CHAPTER-III

The Narowa Group of Sattras

1. Emergence of the Narowa group:

Within the discipline of historical study sattra institutions of 17th–18th centuries of Christian era have come to occupy a distinct position. In the Sanskrit literature the word sattra has been used in two senses, firstly, in the sense of an alms house and secondly, in the sense of a sacrifice lasting from a few days to a year or more. The etymological meaning of the word, says S.N. Sarma, is an association or sitting (vaisad + tra) or an instrument which helps to liberate the noble (sat + V tri) which must have supplied additional weightage to form the above notion about sattra. The Ambari rock inscription dated 1154 saka is a kind of epigraphic document written in mixed Assamese refers to origin of sattra institution in Assam. The basic idea of organizing a sattra was perhaps derived by Śaṅkaradeva form some of the earlier religious institutions of the land. The origin of Vaiṣṇava sattra and the history of its rapid expansion and growth can be traced back to the midst of the 16th century A.D. Observing this S.N. Sarma states that the nucleus of sattra institution formed during the lifetime of Śaṅkaradeva. The sattra institutions established by the Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and their immediate followers played a great role in the social life of the people and as a social force these institution was greatly strengthened by the acceptance of the faith by the ruler and ruled alike. It is evident that the sattras of Śaṅkaradeva era

156 P.V. Kane, History of Dharma Sastra, vol. II., part-II, pp.12-39
157 S.N. Sarma, NVMSIA, p.144
and later period played a significant socio-religious role in propagating and preserving the rich socio-religious and cultural legacy of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. By the end of the 17th century, the most fruitful period of the Vaiṣṇavism ended and the galaxy of Vaiṣṇava stalwarts disappeared from the religious firmament. Relationship between sattra and state following this has reached a complex phase. The complexity further develops form the fact that each institution seeks from its followers or subjects total allegiance. During our period of study (17th-19th centuries) especially in context of Ahom rule the relationship was found to be very crucial and sometimes strained to a great degree. Towards the later part of the Ahom rule mainly prompted by political motive, appointment of an officer, Sattrīyā Barua was made to look after the workings and management of the sattras.159

The present study try to find out the events associated with growth of sub-sects when the smaller groups of sattras began to emerge in large number within the sphere of the Ahom Kingdom and consequently when inter relations between the royal court and sattras developed under a changed atmosphere. The royal authority had to acknowledge it as fait accompli and came forward to patronise them but a supervision impelled by a political motive became necessary.160

It has already been motioned elsewhere for the actions and counteractions taken by Śaṅkaradeva granddaughters and daughters of the great grandsons there arose some new points of difference of smaller magnitude leading to the sattras to be divided into four groups. D. Nath observes, ‘this division weakened the old unity and strength of neo-Vaiṣṇavism, but created a force within each of the sects, to compete with each other

159 Govinda Dasa's 'Santasampada, Ch. V as quoted by S.N. Sarma, op. cit., p. 257
160 ibid, p.248
for expansion of its own organization, in different parts of the state.\textsuperscript{161} Barjuna or ‘etakā mahantar jīnā,’\textsuperscript{162} gives a brief account of the early history and development of the post Šāṅkarite sattras of Assam. This small work gives a list of the sattras belonging to each samhatis along with their first superiors. In course of time these samhatis became wholly independent of the original sects and each of them gathering its own disciples and followers and established scores of big and small sattras. Further while giving a list of the Puruṣa sanhāti sattras, S. N. Sarma also made it clear that a new sub group called nāti sattras emerged at the initiatives of Caturbhuj, the junior grandson of Šāṅkaradeva. He enlisted the group belongs to nāti-sattras along with their first apostles. Sattras like Viṣṇupura (Caturbhuj), Bardowā (Dāmodara), Narowā (Ramākānta), Kowāmorā (Anantarāya), Dighalī (Sārangapānī), and Cāmāgurī (Cakrapānī) come under this group.\textsuperscript{163}

Among these, sattras founded by Dāmodara and his son Ramākānta (according to some accounts) became to be known as Narowā group of sattras for their independence to the nāti sattras. Very soon, this group could obtain the recognition of the rulers and the royal house and in the royal court; they were allowed to retain the third row of seats.\textsuperscript{164}

With the death of Caturbhuj, in Śaka 1570, the direct male lineage of the Šāṅkaradeva’s family even from the daughter’s line ended. However, the movement of

\textsuperscript{161} D. Nath, Satras in Colonial Assam their response to the emerging socio political issues, p.3
\textsuperscript{162} Govinda Dasa, a trusted disciple of Vaṣṇamālīdeva of the Dakṣinpat sattrā composed the ‘Efakā mahantar sattrā ṭhāpanār jīnā’, incorporated in Vaṣṇavī Kīrtana. It is a short but reliable account of the neo-Vaṣṇavī movement and sattras composed in the very early years of the 18th century under the Ahom rule.
\textsuperscript{163} S.N. Sarma, op. cit. p.133
\textsuperscript{164} N. Saikia (ed.), Maniram Dewan's Buranji Vivek Ratna, p.88
establishing *sattras* did not stop here. The daughters of the two grandsons of Śaṅkaradeva, Puruṣottam and Caturbhuja shouldered the responsibility to continue the movement. To understand the situation we may trace out the following genealogy of Śaṅkaradeva. It helps us to know the background of the origin of the Narowā group of *sattras*.

![Genealogy Diagram]

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(Adopted legal heir of Caturbhuj and son of Gobidapriya and Gaurikanta)
The only sister of Caturbhuja, who was the mother of Dāmodara Thakur inspired her son in establishing new sattras in his early days who taught him the lessons of the Śaṅkaradeva’s faith and religion. As Caturbhuja Thākur had no issue at the time of his death, he adopted his sister’s son. The Thākur Carita of Ratikānta Dwija gives an elaborate account of the episode of the adoption of Dāmodara to his order. From this incident one can easily assume that as Dāmodara was implanted into the Caturbhuja’s gotra, and it gives rise to the term ‘Narowā’ (na = new, rowā = implanted) in Western Assam. He narrates Āi Kanakalatā, the widow of Caturbhuja informed the assembly of mahantas on the occasion of Dāmodara’s investiture performed on the srāddha ceremony of Caturbhuja.

Hence Dāmodara was naturally obliged to bear the pains in continuing of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement when Kanakalatā, his maternal aunt played the role of a regent of the order. Some sattras established by Dāmodara with the help of Kanakalatā

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165 K. D. Goswami informs us that only one copy of Ratikānta’s ‘Thākur Carita’ (from v.v. 7-208) had been obtained from one Kuśa Adhikāry (75) of Bardowā Salaguri sattrā.

166 Punyadine subhakhyaṇa cāl prasabila / āi goi bālakar nāvisheda kaihā // Puṭroṣthi jaigyaka kari putṛa kari loilo // subarna mulyaka diya tāhāṅka kīnolo // āmār dwitiya bhājyā mukunda priyāka // dilā nīyā āi pāse putṛa tulibāka // nāma gotra diyā śaūśa kṛiyākha dhariilo / tāhār nāmeka jānā Dāmodara thailo // Thākur Carita of Ratikānta Dwij, reproduced in PKKSI, p.193. Meaning, on an auspicious day, she (Govindapriyā) was blessed with a boy and after being detaching the umbilical cord by Āi Mukundapriyā and observance of the puṭroṣṭhi jagya (a post-natal rite), I purchased the baby on gold value. Now the newly born baby had been taken to my fold as my son. For bringing him up; I handed him over to my wife Mukundapriyā. It was only after the observation of the post-natal rites; he was implanted into my gotra (afn) and given the new name Dāmodara.
are variably called and explained as nāti sattras or ‘prabhur jūdharā dālar dharma pracār’ for obvious reasons. The sattras established by descendants of Puroṣottama and Caturbhujā’s daughters and the latter’s sister, Govindapriyā, are referred as ‘nātisattras’, ‘grandson’s establishments’, ‘thākura nāpta sattrā’ (establishments of Puroṣottama and Caturbhujā) Thākura’s grandsons’, or Sri Śāṅkarar jīyārī vanśar sattra ‘establishments belonging to the line of Śaṅkara on the female side.’ However, its activities came to be known more specifically as the ‘prabhur jūdharā dālar dharma pracār’, (establishments belonging to the line of Śaṅkara on the grand daughter’s side) emerges at the six phases of its development when Dāmodara appointed twelve deputies of his own. Kanakalatā discharged the duties assigned on her with tremendous success as the head of the sattrā following her husband’s death. At the advice of Keśava Ātā of Korcung sattra who was at that time living with Dāmodara, Āi Kanakalatā intended to appoint few more apostles of her own and appointed twelve deputies. However, Maniram Dewān in his work ‘Buranjī vivek ratna’ takes the Kaṇakā group of apostles as having been installed by Dāmodara, and gives another list with variable facts which he identifies as Dāmodariyā bāra-janīya. Account of Dewān makes us believe that despite the presence of a strong woman like Kanakalatā, Dāmodara asserted his power in appointing the new group of apostles following the prevailing tradition. However, Vibhunātha in ‘Bar-junā’ calls the list of the apostles of Kanakalatā as the Kaṇakā-bārajanīyā mahanta.

167 M. Neog, SHT, p.151
168 Dutta Baruah, PKKSI, p 74
169 N. Saikia (ed.), op. cit., p.19
170 K.D. Goswami, PSVFCA, p.46
About the origin of Narowā sattra Santāvāoli, gives a detailed account (vv. 2683-2686) and asserts the time on the first death anniversary of Caturbhujā in the month of Paūṣa (December) (pakṣhya muṇi bāṇa candra śake)171 Henceforth, the terminology ‘Narowā’ came into vogue in 1649 A.D. Bhardacāru’s Anantarām Carita narrates the episode how just before leaving for his last pilgrimage, Caturbhujā Thākur declared Dāmodara as his son and only heir. Dvārikā172 says, the term Narowā sattra came to have attained special attention only in the following years of 1650 A.D. and 1653 A.D. In the first place when Kanakalatā appointed twelve apostles with the help of Dāmodara or vice versa. Later on with Dāmodara they reached Ahom territory and successfully reclaimed Bardowā.

K. D. Goswāmi maintains that Dvārikā’s work that gives account of the life and career of different contemporary Vaiṣṇava preachers appears to be authentic in most cases. The biographer describes the evolution of samhāti so vividly that it earned for him a position of distinction among all the contemporary biographers.173 Dāmodara and his followers expedited the process of setting up of new sattras which gradually been extended further into the eastern and central parts of Assam within the Ahom Kingdom from the second half of the 17th century.

That the Narowā sattras were highly popular is proved by their ample references made in the folklore, folk songs and other oral literatures of that time. Some such sources also provide certain historical evidence about their locations. One such lore tells, ‘upstream there is Narowā (that is Narowā Thāān of Dhemājī), downstream find

171 He died on the Ganges in paūṣa, 1570 Śaka / 1648 A.D. at the age of fifty-four so his first death anniversary was solemnized in Śaka 1567/1649 A. D.
172 Dvārikā nath Dvīj’s Santāvāoli, v. 2686
173 K. D. Goswāmi, op. cit., p.16
Bardowa (the ancestral shrine) and the Vāsudevu Thāān find its place in the middle. (Narowa sattra Vāsudeu Thāān) 174 It also suggests that the three main sattras mentioned in the above folk song sprang up on both the banks of the river Brahmaputra under the territory of the Ahoms. The second line says, 'a growing tree could not grow into fruit ration, it was premature idly twisted and broken (‘lāgani birikh-oi lāgibaloji nāpāle mūsukāi bhāṅgile dāl’), which reflects disturbed political situation of that time when the Burmese invaders extensively damaged the newly emerging sattras. In another such proverb continues in Bardowa area speaks about the condition of the four Narowa sattras.

This runs as –

‘Vaiśnavypur calcali, Bardowā siṁhāli,  
 Bālisattra māje kuh, neūsākhūa Rāmpur 175

This proverb is self-explanatory. The symbolic words used here is to be noted, which indicates some features and condition of some Narowa sattras when internal feud surfaced within them in the last quarter of the 18th century. It is known that under the patronage of the Ahom King Jayadhvaj Sirīha, Damodara established the first two sattras, Lāomūrī and Cāribhāgi in the valley of river Suvanśīrī (in North Lakshimpur).

174 ‘Ujāi Narowā bhatāī Bardowā mājat Vāsudevar Thāān...’
This popular proverb is still in current in Narowā and Bardowā area
175 This proverb was first explained by one lady Premalata Mahanta, Kandhulimārī village of Dhing
In the Geographical sketch of 1800, Dr. John Peter Wade, gives an account of the place and features of a Narowā sattra.

Following this, descendants of the Narowā family established new sattras in various places and put their efforts to radiating the glory of Śaṅkaradeva from 17th century until the later part of the nineteenth century.

Maniram Dewan in his work 'Buranji Vivek Ratna', gives a list of twenty sattras belonging to the Narowā and Kowāmora groups, where names of five sattras viz., Rampur, Bālisatra, Kujī, Pāṭbaūsi (shared) including Vaikuṇṭhapur, the original abode of Dāmodara are enlisted. H.N. Dutta Barua saw existence of some sattras where the descendants of the Narowā Goswami family were living during his survey. They are 1) Vāsudeu Thāān Narowā sattra (North Lakshimpur) 2) Bālisatra (Nagaon) 3) Rampur sattra (Nagaon), Batadrabā Thāān (Nagaon) 5) Bhatiali sattra (Bheṭiyānī) (Nagaon) 6) Kujī sattra (Nagaon) 7) Pāṭbausī (Kāmrūp) This sattra group includes all the sattras belonging to barphāl or bar-hissā, (the senior side) and saru phāl or chotā-hissā (the junior side). S.N. Sarma incorporates a separate list of sattras in his work NVMSIA. From this list we may trace out some names eleven sattras that he put as nāṭi sattras and out of this; four are identified as Narowā sattra. It also contains the name of the founder of all the four sattras as Dāmodara Thāākur. H.N. Dutta Barua narrates some of the salient features and conditions of the cārī sattras of Nagaon, which includes the Narowā of our concern as the prime one —

176 A similar account is also recorded by E.T. Dalton appears in the JARS about Barpetā sattra.
177 N. Saikia, (ed.), op. cit., p.18
178 Dutta Barua, op. cit., p.78
179 M. Neog, op. cit., p.152
180 S.N. Sarma, op. cit., appendix V, p.307
“People used to believe and majority of them still believes that Narowa, Dighalī, Salaguri and Cāmaguri are the chief cāri sattras (four-sattras) of Nāgaon in middle Assam. During the Āhom period the condition of these sattras were satisfactory. As the descendants of the Ṣātkaradeva, the people held them in high esteem and reverence. Although they were known as the household four sattras, economic condition of these sattras were not so good as that of the royal cāri sattras, as a result we never saw any significant change and any outward transformation in their behaviour. While the gosāins or Adhikāra of these sattras set out their movements (Cahar phurā) for some villages of their disciples at least 50/60 bhakatas usually accompanied them. Now the figure comes down to six or seven. During the time of Ahom rule, the kings erected some special camps for their temporal lodging, now they could easily accommodate in village nāmghars. No formal permission is required to meet sattriyaś of these sattras. Disciples of these sattras may meet their Adhikārs or gosāins straightway without any emissaries and can take initiation and ordination as well easily. In comparison to cāri sattras of upper Assam, the relations between the disciples and the superiors of the sattras are said to be more cordial and friendly. Sometimes Adhikāras of the sattras taught some religious lessons and sermons among other sattras. During the brief period of tour, Adhikārs of the cāri sattras stayed in their houses for one or two nights.”

181 Dutta Baruah, op. cit., p.87 The royal Cāri sattras mentioned here are the four sattras of
Immediately after the death of Dāmodara (1665 A.D.), Kanakalatā tried to establish Anantarāya, her own grandson, as the successor of her line. Aggrieved at this both Ramākānta, son of Dāmodara and Anantarāya, grandson of Kanakalatā from her other daughter Subhadrā claimed the leadership and that gave birth to some spurious and apocryphal works which tried to twist the history of the schism to their own advantage.\textsuperscript{182} It is to be noted here that in almost all such works, much importance has been paid to Kanakalatā who tried to establish her daughter’s son, Anantarāya as the sole apostolic successor of Caturbhuja Ṭhākur. In this situation supporters of Kowāmorā or Salaguri sattras incorporated many baseless and incorrect statements by accumulating some works to show that the Narowā gosāins are inferior to Salaguri gosāins.\textsuperscript{183}

From Jayadhvaj Sirīha (1649-1663) until Rāmadhaj Sirīha (1679-1681) the monarchs and the nobles were adherent of Vaiṣṇava gosāins and the most important sattras were established within this period under their patronage in eastern Assam.

Some Adhikāras of this sattra group maintained a cordial relation with the royal house. In recognition to it, Āhom King Lakshmī Sirīha handed over the charge of Bardowā along with Narowā to Rāmadeva mahājan, by issuing a tāmrapatra by which dharmottara grant was entailed on his race in A.D. 1772 (Šaka, 1694). During the Adhikaravel of Rāmadeva, Āhom King Gaurinath Sirīha paid a visit to the sattra in A.D. 1785. These three events connected with the early history of the Narowā sattra simply indicate their shining period.

Auniati, Dakshinpat Gramur and Benganaati of Majuli Island. For details of these Rajāgharīya Cāri sattra (royal four sattras) one may consult S.N. Sarma’s NVMSIA, pp.97-115

\textsuperscript{182} K.D. Goswami, op. cit., p 17

\textsuperscript{183} ibid., p.18
By the time of the death of Dāmodara and Āi Kanakalatā, Narowā sattras secured a foothold in the Brahmaputra valley cantering round its three major locations namely Viṣṇupur (Goālpara), Bardowā-Bālisattra (Nagaon) and Vāsudeu Thāān (North Lakshimpur). It can be safely concluded that Dāmodara and Āi Kanakalatā contributed in radiating Bardowā, and establishing a neat group cantering Bardowā as a main seat of neo-Vaiṣṇavism in post Šaṅkaradeva era. The structural features of a Vaiṣṇavite sattrā also attained its final stage within this period. Besides regular acts of propagation, Dāmodara and his successors were also responsible for carrying Šaṅkaradeva’s message of love and devotion to more and more interior localities by deputing new group of followers and apostolates.

During our study and survey, we have come across seventeen establishments which owe their origin to the family of Dāmodara, Narowā gosains or his Vamsa in the entire Brahmaputra valley.

The list given below contains the entire Narowā group of sattras out of which six are referred as Thāān. Out of these four are ceased to exist.

1. Lāomurī
2. Čāribhāgi \textsuperscript{184} 
3. Narowā Thāān \textsuperscript{185} \hspace{2cm} \{ (17\textsuperscript{th} century) \}

\textsuperscript{184} K. D. Goswami, Sattrā Sanskritir Rup Rekhā, Appendix., p.156
\textsuperscript{185} Vaiṣṇavā Kirtan (ed.), p. 89; \textit{ibid}, p.157; \textit{TC.}, v. 470
4. Vásudeu Thāān-Narowā sattra
5. Bardowā-Narowā
6. Rāmpur-Narowā
7. Narowā-Bālisattra
8. Pāṭbāusī (shared)
9. Narowā-Kuji or Vaiśṇavpur
10. Bhejiyani-Narowā
11. Talibil Narowā sattra
12. Barangābāri-or Itakhuli Narowā sattra
13. Kāśikatā Vásudeu Thāān
14. Tarājuli Vásudeu Thāān
15. Jamuguri Narowā Thāān
16. Jājari- Narowā Thāān

(18th Century)

(19th Century)

(20th century)

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186 Text of the CP. Grant, Siva Sirtiha (Saka 1665, A.D. 1734) vide; N. Gogoi, (ed.) Śrī Thāākur Carita, Appendix
187 The Copper Plate inscription recording settlement of a dispute in Bardowā sattra by the Ahom King, Kamalesvara Srinha in Saka 1721/1799 A. D. M. Neog, Text, PŚ (ed.), plate no. 80; The shrine remain a single unit until its division occurred in 1799 A.D. which became to be known as bar-hissā or Narowā-Bardowā and Chotta-hissā or Salaguri vice versa since 1799 A.D.
189 Copper plate inscription of Pāṭbāusī Sattra, Lakshmi Sirtiha, Saka 1694/ A.D 1772; M. Neog (ed.), PŚ vide Plate no. 80 ; N. Saikia (ed.), loc. cit.
190 Bhakal-mālā of Bālisattra records that Kuji sattra is founded by Dāmodara in 17th century, later on the sattra was re-founded by Rāmdeva’s second son Viśṇudeva in 18th century ; N. Saikia (ed.), loc. cit.
191 M. Neog (ed.), Pabitra Asom, p.120
192 Dutta Baruah, PKKSI, p.146 ; M. Neog (ed.), PA, p.121 , L. Goswami, Śrī Śrī Talibil Narowā sattrar itibrittya, p 12
193 Jogendra, the fifth son of Lakshmīdeva established this sakha -sattra at Barangābāri village in the present district of Morigaon vide; M. Neog, loc. cit.
The reclamation of Bardowā, the original abode of Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568 A.D) remains to be a virgin field of study, which falls under the latter phase of neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement. The expedition of two descendants of the Śaṅkaradeva’s family may be called as the last eastward march of the saint’s family in the mid-17th century. Through the centuries since the time of its re-discovery; newer stories were created and the original information was distorted. Scholar like Maheswar Neog opines, “Had Bardowā not been discovered it would have been a myth.”

A section of Carita puṭhis, local chronicles and devotional accounts help us in understanding the factors and actors of the Bardowā reclamation episode occurred in between 1656-58 A.D. In writing the chronology of events, a critical examination has been made as some Caritas puṭhis of later group give confusing accounts. Bardowā is usually referred as Batadravā. It houses two sattras namely Narowā and Salaguri. The place was earlier under the command of the Bhūyān chieftains of central Assam. In tracing out his genealogy from his ancestor, right from the days of Rājadharā, Śaṅkaradeva himself gives a vivid description of his native place of Bardowā.195 To avoid the frequent disturbances caused by the neighbouring Kacharis and apprehending...
the revenge from the Kachārīs he once advised all the Bhūyāns under his command to 
retreat gracefully to some new places. It was a culminating point for the Bhūyāns, as 
with this migration, Bardowā, the original seat of government of the Bāra-Bhūyāns for 
that matter of Śaṅkaradeva was totally abandoned. The entire territory was left buried 
under thick forests for more than a century after his final migration. Later on Śaṅkaradeva 
descendants and his relatives probably set out for Kāmarūpa from the 
Ahom territory within the kingdom of Naranārāyana. The saint’s family and disciples 
finally came to settle at Pāṭhānsūti near Barpeṭā and during his stay of twenty years the 
major portions of his literary and religious works were composed and completed.

After a long gap of about 140 years fresh attempt was made to reclaim the 
ancestral site of Śaṅkaradeva by one of the great grand-daughter in law Āi- Kanakalatā 
and her cousin Dāmodara in the mid-17th century A.D. Nothing is heard about Bardowā 
following the exit of the great master for a long time. It was only after three generations 
they set out eastward march along with a mission to re-discover the holy arena, where 
the spiritual and cultural renaissance was brought about by the great master. Some 
biographical account like Kathā Guru Carita, Śaṅkar Carita, Thākur Carita, Āi 
Kanaklatār Carita, Āi-Lakshmi Carita, Santāvoolī and other literary accounts throw 
much light on the untold history of the expedition and subsequent events related to it. 
These accounts help us in understanding the nature of the Bardowā reclamation. 
However, these works remain silent about the factors and actors and give confusing 
accounts of the factors leading to this voyage of reclamation.

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S.N. Sarma, op. cit., p.20
Daityārī Thākur, Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva Carita (ed.), v.460; Dvarikā, op. cit., v.965
According to the Thākur Carita, Caturbhuja nominated Dāmodara to be the Adhikāra of Viṣṇupur sattra and Kanakalā, the elder wife was made the regent of the family in presence of other leaders of the Saru-bārejaniyā sattras and bhakatas just before his death. Caturbhuja his family and the wives of Puruṣottama had to face the atrocities and persecution caused by the Koc Kings while they were living in Koc Behar. Later on, Viṣṇupur sattra was invaded under the command of Abdus Salam and Caturbhuja was taken in captive to Nawab of Bengal and was released only after realization of penalty. Following this, Dāmodara and other members of the family shifted to a new and safe location Damarājhar, a few miles to the east of Viṣṇupur sattra. During this time Āi Kanaklata also shifted her abode to Kamal Lochana Choudhary’s taluk of southern bank of Brahmaputra or Dakshinkul. She stayed there for at least 5 years. However, fresh raids of Mughal compelled her to shift to Damarājhar, where Dāmodara was already living. This new spot and the sattra

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198 Dāmodara was the adopted son of Caturbhuja whom he nominated as the representative of Śrīkara. K.D. Goswami (ed.) TC., v. 428
199 Viṣṇupur sattra is located seven miles east of Abhayapuri town on the bank of two water bodies Kanara and Tamnaga in Goalpara district of Assam. This sattra was established by Caturbhuja Thākūr in between the reigns of the Ahom King Sukampha or Khora Raja (1552-1603 A.D). The sattra received patronage from the king of Bijni Mukundanārāyaṇa who gifted some devottara, vide., M. Neog. (ed.), Pabitra Asom, pp. 322-323
200 Ābūdus Saiam, the brother of Mukaram khan, the victor of Kamrup was in charge of the area west of the river Manah under the Mughal ruled Kamrup, vide; Baharasthiani-Gaibai, p.109
202 Ojha Vidyananda or Dwij Vidyananda gives an introduction (v.428) of Kamal Lochan (Kamal Nārāyaṇa) Choudhary as the son of one Adibara gomosthā of Ahom Kingdom in Thākūr Carīta.
were known as Vaikunthapur and Dāmodara Ātā henceforth came to be known as Vaikunthapuriyā Ātā.

Some accounts say that Dāmodara came to the Ahom Kingdom at the royal invitation of Jayadhvaj Śīrīha (1648-1663 A.D). It is stated that the king kept in confinement some of the preachers of neo-Vaiṣṇavism for mutual enmity prevailed among themselves on the question of superiority of their own sanhāti. One preceptor of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite religion, Niranjana 205 a close aide of the King, happens to be a close associate of Dāmodara Ṭhākur informed the king that he might explain the causes of differences prevailed among the erstwhile Vaiṣṇavas. One of the most trusted friends of Dāmodara, Bhagavān who was living at that time at Garā-sattra (Cengājān) in eastern Assam also informed the king about the tradition of Dāmodara Ṭhākur and his good virtues. Knowing it Jayadhvaj Śīrīha sent emissary to bring him to capital who became successful to satisfy his queries. He explained, all these four sanhāties follow Śaṅkara’s faith by worshipping Krṣṇa, abstaining from the cults of other deities and celebrating nāma-kirtana.206 Pleased with his words and behaviour Jayadhvaj Śīrīha released not only all the Jailed Vaiṣṇavas but extended all royal patronage to Dāmodara to reclaim Bardowā and allowed preaching their religion under his Kingdom.207 With royal aid thus received Dāmodara established the first Narowā sattra in the valley of Suvaṇśīrī in North Lakshimpur and set up two other at Lāomuri and Cāribhāgī.208

A section of Carita-puṭhis present a different account for Dāmodara’s eastward movement. It is said that to escape from impending torture at the hands of the invading

205 Niranjan Gābharugiri was the son in law of Caturbhujā Ṭhākur.
206 M. Neog, SHT, p.153
207 ibid, p. 152
208 Aniruddha’s Guru Varṇāna, (MS) 287-ff

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Mughals, he earlier deputed four bhakatas to Gārā sattra to inform Bhagavān, about his most trusted friend the gravity of situation who maintained a close liaison with the royal house at that time. The King in response to the pray of Bhagavāna allowed Dāmodara to come to the Āhom territory and for this provided a carā-nāo.\textsuperscript{209} Knowing it from one Nārad Bhandarī, Kanakālatā, the widow of Caturbhujā and other members of the family and bhakatas expressed their willingness to come to the Āhom kingdom, which was honoured by Dāmodara.\textsuperscript{210} Along with them Bhagavan, Rukminī Devī, the widow of Puruṣottama Thakur and 12 most trusted apostles of Dāmodara and a good number of clerics sailed out to the Ahom territory. They probably, came by upstream from the mouth of Barnḍā (Kuruṇ-ghāṭ) and reached Bardowā ghāṭ under the Ahom territory.\textsuperscript{211} Study on some sources reveals that from Guwahati onwards they might have advanced by taking two different routes dividing into two groups.

\textit{Santāvaolī} gives a vivid and detailed account of the journey of Dāmodara and Kanakālatā. It records that before entering the main land of the Āhom territory, Āi Kanakālatā and Dāmodara encamped at Guwahati for a few months and arranged an interview with the officiating Bar-Phukan.\textsuperscript{212} As had been advised by Dāmodara Ātā, Āi Kanakālatā described to have handed over the Kuśa mulāgūti (a kind of special bead) to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{209} Sri Thākur Carita (ed.), v.v. 449-452, Asom Sahitya Sabhā pratikā, 2nd ed., Vol 1., p 184
\item \textsuperscript{210} ĀKC., pp.60-65
\item \textsuperscript{211} Dutta Baruah, op. cit., p.193
\item \textsuperscript{212} Barphukan was the viceroy of the Ahom kings who was responsible for overall administration of the lower part of Assam including the desa Beltola, Rani, Luki, Dimoria and all other hilly tracts of Goalpara. But according to Padmeswar Gogoi, Tangsu of Handikoi family served as Barbaruah only for a part of his reign but finding him incompetent to conduct the affairs of diplomatic relations for which the King removed him and appointed Sengdhara in his place and Garghgay Raja Sasur was made the Barphukan. P. Gogoi, The Tai and the Tai Kingdom, p.392
\end{itemize}
please the Barphukan.\textsuperscript{213} Kanakalatā prayed royal patronage by giving an account of Bradowā\textsuperscript{214} and the Ahom official ordered one Solāl Gohāi to provide all possible assistance for reclamation.

Entering through Kajalimukh, Kanakalatā and her followers sailed further eastward through Kalang and reached the bank of Sonāi river and encamped there along with her associates for some time. Some other investigators claim that\textsuperscript{215} Kanakalatā after spending some days at a high land near Rāidongiyā village later on met Dāmodara on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. S. N. Sarma also holds that, before they could find out the Bardowa Thāān, Kanakalatā first encamped at a place near it, which subsequently came to be known after her name as Āibheţi, (the plinth of Āi) where her descendants later established a new sattra Āibheţi.\textsuperscript{216} H.N. Dutta Baruah however holds that coming along the Brahmaputra both the leaders encamped opposite to the Śingarī hill (Bardowā-ghāti), the present site of Bālisattra. Soon after Dāmodara, leaving behind his family at Bālisattra went to Garhgaon seeking King’s permission and patronage for reclamation.\textsuperscript{217} It is widely believed in Vaiśṇavite tradition, Kanakalatā first came to

\textsuperscript{213} Dvarikā , vv. 2697-2698
\textsuperscript{214} Bardowā Thāān, the birth place of Śankaradeva is lying deserted for long time overgrown with jungle, help us to reclaim and rebuild it; where in the west, the Śīlikhā tree (Terminalia citrinia) is standing in a reclined form; on which Guru lounged and wrote holy scriptures....‘Santāvau-li, v.v., 10, 17; ĀKC, p.67, the gīta describing the incident is incorporated in Vaiśṇavi Kīrtan,(com.), p 68
\textsuperscript{215} Presidential report, reception committee , Asom Sāhitya Sabhā, Dhing session.,1971
\textsuperscript{216} K.D. Goswami, PSVFCA , p 61
\textsuperscript{217} ĀKC, op. cit., p.62

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learn about Bardowā and its heritage from her great-grandmother in law Kālindi Āi; while she was staying at Viṣṇupur.\textsuperscript{218}

She also got some indications from Lilāwatī, the wife of the Barphukan in finding out the padasilā,\textsuperscript{219} and the lost plinth of Śaṅkaradeva. It is said that Lilāwatī received instruction from a dream following which they unearthed the padasilā from the south bank of Ākāśi-gangā.\textsuperscript{220} A verse of the Āi Lakṣṭhī Carita narrates how after a strenuous search of seven days and following the calls of a Dāuk (a kind of water bird) they reached the holy water body.\textsuperscript{221}

With the support of Jayadhvaj Sirhha and following the instructions of one Jayram Ātoi a straight road \textsuperscript{222} was built (Jordharā āli or Jorkoţā āli) in between Bardowā and Bālisattra. With the help of Tangcu Phukan,\textsuperscript{223} Bhagavāṇā Ātā and Jayrām ātoi; Dāmodara and Kanakalatā finally succeeded in finding out the entire site

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{218} Bardovā, in the north, bardoul (the mighty temple) is in the south; looks like a hill, and the temple of the gosain lies in the middle made on a plinth of the festival (doul-yatra) , on the west the splendid grinder of stone is lying buried under it... vide. 'Thāān Baṛanatār gīt' of Purusottama Ṭhākur. (we have come across two names , Purusottama Thakur and Lakshmikānta, a bard of the eighteenth century as the composer of the song)

\textsuperscript{219} Foot impressions of the Vaiṣṇavite saints cut on stones supposed to be of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva

\textsuperscript{220} Uttare Akāśi gangā bhakti Sarovar
niśā-bhāge namāllaṭṭa Śrimanta Śaṅkara//
vide ;Thāān baṛanatār gīt incorporates in Vaiṣṇavī Kīrtan, (ed.)

\textsuperscript{221} sāṭa din bikanta tabhu thāān nāpawanta dekhi sabe bīsāda karai
Dāuk pakhi rāo karē suni sabe nirantare jala āse mani loī'

\textsuperscript{222} Dutta Baruah has drawn a sketch of a road map existed in Colonial period; see the relevant maps in PKKSI, p. 39 and a footnote in p 194.

\textsuperscript{223} Tangcu (Barbaruah) received his initiation under Dāmodara; AKC, p. 65; TC, Harinarayana, v. 477, p.194; PSVFCA. p.63, one Rangācīlā Phukan also received initiation from Dāmodara. However Dutta Baruah in PKKSI tries to identify him to be one of the Phukan during the reign of Chakradhvaj Simha( 1663-1669), p. 83

\textsuperscript{(78)}
of Bardowā. The Ṭhākur Čarita records the names of more than forty bhakatas who left Viṣṇupur with Kanakalatā and Dāmodara while they marched to Ahom territory around A.D.1651-52. During this expedition, they had to employ an innovative method called ceunikatā for creating some tracks by marking out on the ground through which they slowly moved ahead of Bardowā.

Rahiyāl Baruah, the father in Law of the Ahom King Jayadhvaj Sinha established a small chieftaindom of the Mikir refugees on the shore of Ṭrihulīyā bil in Barapujīyā area and put it under the chieftainship of a man from Ṛangkhāṅgu clan of the Mikir tribe. While passing through Bārapujīyā area, this petty Mikir chief and his men provided safe passage for Dāmodara and his followers and steered him in identifying the surrounding of Bardowā area. The Mikir chieftain named Cetūa granted a plot of land within his territory, where Dāmodara later on raised a monastery called Narowā Kuji sattrā. Dāmodara and Āi Kanakalatā impressed him so much that he facilitated them hunt for the holy site and the later was initiated into the faith. He is stated to be the first among the tribal chiefs of that area who came into the fold of the ‘eka saraṇ nām dharama’ along with a host of people belonging to the plains tribes’ community. A nearby place of Manipur village derived its name Pāgśālī or Pāghālī where Dāmodara cooked his mid-day meal during the expedition.

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224 Harinārāyana, T.C., vv. 456-459
225 Deodhāi Asom Buranjī, (ed.), p. 133
226 A village named Manipor is now under the Mikirbhetā circle of Morigaon district
227 Pāgśālī literally means a cooking place, (pāk = cook, śālī = place)
An account of the Kujī sattra informs the expedition waded through the marshy shores of its surrounding water bodies like Sonduba, Nijarabil, Sukraj bil, Dhoolibil, Deurabil, Kujibil, Balibatiya. Gotangā, Dighali, Santijan and Roumaribil. At early stage, seeing some similarities they mistook Kujī and Āi-bheṭī to be Bardowā and searched for some relics by digging a spot on the south bank of the Kujī-bil. A village named gosāin khāndā exists on that area still speaks about the expedition.

H.N. Dutta Baruah while giving an account of the origin of the Narowā gosāin hails the leadership and role of Dāmodara and calls him the ultimate re-claimer of Bardowā. He writes, 'soon after its recovery, Dāmodara Ātā re-established the sattra on the old plinth demarcating by a korāpāṭ or high palisades and made arrangement for settlement of the non-celibate bhakatas outside of it. In the middle of the site as a nucleus, Kirtana-ghar, (a prayer house) and manikūṭ was tastefully erected with a separate house for the padāsilās. With this Bardowā once again rejuvenated with the sounds of the chanting of hari-Kirtan. A popular gīta still current in the Bradowā area speaks early activities of Dāmodara at Bardowā. It runs thus:

\[ \text{Śāntijānate mourāi cāli lole, pākhia mārile cāti /} \]

\(228\) A short hand written note 'Vaisṇavpur Thāān or Sri Sri Narowā Kujī Sattra' compiled by Atul Ch. Devgoswami, Satrādhikara, Kujī sattra.

\(229\) Dutta Baruah in 1924 identified the spot as the erstwhile plinth of Burhā Khān, Śāṅkaradeva's paternal uncle.

\(230\) Dutta Baruah also identifies Āi-bheṭī to be the first plinth of the Bardowā Bāra Bhūyāns on the south bank of Sonoī River.

\(231\) Literally means digging for God's image

\(232\) Informant: Atul Ch. Goswami, Satrādhikāra of Kujī sattra.

\(233\) Dutta Baruah, op. cit., p.194

\(234\). Loc. cit.
Mathurā kathe pārī  bahī nāme lole //

Mahāpurusar nātī /

cakuri bhakate kākuti karile lagale hājāri ghoṣā //

(Peacock of Śāntijan raises their plumage like fan and flaps their wings, the grandson of Mahāpuruṣa sitting down on the mattress; utter the name of Hari when one twenty bhakatas pray there and he starts singing hājāri- ghoṣā, meaning nāma-ghoṣā of Madhava-deva)

It is noteworthy that Dāmodara, the first Adhikāra of the sattra on the advice of Keśava Ātā and Kanakalatā further selected fourteen other apostles and sent them to different places for preaching the religion and sermons of bhakti.235 Thus the chief cāri sattras of Puruṣa saṅhati sect developed around the newly founded Bardowā.236

With the advent of Dāmodara and Kanakalatā to Bardowā, the long period of seclusion and isolation of the once vibrant neo-Vaiṣṇavite site ended and traditional activities like nāma-kārtana, observances of tiṣṭ of the gurus, Doul utsav, and daily prayer services resumed in the newly built sattra.

To substantiate this observation a brief introduction is needed. We therefore propose in the following pages to have a brief discussion on this aspect; taking the growth and development sattras of the Narowā group in chronological order.

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236 'People used to believe and majority of them still believe that Narowā, Dighalī, Salaguri and Cāmaguri are the chief Cāri sattras (four-sattras) of Nagaon. During Ahom period the condition of these sattras were economically good. As the descendants of Śārikaradeva the people of surrounding locality held them in high esteem and reverence' vide; H.N. Dutta Baruah, PKKSI, p.119
3. Sattras at Lāomūrī, Cāribhāgi and Narowā Thāān

The original sattras of the Narowā group grew and developed in Lakshimpur in the locality, which was known in earlier as Habung, a principality on the bank of Suvansiri River ruled by some Brāhmaṇa chief. Lāomūrī-Narowā Thāān, the earliest known sattras of this group was founded on the right bank of Dolong, a tributary of Korhā; passes 24 Km. North-West of the present site of the Vāsudevar Thāān–Narowā sattras. According to Caritas, coming to eastern Assam, when Dāmodara sought to enlist help from the reigning Ahom King Jayadhvaj Sirhha (1648-1663 A.D.) for Bardowā reclamation, the king first offered two separate plots of land along with hundred pāiks for raising sattras under his territory. With this aid, Dāmodara set up the earliest two sattras on the allotted land at two different sites, Cāribhāgi and Narowā on the bank of Suvansiri river around 1656-58 A.D. The Thākur Carita gives an elaborate account how these sattras traced their origin to the ‘Prabhu jyudharā dāl’ as has been cited elsewhere originated in 16th century. By planting Bamboo grooves, good number of fruit and banana trees the sattras was built and are to be called in the Vaiṣṇavite tradition as Narowā (na = new, rowā = planted) sattras. It is said on the auspicious occasion of establishment of Cāribhāgi-Narowā sattras, Dāmodara obtained the legendary idol of

237. PŚ (ed.), p.187
238. Till late 1950, one could find Narowā Thāān and Ghughuā doul, near Dolong River, buried under deep jungle and west of it; two villages Lāomūrī and Kecu gaon located. STC, ed.) 2001 Appendix.
239. ‘dilā dān dui bhumi loka dui sata ..’.TC, v. 469
240. Reproduced from SHT., p. 152
241. ‘Lāomūrī- Cāribhāgi nāme sattras dui / vanhṣa, bīkṣha, kandaḷi nabin kori rui // Narowā sattras buli dileka ākhyan / samasṭa lokak ito bhaileka byākhyaṇa //’ TC (ed.), v. 470
Vasudeva, the presiding deity of Chutiyas from the Ahom King. Harinarayan Dwij (vv. 466-468) narrates the virtues of the legendary idol, which was said to have brought by the King from Kundil (Sadiya) by deputing one Katuk Saikia and handed over to Dāmodara along with two hundred pāiks and votaries for its worship. Two Copperplate grants of the Chutiya kings recovered from Dhemaji area dating back to 1392 A.D. and 1401 A.D. throw much light on the legendary idol and the living tradition of worshipping Vasudeva and testify the continuation of the Vasudeva worship in that region since Purānic time. The second Copper plate (1401 A.D.) records the name of a Chutiya king Lākṣmīnārāyaṇa who earlier offered the statue to a Brāhmaṇ named Ravideva, a devout worshipper of Vasudeva in the Suvanśīrī valley sometimes in 15th century A.D. According to a local tradition, later on Ravidhar Vāśaspati, a great-grandson of the former, ceremonially handed over the idol to Dāmodara (according to some, it was handed over to his son Ramākānta) by offering ‘til’ and ‘kusā’ on the bank of the river Ghupāsuti. We may presume until then only the remains of the ancient Vasudeva temple and the deity of Chutiya Kings was lying buried in the deep jungles wherein the new sattrā was caused to raise under the Ahom patronage. The present Dekā Adhikāra of Vasudeu Thāān-Narowā sattrā holds that the Cāribhāgī Narowā

\[242\] Vasudeva nāma murti parama gahan//
andhai cakhuka pāya aputre putraka/
Lakṣmī Saraswati save jāra caraṇaka//
āse jai vijaya dui samukhe jāhāra //
sehi nai murtī ki kahibu āra //
Kundil nagara sīṭo ati anupām /
situ śusubhaṇa murti Vasudeva nāma //
tahāṅka thāṅibhu moi tumhāra sattrat l’ Thākura Carita (ed.), v.v. 466-468

\[243\] The Ghilāmara copper plate inscription of a Chutiya King Lākṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, 1323 Śaka/1401 A.D. reproduced in PŚ, (ed.), p.189

\[244\] ibid
*Sattra* was formerly stands on the bank of Ghunasuti. Sarbewar Baru in his rendering of the Ghilāmarā Copper plate seeks to identify Svar-nadi (1.12) with Subansiri, Bakhana-grama (1.12) with Barkhamukh of present time. It should be noted that, despite repeated references incorporated in literary sources, the origin of the statue remains shrouded with myth and legends, which cannot be established historically on any safe ground. It might have only a horary link with the episode of the establishment of the first two Narowā *sattras*. A strong tradition is also in current in the locality that the idol was earlier worshipped by Rukmi of Kṛṣṇa legend. It came under the possession of the Āhoms when they defeated and subjugated Chutiyas.

Just after setting up these new *sattras* Dāmodara appealed the reigning king for allowing him to go to Bardowā to complete his unfinished mission.245

When some remains of the old *sattra* were recovered buried under deep jungle in early decade of the 19th century, an eye witness saw its some remains and the old plinth with a length of 22.86 m × 7.62 m wide. The height of the plinth is measuring at 0.915 m.246 According to some local people, from the time of Ramākanta to Lakṣmīdeva (or till the invasion of the Burmese) affairs of the early Narowā *sattras* were conducted by the descendants of the family of the Narowā gosāin who stayed at the Vāsudevar Thāān-Narowā *sattra*. The inmates of these *sattras* utilized the vast fertile tracts of lands for cultivation of various crops as the lands at the new site of the Vāsudeu Thāān were not suitable for harvesting. The *sattra* was subjected to atrocity, arbitrary and forcible seizure of the accumulated wealth during the Burmese invasions in 19th century. In the wake of the invasion, a good number of *bhakatas* of the Lāomurī-

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245 TC., op. cit., v. 472
246 P. N. Goswami Shastri, *Śrī Śrī Vāsudevar Thāān Narowā sattrar itibrittya*, p. 28.
Narowa-Thaan were mercilessly slain while they were engaged in a congregation of nama-kirtan. With this gruesome incident, the panic-stricken families of bhakatas, Adhikāra and the laities of the nearby villages deserted the sattra. Thus, the entire site remains uninhabited for a long period. Later on, when Achutyananda Devgoswami, a descendant of the Bardowā-Narowā family came to that area he devoted much of his time and energy for rebuilding the Vāsudevar Thāān only. However, until the time of his grandson Maheshcandra, the family of Narowā Goswami had maintained causal relationship with some families of the bhakatas living around the earliest sattra. According to some accounts, Narowā sattra was actually came into being during the time of Cakradhvaj Sirīha (1663-69 A.D.) under the care of Ramākānta Ātā, the son and successor of Dāmodara. Earlier, Dāmodara had to leave eastern Assam for Bardowā only after a brief stay of two years and died subsequently at Bālisattra. Later on, Ramākānta came to that area and reclaimed the earliest two sites of Cāribhāgi and Lāomurī. According to some accounts, it was during the invasion of Mirjumla apprehending oppression in the hands of invaders, Ramākānta sailed down to settle in this locality. When peace was restored Ramākānta and Anantārama did not return immediately to Bardowā and went on preaching the religion of neo-Vaiṣṇavism in some localities of eastern Assam by establishing two famed monasteries, Narowā and Kowāmorā. According to another source, following the death of Kanakalatā, Ramākānta first came upstream and reached the bank of Suvanśīri. At that time Cakradhvaj Sirīha called both Ramākānta and Anantarāma to his capital and highly

247 ibid., p. 29
248 S.N. Sarma, NVMSIA., p.130
249 N. Gogoi (ed.), STC, Editorial
250 ibid., p.130
251 Dutta Baruah, op. cit., p.195

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pleased at their mild behaviour that endeared them and made arrangement for temporary stay at a place called Naosal.\textsuperscript{252} Subsequently, they moved eastward and Ramākānta succeeded in reclaiming the earliest site of Narowā gosāins under royal patronage. Ramākānta Ātā passed away at Ċāribhāgī on the first bright moon of the month of \textit{Vaiśākha}.\textsuperscript{253}

When Ċāribhāgī Narowā sattra was threatened and sattra lands were swallowed away by Suvanśirī river, the reigning Āhom King Śīvā Sīrīha offered men and materials for shifting the monastery to a new location on the bank of Čāmporā river in A.D.1734. Despite some confusing accounts, we may ascertain that some bhakatas of the original sattras continued to stay at Ċāribhāgī-Narowā for a long period in spite of natural calamities. It can be said that during the time of Rāmacandra Ātā, some descendants of the original family of the Narowā Goswami shifted from the original site when the separate sattra was built on the bank of the river Čāmporā.\textsuperscript{254}

4. Vāsudeu Thāān Narowā sattra

Vāsudeu Thāān Narowā sattra claims to be the most influential of all of the Narowā sattras. The locations offer a great refuge for those seeking peace of mind or a quiet place to meditate which serve as residences for monks and devotees who practice or share the teachings of Śāṅkaradeva. Situated in the erstwhile Gohain mouja to north of Lakṣhīmpur district, the shrine at present nestled in 150 bighās of land at Mornoi

\textsuperscript{252} Present Hāḥcarā village in Sibsagar district \textit{ibid.}, p.195

\textsuperscript{253} Bhakat-māla

\textsuperscript{254} A proceedings of a suit (no. 541/1893) of Nagaon district informs us that Rāmacandra’s six sons from (his second wife) Ratulī Devī were living at Ċāribhāgī-Narowā sattra till the last decade of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. For details of the genealogy of Rāmacandra see Appendix-A.
Bebejiyā village which is 8 Km south-east of Dhakuakhana. References of the Vāsudeu Thāān-Narowā sattra has been found in a Copper plate grant issued of sattra in 18th century. Earlier, when the Āhom king Rāmadhvaj Sīrīha (1673-75 A.D.) became a disciple of Ramākānta Ātā of the Narowā sattra, it began to prosper in a great way in materialistic wealth. The King extended generous patronage towards glorifying the status of the Narowā sattra and its gosāins. S.K. Bhuyān gives new information that the king Rāmadhvaj wanted to have a regular appearance of his guru caused to build a monastery at Gajpur during his reign, for which Debera Barbaruah was instructed to supervise the construction. At this time the King was suffered from dropsy and made all provision for institution of nāma-kīrtana at the newly built monastery near his capital with a pray of the King’s recovery. Earlier Debera informed the King how he arranged for nāma-kīrtana at the Narowā sattra with a pray of the King’s recovery from the ailments.255 In the month of May-June (Jeth) of 1702 A.D. when Āhom King Rudra Sīrīha (1696-1714 A.D.) promulgated an order to the Sudra Medhīes of the sattras to show any text authorising a Sudra to offer initiation to a Brāhmaṇ, Rāmacandra Ātā of Narowā was punished and ill-treated and humiliated. In this incident all other medhīs excepting five preachers pleaded to carry out the command of the King. Among them Rāmacandra of Narowā of our concern along with Bāreghariyā Sirām, Mādhavānanda, Ramānanda of Bhavanipur and Caturbhūja of Sechāmukh stated that they could produce texts where relevant passages were incorporated. While they failed to refer to produce any such texts they were inflicted punishment by jars painted with lime and suspended from their necks. The king ordered to settle them in different places and issued an order that the Brāhmaṇas living in the sattras should no longer be allowed to

255 S. K. Bhuyān, Aṭān Burhagohain and his Times, p.90

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provide shelter and initiation from Sudras. Following this Rāmacandra had to settle for some time at Kowāmorā *sattra*.

Āhom king Śīva Sinhā in 1736 A. D. (Śaka 1656) issued the first Copper plate grant to the Narowā *sattra* when it was shifted from the bank of the Suvanśīrī to the present site of its functioning. This grant records its earliest boundary as Tāmrangā Baruah āli in the east, Uvotāmukh and Šukuṭipotā in the west, Cāopā river in the north and Korhā river in the south. The *Thākur Carita*, a contemporary source also confirms the same information. The entire tract of land consisting of 250 *purās* of *Devottar bhumi* (land) were allotted on a wide field called Roumarā pathār under Gohain Mouja. This endowment offers 7 families of clerics from Brāhmaṇs, 11 Kalitās, 44 *Koches* and *Keofs* to the *sattra*. Besides the King, several nobles received initiation from the Narowā Thākurs within this period. Royal official Ṭāṅgcu, a Barbaruah of Cakradhvaj Sinhā received ordination from Ramākānta Āṭā who generously offered benefactions to raise glory and prestige of his guru. He offered a pair of metal bell and a big gong to this *sattra*. With royal endowments, the *sattra* was re-established ceremonially during the time of Rāmacandra Āṭā, the third *Adhikāra*. It is said, one Bahudāsa, a disciple of Rāmacandra Āṭā apprised the king and through him Narowā Āṭā managed to secure the said grant. After setting, the house of the *sattra* in a firm

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256 S. K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Tungkungiyā Buranji*, p. 33
257 Āśīr Harinarayana composed *Thākur Carita* by staying at Narowā *sattra* in A. D. 1736
258 *TC*, v. 541; This verse narrates the boundaries of the *sattra*.
259 Dutta Baruah (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.195
260 *TC*, v. 539

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footing Rāmacandra Ātā died at Narowā at the age of 44 years. According to a *Vaiṣṇāvālī* of Bardowā, he died on *śukla Navamī* in the month of *āsāra* and cremation was performed in presence of his brothers Rāmadeva, Naradeva, Kāmdeva and Sahadeva.

The second grant of the *sattra* issued by Āhom King Lakshmi Sirhīha offered to one Śaṅkar medhi, a follower of Śaṅkaradeva during the time of Rāmadeva in the greater Bardowā area in Śaka 1691/ A.D. 1769. Contemporary political scenario in the previously mentioned year was full of confusion and turmoil, when Āhom statehood witnessed the first organized move and challenge of a group of Vaiṣṇavite disciples of the Mayāmora *sattras*. Religious policy of the Āhom monarch also created a schism in the Śākṣa camp as the reigning King took initiation from one Ramānanda Ācārya, an Assamese Brāhman refusing the supremacy of *Parvatiyā gosāin*. It is assumed that by offering this grant, Lakshmi Sirhīha might have tried to keep the *Adhikāra* and laities of Narowā in the royal camp who at that time rose into prominence with a large number of disciples. The third Copper plate grant was offered to Rāmadeva Mahajana by Lakshmi Sirhīha in Śaka 1693/ 1771 A.D. which offered thirty servitors along with their families comprising of various castes namely *brāhmaṇa*, *kāyastha*, *kalitā*, *kaivatrya*, *nāpit*, *koch*, *keot*, *camār*, *dhobi*, *nāt* and *caudāl* to the *sattra*. It clearly records the

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261 Old Narowā *sattra*, PKKSI, p.239
262 One MS. Copy of the *Vaiṣṇāvālī* was possessed by one Puspakānta Devgoswamī (75) of Bardowā.
263 *Bhakat-māla* of *Bālsattra* records that Rāmacandra Ātā is cremated on the bank of Suvarnasirī in the old Narowā *sattra* by Rāmadeva Ātā, family members and associate *bhakatas*.
264 Please see Appendix-B and plate-2
265 Vide C.P (acc. no. 5018, ASM); Mahjar book no.189, (Record room of the Deputy Commissioner of Kāmrūp district.)
boundaries of the two chief sattras of the Narowa group, Narowa in Lakshimpur and Bardowa in Nagaon. It gives the earliest boundary of Narowa sattras as ‘Baruah ali in the east, Kānkāni pukhuri in the south, Uvotāmukh in the north, Khārumar beel and Cāoporā river in the west along with a new boundary of Bardowa.

According to Tungkhungiyā Buranjī, Lakshmi Sirīha’s successor Gaurinath Sirīha paid a visit to Narowa sattrā during the time of Rāmdeva mahajan in the month of Phālgun of Śaka 1707 or 1785 A.D. It says how the King crossed the Lohit and proceeded to the monastery of the Narowa mahanta when the Narowa Ātā came out in a festive array, accompanied by singers, drummers and woman to welcome and receive the king. The King came to know somehow that a highly placed yeoman extended his support to rebellious group belonging to the Moāmoriya camp and the Narowa to disappoint the royal camp provided shelter to the yeoman’s son. The king therefore left the sattrā and decided to go back to his capital. The king however had to postpone his journey for a while and stayed a few more days in the sattrā reluctantly for the river Lauhitya was in sudden spate. The Adhikara’s supporters very shrewdly interpreted the incident that the king had to return to the sattrā for the sin he committed by showing dissatisfaction with the mahanta.

Rāmadeva mahājana of our concern appears to be so influential at this time that King Lakshmi Sirīha even acknowledged his heritable right by granting another important endowment, which confirmed his important share of the Pāṭbaūśī sattrā of Śaṅkaradeva. This grant issued in saka 1694 (1772 A.D) records names of 98 servitors and a huge landed property. With this endowment the King established the Narowa Mahanta Rāmadeva in the Pāṭbaūśī sattrā to strengthen his power and prestige on the

266 According to K. D. Goswami the Adhikāra was Rāmadeva; vide; PSVFCA, p.84
one hand and displayed his control and authority over the region on the other. While making a review of this charter in Prācyā Śāsanāvalī, M. Neog calls Śrī Rāmadeva mahājana of Narowā (originally in the Lakshimpur district) in the same place is known as Vāsudeu Thāān as the Adhikāra of Pāṭbāusī sattṛa. Within this period, relation of Narowā sattṛa with the royal house reached its height.

In this context we may quote observation of eminent historian Romila Thapar when she says 'apart from the personal devotion to a particular religion by a ruler there was the additional factor, that endowments kept religious organizations satisfied and thereby decreased the risk of their organizing opposition to a ruler.' Likewise S. L. Baruah opines, 'by adopting the Śākta faith supporting Vaiṣṇavism, monks, sattṛas and maintaining the Ahom rituals and ceremonies the Ahom rulers encouraged a state of triarchy in the religious matters leading to a considerable amount of rivalry between the three groups. Further pointing out to the changing religious policy of the Ahom Gajendra Adhikāry elucidates that the Tai Ahom rulers were never serious in respect of rites, rituals and procedures of worship, but very cautiously and carefully tried to utilize religious sentiments in extending and legitimizing their political authority over the Brahmaputra valley. It might be cause why King Lakṣhmi Sīrīha established Rāmadeva in the three sattṛas of Narowā, Vāsudeu Thāān, Bardowā and Pāṭbāusī simultaneously.

267. M. Neog (ed.), PS, plate no. 80, p. 172
268. Romila Thapar, The Past and Prejudice, pp. 41-42
270. G. Adhikary, Religious establishment of Assam, p. 37
Dr. John Peter Wade who accompanied Captain Welsh in his expedition into Assam in 1793 A.D visited the shrine and throws much lights in his most cited work ‘Geographical sketch of 1800’ describing a brief account and the geographical location of the shrine. He writes --

‘Narowā is a smaller district which does not exceed eight miles in length and six miles in breadth. It is chiefly noted for that a temple or Takoorbari (Thākur-bāri). It is bounded by a much larger district, Manipur. The Sowpara (Camparā) river from the mountain Miri flows through Coticossi, water contribute to enrich the estate of Naroowah Gosaign (Narowā gosāīn) or Goswami and after very long course join the Brahmaputra about sixty miles below Sudiya (Sadiya).’

From this aforesaid note, one can easily have an idea of the condition of this holy shrine in the later part of the 18th century in the same location referred earlier in the Copper plates and in other sources. It can easily be understood by using the term ‘Takoorbari,’ Wade meant the sattra located on the bank of the Čāopara river and for its vastness he further says it as a small district that covers an area of eight and six miles in length and breadth.

It further clarify that perhaps the dual structure was not existed during the time of Wade’s visit. The last line of his observance has clearly indicated the name of the owner of the estate whom he mentions as Naroowah Gossaign (Narowā gosāīns).

The second phase of rejuvenation of Vāsudeu Thāān begins only from the time of Achyuta Ātā, who reclaimed the shrine in the early part of the 20th century after a

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long gap of fifty uneventful years. There is every possibility of emergence and popularly of the prefix ‘Narowā sattra’ along the ‘Vāsudeu Thāān’, which was re-christened around 1931 A.D. Although the Adhikāras remained in the sattra since the middle of the eighteenth century the prefix ‘Narowā’ got outshone by the powerful suffix ‘Vāsudevar Thāān’ for the presence of the legendary idol.

A later account of Bardowā- Bālisattra, narrates under what circumstances Achyuta, the middle son of Bāmdeva, the grandson of Lākṣmīdeva had to leave Bardowā and undergo a rigorous punishment in a Jail at Andaman Island for killing some bhakatas at his ancestral site Rāmpur sattra in early decades of 20th century. According to one local source, he committed the heinous crime as some bhakatas hatched a conspiracy against Bhagīraṭha Deva, his brother and the presiding Adhikāra of Bardowā. At Kāliyāpānī (Andaman) it is said he displayed his valour and good gestures for which the life term punishment was cut short. However, Achuyta did not return to Bardowā. He went to Kukurcū village, a camp of the Narowā gosāin at Teok near Jorhat where he learnt that his two minor sons were died of pox within this period. Soon after, he decided to go to the ancestral site in Lākshimpur along with a group of trusteed followers. At Jalbhārī village near Narowā he met one Rāngāi ālḍhārā, who was a staunch devotee of his grandfather Lākṣmīdeva. Rāngāi helped him in reorganising the holy site remained almost abandoned from the departure of Lākṣmīdeva at the advent of Burmese rule. Achutya, made an arrangement of regular

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272 Jitram Kalita, Itihāshe garakā Dhakuakhana , p.10
273 Quoted from the ‘Gangādhara kṛtya Narowā gosāin āru Bālisattra Varhāvāli’, (MS.), pp. 330-336
274 P. N. Goswami Shastri, Śrī Śrī Vāsudevar thāān Narowā sattra itibṛitya , p. 24
275 ibid. p. 25
prayer services and other religious activities have been resumed in the newly constructed sattra following the customs prevailed in the Purusa samhati of Bardowā sattra.

While conducting an extensive survey in the present site of the sattra, stands in the sprawling Roumora pathār (from July 2009 - January 2010), we have got some relevant information of its glorious past that helps in understanding the traditions and customs of the shrine. Traces of some ramparts are still seen buried in the sattra which were raised for fortification of the entre shrine area. One may see trace of some old tanks and remains of some of the palisades spread around the shrine. One such rectangular earthen rampart runs in north-south direction. Another one with a height of 2.5m and breadth of 5m runs along the deep ditches that touch the Cāmporā (Cāporā) river. In our survey; four old plinths of Adhikāras have been traced out around the Kirtanaghar. Amongst the modern structures, the Kirtana-ghar, the biggest one is measured at 58.22m × 20.43m. Altogether seven old tanks are located spread around the sattra and the temple, out of which Barpukhuri (L= 231.65m × B = 21.34m) is said to be the biggest one. Existence of a big tank in the northern side is called ‘Āi gosāmir Pukhuri’ (121.92m × 39.624 m) suggest the existence of a separate tank for the use of womenfolk. Traces of five earthen ramparts once constructed for the protection of the shrine and its inhabitants are found around the shrine. Some long ditches that were dug out in all probability to provide supply of drinking water as well as for the protection of the inmates are locally called garkhāoi. These ditches encompass the shrine from the east. The longest one is measured at 335.28 m × 18.29 m.

Traces of good number of granaries, which are not usually found in other Narowā sattras, found in the extreme eastern end of the Roumarā pathār. These were
constructed at a distance of 900m from the main *sattra*. Amongst them, the largest one is measuring at 405.39 m x 24.38 m. Traces of a good numbers small pond are seen along the side of the granaries. These are called *bharālor pukhuri*. Seven numbers of long plinths might be used by the *sattra* inmates or *Śic* (disciples) of the Narowā *Adnikāras* engaged in cultivation of various crops in the *sattra* land. Three plinths of the *Bharāl* (granery) are measured at 1219.45m x 36.57m. The temple of Vāsudeu, the focal point of attraction of the *sattra* stands in the east-westerly direction. The innermost heart of the temple is the sanctum where the deity (usually of fixed stone) is stands on a stone altar, an attached shade called *hāb-ghar* to accommodate devotees is found at the entrance. Here some spaces are kept for circumambulation as a mark of paying respect to the idol. It is measured at 12.20 m x 6.56 m. The front shed of the temple is 2.86 m x 3.51m. The spacious *Kīrtana-ghar*, *a moṇikūṭ grha* and the wooden *guru-āsana* were built following the model of Bardowā Narowā *sattra*. The length and breadth of the *Kīrtana-ghar* is 33.23m x 20.42m respectively. Our filed survey reveals that the newly constructed *Kīrtana-ghar*, independent *bharāl-ghar*, temple, *satrādhihikār’s bohā*, and a wide *bāṭcorā* draws the attention of any one coming to the site are an imitation of structure of an old *sattra*.276 These findings clearly indicate the existence of a well-organized society of different professions at the vicinity of the Vaiṣṇavite shrine.

Some Mising devotees inform us about unique features of the shrine. One Mularam Modak (70) said, people who committed sins during the Ahom period used to visit the *sattra* and stayed there for some years expecting changes of their nature. The sinners used to come to it wishing to serve as *bhakatas* to rectify their character by

276 For details of the shrine area and its interior see the Diagram-1

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voluntarily engaging themselves in pursuit of religious activity. We are also informed about popular belief still current there that if somebody with deep devotion and faith visits the shrine get his or her wishes fulfilled. It is widely believed that even childless couples who occasionally offer *tupolā* to *Vāsudeva* are blessed with child, who in turn called their child as gifted child of *Vāsudeva*. Most of the people living in greater Dhakuakhana claim that it is not an exaggeration to say that the entire Hindu population of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji district have been swayed over by the influence of *Vāsudeu Thāān- Narowā sattra* for more than two centuries.” From various *Carita*, chronicles and literary accounts of the post Śaṅkaradeva era we may trace the following a tentative genealogy of the *Adhikāras* of the *Vāsudeu Thāān Narowā sattra*:

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Ramākānta alias Ratikānta  
|  Rāmacandra
|  | Rāmadeva
|  | Lakṣmīdeva
|  Bāmdeva
|  | Achutyananda
|  | Muktiṃāṇa
|  | Kuśha
|  Śiva
|  | Maheshcandra
|  | Rupendra
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277 Informants are Boxiram Morang (68) and Mularam Modak (72) who described some virtues of the *Vāsudeu Thāān - Narowā sattra* in an interview with this investigator conducted in that area from July 9-12 of 2009.
From the above discussion, we may draw a suggestive map and its relative diagram of the area wherein the first permanent sattra of the Narowā group was founded and then shifted to the bank of the river Cāoparā under Gohain mouja of present day Lakshimpur district.
Prepared by the investigator for the study of the Narowa group of sattras and their contribution towards neo-Vaishnavite movement of Assam
Diagram of Vāsudeu Thāān -Narōwā Sattra

INDEX

Vāsudeu Thāān -Narōwā sattra

Plinth of granary: 
Tank- 
Main Shrine: 
Road: 
Plinth of bhakata- 
Adhikar's' plinth

Tank and Ditch 
Vāsudeu Temple 
Toran 
Ramparts (Inner) 
Ramparts (Outer)

For details of measurement see- Appendix-H

Prepared by the investigator for the study of the Narōwā group of sattras and their contribution towards neo-Vaišnavite movement of Assam

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Diagram of Narowā Sattras (Under undivided Nagaon district)

Prepared by the investigator for the study of the Narowā group of sattras and their contribution towards neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement of Assam
5. Narowā -Balisattra

With a mission to recover Bardowā, Dāmodara Ātā and his followers sailed from Bijni, (bhāf) of Koch kingdom to central Assam in the midst of the 17th century and anchored on the south bank of the Brahmaputra opposite to the Šingarī hill. A sandy bank or bāli-cāpāri of Brahmaputra where they first made bohā and started living came to be known as Bālisattra. In a sketch map drawn by H.N. Dutta Baruah in his work PKKSI identifies Bālisattra as the 18th plinth and the homestead campus of the Bara-Bhūyāns of Šaṅkaradeva’s day. In the diagram of the Bhūyā-bhefī he sketched Bālicāpāri in between Bhūra-cāpāri and Šembuwāni cāpāri where the present sattra grew and developed. Coming from west, Dāmodara and his followers first reached Bardowā ghāṭ on Bālicāpāri in the south bank of Leteri stream. According to another source before coming to Bālisattra, Dāmodara went to eastern Assam and set up the first three Narowā sattras on the bank of Suvanśirī in the North bank of Brahmaputra.

The Thākur Carīta records that Dāmodara met one old monk Vanavāsī ātōi at the Bardowā ghāṭ, from whom he came to know about the area and succeeded in reclaiming the lost site subsequently. Just after establishing two sattras in erstwhile Habuṅg area in Lakhimpur, Dāmodara appealed the Ahom king Jayadhvaj Simha for royal patronage and to allow him to go back to Bardowā to complete his unfinished work of reclamation. Earlier, coming to the Suvanśirī valley in eastern Assam Dāmodara engaged in proselytizing activities of nāmāharmā with some of the old group.

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278. Dutta Baruah, op. cit., p.40,
279. Śrī Thākur Carīta (ed.)
bhakatas who settled earlier in that region after being 'ājnya paras' and came under the broad group of 'etakā mahanta'.

We shall try to draw out a boundary of Bālisattra from an old sketch of the survey map of Colonial period, 1841 A.D. It shows Barkuh, Cenimāri and Dāmodara Ātār Thāān bound the sattra in the east. Other landmarks like Doomdomiyā sattra and Rāmpur sattra moujas, grazing area of Bālisattra and the river Leteri are located towards its south and north respectively. The length of the old road passes through Bālisattra is measured at 848.56 m in length. It is observed that the road (Jordharā ālī) constructed from the south bank of the Leteri touches the south end of the Bardowā Thāān. This straight road at present bisects Nagaon–Dhing P.W.D. road at the juncture of Kadamani village (Koroiguri).

According to an account Dāmodara Ātā caused to build this road on the old narrow tract showed to him by some bhakatas with the services of pāiks he received from the Ahom King Jayadhvaj Sinha. They used this road even at night hours by burning some 'jors' made of reeds. Being the male leader of the mission Dāmodara played a major role in radiating and resetting the house at Bardowā, the most venerable

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280. During the reign of King Rudra Simha it is said that he made a survey of sattra and fixed the number of a rupee value (etakā). This means that each sattra formed of a rupee which than consisted of 64 paisa or 1280 cowries. All the mahnatas or the heads of the sattras were included in the recognized list which was considered as members of 'Etakā mahanta'. Vide, Āuniati sattra, p. 489.

Later on the names of the preceptors and sattras are enlisted in Vaiṣṇavī Kirtan or 'etakā mahantar sattra thāpanar jhunā'; vide, Hemkosha (ed.), p.190, N. Saikia (ed.), Maheswar Neog Rachanāvali , p.378

281. The original length of the road is measured at 232 beu. Beu is an old measurement scale (foot-scale); 1 beu is equivalent to 12 feet or 3.66 m.

282. Dutu Baruah, op. cit., p.39
seat of Vaiśnava. Within this period, he built two new monasteries, Bālisattra and Vaiśnavpur (Kujī) in the same locality. However, he made his campground at Bālisattra and started living there returning from eastern Assam until his last breath. Being the heir of Caturbhuja Ṣākār, Dāmodara obtained some the traditional and sacred articles belongings to the family of Śāṅkara-deva and his immediate successors. These include a copy of illustrated Bhagavata, augsthapramāṇa Gītā (thumb sized scripture), a Vamsivādan statue along with the four posts of a dharmāsana, believed to be a gifted by Koc king Naranārāyaṇa to Śāṅkara-deva. These inheritable articles of neo-Vaiśnavite era are now preserved in the Bālisattra. Dāmodara breathed his last at Bālisattra on the Śukla pancami day in the month of Kārtik of Śaka 1584, A.D. 1662. According to an account, he was cremated on the bank of Lauhitya in presence of the twelve mahantas (brāhma-mahanta) and the two gābharugiris. However the site of his cremation was eroded overnight by surging water of Brahmaputra leaving only traces of pond namely Bālikuh with traces of Barkuh and Sarukuh. People and devotees of the sattra still believe the incident to be a legend connected with Dāmodara Ātā. Later on, some bhakatas and villagers built a separate Thāān (Dāmodara Ātār Thāān) near the spot of his cremation. At that time Ramākānta (1652-1720 A.D.), Dāmodara’s only son was a boy of thirteen year old. It is said just after observance of the rituals of ādya śrāddha of Dāmodara, Kanakalātā, the co-discoverer claimed a share of Bardowā for

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283. The Bhakat-mālā of Bālisattra; Dutta Baruah cited the date of birth and passing away of Dāmodara as 1626 A.D. and 1662 A.D, Dutta Barua, ibid., p. 235
284. Śāṅkara-deva Varṇāvali (MS.) folio.12 (Collected from Doloicubā sattra, Morigaon, now preserved at Narowā-Bālisattra)
285 Bhakat-mālā of Bālisattra, p.17, Hairām and Rupāl Gābharugiri are two sisters in laws of Dāmodara.
286 Bhakat-mālā; Aniruddha Carita, v.v. 322-324
287 M. Neog, op. cit. p.763

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her grandson Anantaram or Jagajiva.²⁸⁸ It led to a conflict between the descendants of two families, which eventually went to the court of the Ahom King. After a long gap of 137 years, the competent authority finally delivered a verdict and the dispute was settled by dividing the holy properties of Bardowā Thāān between the descendants of the two in A.D. 1799.

Due to Mirjumla’s expedition in 1662 A.D. and three recurrent invasions of the Burmese hordes in 19th century, the area became depopulated when families of the bhakatas inhabiting that area deserted it apprehending further atrocities and sufferings. On the contrary, during the period of Burmese invasion that followed a period of unrest and turmoil, Bhadradeva, the head pontiff of Rāmpur sattra shifted his abbot to Bālisattra. Later on, Bhadradeva’s son Lakṣmīdeva alias Lakshmikānta came to live permanently at Bālisattra. With the restoration of normalcy, Bālisattra attracted many people for its richness in all requirements like fish and food at that time.²⁸⁹ However, Bhakat-mālā²⁹⁰ informs that it was due to differences of opinions with a group of bhakatas; Lakṣmīdeva left his ancestral site and started living in a new site till his death. Before his final exodus, he asked some of bhakatas of Rāmpur to settle at Bālisattra, who refuted to follow him. Later on while they started their shifting, Ātā forbade settling within the four walls of the Bālisattra. Finding no way out, a group of bhakatas began to live separately on the bank of the river Leterī called Afalā pathār, outside the sattra nisfkeraj now known as Rāmpuriyā gāon. Since the time of Lakṣmīdeva, Bālisattra became the nerve centre of various socio-religious and cultural

²⁸⁸ ‘kriyā karma ante danda kare dangar āi
bole subhādrāra putre dharma botā pāl,’ v. 489, TC
²⁸⁹ K.D. Goswami, PSVFCA, p.84
²⁹⁰ Bhakat-mālā
activities of central Assam. The sattra thus rejuvenated under the leadership of Lakṣmīdeva was highly acclaimed by the Vaiśṇavite circle and the Ahom king Candrakanta Sinha (1819-1821 A.D). Question may arise, what sort of influence Bālisattra exercised under him over the Vaiśṇavite society? The answer lies in the formation of a congenial and peaceful atmosphere for pursuing cultural heritage the houses of Bardowāi-Bālisattra played an important role for which these Sattras are known at large. Highlighting literary contributions of Lakṣmīdeva, S.N. Deva Goswami in his work tries to define and justify the title ‘Ishwar puruṣa’ conferred upon him. He points out that the honorific and venerated appellation ‘Ishwara puruṣa’ might have conferred upon him when he succeeded in reclaiming Bālisattra, the original site of his ancestors. He also showed his proficiency in introducing certain lyrics for songs and satrīyā style of dance and drama and was known for his role in codifying prayer services of Narowā and Bardowā thul. He composed six dramas of well repute based on Vaiśṇava religious literatures and enacted the most celebrated one called ‘Kumara Haran’ at the invitation of the Ahom king Candrakanta Sinha. When Lakshmīdeva became the Adhikāra of Pāṭhaūsī, Bālisattra and Rāmpur, his brother Gaurikānta was installed Adhikāra at Narowā share of Bardowā. When he died without a male successor, Laksmīdeva retained the Adhikārship of the entire Narowā group of sattras

291 K.D. Goswami, op. cit. p.84
292 S. N. Devgoswami, Nātyakāra Lakṣmīdeva, jīvan āru kṛiti , p.20
293 The honorific title ‘Ishwar puruṣa’ is believed to be conferred on religious preceptor for his outstanding calibre and certain unique contributions
294 For details of literary contribution of Lakṣmīdeva please see literary works incorporates in table-VI
295 Sri Candrakānta Sinha nripati pradhān /

karāwata ohi nāta nrimaṇa ll vv.27-28 mōkti mangal bhāṭimā (opening benediction of the drama)
including Bardowā. Various sources refer Narowā-Bālisatra to be earliest site where all the heritable artefacts and antiquities of the Narowā group of sattras have been preserved. These include a Copper plate, Sri Sri Vaikunthanāth muṭṭi, artefacts of the Ahom kings viz., ghautā (metal bell), borkāh (Gong), borup (canon) foot-dust and the padasīlā of Śaṅkaradeva. When the family and most of the bhakatas of the Narowā gosāins left Rāmpur sattra, they brought artefacts from to Bālisatra. It includes the Ādya daśam (Citra-Bhāgavata) and the worshipping idol of the sattra Sri Śri Vāsudeva. The idol earlier brought to Bardowā by Rāmadeva Ātā, installed at the new sattra Rāmpur.

On the second night of the new moon in the month of Āhār (August) in 1858 A.D. Lakṣmīdeva breathed his last at Bālisatra. He was cremated at Bardowā on the bank of the Gangā (Ākāśi gangā) in presence of his four sons Naranāṭ, Bholānāṭ, Jogendra, Dhanēswar and two sons in law, Mahīdhār and Suttrādhār Bāpu. Following the order of father, the youngest son performed the last rites and became owner of the pinda. As per the prevailing tradition, Dhanēswar (1838-1925 A.D) was ceremoniously handed over the relics of the sattra, muṭṭi and Bhāgavata on that occasion. Following this, a tradition came into vogue in the Narowā sattra that the Adhikāra of Narowā should be appointed in order of seniority. It has been found in archival record that while the order was defied the Rampur-Bālisatra got bifurcated and internecine conflict of the house set in. The Deka Adhikāra designate of Bardowā-

296 Presidential report, Sattrīyā Sāṁskṛtik Samāroh, Śrī Śrī Narowā Bālisutra, 522 Śaṅkarābda (1973)
297 His sister in law
298 A lump or ball of rice mixed with milk, sugar, water etc. offered to the manes of a deceased person. Vide, Hemkoṣṭ (ed.), An Assamese dictionary, p.682.
299 Bhakat-mālā ; Śaṅkaradevar parā Śivendraloi, (MS.) p.137
Rāmpur. Naranāth separating himself from the original house settled first on the bank of a tank Talibil near Dhing and his two brothers Bholānath, Jogendra stayed for some years in the ancestral site at Bālisattra. Earlier, when Harendra failed to install himself on the line of seniority, he setup a new sattra at Bhetiyāni near Bardowā with the support of some followers and bhakatas.

A field survey conducted in the sattra reveals that the present manikut and the Kirtana-ghar were built about 6m north of the pora-bheṭi, the ground area is measured at 32 m × 21m and 45m × 22m. Distance between the sattra connecting road and the old plinth is 50m and the outer Korāpat stands at a distance of 168 m on the P.W.D. road from the sattra. During our survey, traces of some old ghāṭs are found on both the banks of the water body at a distance of 6.5 m east of the Kirtana-ghar. Altogether seven such ghāṭs existed earlier were Hijalar ghāṭ, Āhat Tolar ghāṭ, Bakul tolar ghāṭ, Siparīyā ghāṭ, Gāro- ghāṭ, Bākori ghāṭ Kumārīr ghāṭ Ishwar gosāin ghāṭ, Dokāni ghāṭ. Some of them were used by the inmates for bathing and washing purposes, some for boats, which ferries people through Śāntijān to Kuji via Bardowā. Trace of two named Gāro-ghāṭ and Kumārīr-ghāṭ indicate existence of two different communities in the sattra area. The four earliest families who migrated from Rāmpur to Bālisattra in Bhadradeva’s time are still known as Bhuyār-ghar, Burhā bhakatar ghar, Hazarikār ghar and Sonārīr ghar. Another four families who subsequently came and settled at Bālisattra permanently were Dhivajā Borār ghar, Bāgidiyār ghar, Becā gāyanar ghar and Bāyānar ghar. Among them descendants of the original family of Kapil, a

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300 An account informs the Porā bheṭi or burnt plinth, the earliest plinth of the sattra Nāṃghar was gutted completely in an accidental fire occurred in later part of the eighteen century.

301 Satṛīyā Sanskritīr Samaroh (ed.), op. cit., p.7

302 ibid
Brāhmaṇa of Bharadwaja gotra and the family priest of the Narowa vanśa is also found. A Chutiā family of Jālbiāri village of Dhakuakhana who migrated to that area settled in the eastern boundary of the sattra.

A source of the late Colonial period informs Bālisattra’s nisf-khiraj estates standing in the name of the Adhiṅkāra of Bardowā when three families of mahantas were found living around the sattra. The present Kīrtana-ghar of the sattra was built in the last century.

From the above discussion, we may draw a suggestive diagram of the area wherein the Bālisattra of the Narowa group was founded by Dāmodara and still exist as a vibrant neo-Vaiṣṇavite sattra.

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303 Bālisattrar Varhsavāti, v.361
304 Village note, ASPO (Rev) no. 34-3000, dated 5-10-1928, AER-1930-31
Diagram of Narowā Bālisattra

Prepared by the investigator for the study of the Narowā group of sattras and their contribution towards neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement of Assam

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6. Bardowā -Narowā

Bardowā that is also referred to as Batadravā in various accounts houses two sattras namely Narowā and Salaguri is situated in Batadravā moujā of Nagaon district. Earlier name of Bardowā was known as Ģembaruani or Ģemunīya. Ģaṅkar refers to his native place as Batadravā with no equal in point of agriculture crops and fish situated on the bank of Lohityā. Bardowā which ever since its inception has been an institution of unique importance in which millions of Devotees have reposed their faith and belief regarding it as the epitome of their tradition and culture. Once the place was under the command of Bhūyān chieftains of central Assam when their territory was extended from the river Kapili to Cāmdharā on the south of the Brahmaputra and from Śūṅgari to Ghiḷādhārī on the north. The Bardowā Carita says that the kingdom of the Bhūyāns stretched from Kaflyābar to Kājālāmukh. It includes the whole of the Bhūyān cāpori, surrounded by Brahmaputra in the north, Sonā River in the east. Kālikā thāān in the east, Kachārī Kingdom in the west.

Śaṅkaradeva who took the charge of Śiromonī Bhūyān-chief from his grand uncle Jayantā Doloi steered the course of administration cautiously to avoid any friction

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305 ‘Tembuwāni bāṇḍhe grām Bardowā jāra nām Lāhityara jale anukuta’ (meaning, Bardowā is on the dam of Tembuwāni bāndh which is located beside the waters of Lāhitya)

H.N. Dutta Baruah (ed.), Haricandra upākhyaṇ, Sri Śaṅkar Bākyāmrītya, 1st part

306 When Šaṅkaradeva constructed a dam on the mouth of Tembuwāni with the help of the chaste woman Rādhikā and other villagers the channel towards the sattra dried up; for which it has derived the name Temunīya., Bardowā guru Carita (ed.), p.59

307 ‘Tembuwāni bāndhe bāṣāilā prabhāṇḍhe Bardowā nāme grāma.’

Rukmini Harana (Kāvya), v. 529

308 Bhāgavata- Book-X , Ādi ,v.1475

309 M. Neog , SHT, p.66
with Kachāris.\footnote{U.C. Lekharu (ed.), KGC, p. 43} However, in the wake of aggression of Kachāris in 1516-1517 A.D., he had to leave Bardowā for good. Just after crossing the Brahmaputra and passing through Šingari, he stayed one night each at Šingari, and Ghilādhari and finally reached Gangmau where spent a couple of years along with his kinsfolk and disciples.\footnote{M. Neog (ed.), Bardowā Guru Carita, p. 67} With the migration of Šaṅkaradeva and other Bhūyāns of Bardowā and the erstwhile Kāmarūpa Bhūyān left their chieftaindoms allowing to burying under deep jungles for more than a century.

After a gap of 140 years, as desired by Caturbhuja Ṭhākur and beckoned by sheer calling to rediscover the glory of the preceptor, two descendants of Šaṅkaradeva set out from the erstwhile Koc-territory to rediscover the shrine in an era of inhospitable terrain and communication. The male leader, Dāmodara who played the stellar role in organizing the plan of reclamation became the first Adhikāra of the re-christened Bardowā.\footnote{For detailed history of this episode please see chapter 3.1} Dvarikā fixes the date of reclamation at śaka 1575 corresponding to 1653 A.D in the month of phalguna.\footnote{Santāvaolī, vv. 2752-2753} Since the time of Dāmodara the vastness of Bardowā which once meant the entire Bhūyān cāpari spread over a vast area on the south of Brahmaputra became slenderer in size.

Following the order of the Ahom King Jayadhvaj Siṅha, Ţangsu and one Lahon Sandikoi supervised the construction of the Bardowā Thāān. Just after the recovery of the padaśilā, the King offered a sacred divya-stand having one hundred earthen lamps to illuminate the venerated relic.\footnote{AKC, (com.), p. 67} To its east, Āi Kanakalatā built a separate house for

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{U.C. Lekharu (ed.), KGC, p. 43}
  \item \footnote{M. Neog (ed.), Bardowā Guru Carita, p. 67}
  \item \footnote{For detailed history of this episode please see chapter 3.1}
  \item \footnote{Santāvaolī, vv. 2752-2753}
  \item \footnote{AKC, (com.), p. 67}
\end{itemize}
saru Āi (the younger mother) and Dāmodara in the north and she stayed towards south of the newly built shrine.315 After this Dāmodara raised a Korāpāṭī316 around the shrine and made proper arrangement for settlement of celibate and non-celibate bhakatas in cāri-hājis. Descendants of Dāmodara and Kanakalatā started living around the shrine and smoothly exercised daily rituals and proselytizing activities with the group of celibate and non-celibate laities. In their early years on the tenth death anniversary of Caturbhujā Thākur; which falls in the Śuklā Caturthī of the month of Pauśa, Dāmodara and Kanakalatā invited all the Barbārājanīyā mahantas and other bhakatas of nearby sattras. When they refused to attend the ceremony, an alternative arrangement was made for observation of śrāddha at the advice of Kesava Ātā of Korcung sattrā. In śaka 1580 (A.D.1658) on the ādyā-srāddha day of Caturbhujā Thākur, Dāmodara on behest of Kanakalatā separately appointed some new apostles.317 These apostles are known as Kanakā-bārejaniyā mahanta318 which include six from Brāhmaṇs and eight non-Brāhmaṇ communities. Maniram Dewan319 Ātā Damodare patīf (having been established by Damodara).320

315 ibid.
316 Four walls , Korāpāṭī is a gateway shed before as sattrā or religious establishment, See Hemkosha, p.226
317 Santāvaoli, v. 2766 (bar ālr āgyā loliyā ātā Dāmodara nirmāli diveka uthi maṣṭak upar)
Caturbhujā bhāgin Dāmodara maha santa / Caturdāśa janā sādhu tehe pāṭilanta , ĀKC, p. 55
Santāvaoli gives veritable lists which include names of four apostles of this group making the number sixteen. vide vv. 17-18
319 BVR (ed.), p.19
320 Santāvaoli, v. 2760-2786

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With the invasion of Mirjumla, Bardowā once again faced a deep crisis and the families of Dāmodara and Āi Kanaklatā had to leave for a couple of years. At that time Ramākānta Ātā went to Narowā with Bhagavāna Ātā, the closest friend of his father. The younger wife of Caturbhuja Ṭākūr, her daughter Sumītrā and daughter in law Maṇohar Gābharugīrī went to Viṣṇupur sattrā apprehending fear of persecution at the hands of the Mughal invaders. Sometime earlier, Āi Kanakalatā sailed upstream with her family and settled at Cināтолī in Mājulī Island with some of her followers.\footnote{321} Thus, Bardowā once again deserted for the second time.

During the reign of Gadadhar Sīrīha, (1681-1696 A.D) Vaiṣṇavite sattras and bhakatas had to face rigorous mode of persecution, bhakatas living under Bardowā was not spared from it, and once again, it became depopulated. From Bardowā to Majuli more than three thousand bhakatas were found in different sattrā and nām-ghar. During that operation two thousand bhakatas were enumerated at Bardowā alone who were distributed in different places like Ceuni and Ghiladhari.\footnote{322} The Tungkhungiyā Buranji narrates how Rangacīḷa Bejdoloi Bhandaff Baruah unleashed the reign of terror in this time by persecuting the Vaiṣṇavas and extracted money from all the medhies and sent them to settle at Namrup, Toklāi and Ceuni.\footnote{323} Within this period like its counterpart Kōvaṃorā, the sattrā house was set into fire by the Ahom army and demolished.\footnote{324} When the persecution spread everywhere Ramākānta Ātā once again fled away from

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{321} J.N. Mahanta, Dharmālaya Śri Śri Kōvaṃorā sattrar camu itibṛttya, p.31
\item \footnote{322} Benudhar Sarma, Dekṣinpat Sattrā, p.52
\item \footnote{323} S. K. Bhuyan (ed.), Tungkhungiyā Buranji, p.2
\item \footnote{324} S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit., p.29', 'Sarbseka lolyā khedileka dura kori Becā, Ceuni nāme āsa ehi thāi mahanta sabake tāte thailā āntarāi, Il Asomar Padya Buranji (ed.), p.32
\end{itemize}}

\footnotesize{(113)}
Bardowā and took shelter at Bijnī rājya in western Assam for several years. After a few years later, Anantarām, the founder of Kowāmorā sattra passed away in 1724 A.D. and his son Harirāi came to Bardowā and became the head of the sattra. Hari-rāi was succeeded by Kesavrāi, Lakshmikānta and Rāmcaran respectively as the head pontiffs of Bardowā-Salaguri. Learning it, Rāmadeva Ātā, the grandson of Rāmacandra Ātā who became most influential Adhikāra at that time shifted to Bardowā and started living at Rāmpur by raising a separate sattra in 1761 A.D and claimed the share of Bardowā.

During this time Ahom king Lakshmi Sinha issued Rāmadeva a Copper plate grant which furnishes the vast area along with the four boundaries of Bardowā along with the Vāsudev Thāān in in Śaka 1693 (1771 A.D). This charter records Aśītangani-Pukhuri as the eastern most boundaries, Śīlsimaloo in the south, Roumarī bil on the west and the river Brahmaputra, the common border. At present, we may see existence of the three old boundaries which are easily identical. It confirms firm footing and expansion of the Narowā sattras as the reigning king offered two more charters in the name of two different sattras under Lakshīmpur and Kāmrūp. Till the reign of Kamaleswar Sinha, (1795-1811A.D) management of the sattra was amicably conducted by the descendants of Dāmodara and Anantarām. However, the appellation ‘Narowā’ belived to be originated in eastern Assam became popular in Bardowā after its formal division in Śaka year 1721, (A.D 1799). With this division, the Narowā part of Bardowā came to be known as bar-hissā and the Salaguri part as the chotta-hissā. The dual ownership system of the same site thus came into vogue at Bardowā had its ramifications in bifurcation of ritualistic practices and literary and cultural activities.

325 S. N. Sarma, NVMS/A, p.130
326 The four boundaries are inscribed in the Copper plate, please see Appendix-B
Some information on the status of the Narowā sattras in the colonial period have been incorporated in an account of Bronson published in 19th century. In 1843 A.D. Bronson, accompanied by Captain Gordon, two British officers went to Bardowā to see the foot-impression (padasilā) of ‘Śoṅko’ (Śaṅkaradeva) as they called. We have gone by an account of the condition of the saint's place in the pages of the journal of Bronson. ‘There is a great attempt’, as Bronson writes, ‘to show an increasing effort to obtain for it a celebrity, as a holy place, like that of Benaras and other places’.328 So great was the influence upon the society that he saw how the local magistrate had to lend its support when the witnesses were made to swear at the manikuf of the Thāān to speak the truth.

It speaks the importance of the holy relic padasilā (foot impression of Śaṅkaradeva) which enshrines the Thāān from the time of Dāmodara. The account reveals how the criminals and witnesses dared only to tell a lie swearing in the name of the Bardowā sattra manikuf.

The missionaries furnishes some useful statistics about influence and condition of Bardowā in 19th century like this –

"The Noruā (Narowā) division of Bardowā thāān obtained by a decree of the deputy special commissioner, dated 9th July, 1841, contains four thousand seven hundred and nine poorahs of land. It has one hundred and seventeen families of bhakatas. The mahant says that he has two thousand disciples. The Hologuri (Salaguri) divisions, besides having a large amount of land, have one hundred and one bhakatas,

328 As quoted by B. Gupta in A tribute to Śaṅkaradeva, p.9
granted by Rajā Komoleswar (Kamaleswar) Simha. The mahant acknowledges existence of about eight hundred disciples.\footnote{329}

Influence and impact of the Narowā sattra on the society in the early 19th century can easily be understood from the number of bhakatas found recorded in that account.

According to a source\footnote{330} during the time of Bhadradeva, the huge royal endowment including huge land grant of Lakshmi Simha earlier granted to Bardowā was forfeited by a special decree of Deputy Hopkinson, the officiating Commissioner in 1847 A.D.

During the Adhikārship of Varnāsidhardeva the old Kirtana-ghar of sattra was badly damaged in a hailstorm in 1927 A.D. When the process of re-construction of a new prayer hall started, a dispute arose between two groups of bhakatas when litigation was instituted by a leader of a group. His son Purnacandra Devgoswami (1919-2007 A.D) became the Adhikāra of the sattra at the tender age of sixteen in A.D. 1935. A general meeting of satrīyās held in presence of the two presiding Adhikārs of that time, Purnachandra Devgoswami and Dharma Ch. Devgoswami resolved to work for unification and overall development of the Thān. In 1958 A.D. after a long gap of 159 years, the much awaited unification was accomplished. As a result, a common Kirtana-ghar was artistically built for all the Vaiṣṇavas that replaced the existence of two separate nām-ghars managed by the families of the Narowā and Salaguri Vaiṣṇas. It is

\footnote{329} Journal of Bronson, \textit{BMM}, June, 1864 A.D., pp. 164,165 reproduced in H.K. Barpujari, \textit{The American Missionaries and the North east India} (1836-1900)

\footnote{330} An appellant decree of Hopkinson, March, 1847 A. D., now preserved in the room of the Deputy Commissioner, Nagaon district.
measured at 27.43m × 14.02m. A public meeting held under the presidency of Bishnuram Medhi, the former Governor of Madras, the door of the newly built Kirtana-ghar was declared open on October 11, 1958 A.D. Following this, the first Thāān management committee was formed with Purṇacandra Devgoswami, and Kusha Ch. Devgoswami, Adhikāras of Narowā and Salaguri sattra as its first president and secretary respectively. Later on two separate padaśilā grhas on the both side of the present Kirtana-ghar were built in A.D.1975. Posts of the padaśilā grha of the Narowā side were decorated with the images of Brahma, Hara, Kapil, Kumar, Śuka, Bhiṣma, Bali, Yama, Janaka, Nārada, and Prahlāda. Upper panel of the newly built nāṭghara was richly painted and decorated with some of the illustrations of Citra-Bhāgavata that starts drawing the attraction of visitors.

The following is the list of Adhikārs of Bardowā–Narowā from the time of Dāmodara till to date.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dāmodara</th>
<th>(1616-1665)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ramākānta</td>
<td>(1652-1720)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāmcandra</td>
<td>(1689 – 1761)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāmadeva</td>
<td>(1724-1802)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhadradeva</td>
<td>(1750-1839)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakṣmīdeva</td>
<td>(1774-1858)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

331 Bardowā (ed.), 1st ed., 1985, p.21
332 Bardowā, (ed.), 1976, Nowgong, pp 34-37
333 ibid., p.22
From the above discussion, we may draw the following suggestive diagram of Bardowā sattra and its area.

\[ \text{Gaurikānta} \quad \text{Bāmdeva} \quad \text{Bhagirathdeva} \quad \text{Varṇāśūdhardeva} \quad \text{Pūrṇacandra} \quad \text{Devananda} \]

\[ \text{(...)} \quad \text{(...)} \quad \text{(...)} \quad \text{(...1935)} \quad \text{(1919-2007)} \quad \text{(present)} \]

334. Dutta Baruah, *PKKS*, p.142; (vide a litigation no.1 of 1892) Archives of Nagaon
335. Ramākānta Muktiyār Āṭā, *Jagaṭguru Śrimanta Śaṅkaradevar bālyālīā āru Janambhumi Baladraba Thāān Carita*, Foreword
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7. Hāṭi –Pukhuri
8. Karāpāṭ
d. 11.
9. Narōwā Adhikāra’s bohā
10. Barhissā Village
11. Dag no. 175 & 193

NOT IN SCALE

Prepared by the investigator for the study of the Narowā group of sattras and their contribution towards neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement of Assam

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7. Kuji-Narowa

Vaiṣṇavpur or Kuji sattra lies to the east of Šilpukhuri and contains the Kuji bil after which it is named. It is now located under the old Šilpukhuri Mouja of the Mikirbhetā revenue circle of Morigaon district which once came under the temporal control of the erstwhile Pācuraiyā and Sāturaiyā kings of pre-colonial Assam. H. N. Dutta Baruah identified in 1924 A.D. the high plinth of the sattra on the south shore of Kuji bil to be the 19th plinths of the erstwhile Bāra-Bhūyāns. He maintains that Burhā Khān, the paternal uncle of Šāṅkaradeva, lived there as a local chieftain of Bhūyās in the erstwhile Bhūyān territory in 15th century. An early reference to the site is found in an old Caritā which says that Burhā Khān established his dopdar here while he ruled an overlord of the territory of greater Bardowā area. He was said to have engaged here in a series of debates with the Brāhmanas of nearby areas whom he defeated after a prolonged sessions, on the question of acceptability of the ‘ek šarana nām-dharma’ of Šāṅkaradeva. According to another tradition, Kuji derives its name from Kujiya-jān, a place near Viṣṇupur, the abbot of Caturbhujā Thākur and the ancestral site of Dāmodara. To its South-West, Kusumbori, the second seat of governance of Kusumvar Bhūyān stands on the bank of Deura bil. During the Siromoni Bhūyāship of Kusumvara, Kachāri, a neighbouring tribe of that area created disturbance and invaded Ālipukhuri, the first seat of governance of Bhūyāns located on the Bhurā

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336 Dutta Baruah, op. cit., p.40
337 Sanat Kr. Mahanta (ed.), Kalśila-Carita
338 The court of the Kāyasrhas is called ‘Dopdar’
339 Rām rāj jān dīla brāhmaṇaṅka bāi Kuji deūrār māje burhākhār thāl / sehi dopdare āmi bāda kari jāi, burhākhār bād haṅka śāstra cāi II verse of Kalśila-Carita , quoted in PKKSI., p.51
cāpori, when all the Bhūyāns had to flee to a nearby jungle. Some of the Bhūyāns made
a counter attack on the Kachāris in 1516-1517 A.D. The counter attack might have
occurred on the bank of Deūrā bil, located in the southern side of Kuji. To avoid the
frequent disturbances caused by the Kachāris and apprehending the revenge from them
Śaṅkaradeva advised all the Bhūyāns under his command to retreat gracefully to north
bank the Brahmaputra where some kith and kins of his family were residing. With this
migration of Śaṅkaradeva’s family from the southern part of Bhūyān territory places
like Bardowā, Kuji, Kusumbori, Ālipukhuri were lost. Later on when Dāmodara
camped in the area might have introduced the popular name to the site. During the
period of Bardowā expedition, Dāmodara used to cook his meal at this spot by planting
three twigs as a Carombola tree locally called Kardoi. A full-grown tree believed to be
an off spring of the old tree is still seen in reclined form in right corner of the Kirtana-
ghar. This tree is considered as a holy relic by the sattriyās and held in high esteem.
According to some sources, Cetuā, the Mikirgayā king of Pācurajya Kingdom became
a disciple of Dāmodara Āta and had allotted a plot of land on which he raised the
monastery. At the beginning, Dāmodara and his followers mistook Kuji bil to be the
Ākāśī Ganga and raised some plinths (bori) for bhakatas namely Borbori, Sarubori etc.

At present Kuji a cluster of old, Assamese Hindu villages and some water bodies
like Kuji, Bherbheri, Soṇdubā, Gotāgā and Dighalī surround sattrā. The north bank of
the Kuji bil is bounded by Gosāikhaṇḍā, Balikoṭiyā and Kobāikotā villages and eastern
and southern sides are bounded by some of the old plinths of Bāra-Bhūyāns namely
Barbheṭī, Catiyambheṭī, Bowālaguri, Modkuṭā bheṭī, along with some villages like
Hāladhāṭi, Koṭaguri, Śimaluguri etc. A most popular lore that is still in circulation runs
as ‘Vaiṣṇavpur calcali, Bardowā simhāṭi...’ This reminds us the earliest name of the

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The Kují sattra (Vaiśṇavpur) is almost submerged in water. According to a source, the Kují sattra received royal grants both from the Ahom and the Mikirgaya chieftains. Haripada Dekā Phukan, an Ahom official at Phukanar khāf, 5 km south-east of the Kují sattra, issued another Copper plate rendering a land grant to the sattra for and behalf of the Ahom King Kamaleswar Sirhha. Since that time, a tradition continues at sattra where blessing for the well-being of the king and his subjects have been offered in daily prayer services of derporiyā and sāndhya nāma-prasangā. The sattra attains a special position from the time of Viṣṇudeva, an offspring of the fifth generation from Dāmodara Ātā when it was re-established in the early decades of the 19th century. Since the time of Viṣṇudeva, the real architect of the sattra we have obtained an unbreakable genealogy of the Adhikārs until to date. It runs as follows-

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340. Silpukhuri, Souvenir, 9th bi-annual conference of the Morigaon jīlā Sāhitya sabhā, 2005, p 76
341. Hiteswar Barbaruah in his work Āhomar din writes that the Ahom King Kamaleswar Sirhha offered a huge land grant to one Haripada Phukan who played a major role in defeating the Kachāris in Śaka 1725-26. The sattra received some land grant from the said Phukan during Viṣṇudeva’s time.
342. Silpukhuri (ed.), op. cit. p 5
343. Atul Candra Devgoswami, (72) Adhikāra of the sattra records the genealogy of Sattrādhipikāras in an account ‘Sr Sri Vaiśṇavpur Thāśā – Narowā Kujī sattra camu paricai.’
The idol of Caturbhujā Viṣṇu of Kuji sattra is of a unique character.\textsuperscript{344} Conducting a field survey for a period of three months from November, 2009 to February, 2010 we have derived some information about some aspects of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite shrine. A cluster of villages stretches towards further south along the South bank of the water-body starting from the main Korapat of Kuji. The sattra and its adjacent village called Kuji sattra gāon is now formed with sixty-six families belonging to Kalita and Kāyasṭha caste. Moreover, there are number of families belonging to two

\textsuperscript{344} Hemanta Kumar Sarma, a reputed scholar of Assam who visited the sattra in 1970 informed the inmates that the idol was unique in respect of its height and beauty.
plain tribes communities like Hirā and Tiwā. The wards where Hirās live are known as Hirā Cuburi and that of the Tiwās are called Mikirgaya cuburī. Bāmuambil and the Southeast and north bound the west side of Kuji by sprawling waters of Deurā bil. While interviewed with the deka Adhikāra Nityananda Devgoswami informed about the customs and traditions of the sattra and three old ponds located in the premises. They are called ‘Jogān dharā pukhurī’ māhduhā pukhurī and hāti-pukhuri. Traces of Jogān dharā pukhurī, māhduhā pukhurī are found in the eastern corner, and the hatipukhuri is in the west side of the Kirtana-ghar. The length of the Jogāndharā Pukhurī is 27.74 m; the others are small. The only hāti-bohā stands on the bank of hāti-pukhuri over four kathas of land. Two old boat ghāts namely Cenceni āmtolar ghāt and Bortalar ghāt are located few meters behind the Adhikara’s residence on the south bank of the Kuji bil. Earlier, these ghāts served as the point of transportation of the inhabitants of the sattra. Country boats were the only mode of transportation there till the early part of 20th century. Local people say, Dāmodara Ātā conducted the Bardowa-reclamation by using a corā-nāo to cross the Kuji and Deurā bils, two largest water-bodies of that area. It is seen that Kuji bil became an important juncture from the time of Dāmodara Ātā, which connects the four Narowā sattras, Kuji, Bardowā and Bālisattra and Bhetiyāni.

The Kirtana-ghar located on the east-west direction of the ghāt that enshrines the huge guru-āsana is the main seat of attraction. The main grha is measured at 26.82 m × 14.32 m and the floor area of the manikuṭ are measured at 9.45m × 5.33 m. It houses a huge seven tired wooden altar in the centre and three idols of Viṣṇu, Varāṇīvādana and the Kṛṣṇa.

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Local people say, during Burmese invasion Kujī sattra had to bear the burn of the aggression and atrocities of the invaders. During that period of crisis, one Mānikī Aikon, a beautiful maiden of the sattra was forcibly taken away and some metal artefacts engraved in the Simhaduār (main-door) were whisked away and damaged by the invaders. Some early inhabitants of nearby Katahguri and Ūktukī villages settled on the bank of Šilpukhuri came into the fold of Vaiśavism under the influence of gosāins of the Kujī sattra. However, after a short period, almost all the villagers surrounding the nām-ghar were died of an epidemic (Cholera) broke out in 1930-35 A.D. and the rest of them deserted the site. Frustrated at this; Basugosāin, the 10th seating Adhikāra who allowed them raising a nām-ghar threw away the worshipping Viṣṇu- idol into a deep well. In 1924 A.D when Dutta Baruah visited the sattra and the drew a sketch of the old Bhūyān-bhei, Basu gosāin extended all possible help in identifying the old traces of the Bhūyāns spread over an inaccessible locations spread over the southern bank of Brahmaputra.

From the above discussion, we may draw a relative diagram of the area wherein Kuji sattra of the Narowā group was founded and developed.

345. A historic tank of that area
Diagram of Narowā Kuji Sattra

INDEX

1. Tree
2. Monikut
3. Kuji Beel
4. Tank
5. Sattradhikar's House
6. Toran
7. Bhakatar Boha
8. Kirtan Ghar
9. Inner Road
10. PWD Road
11. Cenceni āmtolar ghāt

Prepared by the investigator for the study of the Narowā group of sattras and their contribution towards neo-Vaiñavite movement of Assam

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8. Rāmpur-Narowā

Coming to Bardowā from their earliest abode Vāsudevar Thāēn of Lakshimpur, Rāmadeva instead of staying at Bardowā proper founded a new abbot on the bank of rā-suti, a stream of Brahmaputra and lived there for 8 years. The new sattra house is said to have derived its name and origin from its founder Rāmadeva. Rāmcandra Ātā of Narowā had two wives, and from his second wife six sons were born but excepting one, all of them died prematurely. From the descendants of his second son two families were emerged. Rāmacandra died at Narowā on the fourth bright moon on the month of āṣūra in A.D. 1752. With a view to claiming the right ship of Bardowā, Rāmadeva left Lakshimpur and later on founded a new sattra in between Bardowā and Bālisattra on the right bank of Rā-suti, a small dried up stream of Brahmaputra in A.D 1799. During the time of his migration from eastern Assam, Rāmdeva emerged as the most influential Adhikārs of the sattra group who received three important land grants and extensive patronize from the Ahom king Lakshmi Śīrha. Rāmdeva breathed his last in 1802 A.D. While visiting the area Dutta Baruah might have saw the plinth of Rāmpur on the Tembuwāni Cāpāri and put it in the sketch map as the 17th plinth. The present site of the sattra is only 2.5 km north of Bardowā. During his life time, Rāmdeva installed his son Bhadradeva alias Jadudeva at the sattra who used to live at Rāmpur in early years and conducted the affairs of two sattras, Rāmpur and Bardowā-Narowā (bar-hissā) together. During his time, he paid much attention in setting the house of Narowā and strengthened its administrative machinery by appointing different functionaries and furtherance of ‘ek-śaraṇa nāṃdharma’. During his Adhikārship a

346 K.D. Goswami (ed.), GCK, p.48
347 Dutta Baruah, PKKSI, p.197
348 Ibid. p 40
good number of people came to Bardowā from different areas irrespective of their caste high or low and formed an egalitarian society around Rāmpur in 19th century. A survey (revenue) map of the Colonial period clearly reveals how Rāmpur constitutes with a big sattra mouja in the erstwhile Nagaon district in British era. This map indicates the demarcation of the mouja and indicates the exact location of the sattra, which is bounded by two other sattra moujas, Bālisattra and Doomdomiyā to its north and Ālitangaṇī (an old revenue mouja) in the east. The western boundary of the sattra (calls as mouja) touches Dihing mouja and southern side bounds by Bardowā sattra, which are clearly drawn in the map as a hissā or share of Bhadradeva mahanta.

In the wake of the Burmese invasion, Rāmpur was razed to ground. It is said; the Burmese hordes created a reign of terror in the entire Bardowā area when panic-stricken villagers had to leave Rāmpur sattra village taking shelter in nearby areas. According to local sources, one Gandhiyā gāyan, the nām-laguā (name-leader) of the sattra was brutally killed by some Burmese soldiers at Barālimorā near a phettāšimalu tree while he was coming alone to Bardowā from Rāmpur. The sources further claim that Bhadradeva the presiding Adhikāra of the sattra was left undisturbed as the invaders saw him worshipping and mediating lonely at the sattra house like a sage. They believed him to be an extraordinary human being endowed with spiritual power.

349 An old Survey map, 1840-41 A.D., endorsed by Commissioner B.K. Hudson; vide Archives of Nagaon district.
350 Doomdomiyā, a nikā Sarñhali sattra is located west of the Narowā-Bālisattra under the area of old Dihing mouja of Nagaon district.
351 The survey map of the Colonial period (1840-1841) also provides the boundaries of the three sattra moujas, Rāmpur, Bardowā and Doomdomiyā.
352 S. N. Devgoswami, Nātyakar Lakṣmiḍeva: Jivan āru kṛiti, p.19
353 Sañkardeva Uddha addha purusar varśāvali (Ms.)
354 S. N. Devgoswami, op. cit., p 19
Showing his deep anguish and dismay for this barbarism, Bhadradeva gave up the habit of taking meal and used to live rest of his life only on rice-powder (pithā-gūrī) following the invasion. His name is written as Bhodrokant, (wrong insertion), an officer of Batadraba sattra (2nd share) when the circle was created under the Mehal Lakheraj. His son Lakṣmīdeva’s (Lackeedeo Mohunt) name also appear in the same list of officers appointed against the circle of Rāmpur (Rāmpoor Sustro) in Nowgong district. It can be gleaned from the said account that during the Adhikaraship of Bhadradeva and Lakṣmīdeva the original land grant of Bardowā and Narowā sattra got revoked. Bhadradeva is also known as a bāksīddha puruṣa or a fortune teller in the family of Narowā. He breathed his last on the Kṛṣṇa caturthi of pausa in Śaka 1761/1839 A.D. With his death descendants of the Narowā family living at Rāmpur sattra began to shatter and the prosperity of sattra went onwaning. At this sattra, Bhadradeva and Bhavani Devi’s only son Lakṣmīdeva was born in A.D. 1775. During his childhood, overall condition of the sattra was very sound with huge landed property and vast household items including herds of buffalos and a pair of elephants. At Rāmpur Lakṣmīdeva spent his early life, learnt various histrionic arts, and developed skill for creative writing. In his childhood, Hur and Supahi, two maidservants took care of him. Following the death of Bhadradeva, Lakṣmīdeva decided to leave the place and settled along some of with some old clerics at Bālisattra, the original abode of Dāmodara of the sattra. The Bhakat-mālā of Bālisattra states bhakatas and gurus are

355 Ibid
357 Ibid
358 loc. cit.
set apart at this point and Lakṣmīdeva Ātā breathed his last at Balisattra. According to some descendants of the Narowa family, Achutya the grandson of Lakṣmīdeva committed a heinous crime at Rāmpur sattra where families of some bhakatas were still living even after the migration of the families of Adhikāras. Achutya, the grandson of Lakṣmīdeva was a hot headed person and for some of his misdeeds there arose disputes among the bhakatas living around Rāmpur and Bardowā. While he prohibited a section of the bhakatas in staging a Bhāona some of them opposed his strictures. Infuriated at this violation, Ātā, said to have armed with a gun decided to kill all the bhakatas assembled on the occasion and four of them had lost their life in that bizarre incident.

This incident had made the people stunned at that time which might lead to further exodus of villagers from Rāmpur to Bālisattra, Bhetiyāni and some other nearby places. Later on, Achutya himself went to Vāsudeu Thāān at Lakshimpur and re-established the old sattra in early decades of the 20th century.

Residents of Bardowā-Bālisattra talk about how suspected new settlers in the early decades of the 20th century have encroached upon a vast tract of lands belonging to the old Rāmpur sattra. Purna Ch. Devagowami, a 10th generation descendants of Šāṅkaradeva's son Haricaran and the presiding Adhikāra of the Bardowā-Narowa in his eighties once said that some new settlers occupied land belonging to the Rāmpur sattra in the 1960.

359 Rāwana Badha nāt, (ed.) K.D. Goswami, p.27
360 'agnikāra anusari sehi Rāmpure / Bhaonārā belā bhakća gułi kari māre/.... lägi goilā hāhākāra cīkāra korī / Cāṅgūt bhakća jānā tathāte morīa lī' v.v.330-335:'Naradeva kṛta Narowā gosāin āru Bālisattra Varnśāvalī' (Ms.)
361 Times News Network, Times of India., New Delhi, April 7, 2006
thriving sattra until 1970. Thus, Rāmpur happens to be the only extinct neo-Vaiṣṇavite sattra of the Narowa group in the district of Nagaon. Epidemic like Cholera and Kalajhar were also responsible for disintegration and decadence of the once vibrant sattra. During the late decades of 20th century, heavy and rapid encroachment made by some doubtful citizens under political patronage compelled the last group of the indigenous settlers to flee for other places leaving this sattra to be extinct. The sattra is nowadays exists only in the official papers.

9. Bhetiyānī - Narowa

Lakṣmīdeva, the illustrious Adhikāra of the entire Narowa group of sattra who conducted affairs of Bardowā, Rāmpur Bālisattra, Pāṭhaūṣī and Narowā Thāān passed away in A.D. 1858. Six sons viz., Dāmdeva, Bāmdeva, Naranāth, Bholānath, Jogendra and Dhāneswar succeeded him. Earlier, Lakṣmīdeva’s eldest son Dāmdeva, died at Guwahati, when in pilgrimage and according to the prevailing tradition of heritable succession of male descendant, his grandson Harendra was installed as the Adhikāra at the Narowā Bardowā sattra in 1862 A.D. However just after the death of Lakṣmīdeva, on the question of succession to the sattra the bhakatas of Bardowā house were divided into two distinct groups under the leadership of Bāmdeva and Harendraṇarāyana. Bāmdeva, the second son of Lakṣmīdeva earlier installed the Dekā-Adhikāra of the sattra was not present at Bardowā when his father got expired. Returning back to Bardowā on the ādyā-srāddha day, Bāmdeva with the support of some bhakatas forcibly installed himself as the Adhikāra replacing Harendra.362 We find that on the strength of an order of the officiating Deputy Collector of Nagaon, Bāmdeva installed

362 An appeal filed in the Dewanī Adalat of Nagaon by Bāmdeva (Appeal no.5, 1863 A.D)
himself to be the rightful successor and the eldest living son of Lakṣmīdeva.\textsuperscript{363} Annoyed at this, one group of bhakatas and his supporters who earlier installed Harendra at the gaddi of the sattra rose in a revolt claiming his reinstallation and rights. It is said, in the month of bhādra (August) when the river was in full spate; some bhakatas after having a secret understanding with Cenehi Mahantanī, the mother of Harendranarayana ferried away her six years old son Harendra in a country boat from Bardowā-Rāmpur to Telāhī of Morigaon district. On their way to Telāhī- hideout, at different ghāts and posts the leader of the rebellious group named Gaṅgāram Soṇāri (a Goldsmith) outwitted the suspicious people by offering gold coins and ornaments. In this manner they reached Telāhī with an intention to reinstall minor Harendra to the seat of Adhikāra of Bardowā. Harendra was made to live in a duli (a round bamboo basket) by bhakatas without any meal. According to social custom of that time, he was fed only on jālpān (luncheon) for one and half years instead of regular meal by his supporters. The bhakatas who defended the cause of Harendra rose in a revolt and the mother Cenehi who worked as the regent, filed an appeal (suit no. 5/1863 A.D) in the Court of the Sub-Judge A. E. Cambel, Nowgong district on the contention that Adhikāra should be appointed as per the order of male descendent form father to son with the support of some bhakatas. As a result there arose a sharp division between the two groups. The leaders of the bhakatas who were involved in devising the conspiracy were Siva Bharalī, Ṭakaru bhakat, Becā dhobā, Durlov Deuri Sarma, Bhad Sutradhar etc. Two, one Anādar Rajkhowā and Gaṅgaram Sonāri led the conspiracy.\textsuperscript{364} Some other members were Bethāram Muktiyār, Kanāhali and Kaṇīkā Sevācalūā.

\textsuperscript{363} ibid.
\textsuperscript{364} Bhakat-mālā of Balisattra.
Later on when they failed to install Harendra, his mother shifted the family to a new location called Bheṭiyānī, in the south east of Bardowā, which became to be known as Bheṭiyānī sattrā, the first independent śākhā of the Narowā group. Having been defeated in her appeal claiming the right ship of the Adhikāra of Bardowā-Narowā Cenehī further moved to the Calcutta high court and filed a fresh appeal seeking revision of the decree passed in favour of Bāmdeva. However the Calcutta High court declared that bhakatas (Bhuggats as they calls) had no voice in the matter of succession of an Adhikāra on 19th August, 1864 A.D.at Narowā sattrā. This led to the first branching off the Narowā sattrā.

Harendra married Hemalata and became father of four sons and five daughters. His first son Narendra died without an heir. Two other sons succeeded Harendra (1855-1933) at Bheṭiyānī and Telāhī sattras were Purnendra and Rabindra.

The following genealogy of Adhikāra can be drawn:

Harendra          Hemalata (w)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dharma  Krishnananda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Present Adhikāra)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From that time onwards it is seen number of new sattras proliferated from the Narowā house either due to internal feuds between the aspirants to the headship of the sattrā or for the sake of expansion of the religion of neo-Vaiṣṇavism to newer places.
10. Talibil-Narowa

When Ramadeva Ata of Rampur went to Vasudevar Thaan, his followers formed few smaller groups and created some new sattras. Some of them went to Majgion, some settled at Lotamar dongo and some stayed in their ancestral site. During this period Bhadradeva, son of Ramadeva engaged himself into the services of re-establishing the glory and tradition of its earliest house staying at Balisattra. Naranath, the deka-Adhikara and the third son of Lakshmideva who first moved with his family from Balisattra shifted his abode to further westward and finally made his permanent abode at Dhing under the old Dhing Mouja of Nagaon district. The sattrā presumed to be founded around 1864 A.D. following a decree of Lt. A. E. Cambel passed declaring the order of succession in Narowā–Bardowā sattrā. The new sākha named Talibil as a breakaway from the Narowā Bālisattrā. After cleansing deep jungle over an area of 16.53 acre Naranath raised the new sattrā-nāmghar on the east bank of a water body called Talibil. A hand written account of the sattrā inform us that Ata built a bathing ghāṭ for the bhakats which is still known as Bhagati-ghāṭ trace of which can be seen on its east bank. He along with the first group of bhakatas toiled and cleared at least 50-60 purās of jungle for paddy cultivation. This newly raised sattrā is an important sākha or branch of the Bardowā-Narowā house. However, on the wake of menace caused by the wild animals, the sattrā had to be shifted to a few meters east. It is said, Naranath Ata, was well versed in Vedas, Upaniṣadas, Gīta and Bhāgavata and

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365. 'Naranath was appointed dekā Adhikāra of Bardowā by his father Lakṣmīdeva', this has been stated by Bāmdeva, his elder brother in the proceeding of a suit (no 5/1863 A.D.)

366. Duta Baruah, op. cit., p. 146

367. The decree came into effect from 16th September, 1863 A.D.; (Archives of the Nagaon district)

368. Information is found from an old hand note of Tilakchandra Ata.

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showed his proficiency also in writing holy scripts, recital of nāma-kīrtana. He was popularly known in the sattra circle of Bardowā as Bhāgati or Bhāgavati Āṭā for his expertise and extra ordinary merit in expounding Bhāgavata in different places. According to some old clerics and bhakatas of the sattra, Naranāth practiced Ayurveda treatment, astrology and employed some magical tricks in treatments of diseases. According to Bhakat-mālā of Bālisatra Naranāth was cremated on the bank of the Kuh of Bālisattra in presence of Ishwar Al-dharā, Bhavaram Baṇua and his three brothers, Bholanath Jogendra, Dhaneswar. His youngest son Bhavacandra retreated to Bālisattra. Naranāth was succeeded by Dharmacandra, Tilakcandra and Mahicandra as the Adhikārs of the newly built Talibil sattra. Dharmacandra is called as coṭa Bhāgavati Āṭā who had been the head pontiff for a long period of 56 years and died in 1872 A.D. He showed his proficiency in recital of religious scripts and performing arts. Tilak chandra, the eldest among the three sons of Dharmacandra, is known as bākari-gosāṅ or Ulutali gosāṅ, succeeded his father in 1928 A.D. Tilakcandra showed his expertise equally in astrology and Ayurveda treatments like his ancestors and had to his credit seven dramas, out of which we have so far identified four. Besides a preceptor of high order he was a freedom fighter of repute in Nagaon district, whose struggle some life story is rendered by Navakanta Baruah, a noted litterateur of Assam in his popular novel ‘Kapili poriya sadhu’. It is noted; the Adhikāras of monastic sattras initially remained indifferent towards the national struggle as the Colonial government adopted a policy of non-intervention in their internal affairs. In this context Tilak Āṭā was

369 It is known from a sattra source that Naranātha was an expert in practice of some mystic arts and earned reputation for the practice of Ayurvedic and herbal treatments.
370 L. Goswami, Sri Sri Talibil –Narowā sattrar itibritiya, p.50
371 Navakanata Baruah, Kapilipariya sadhu, p.p25-26
exceptional, who joined in the struggle of the Indian independence and went to jail as political prisoner. Pitambaradeva Goswami, Sattradhikar of Garmur sattra of Majuli was known for his anti British stand that inspired other sattras like Talibil-Narowa of our concern to come out for the cause of the nation.

Laities had traditionally sought out the holy man to cure illness supplemented by treatment. Likewise at Narowa-Talibil services of some Adhikaras were sought by laities to treat some illness supplemented by Ayurveda and herbal medicines. This sattra along with Bālisattra developed to be the two popular seats of astrological studies and Ayurveda treatment. Naranatha, Dharmachandra and Tilak Chandra three heads of the sattra proved their expertise and proficiency in making certain astrological calculations as well. Tilak Ātā believed to have learnt some mantras from his Mikir disciples and applied them in healing obscure diseases. Even today one can see an orchard with trees, plants and rare herbs in the courtyard of the sattra. People who lost their valuables and domestic animals also sought advice of the sattradhikārs who were largely known as expert fortune-tellers. They said to have applied some mystical art and mantras like nakh-bāsoni, bāticāloni for giving clues to the lost things.

It has been observed the pharmaceutical knowledge neither based on the Ayurvedic tradition, neither in India nor in west can medical practice always clearly distinguishes between spiritual (psychic) factors and physical ones. In fact distinction is possibly spurious in nature. In this context David M. Miller comments, ‘the medical and educational services of some monasteries today represent a more modern form of the

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372 ibid., pp.25, 26, 28 ; L. Goswami, op. cit., p.53
373 Binoy Mohan Saikia , 'Ekhan luptaprai sattrarpam khedf, DainikAsom, (an Assamese daily Guwahati) published in October, 2007, p 4
social functions traditionally associated with some ascetics. The forms have changed, but the basic content of the services remains the same.\footnote{374}

The history and origin of the oldest Jagannath temple of Dhing also owes its origin to the family of Talibil gosāins. It is said, one day Tilak Ātā; saw an old hermit with a pair of idols worshipping under a bilba tree in the old site of the sattra. The hermit was disappeared and Ātā along with some of his associates dug out the idol of Jagannatha and Subhadrā from that site. These were installed ceremonially raising a thatched temple of Lord Jagannatha in 1926 A.D. This temple cum nām-ghar of Dhing has transformed to be a central prayer site for the Assamese Hindu inhabitants living in the north east part of Nagaon district. The tradition of celebration of Doul-Utsava, rāsa-līlā, Bhāgavata recital and other activities in that area begun to attain a high degree of participation from masses and all sections of people. The family of the Talibil Narowā Adhikāras were involved conducting various rituals and customs at the sattra nāmghar and the temple till the end of the last century. The following genealogy of the sattra heads can be drawn:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{c|c}
Naranath alias Bhagavati Ātā & (1791-1872) \\
| Dharmachandra & (1851-1938) \\
| Tilakcandra & (1884-1959) \\
| Mahichandra & (----)\footnote{375}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\footnote{374}{David M. Miller, Dorothy C .Wertz, Hindu monastic life the monks and monastics of Bhubaneswar, p.3}
\footnote{375}{L. Goswami, 'Dhing Jagannath Mandir,' Amar Asom, (Assamese daily), published on December 20,Guwahati, 2006.}

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We come to have information on some other establishments known as Narowā sattras originated from the main sattras. Most of the latter group of sattras were founded by the descendants or deputies by bringing sacred flame from the main sattras of Bardowā and Vasudeu Thāān Narowā sattrā in the latter half of the 19th and 20th century. When Harendranārāyana took his shelter at Telāhi village some bhakatas of the village established a sakhā sattrā called Telāhi-Narowā. When the rights of Jogendra, the fifth son of Lakṣmīdeva was denied at Bardowā-Narowā he also established a separate branch at Barangābāri-Narowā in Morigaon. From Vāsudeu Thāān-Narowā sattrā two new branches Kāsikātā Vāsudeu Thāān (1929) and Torājuli Vāsudeu Thāān were sprung up in late 20th century. The founder of the first one Śivacandra Devgoswamī, the third son of Achutyadeva. His son Muktināth Devagoswami also set up another branch at at Pathāli pāhār (Torājuli Vāsudeu Thāān) in North Lakshimpur in A.D. 1958. At Jajori village in Nagaon district one Lambodar, an offspring of the Bardowā Narowā family, founded another branch of the sattrā at a much latter time.

Thus, the original Narowā sattrā have been bifurcated and some new branches emerged in undivided Nagaon and Lakshimpur district at the latter half of the 20th century.

The influence of neo-Vaiṣṇavite sattras in Nowgong district under the Colonial period was very high. Dr. Miles Bronson, an American Baptist missionary once expressed his regret that he could not even succeeded in converting a single Hindu into Christianity within two years. By writing two letters in the Magazine of American Baptists Missionary, he expressed his hopelessness and said that it happened due to
untiring influence of some *gosāins* and *mahantas*. The above discussion reveals the existence and dominance of some neo-Vaiṣṇavite *sattras* upon contemporary Assamese society, which includes the Narowā group of *sattras* of Bardowā, which destined to play a reasonably important role in checking the activities of the powerful Christian missionaries.

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376. M. Neog, *Bronson's prasatri, Dr. Miles Bronson mītu śata vārṣiki*, November 9, Guwahati, 1983 (139)