river comprising the Mangaldoi sub-division, Kamrup and Goalpara districts and the eastern part of Mymensingh to his nephew in 1581 A.D. The two kingdoms thus demarcated came to be known as Behar and Kamrupa by the biographers. This partition further weakened the Koches and Raghudevnārāyana had soon to give up the westernmost tract of his territory to the Afghan Bhuyan of Bengal, Isa Khan.

The quarrel between Naranārāyana's son, Lakṣmīnārāyana (1587-1627 A.D.) and Raghudeva's son, Parikṣītnārāyana (1603-1616 A.D.) led to the invasion of Kamarupa by the Nawab of Dacca in 1612 A.D. and its annexation to the Delhi empire in 1616 A.D. as far as Barnadi.

2. Gait, E.: History of Assam, p. 57
The religious history of Barpeta is related with the coming of Śaṅkaradeva to this place and settling permanently at Pātbāusī near Barpeta. Śaṅkaradeva's movement got its inception while he was at his native place Bardowā. But soon a period of unrest began in that place, for fear of persecution by the Kacharis Śaṅkaradeva along with his kinsmen left the Bhuyan territories and crossed over to the northern bank of the Brahmaputra and stationed themselves at Dhuwāhāt in Mājuli.

Śaṅkaradeva's stay at Dhuwāhāt was prized by his acquisition of Madhavadeva to his fold. Madhavadeva after conversion proved to be able disciple and successor of Śaṅkaradeva.

Due to an unhappy incident Śaṅkaradeva had to leave Dhuwāhāt soon. Ahom monarch, Suhunghmuṅ (1499-1539 A.D.) arranged catching wild elephants. In that connection, the king arrested Śaṅkaradeva's son-in-law Hari Bhuyan and Madhavadeva also. Hari Bhuyan was ultimately put to death but Madhavadeva was let off. This sad incident embittered Śaṅkaradeva's feelings against Ahom monarch and he was then
on the lookout for possibilities of changing his place of residence to a safer locality. The kingdom of Koch king Naranārāyana (1540–1581 A.D.) who was known to be an enlightened monarch having reputation of sheltering and encouraging scholars, was considered the better resort. Sāṅkaradeva and his relatives set out (1546 A.D.) for Kamarupa following river routes, within the kingdom of Naranārāyana. They temporarily stayed at different places like Kāpalābāri (in Kamrup district), Bārādi (north east of present Barpeta town), Pālenđī or Ćūnporā (now a part of Barpeta town), Kumarkuchi and finally settled at the village Bāusi, later known as Pātbāusi. For nearly twenty years, Pātbāusi was Sāṅkaradeva’s permanent residence. Staying at this place he made all his major poetical and dramatic works and sections of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa and so on. From Pātbāusi Sāṅkaradeva again set out for a second course of pilgrimage. After his return from the pilgrimage he engaged himself in the task of propagation.

5. Sarma, S.N.: op.cit., p. 14
Lekharu, U.C.(ed.): Kathāguru Carita, p. 224
In the meantime Šaṅkaradeva had to appear before the king Naranārāyaṇa at Cooch Behar in connection with certain complaints lodged against him. All the allegations against him being proved untrue, the king ultimately sought initiation from him. During the last few years of his life Šaṅkaradeva kept close contact with the royal court and visited several times. Cilārāya managed to build a satra for him which was later known as Bhelā or Bhelādāṅgā Satra. At the special request of the king Šaṅkaradeva prepared the famous Vṛndāvani cloth.

Šaṅkaradeva left Pāṭbāusī for the last time by boat in the year 1568 A.D. Before leaving for Cooch Behar he stayed one night with Mādhavadeva at Ganakkuchi and had the last intimate talk with him.6

At the time of Šaṅkaradeva’s passing away in Cooch Behar in 1568 A.D. Mādhavadeva was still residing at Ganakkuchi. From there he occasionally visited Pāṭbāusī to see Šaṅkaradeva’s wife and family. Later on Mādhavadeva moved his camp

6. Neog, M. : op.cit., p. 120
to Sundaridiya near Barpeta. He outlived Śāṅkaradeva by twenty eight years. Staying at Sundaridiya Madhavadeva composed his monumental work Nāmaghoṣā. Most of his time at Sundaridiya was spent in propagating the faith of Śāṅkaradeva far and wide and moved extensively in the surrounding areas. 7

Socio-demographic outline:

The new district of Barpeta was created on the 1st July 1983 consisting of the old sub-division of Barpeta which was created nearly hundred and fifty years ago. It has a total area of 3307.3 Sq. Kms. Of the many problems faced by the sub-division (now district) during the one and half centuries of its existence, the problem of unusual rise of population has stood as the greatest danger in its social, economic and political dimensions. Unchecked inflow of people, particularly from East Bengal of undivided India (East Pakistan after partition and now Bangladesh) is the only cause of the population increase. In the year 1911, there was only 1% immigrant

population of the total population of the sub-division and now it has increased nearly 50%. An idea of the population increase during the decades can be had from the following Table.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population of the sub-division (now district)</th>
<th>Decadal variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>539,423</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>715,562</td>
<td>32.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>971,731</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1348,200</td>
<td>38.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the ten years from 1961-1971 the population of the sub-division has increased 36% whereas the rate of increase of population in central and state level were 24.80% and 34.95% respectively. Usually char (river island) areas of the river Brahmaputra are the places mostly occupied by the immigrant population. The rate of increase during 1971 and 1981 was 38.75%.

Growth of the township:

Towards the growth of the township of Barpeta the satra institution situated within it was not the only factor. There are several such satras near about Barpeta such as Patbāusī, Gaṇakkuchi, Sundarīdiyā, Bārādi, Janiā, Bhawānīpur etc. Saṅkaradeva and his apostle Mādhavadeva stayed in some of these places for longer periods than in Barpeta and established satras there. But such satras did not flourish like Barpeta nor those places grew into township. Topography of the place was the cause of the growth of the township and this also facilitated the incoming of the great preachers. Barpeta was then connected with the main stream of the river Brahmaputra through certain tributaries (The present Galiāhāti of Barpeta symbolises the old Goloyā jān through which Mādhavadeva is said to have entered Barpeta). River Cāulkhowā which flows beside Barpeta is extinct now, but at one time all the major rivers of the sub-division merged with this river. The contiguous area being a low-lying one, and in the absence of a good road communication people were compelled to be expert in navigation. Again for the said nature of the land surface,
agriculture could not be the main occupation of the people.

Primarily a religious community, consisting of 280 families of bhakats (devotees) and paiks (men who worked on the land granted by the king) granted and established by the Ahom king Siva Simha (in 1735 A.D.)⁹, Barpeta emerged as a non-peasant society. For the facilities of the river system and being situated on the bank of the river Cāulkhowā, Barpeta became the business centre for the local people and the township came up in the course of time.¹⁰ It being a primarily non-agricultural area, the rituals and festivals observed in Barpeta fall in the summer season. During this season it also becomes easy for communication with the neighbouring areas. The non-peasant people turned their mind towards economic pursuits and now people of this place move to far off places in search of business facilities. In the township of Barpeta, also the local entrepreneurs have been able to maintain a hold on the business as against in some other places of Assam where the businessmen from Marwar, Rajasthan or the Bengali

¹⁰. Barpeta local Board was formed in 1880 A.D. and Municipality was formed in 1886 A.D.
businessmen dominate the scene, People of Barpetā now show proficiency in the trade with motor vehicles. Thereby they offer employment opportunities also to the local youths.

The name of the place:

"The word Barpetē is variously derived. Some say it is a corruption for Barpāta and means the great throne, great altar, or with reference to the grant of lands conferred on this institution, it may signify great endowment."\textsuperscript{11} It is also said there was a Barphith (i.e., big tol or centre of learning) here and from this word the name Barpetē has emanated. Another view is that Saṅkaradeva made a prophecy to the effect that the place would be Barphitha, i.e., a great sacred place and from this the present name Barpetē has come after a series of phonetic changes. The name Barpetē is also related to a fishing swamp (bil) known as Barpetē bil which is stated to have situated within Barpetē. It is regarded as the Barpāt or great seat of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam.

and as such the name of the place is Barpetā.

The old name of this place (present Barpetā) was Tāntikuchi, the land of weavers. Even today the women of Barpetā are expert in the art of weaving. Šaṅkaradeva with the help of Mādhavadeva and some weavers including Gopāl Tānti (later known as Mathurādāsa Burhā Ātā) prepared the famous Vṛndāvanīyā cloth at Tāntikuchi for presenting the same to the Koch king Naranarāyana. In this cloth the life and activities of Śrī Kṛṣṇa of his childhood at Vṛndāvana were beautifully decorated with the help of multi-coloured threads. As such, later on the place was regarded as a sacred place. Tradition goes that the Kirtanaghar of Barpetā Satra was constructed in equal size of the Vṛndāvanīyā cloth.¹²

¹². Informant: Śrī Thanuram Atā Burha Bhakat of Barpeta Satra. Data collected on 10.1.90
Establishment of the satra:

There is dearth of historical material to trace out the origin and development of Barpeta Satra in detail. Only this much is certain that the satra was founded by Madhavadeva, the chief apostle of Sāṅkaradeva, in the year 1583 A.D. According to one account prior to founding the satra at Barpeta, Madhavadeva had his seat at the Sundariyā Satra founded by him, at a distance of 2 Kms east of Barpeta. He however, began disliking his stay there because his disciples at Sundariyā were constantly disturbed by some antagonists. Ultimately Madhavadeva decided to leave Sundariyā and while preparing to go to Guwāgāchā, he was packing his belongings one of his disciples Mathurādāsa Burhā Atā, who hailed from Barpeta persuaded him to stay at Barpeta instead of going away to a distant place. Burhā Atā took up Madhava's luggage on his shoulders and hastened to his own place (Barpeta). At

Barpeta, Madhavadeva was provided accommodation by the people at the initiative of Mathurādās Burhā Ṭātā in a thatched cottage with three rooms — one for cooking, one for sleeping and the other for holding prayers and religious discourses.\textsuperscript{14} This was the inception of Barpeta Satra. At that time Narāyana Dās Thākur Ṭātā who was influenced by the attraction of the satra of Dāmodaradeva situated at Pāṭbāusi advised Madhavadeva to plan and build a satra at Barpeta on the model of Dāmodaradeva. Thus Madhava felt the necessity for reconstructing the satra under the guidance of Mathurādāsa.\textsuperscript{15} Land for the purpose was made available by one old man Rām Lāruā by name. Timber was available from the very plot of land. Madhavadeva’s disciple Parbatīyā Kṛṣṇai and his two sons Rām Kārikar and Vibhīṣaṇa were engaged as carpenters who prepared the required number of posts and beams etc. Bamboos were collected from Bajali area. Stronger bamboos were split into long rods (kāmī) and the thinner ones into whole rods (ruwā). In order

\textsuperscript{14} Lekharu, U.C.(ed.) : \textit{Kathāguru Carit}, pp. 351-357
\textsuperscript{15} Supra, Chapter II.
to make them durable all were kept under water for some time. After that they were dyed red. The posts were then erected and the cross beams fitted. The red dyed rods were then spread and tied to form the roof which was covered with thatch. Walls of the house were then erected with bamboo and wood, windows (kundrākṣa jālā) being kept in proper places. The people thus built a spacious prayer hall (Hari Mandir) for Mādhavadeva's satra at Barpeta with material and labour supplied by his admirers and disciples. The hall was not merely spacious but magnificent because of various colourful decorations created by some of his disciples. The materials used in the work besides timber, bamboo and thatch collected from neighbouring villages were chalk, tinfoils and mica for painting and decoration in every part. Thus it came to be called as rāṅgīyāl ghar, i.e., colourful house or rāṅga grha house meant for dramatic performances.16

It is said that after completion of the prayer hall Mādhavadeva devoted himself fully to the propagation of the

neo-Vaisnavite faith in the area. To attract people to the message of the faith he organised theatrical performances called Bhāona along with songs, dance and action on the various facets of life of Lord Kṛṣṇa. It was not however, a smooth passage for Mādhavadeva in the initial stage at Barpeta. He met with opposition from some quarters in propagating the new faith which he ultimately overcame.

Growth of the satra:

(a) The first phase:

As the story has it, Mādhavadeva eventually left Barpeta Satra and made his seat at Bheladwā or Bheladanā Satra situated at a distance of 2 Kms from Cooch Behar, the present district headquarters. The management of Barpeta Satra was left in-charge of his close disciple Mathurādāsa Burhā Ātā. The finely decorated rongiyāl ghar was consumed by wild fire and had to be built a new. Mathurādāsa met Mādhava at Cooch Behar sometime later. Mādhavadeva nominated Burhā Ātā as the

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17. Now in West Bengal, formerly the capital of Koch kingdom. Raghudhevnārāyana was the king of Cooch Behar when Mādhavadeva established his satra at Barpeta. At that time Barpeta was included in the Koch kingdom.
Sabriya (head of the satra) of Barpeta Satra and asked him to be at Barpeta and presented him a big cloth (wrapper called dopati bastra), two silver coins (rupee called nāgerī tokā, which are still kept in the satra as sacred relic) with a flower garland thus recognising him in the high post and asked him to move to Barpeta.\textsuperscript{18} The office of Satrīya\textsuperscript{19} entitled Mathuradasa to receive gurukar from the disciples. It was further decided by Madhavadeva that Mathuradasa along with his disciples should work for the spread of the faith not merely in Barpeta but over large areas extending from the river Sonkoś in the west to as far as the river Barnadi in the east. This was to be the so-called religious kingdom of Barpeta.\textsuperscript{19}

(b) The second phase:

As the head of the Barpeta Satra Burhā Atā made up his mind to rebuild the prayer hall on a larger plan in order to accommodate the growing number of devotees. With his initiative

\textsuperscript{18} Neog, M.: Śāṅkaradeva and His Times, p. 137
\textsuperscript{19} Das, A.C.: Mahāpurusī Ṭā Dharmar Pañca ratna, p. 28
a beautiful prayer hall was raised. Mathurādās Burhā Ātā is known as the builder of a spacious prayer hall called Kīrtanghar at the satra site rebuilt and renovated several times in the course of the last four hundred years. The Kīrtanghar, as the focal point of Barpetā Satra still stands at the same site. The satra grew and flourished under the able leadership of Mathurādāsa. Even after the death of Mādhavadeva (1596 A.D.) Barpetā Satra was looked upon with great veneration by the Vaiṣṇavas. It is said that king Vīranārāyaṇa (1627-1632 A.D.) of Cooch Behar once visited Barpetā Satra and was much impressed by the spirit of service he saw in Mathurādāsa.20

The initial development of Barpetā Satra is thus intimately tied up with the activities of Mathurādās Burhā Ātā.

(c) Organisation of satra activities:

It is said that Mathurādās arranged the fourteen ceremonial religio-ritual sittings (prasāṅgas) in a day.21 For this

   Neog, M. : op.cit., p. 137
   Das, A.C. : op.cit., p. 32
purpose he brought to Barpeta persons who were capable of singing devotional songs (prasanga) or playing the khol (drum) and encouraged them to settle in the locality as satra functionaries and entrusted them (including the celibates) with the various stipulated duties (bābs) to be performed. Their descendants are still continuing their traditional duties. Mathurādāsa also organised the residential community composed of the various satra functionaries and the disciples. The houses of the people were arranged along paths forming different hātis. He also initiated a fund in each hāti which was intended for the economic well-being of the inhabitants of the hāti. Another important organisational step was the formation of the community of devotees (samūha bhakat), membership of which was allowed by payment of a definite fees. Members were also required to pay an annual fees, render services to the satra and to look after the satra in all aspects.

22. Mahanta, J. : op.cit., pp. 111-113
Das, A.C. : op.cit., pp. 33-34
After the passing away of Mathurādās Burhā Ātā (1641 A.D.) changes took place in the satra affairs. A non-Brahmin celibate, Govardhan Ātā, came to the post of satriya after Mathurādāsa. Brahmins were skillfully inducted into the satra fold after him. The subsequent years witnessed a chain of events during the tenure of several Brahmin satriyas resulting in litigations. As the management of the satra was going from bad to worse and there was misappropriation of the properties, a case was instituted for the proper management and wellbeing of the satra in the Calcutta High Court. The case was remanded in 1920 (Judgement of the High Court, 10th June 1920). After a subsequent appeal against this judgement, the case again lingered for another fifteen years in order to determine the samūha and its jurisdiction, was finally disposed of by K.C. Chunder, the District and Sessions Judge, Assam Valley Districts by a judgement dated 26.9.35. In the decree of the case it was decided that the samūha has a hand

23. Scheme case No. 7 of 1912, Manhari Das and others plaintiffs versus Umanath Mazumdar and others defendants.

24. As there was no High Court in Assam, Gauhati High Court being established only in 1948.
in the satra affairs. As a part of the judgement a scheme of management for the satra was framed. With the decree of the scheme case and introduction of a scheme of management the satra has entered into a new era of democratic provisions.

(d) Subsequent stages of development:

Ahom rule in Assam has been considered as the glorious phase in the history of satra institution in which period various satras were endowed with land grants. Barpeta Satra was also granted lands by the Ahom rulers.25 "The institution is less richly endowed by the former rulers of the country than many others of far less importance."26 The small brick temple called matha is an example of Ahom architectural style of the eighteenth century, constructed during the tenure of Kinaram Misra as Satriya.27 Another concrete structure is the deul with a dome on the north west corner of the satra compound. The main entrance is also a concrete

25. Through a copper plate grant of King Siva Simha in the year 1735 A.D.
27. Pathak, G. : op.cit., p. 56
whose construction was completed during thirties of this century. The house where recitation of Bhāgavata is held daily is a recent addition to the satra complex which was again renovated (1987) at an estimated cost of Rs. 75,000.00. Late Dharmeswar Mahanta, Dekā Satriyā constructed a guest house along with his residence prior to his death, with the collections from various disciples of him. A beautiful stage for holding dramatic performances, meetings etc. was added during last decade. During the tenure of late Chandra Kanta Misra Satriyā (1945-1981) various other construction and renovation works were undertaken the most important being that of giving the final shape to the Kīrtanghar with the substantial pillars and mosaic floor. Other beautification schemes also included digging a fishery (1985) near the satra. Inauguration of a library and a plan to construct a guest house are important steps towards development.

The satra organisation:

For day to day activities of the satra, there is a compact organisation consisting of a number of functionaries with definite spheres of activities. Due to their whole
hearted participation, the varied activities both religious and secular, take place smoothly.

The samūha bhakat (community of devotees) is the supreme authority of the satra in all matters. The religious affairs are managed in a traditional manner. For managing the religious activities there are the following office bearers.

The satrīyā.: The person in highest authority in religious and other social matters of a satra, is popularly known as Adhikāra or satrīyā. His position is similar to that of the Mahanta of medieval Mathas or the Abbot of the Christian monastic system. He is the religious head and also the spiritual guide of the people having affiliation to the satra.

The formal initiation of the neophytes to Vaiṣṇavism called sarana is conducted by him in the Kīrtanghar.

The Adhikāra or Superior is to live a life of simplicity, regularity and self-restraint. Adhikāra is to perform and attend the religious duties and ceremonies regularly. He is to conduct and preside over the discussions held in the Kīrtanghar.
The title Adhikāra which conveys the sense of ownership was never applied to the superior of Barpeta Satra. The satra collectively belonged to the community of devotees and the Adhikāra or Satriyā act as the guide or the leader of the religious community. There are two offices of Satriyā of Barpeta Satra. The senior Satriyā of Barpeta is known as Burhā Satriyā, while the junior is the Dekā Satriyā. The Satriyā is to regularly attend the prayer services and preside over the meetings of the samūha (general community of devotees). He is to look into the regular performance of the daily religious activities of the satra. For any change in the daily performance, he is to arrange for it. As a religious head of a satra he is also to look into the matter related to the expansion of the faith. The office of the Satriyā of Barpeta Satra has been enjoyed by the descendants of Rām Rām Guru from early times, who was contemporary of Śāṅkara-deva.

28. The names of the satriyas of Barpeta satra:
Genealogy showing the line of descent of Sri Chandra Kanta Misra. 29

Deka satrzya: Next to satrzya in power and prestige is deka-satrzya. In the absence of the satrzya the deka-satrzya performs the duties of the satrzya concerning the religious matters of the satra. He attends the daily prayers in the morning. The custom of appointing a deputy to the superior called deka-satrzya is probably of later origin.\(^{30}\)

Ghāideuri: He is the head priest of the satra. Ghāideuri is from among the senior grade of celibate devotees (Būrbhābhakat). He is to arrange for all the daily religious performances in the satra including lighting of the earthen lamps in front of the āsana and the two house-sites of Mathurādās Būrabeta Aṭā and Bādalā Aṭā. He is to place the scripture in the proper place for expounding every morning and evening and to

\(^{30}\) Dekā satrzya Istqdev Nābis died in December 1990. The post since then is lying vacant. Istqdev Nābis was elected to the post in 1978 in a triangular contest. He had a life long association with the Mahāpurusīya faith. As a Dekā satrzya of Barpēta Satra he travelled far and wide in Assam in the pursuit of the spread of the faith.

take special care of the aksaya banti (the lamp eternal). The ghāideuri is to distribute nirmāli (offered flowers, leaves etc.) to the visitors. The term of ghāideuri is rotatory.³¹ He is paid rupees one hundred per month from the satra fund.

Pālideuri: He is the helper of the ghāideuri. Another celibate devotee serves as pālideuri. His main duties are to distribute prasāda (propitiatory offering or gift), salt, betelnuts and leaves etc. among the devotees. There being very few celibate devotees in the satra at present there is none to work as pālideuri. These works are done by the ghāideuri himself.

Ghāibharālı (the principal stores-in-charge): He is the custodian of all the articles and utensils of the satra necessary for daily use and in time of festivals. He is also

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³¹ It was for three months' term among five such senior bhakats during the course of my earlier investigation (1976). But now (1988) it is for six months alternately between two of them after the expulsion of the third one Śrī Mohan Ātā Burhabhakat in January 1985. The remaining two are Śrī Halirām Ātā Burhabhakat and Śrī Kalicaran Ātai Burhabhakat.
in-charge of the large number of sacred books written on *sāci* barks. This honorary charge is given to a senior celibate devotee.  

**Pūjārī (the worshipper):** A Brahmin worshipper has got the sole responsibility of worshipping the idol of *Kāliyāṭhākur* daily in the morning. Koch king Raghudev Nārāyōn (1581-1603 A.D.) while presenting the stone image of *Kāliyāṭhākur* to Barpeta Satra also sent a Brahmin worshipper along with it. Paramānanda Rājmedhi was the descendent of such a Brahmin family. Lākṣmīkānta was the youngest of his three sons (so he was called Seharām). Besides being a *satra-pūjārī*, he was a genius in *satriya* dance and music and was also a skilled artisan in the art of wood carving. Most of the carvings on the walls of the *Kirtanghar* are the products of his expert hands. The Ahom king Sīva Simha also donated land together with 280 families of *pāiks* including 5 families of *pūjārī*

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32. Śrī Thanurām Ātqi Burhābhakat is the ghāibharālī after Ahorū Ātqi Burhābhakat died on 5.1.81.

(in 1735 A.D.) to the satra. In the course of time there being no proper person of those families for the job, late Rasudev Sarma was entrusted with the work. He continued in the task for eighteen years till he died in April, 1984 at the age of 76 years. He took help of other hands at the time of Daul festival (the festival of colour) and in the time of Janmāstamī (birth anniversary of Lord Kṛṣṇa). After the death of Basudev Sarma, in a general meeting of the samūha bhakat in the presence of the satrīyā and the ṛekā satrīyā, Śrī Manomohan Dev Miśra was entrusted with the task of worshipping the deity. Accordingly he took charge from September 15, 1984. Later on Śrī Munindra Nāth Bhāgavatī of Sundarīdiyā was also inducted. Ultimately they divided the period of work between them alternately with one month's term. According to Śrī Miśra there is no system of paying salary to the pujaṛi from early time, it was the duty conferred on particular families by the king, instead there was a tradition of giving rice and other eatables to the pujaṛi at the time of Daul festival.

34. Neog, M.(ed.): Prācya-Sāsanāvali, p. 22
Janmāstami and the three kīrtan festivals.

Bhāgavatī (exponent of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa): Reading and expounding of the Bhāgavata has been included as a unit of the daily prayer service of the satra. Formerly it was the duty of the particular family. Late Ramkrishna Bhāgavatī was doing the conferred duty. But now for want of proficient man in the family Śrī Chandra Kānta Misra, the Burhaṣatriyā is doing the honoured job.

Pāthak (reciter of the scripture): A man from the Pāthak family or one appointed by them is to read few passages of selected scriptures daily in the morning and evening as part of daily prayer service. This is considered as bāb or special duty of certain families to be rendered at the satra. At present Śrī Gopāl Pāthak is doing the service of a pāthak.

Other than the Pāthak there are families who take part in other items of prayer service. There are the Gāyan-Bāyan, men of two families forming the satrīyā music party who accompany in performing definite units of prayers (in the evening called sevākīrtan). Similarly men of Ojha family present
Ojāpālī performance by playing small cymbals at the time of celebration of the Kirtans and Bihus.

Mazumdar (cashier): He is the cashier of the satra who maintains various day to day accounts of the satra on behalf of the samūha. He attends the office of the secretary at about 9 in the morning and also in the afternoon. He receives any offering made to the satra and issues receipts for this. Generally a person retired from other job is appointed a mazumdār. He is paid rupees one hundred as salary per month.

Gosāibharālī: Generally aged persons are appointed gosāibharālī who takes seat near the eastern and the western gates of the kirtanghar. He receives the things brought by the visitors for offering (salt, mustard oil, incense etc.), gives blessings and offers nirmālī from the decorated pot. A locked cash box is kept infront of each of them where the visitors put coins while offering praṇāma.

Pālādharīyā: Pālā are certain services to be rendered to the satra by every individual member of the samūha in turn. The services include washing of the floor of the kirtanghar
collecting flowers and leaves for offering, beating the drum and playing upon other musical instruments. One who renders such services is known as pālādhariyā. He is also to keep watch day and night over the temple and its properties. On default of such services one has to pay rupee one per day to the satra through the mazumdār. Another man working as pālādhariyā on his behalf gets the amount. It is observed that a particular man may work on behalf of the defaulter members of the samūha. Formerly the term of the pālādhariyā was for one month, then it was reduced to fifteen days, ten days and now it is for five days as the number of samūha bhakat increased. The pālā falls due on individual members of the samūha after nearly five years. 35

Chowkidar: Chowkidar is to keep watch of the satra compound and its properties day and night. He is also to look after the pet animals and birds of the satra and to supply grass and other food to them.

35. This information was collected from Śrī Cidānanda Bāyan (aged 91) of Nahati, Barpeta on 2.2.90.

36. There are a number of pet deers and peacocks which are sources of attraction to the visitors and are a kind of property of the satra.
Pāchanfarr (messenger): He is a messenger of the samūha. His duty is to deliver the various notices and messages of the samūha among the residents of the various hāṭis of Barpetā, which may be regarded as special function to the satra, any change or special arrangement of the daily activities or in connection with any meeting etc.

Other than these office bearers there is the managing committee constituted of twenty eight members elected by the samūha to look after the organisational affairs of the satra and to arrange various religious ceremonies associated with tradition of the satra. To conduct such activities the members of the managing committee elect a secretary and an assistant secretary from among them. The secretary holds an office with assistant secretary, accountant, registrar and office assistants etc. In their respective spheres of activities the functionaries are loyal to their duties and that is why functions of the satra are running systematically and smoothly.