CHAPTER-IV

Management of the sattras

The first stage for sattra naturally began with Śaṅkaradeva, but in his times the religious association organised by him did not take the shape of a regular institution of a permanent nature.\(^{377}\) Material prosperity began to govern a major aspect of sattr\(\text{y}^{\text{ā}}\) way life only after passing away of the early stalwarts of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva, Dāmodardeva and Harideva. Some of the biographical literatures give a definite account to the part played by Mādhavadeva and Dāmodardeva in shaping the structural features of the sattra institutions after Śaṅkaradeva. The sattra institution under them took a monastic turn where prayer hall was tastefully decorated with various designs and lines of huts for celibates were properly arranged. Monastic sattra is a highly developed one with a distinct community life governed by its own rules and regulations. Final phase of evolution and improvement of organizational side of the sattra attained with the extension of royal patronage beginning to pour in the second half of the 17th century which placed sattras in a sound economic footings.

1. Property

The Hindu Religious endowment means all property belonging to or given to or endowed for the support of Temple or endowed therewith of any other religious charity and includes the institutions concerned and premises thereof and also all properties used for the purpose or benefit of the institutions and includes all properties acquired from

\(^{377}\) S.N. Sarma, NVMSIA, p.145
the income of the endowed property. Properties of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite satras of our concern may be divided broadly into two groups, movable and immovable. Each sattra has its own immovable properties like Kirtana-ghar, nām-ghar or sattra grha, bhakata-bohās and huge quantity of cultivable landed property and water-bodies etc. Movable properties include various types of Sūkhāsanas, worshipping and decorative images, idols, utensils, musical instruments and gifted articles received from Kings, nobles and laities and disciples. Sattras are also found with various persons assigned to various services for its management and smooth running of day to day activities. Majority of sattras are in possession of revenue free (Lākherāj) or half-revenue (nisf-kherāj) land settled by the Ahom Kings and royal officers. Like temples, sattra possesses three classes of lands viz., Brahmottara, Devottara and Nānkar. These grants were usually made in the name of the worshipping image of the sattra who owns all lands and possessions of the sattra, the Adhikāra being the trustee only. The sattra derives its income from two main sources: i) Land and ii) Dues of disciples or guru-kar.

After initiation, a disciple is required to pay annual dues (kar). The Adhikāra is also entitled to get on the death of the disciples to the most of valuable of the articles offered in the name of a dead disciple at the first srāddha ceremony, generally bell metal and copper dishes, bowls etc.378

S. N. Sarma pointed out existence of three types of ownership

i. Ownership vested in the idol of the sattra

ii. Ownership vested in the community of devotees

iii. Family ownership.

378 Andrie Cantile, The Assamese, p.164
A total of five Copper plates of the Narowā sattras are so far found during our study in different places. Two (C.P-II and C.P-III) are now preserved in the archives of the Assam State Museum and the remaining three (C.P-I, C.P -IV, C.P-V) are kept in respective sattra repositories. A scrutiny of these plates shows three types of endowments are attached to the sattras. The earliest inscription referring to land grant belongs to the period of Śiva Sinhā. In the Śaka year 1656 (1736 A.D) and it was given to Rāmacandra mahājana, the third presiding Adhikāra of the sattra. This is presumed to be the first charter of its kind granted to a Puruṣa Samhati sattra (Narowā sattra) under the Ahom rule. It allotted 2500 purās of Devottar bhumi of two classes i.e. faringāti and bhīṭā māṭī in the name of the worshipping idol Śrī Śrī Vāsudeva in Lakṣhimpur. Altogether 72 servitors were attached with it. It records the four boundaries of the sattra. We have come across the second Copperplate of the Narowā sattra entitled land and servitor grant of Lakṣmi Simha, Śaka 1691/1769 A.D. measuring at 33.6 cm. × 16.2 cm; which is now preserved at the Assam State Museum.

After a careful scrutiny and close observation, we could ascertain the year of its issuing as Śaka 1769; corresponding to Śaka 1694, January 18 of A.D 1769. It is assumed that the term ‘nātimānuḥ’ seems to be referring to either Śrī Rāmadeva mahājana or some of his deputies on whom the grant was made. We propose to endorse it as the Land and servitor grant of Ālipukhuri since it is the only C.P. wherein the birthplace of Śaṅkaradeva (Ālipukhuri) and the boundary is recorded clearly.379 The third Copper plate grant of Narowā sattra (Śaka, 1693/ A.D.1771) is equally important

379 B. Hazarika, 'Some Copper plate grants of Narowā sattra', NEIHA proceeding, 2009, pp 82-92
which contains the boundaries of two sattras with a long list of thirty servitors belonging to people of different classes.

The fourth C.P. issued to Rāmadeva mahājana in Śaka 1694 /1772 A.D needs to be highlighted separately as the Narowā sattra received huge royal endowments in this year. This plate entitled ‘Pāṭbāusi sattra’, Barpeṭā, Kāmarūpa’ appears to be the biggest in size (51 cm × 29 cm) which contains a list of 98 servitors. The shared right-ship of Pāṭbāusi, the principal shrine of Śaṅkaradeva was accrued to the Narowā mahantas by the order of the reigning king Lakshmi Sīrīha.\(^{380}\)

We have come across the last charter issued in 1799 A.D/Śaka1721 by Kamaleswar Sīrīha (1795-1810 A.D) that appears to be a most significant judicial record for settling disputed property rights of neo-Vaiṣṇavite sattras under the Ahom rule. This charter settled a long drawn dispute planted between the lines of Govindapriyā, (Narowā-vaiḥśa) and the line of Subhadrā (Salaguri vaiḥśa) when the right ship of the nām-ghar at Bardowā reached its climax.\(^{381}\) This charter contains the minutes of the proceedings of the bifurcation of the Bardowā Thāan, a permanent fait accompli.

We have so far come across three types of land endowments in the Narowā group of sattras i.e. Devottar, Brahmottar and Dharmottar. From the recording of the C.P-I and C.P-III the names of the two presiding deities of the Narowā sattra have been found as Śrī Śrī Vāṣudeva and Vaikunṭhandha on whom the entire ownership of the

\(^{380}\) M. Neog (ed.), PS, p.172, vide plate no. 80, The C.P. is now preserved at Narowā-Bālisattra
\(^{381}\) Ibid., pp.182-183
sattras vested.\textsuperscript{382} In the second charter granted by Lakshmí Sinha, the name of the idol is clearly stated as Sri \textit{Vaikunthanātha}.\textsuperscript{383} Although the grant was accorded in the name of the worshipping idol, the Adhikārs the formal head of the sattrā decides all-important issues concerning its properties.

The third mode of ownership called as family ownership which is also prevalent in the sattrā, which is called heritable. The scion of the Narowa Varṇa invariably and traditionally seems to hold the Adhikārship of the sattrā of their predecessors; all movable and immovable properties are possessed by him, the new Adhikāra.

For a detailed account of the landed property of the Narowa sattras, five Copper plate grants, archival documents, revenue record of A. J. F. Mills and some relevant papers have been compared and consulted. After proper verification and analysis of data the following two appendices (tables) are prepared.

1) Landed property of Narowa sattras under Ahom rule\textsuperscript{384}

2) A list of Immovable property of the Narowa sattras in Colonial period is drawn from the report of A. J. M. Mills and other relevant sources\textsuperscript{385}

An archival document entitled ‘\textit{Devottar, Brahottar and Dharmottar bhumi\textit{Thikanā register of 1840-41}’ furnishes some information on status of the landed

\textsuperscript{382} It is evident from the line no.6 the grant was offered to Rāmacandra mahājana, a descendant of Śri Śri Śankaradeva for worshipping of Śri Śri Vāsudeva in Lakshimpur; which runs as ‘Lakhimpurar Śrī Śrī Vāsudeva caraṇa pujārthe Śrī Śrī Śankaradevar Varṇādhara Śrī Rāmadeva mahājanae …’

\textsuperscript{383} The grant was endowed to Rāmadeva mahajana of Narowa sattrā for the worshipping of Vaikunthanātha- (\textit{eta dwibaranang punyārthe Śrī Vaikunthanātha deva (ore) …} vide; mahjar book (no.189) preserved in the record room of the Deputy Commissioner, Kāmrup district

\textsuperscript{384} For details please see appendix-P

\textsuperscript{385} For details see appendix-C

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property of Narowā sattra in the beginning of the Colonial rule in Nagaon district. It contains a list of different sattras, their Lākherāj holdings, names of the grantees, and record of confiscation of landed property etc. From this record we find the name of Lakṣmīdeva (it read as Lackeedeo Mahanta) the presiding Adhikāra of the Bardowā-Narowā and Rāmpur sattra at that time. Another such source reveals that ownership was vested with the Narowā Adhikārs (appear in SL.1 and 4). On making a comparative analysis of the data of archival sources of the contemporary time a striking difference has been noticed. It clearly reveals that the land holding of the sattra drastically got reduced to a mere figure of 759 Bighās in 1854 A.D. Landed property of the sattras (1847 A.D) was found as 19,756 Bighās. The second share of Bhadrakānta or the share pertains to Narowā is found to have altered (appear 8,499 Bighās in 1854 A.D). At present landed property of the Narowā-Bardowā in the main sattra area is found as 527-bighā, 3-kathā, and 12- Lechā. We have gleaned from another record that the Bardowā-Narowā was earlier allowed to retain 11,688 Bighās of cultivable land against 140 numbers of bhakatas in that year. It reveals that the original order of Hopkinson disapproving the Lā-kherāj grant might have come under revision. The record seeks to mean that a section of bhakatas through their appeal got back some of their pre-colonial privileges, which came into effect on March 12, 1847 A.D. It shows Bardowā, Rāmpur and Bālisattra were allowed to retain a total of 298, 429 Bighās and

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386 See Appendix-C for a recording of the landed property of four Narowā sattras included in the 'Report on the Province of Assam' by A.J.M. Mills
387 The survey was conducted in 1847 A.D.
388 Vide a suit dated 9th May, 1847 A.D, filed in the sub judge Court of Nowgong district
389 Henry Hopkinson was the agent to the Governor general of North East Frontier

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101 purās of Lākherāj lands in that year. One specific column of the register has further furnishes that the huge grant of the Ahom King, Lakshmi Sinha (18,836 Bigha or 4709 acre) a total of 7,168 Bighās has been placed under confiscation by the order of the Henry Hopkinson. It seems the British administrator Captain Rutherford divided the lands of Nowgong, Koliabar and Mikirpoor into mouzhas and villages, and made a Ryotware settlement taking engagements from the ryots to pay rent for the quantity of land in the occupation of each; to each village he appointed a Bissoah to collect the rent from the ryots who was made responsible for only what he collected, and for this he was remunerated with a commission of twelve rupees and two amnas on the collections in 1832-33 A.D. In 1840-41 three revenue officials Mouzahdar, Khagottee and Teklah were appointed for this purpose when land tax was imposed for the first time in five mahalas in Nowgong district. A new fiscal arrangement emerged with the creation of some Lākherāj Mehals where Satrādhikāras were appointed as Bissoah or Lakherajdar. This account reveals that the four Adhikāras functioning at the Narowā sattras came under the direct control of the Colonial administration. Total Population in these circles (sattras) is estimated at 1,705 and the gross rent of revenue stands as 467 takkā, 36 annā, and 28 paisā. We have derived a brief account of land revenue of Narowā sattras in late-Colonial period. Under this system, the Adhikāra of Narowā Kuji sattrā realizes the rent at sarkari rates, which was two anna at local rates per rupees in

390 An undated revenue paper contains an order of the officiating Commissioner is now preserved at the Archives of Nagaon district.
391 Some of the sattras which possesses a huge amount of landed property are Āuniāti (21,600 acre), Garmur (30,000 purā under Ahom period), Benganāti (2,500 acre) Dakhsinpat (10,400 acre), Kamalābāri (5,900 acre) source: A.J.F. Mills report on the province of Assam, 1853
392 Mills Report, op. cit., p.449
393 ibid, p.450
394 ibid., pp.,486-487

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the prevailing period. Under this system the bhakatas are exempted from paying the rent and they were required to render personal services in the sattra nām-ghar.\textsuperscript{395} For fiscal purpose Nagaon district was divided in Colonial period into 127 separate collections of villages (parganās). Names of the two Narowā sattras viz., Narowā Batadrabā (Bar-hissā) and Narowā-Kujī are enlisted in Sl. no 20 and 80 respectively.\textsuperscript{396}

In last decade of 19\textsuperscript{th} Century Bāmdeva Mahanta (Goswami), the Adhikāra of Bardowā Narowā sattra and the second son of Laksṁideva appointed three muktears (attorney) namely Bhagirath Dev Deka mahnta (his son), Guniram Kakati and Jogai Deka Hazarika in September 15, 1896 A.D. It is stated that they were assigned with the power of attorney to attend different district courts to look into sattra property related cases of Narowā group sattras lodged under Dibrugarh, Nowgong and Lakshimpur districts at that period. It seems that property related disputes of the Narowā group of sattras have reached its climax at the prevailing time.\textsuperscript{397}

Most of the royal endowments are found endowed in the name of the two worshipping idols, Śri Śri Vāsudeu and Śri Śri Vaikunṭhanātha. It is said, during the Burmese invasion, sattras existed in Lakshimpur district was badly affected when the Adhikāra, along with a group of bhakatas and their family members had to flee for the sake of life and property. During this period of turmoil and unrest most of the families residing at the Narowā sattra in Lakshimpur district migrated to Bardowā and Bālisattra along with the movable artefacts attached in the name of the sattra statues including the venerated Vāsudeva mahāprasṭhar. Thus from 19\textsuperscript{th} century onwards, Bālisattra became the main centre and entry point to Bardowā via water way of Brahmaputra and

\textsuperscript{395} Village note of the Kuji sattra
\textsuperscript{396} W.W. Hunter , A Statistical account of Assam, pp. 217-218
\textsuperscript{397} See plates 31 and 32 for details of appointment of muktears during the time of Bāmdeva.

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transformed into a transition point for reaching all other Narowā sattras in central Assam.

Out of the long list of royal endowments of the Narowā group of sattras a pair of engraved Bell metal gong called Kāh of 480 tolas (4.66 k.g.) gifted by one Mahidhar Burhagohain in 1717 Śaka (A.D 1795) appears to be most significant artefact. The Tungkhungiyā Buranjī, narrates Gaurinath Sīrīha’s visit to Narowā sattra in 1717 Śaka. During this visit, Mahidhar Burhagohain who accompanied the King offered the big gong seeking blessing of the holy centre for relief from diseases. However, some accounts reveal that at the time of offering the gift Purnānanda was the Burhagohain of Ahoms who later went to Bardowā after four years to settle the long standing dispute of the sattra in A.D. 1799. Another official Phalāikhya Rāidongiyā Phukan bestowed a pair of metal Bell in the holy feet of the worshipping idol ‘Vaikunthanātha’ of the Narowā sattra in A.D1738. A long-handled canon that is now preserved at Bālisattra is another important artefact that might be a gift of some nobles for the protection of the sattra and sanctity of its presiding deity Vāsudeva.

398 Text inscribed in the Bar-Kāh or big Gong runs as:
‘Narowākhasya Satrāyasa Śrīmat Kirtana gehakang Šärīrārogyā Kāmentasmūi āyusa bṛdhāye//
Śrī Mahidhamāmmam bai Daṭṭ朗g Burhā goḥāīnyana
Ramya bādyang Kangsang Šake sapta Bhumālākye
Āsīnyāng paunya masyāncā vāsar dwij rājakake
manyatta Ṣitadhiṅkaṅca catu tolokaṁ’
Bara Kafkha (modern Bar-Kāh) is usually made of hammered malleable metal, flat or approximately flat in form and is stuck by hand with a soft mallet. Vide; B.K. Baruah, A Cultural History of Assam, Appendix-III
399 PS, op. cit., p.177
400 ibid.
401 A Phukan in charge of the Rāidongiyā-mel of the Ahom queens

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Among various genres of literary and religious works namely *Bhāgavata*, *Nāmghoṣā*, *Rājasuya Yanga*, *Śrī Rāmacandra nāṭak*, *Ratrīvaṇa*, *Haricandra Upākhyāna*, *Bṛgīta*, *Bhakti Ratnakara*, *Adī Kanda Rāmayana*, *guru-carit*, *Harivamsa puranar sar*, *Ṭhākur Āṭār carit*, *Curdharā pimparā gusawā nat*, *Bhāgvatā*,(XII book), *Loṅkākāṇḍa*, *(Rāmayana)*, *Uttara Kāṇḍa (Rāmāyaṇa)*, *Shyamanata Harana Nāta*, *Vāmsavāoṭī pustak* were traditionally preserved at the Bardowā sattra Kirtana-ghar. At Narowā Bālisattra some other works of the *Adhikāras* namely *Abhinanya vadha nāt*, *Rāwana Baddha nāt*, *Balichalan nāt*, *Śita harana nāt*, *Śhyamanta haran nāt*, *Vīrat Parva nāt*, *Tarani Sen Vadha*, *Sudhmva Vadha*, *Trīsāṅkur Swargalav*, *Rajasuyā Yanga nāt*, *Śri Śrī Śaṅkaradevar Vāmsavāoṭī*, *Nyṛṣṭhā yātrā nāt* along with the illustrated *Citra Bhāgavata (ādi daśam)* were found in the possession of Asit Chandra Goswami, and Kandarpa Goswami of the *sattra* in fifties of the last century. All these properties are now at the custody of the management committee of the *sattra*.

However the most acclaimed and venerated property of the Narowā *sattra* is the Vāsudeva idol which owes its origin to the time of the Chutiya Kings. This statue became an integral part of the Narowā *sattra* from the time of Dāmodara when he founded the earliest *sattra* on the bank of Suvarnisiri. S. N. Sarma opines that the Puruṣa sarīhati lays special emphasis on *nāma*, however it does not deny the necessity of image worship and observance of some Brāhmaṇical rites as well. However the rites observe and associated with the statue are simple and not so prominent. Some rites and

402. Monikanta Goswami, Deuri of Bardowā *sattra* displayed these scriptures to one scholar Dandi Ram Dutta in A.D 1957.
404 S.N. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 132
customs associated with worshipping of the Vāsudeva are continued as before at the Vāsudeva Thāān -Narowā sattra.

During the period of our on-going study some remains of an old statue was found from an abandoned plinth of namdharma of Narowā Bālisattra, called 'purā-bheft', located 6 m south of the present Kīrtana-ghar on 13th February 2009. An exasperating restoration work carried out by piecing the three hundred odd stone pieces finally brought it back to a standing Viśṇu statue. After restoration it is measured at 1.22 m. It appears that the restored Vāsudeva-Viśṇu statue holds a mace in the upper left, a full blown lotus in the lower right, discuss in the upper right and with abahya-mudrā in the lower right hand is considered to be the tallest one discovered so far from any neo-Vaiṣṇavite satras of Assam. With makarika and Vyālatorana, at the apex or Kirtimukhā, Lakshmī and Sarasvatī, the two permanent consorts of god on its left and right respectively the image exhibits some unique features of a highly acclaimed Viṣṇu. Scholars and experts who visited the site of its recovery like R.D. Choudhury, N. D. Choudhary, N. Kalita, G. Adhikary and K.D. Goswami opine the statue to be dated back to the period of 10th -12th century A.D. and its restoration was challenging and stupendous. The elegantly carved Viṣṇu image is of iconographic importance would throw some light on undiscovered facts of the Narowā group of sattras in particular and

405 A report has informed us that the old prayer house of the sattra was gutted in a fire more than 150 years ago; Sattriya Sahskritir Samāroha(ed.), p.7
406 Restoration work began at the recovery site from 13-05-09 and ended on 20-05-09. The procedures were conducted by the present investigator and Bijoy Bhuyan, a trained restorer from New Delhi. This drew attention of scholars and reported widely in various print and electronic Medias; The Assam Tribune, 22nd February, Vol. 71, no. 51, p.1, 2009; The Sentinel, June 21, p.7, July 15, 2009.

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the later history of neo-Vaiśnavite movement, practice of worshipping of Viṣṇu in Assam in general.

From the textures of the statue and examining available reference to its earliest usages we may claim it to be the same statue once worshipped in the Vāsudeu Thāān in the erstwhile Habung area that too owes legendary origin from the time of ‘Kālikā purāṇa’. In neo-Vaiśnavite sattra circle it is known as Vāsudeu or Vāsudeva instead of Viṣṇu. A small literacy account 407 of Bālisattra points out that Rāmadeva, grandson of Dāmodara Ātā and the entire family of the Narowā gosāins left Lakshimpur and brought the statue during the Burmese invasion. Later on it was installed first at Rāmpur sattra in the last decades of 18th century. According to a sattra tradition, Bhadradeva Ātā of Rāmpur brought it to Bālisattra and continued its worshiping as before for some years. As has been supplemented by the same source 408 a devastating fire broke out at the sattra sometimes 150 years back, razed the statue, which was burnt to pieces and buried under soil. In early decades of 20th century when Achutyananda 409 went to Vāsudeu Thāān, he built another replica of it and reinstalled it at the new sattra started its worshipping once again. Our finding has ascertained the present statue of Vāsudeva at Narowa Vāsudeu Thāān is of a later origin. In its daily worshipping the eight syllables vija mantra ‘Om namo bhāgavate Vāsudevāya’ of the Pāncaratra days has been traditionally uttered.410

407 Presidential report, Sattriya Saṁskṛiti Sarāḥ, Bālisattra, 522 Saṁkarābdha, p.7
408 ibid
409 Details of early life Achutyananda and his activities has been described in Ch. III, pp.111-112
410 Informant : Durlav Ch. Devgoswami (60), the present Dekā Adhikāra of the sattra who performs daily worshipping (nitttya pujā) of Vāsudeva.

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2. Relics and rituals

A relic\textsuperscript{411} is an object or a personal item of religious significance preserved as a tangible memorial. Relics are an important aspect of some forms of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Shamanism, and many other religions. The word relic comes from the Latin reliquiae, meaning ‘remains’ or ‘something left behind’ (the same root as relinquish). A reliquary is a shrine that houses one or more religious relics. Since the beginning of religious history, individuals have seen relics as a way to come closer to the saints and thus form a closer bond with God. Vaisānavas often took pilgrimages to shrines of their saints and monasteries from the beginning of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. The concept of physical proximity to the ‘holy’ (tombs of saints or their personal objects) was considered extremely important after passing away of the earliest preceptors. Instead of having to travel hundreds of miles to become near to a venerated place, one could venerate the relics of the saints within one’s own area.

In neo-Vaisānavism, Barpētā, Sundarīdiyā and Pāṭbaūśī are called as relic shrines where some of the articles once used by Śaṅkara, Mādhavadeva and Dāmodara in their daily lifetime. M. Neog writes that relic worship in the neo-Vaisānavite monasteries is of a mild type, having for its purpose the preservation of certain things in the preceptors use as objects of veneration.\textsuperscript{412} The practice of relic worship however came into vogue after the death of Mādhavadeva and Śaṅkaradeva.

\textsuperscript{411} Macmillan English Dictionary, (Oxford, 2002) defines relics as a portion of the body of a saint, martyr or other holy person or some article associated with him or her anything with very sacred associations often regarded as possessing miraculous properties preserved as an object of religious veneration.

\textsuperscript{412} M. Neog, SHT., p.322
The first reference of some holy relics associated with Narowā sattra has been dates back to the time of Caturbhuja Thākur. Bhakat-mālā, a literary work found at Narowā-Bālisattra, describes, while Dāmodara Ātā was installed Adhikāra at Viṣṇupur sattra by Caturbhuja Thākur, a murtī (statue), a copy of Bhāgavata and some venerated articles were ceremonially handed over to him.413 These relics are now seen preserved at Bardowā, Bālisattra and BhetiyanT, three Narowā sattras. It is said that earlier when Śaṅkaradeva was leaving Bardowā for Eastern Assam, he kept two ‘pādaśilās’ under cover of earth and another was left similarly at Gaṅgmāu.414 When Dāmodara and Āi Kanakalatā came to Bardowā they went on searching these relics. It is widely believed in Vaiṣṇavite tradition that Kanakalatā learnt about the venerated and traditional relics from her great-grandmother in law Kālindī Āi while she was staying at Viṣṇupur. She also received some indications from Lilāwatī, the wife of then Braphukan Tāṃgu at Guwahatī in finding out the land mark called ‘pādaśilā’, buried somewhere under the earth on the bank of the ‘Ākāśī gangā’ at Bardowā. It is said the unearthing of the ‘pādaśilās’ had signalled the completion of the entire process of reclamation. Soon after construction of the Kirtana-ghar, Dāmodara installed the ‘pādaśilā’ in a separate sacred house 415 and from that time onwards this most revered reliquary enshrines the monastery. Later on two separate houses were constructed to display these relics when Bardowā-Thāān got bifurcated between the scions of the Narowā and Salaguri in A.D. 1799. It is said, on coming to Bardowā, Dāmodara and his associate unearthed three

413 Bhakat-mālā; ‘Sattra sabhā baśju jata bhakṭa Bhāgavata murtī Dāmodara hate sabe diḷā...’; TC., v.428, meaning he handed over all the belongings including sattra, Bhāgavata, bhakatas and statue to Dāmodara.
415 A shrine where relics are kept is called reliquary, vide ; Western Universal Dictionary
Bombay, 1970

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different ‘padasilas’. They are believed to have meant and used for purposes like pān (drink), bhojan (meal) and śāstra-racanā (script writing) during the time of Śaṅkaradeva. Now two such items are found preserved at Bardowā and at Bhetiyānī-Narowā sattrā.\footnote{Dutta Baruah, *PKKS/\textit{I}, p.194} Another such relic was brought from bhājī (western Assam) by Dāmodara and installed at Bālisattra. Earlier, at Kowāmorā sattrā, Anantarāyā placed one such relic, a pair of wooden foot-wear of Purośottam Ṭhākūr, the elder uncle of Dāmodara with great reverence for few minutes and finally lid it on a tray so that all his disciples could bow down to it. In Narowā Kuṭī sattrā a pair of wooden foot-wear supposed to be used earlier by Dāmodara Ātā is now seen and bhakatas respects it as most venerable article. Other important relics and articles of high venerations brought by Dāmodara to Bardowā includes particles of foot dust called gurupada-dhulā etc.\footnote{According to a tradition, a little dust of Śaṅkaradeva’s feet believed to be taken by Candarī, one maid servants enshrine in the sattrā moğiṭ as a venerable thing} All these traditional and heritable articles believed to be the household and venerated articles belonging to the early preceptors of neo-Vaišnavism which are now preserved at Bālisattra. Bālisattra happens to be only sattrā where ‘pada-dhulā’ of guru has been preserved as a venerated article.

While describing various types of relic worship, M. Neog earlier refers to some trees or herbs associated with the life of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva to be another kind of relic. We have observed that the tradition of worshipping herb or a particular tree as venerated relics of the Vaiṣṇavas at Narowā Kuṭī sattrā. While coming to Bardowā, Dāmodara planted a twig of Caraombala tree used as posts for cooking\footnote{At Kuṭī sattrā Dāmodara said to have planted three twigs of Carombola tree for cooking his daily meal.} his
meal at Kujī. When the new sattra house was raised, there these branches became prominent into a matured one, monks, and laities of the sattra started considering the offshoot of the old tree planted by Dāmodara as a most venerated item. Likewise, with the re-establishment of Bardowā the Śilikhā tree (*Terminalia citrinia*) believed to be the days of Śaṅkaradeva came into prominence and became an integral object of veneration of high order among the Vaiṣṇavas. The new tree which has now grown in the place of where the older one stood in a reclined from on the south of the *Kirtana-ghar* has been securing same respect from the devotees.

**Rituals**

Highlighting some of the features of sattras functioning at Bardowā, Andrei Cantile writes, ‘in this group (*Puruṣa-samhati*) a degree of uniformity in custom and rites have been maintained which are not found in sattras of other samhatis because of the cementing influence of Bardowā. They claim pre-eminence on the grounds of retaining the original features of Śaṅkaradeva family teaching’. 419 This *samhati* upholds the hereditary principle.

The festivals of neo-Vaiṣṇavite sattras can be divided into four classes viz., i) *tithi kendrik* or date centric 420 ii) *nakṣatra kendrik* or star centric iii) *Saṃkrānti kendrik* and iv) *māh kendrikor* or month centric. 421 Some festivals are celebrated at the Narowā sattras following a yearlong calendar beginning from the Assamese New Year on the month of *Bohag* (April-May).

419 Andrei Cantile, *The Assamese*, p 173
420 Pitambar Dev Goswami, *Sattriya Utsavar Paricai aru Tatpajya*, p.93
421 For instance i) *Tithi of Mahāpuraṣa* ii) *tithi of sattrādhiḥkāras* or *Ātās* etc. and iii) *Janmāśṭami* iv) Bihu festivals iv) *Pāñam* etc
Śaraṇ or initiation

Lakṣmīdeva of Narowā sattra in a work entitled Vaisnavāhānika prescribed a detailed account of rituals of daily (nritya), naimittikya (regular) and other devotional rites to be observed by a Vaiṣṇava. The process of initiation, the first requirement of a Vaiṣṇava neophyte is known as ‘śaraṇ-lowi’ which is not uniform in all the samhatis. With the expansion and development of sattra institution, the śaraṇ ceremony underwent a process of modification and became more and more formal in nature.\(^{422}\)

The person seeking initiation is to follow the certain codes of conduct and take a vow not to bow down to other Gods than Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa from that day onwards. A spiritual initiation rite normally implies a shepherding process, which includes the revelation of secrets usually reserved for those at the higher level of understanding.\(^{423}\) The process of initiation or ordination in neo-Vaiṣṇavism is also called ‘bhakat-howā’ and administering into it known as ‘bhakat-karowā’ or ‘śaraṇ diybā.’ śaraṇ, as indicated by various works \(^{424}\) required a guru to initiate the novice into the Vaiṣṇava fraternity. M. Neog says, Śaṅkara first introduced the three principles enumerated in the procedure as four reals in the order nām, deva and bhakat but it was Mādhavadeva who laid the emphasis that faith was to be realized from the guru \(^{425}\) alone. To place oneself absolutely under the shelter of the cāri-baṣtus a solemn oath is required and śaraṇ

\(^{422}\) S. N. Sarma, op. cit., p. 167

\(^{423}\) Merriam Webster, an encyclopaedia of Britannica refers initiation is a key component of Vaishnavism, Sant Mat, Surat Shabd Yoga and similar religious Gnostic traditions. It denotes acceptance by the Guru and also implies that disciple agrees to the requirements (such as living an ethical lifestyle, meditating, etc. See also, Empowerment (Tibetan Buddhism) and Endowment (Latter Day Saints)

\(^{424}\) Nimi-nava Siddha sanvāda, vv.217-29

\(^{425}\) In one of his earliest ‘Guru Bhaṭīmā’ (panegyric), Mādhava asserts that without a preceptor devotion can never be evoked. (‘...bina guru ca raṇe bhakṭi, mukti, rakati kabhu no-hoi...’)

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completes the process. At the time of initiation, Śaṅkara and Mādhava have to be called as the guru or dājana-guru. This process of initiation earlier incorporated into śaraṇ is called as ‘mahāpurusāk guru bolowā’ (making Mahāpurusa one’s religious preceptor). In Narowā and other three Puruṣa sanhata sattras the rite is ordained after the ceremony of sacred thread taking called utsari-lowā. The members of the family of a particular sattra are administered initiation by qualified senior preceptor of the same group of sattras. In this context, K.D. Goswami informs how the Adhikāra of Bardowā–Narowā (Purnacandra) was administered ordination by Śivendra Devgoswami, the chief dharmācārya of Bālisattra. At Narowā-Bhetiyāni sattra, Harendranārayaṇa received his ordination from the Adhikāra of Korcung sattra instead of Bardowā.

On the previous night to the day of initiation, the neophyte is made to go on fast, allowed to take only simple cooked rice with butter and has to undergo some process of purifications (prāyacitra). Next day the person seeking initiation after morning bath comes to the Kīrtana-ghar with a śarāi containing rice, areca nut and betel leaf, holy scriptures daśama Kīrtana, ghoṣa and Ratnāwolī and put the tray before the holy relics or altar as advised by the gosain. According to M. Dewan the preceptor then advice the neophyte to consider the Holy Scriptures as the originator of the religion, Śaṅkara and Mādhava followed expounding of the episode of ‘nārādiya sampadā’ contains the detailed history of śaraṇ. The novice then rendered the secret mantras (parama taṭṭava) which he vows to obey as ‘guru vākyā’ based on the four reals (cāri-
vaṣṭu) of Vaiśnava. The Narowa group uses kaya, (body) vākay, (word) mana (mind) incorporated in a guru-\textit{Carita} of Gadādhara where neophyte prostrates himself before the guru. The second part of ordination is called \textit{bhajana}. It is a part of higher grades of initiation in certain \textit{satras}.\textsuperscript{431} The Narowa group being a household \textit{sattra} may not able to adhere to the \textit{satya}\textsuperscript{432} and take the oath only by taking vow for Kāya vākaya mane. In this context, one old monk of Bāliṣattra opines that a householder \textit{bhakata} prefers to abide by the aforesaid vow as he may not be able to adhere to oath of \textit{satya} or truth. Although the term \textit{bhakata} may be used in case of ordinary or lay disciple, here the term \textit{bhakata} is meant a person who receives \textit{bhajana}. The person who after becoming a \textit{śic} or \textit{śisy}a qualifies himself with the conferment of rosary is called as \textit{bhajanīyā}. In this stage, four things contained in the sacred texts ‘\textit{Catusślokai Bhāgavata}’ viz. \textit{jnāna}, \textit{vijnāna}; \textit{tadanga} and \textit{rahasya} are explained to the devotees. The formal process ends after completion of four stages with an advice for mediation and then only the marks of \textit{tilaka}\textsuperscript{433} can be applied to his forehead.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{431} Andrie Cantile, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 160
\textsuperscript{432} \textit{Keśava Carita} (Ms.) v. 95, mentions about ‘six satyas’ of Vaiśnava
\textsuperscript{433} Mark of sandal smears on the forehead
\end{flushright}
Conferment of rosary (mālā)

Beads have long been linked with the act of prayer. Over two-thirds of the world’s population employs prayer beads as part of their religious practices. The English word bead is derived from the Anglo-Saxon words bidden (to pray) and Bede (prayer). In neo-Vaiṣṇavism, the custom of counting beads was introduced by Śaṅkaradeva when he was living at Dhuāhāta. Maniram Dewān gives a detailed list, which contained thirteen different types of trees and other materials from which rosary beads could be obtained. The rosaries of Vaiṣṇavas are of two types, kantha mālā (necklace rosary) and karamālā (hand rosary). We find reference of offering a gift of one such special rosary to the officiating Barphukan (Barbaruah) by Kanakalatā. The use of rosary that involves act of counting of beads is prevalent only in Puruṣa and Brahma Saṅhathi sattras. We find instances in Nikā Samhaties also. The Šarana sanhitā gives the names of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Govinda, Hari and mantras like ‘om namo bhagavate Vāsudevaya’, ‘om namo rama, om namo nārāyana’, for muttering over the beads of rosary. During the offering session, it is considered Brahma and taking of four names as four parts of guru or god. Touching each bead for hundred times guru put his left hand on the forehead of his śic and offers the mālā on his head by muttering four names in his ears. After the preliminaries are over guru explains the origin of the rosary and traces the process through which that particular type of rosary came to be associated

434 M. Neog, op. cit., p. 352
435 Dāmodaradev Carita, (ed.) p.327
436 S. N. Sarma, op. cit., p. 169
437 Šarana sanhitā of Śuka, (Ms.no. 458), DHAS, vide ff. 13b-14a
438 N. Saikia, (ed.), BVR., p. 65
with the samhati to which the sattra is affiliated. As a part of dakshinā for offering śaraṇ and mālā, sic offer a mild annual rent, rice, caratiya, clothings like gāmochā etc. Śaṅkaradeva prescribed amerukāmālā which is represented by the largest bead in its central joint. The muttering of the rosary must be done daily just immediately after guru-sewā or prayer. Moreover a devotee if he so desires can engage himself muttering the rosary at any time according to his convenience and also for as many times as he wishes; but he must finish the minimum number prescribed for such counting. In Vāsudeu Thāān Narowā sattra the person starts worshiping the idol after the counting of beads. The tradition of mālā-japā is one of the daily rites of the monks and a superior or an elder has initiated other clerics of sattras and of such among the laity as in to the observance.

Guru tīthies: Celebrations and festivals

In the month of Bhādra Puruṣa samhati sattras follows a fixed programme for observation of certain anniversaries and primary religious ceremony and festivals. Out of the three main functions observed in this month first and the most important is the tīthi or death anniversary of Śaṅkaradeva which falls on the day of the second bright of in the lunar month Bhādra and Mādhavadeva that falls 10th day waning half of the same. Sattras affiliated to Puruṣa-samhati also celebrate death anniversaries of the

439. S.N. Sarma, op. cit., p. 170
440. Taking śaraṇ without any offering to guru is considered to be a fault. Despite meeting Śaṅkaradeva four times Gopāla Atā could not take śaraṇ as he went bare hand. Vide; Sri Sri Gopala Atar Carita. (ed.) p. 99
441. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 353
442. Ibid., p.354
founders of the sāmhāti, Puruṣottama Ṭhākur, Caturbhujā Ṭhākur and Kanakalatā. On the anniversary of Śaṅkaradeva, they give pinda or oblation in his name. Following usual tradition Narowā, Kowāmorā Dighalī and Cāmaguri, these four sattras offer Śaṅkaradeva’s pinda and of Puruṣottama at Dighalī and Cāmaguri. Highlighting the observance of various rituals, Maniram Dewan informs that Narowā and Kowāmorā offer pinda of Caturbhujā Ṭhākur. The night preceding the tīthī, bhakatas of the sattras usually observe fast and keep on chanting nāma-kīrtana. Next day, they observe śrāddha and if it is a śrāddha day, otherwise they chant hymns from the Kīrtana followed by the recital or prasanga.

The celebration of guru-kīrtana or tīthī starts on the evening of the previous day with yorā prasanga called ‘gandh gowā’. The tīthī day falls on the Śukdā dwītyā of (2nd day of bright half of Bhādra which starts with ‘yorā prasanga’ followed by a presentation of a composition of Rāmacandra taken from his popular play ‘Kāṃsa Vadha’. In the matins called ‘burhibhakatir puwār prasanga’ sections of the na-ghoṣā of Puruṣottam Ṭhākur are sung. In the biyalir prasanga two gītas, ‘uddhava vāndhava he...’ and ‘jaya jaya sakala mangala Vāsudeam...’ are included.

On that day in the time of main prayer hour called der-pariyā prasanga includes nine ghoṣās to be followed by two more Kīrtanas. In the afternoon ‘Bhojan behār Bhāonā of Mādhavadeva is performed as din-Bhāonā (day time play) followed by two other presentations that enlivened the celebration. These include Kāṃsa vadha

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443 S. N. Sarma, op. cit., p. 187
444 Andrie Cantile, op. cit. p. 171
445 N. Saikia (ed.), op. cit., p. 61
446 Following Kīrtanas are sung 1) ‘Rāma Niranjana, Niranjana Niranjana hari ...’ 2) A hari rāma niranjana Jadupati ... 3) Bhāi bhābio rām cintio rām...
Bhāonā of Rāmacandra Atā at Bar-hissa or Narowā and Rukmīni Harana of Śaṅkaradeva at chotta-hissa or Salaguri. In the dramatic performance being observed on that occasion at Narowā–Bardowā, a total of nine ghośās are presented instead of seven or eight in the ghośā dhemāli or preliminaries of the Bhāonā.447 However, Aniruddha Carita or Sri guru Vohāvācālī provide us an information of presentation of Kālīya daman, another one act play of Śaṅkaradeva on the occasion of his death anniversary at Narowā Vāsudeu Thām.448

On the tithi of Mādhavadeva that is being observed on the day of the fifth dark moon of the same month most of the functions are remained same with the preceding one. In the prime prasānga of the day, (derpariyā prasānga) eight ghośās and two Kārtanas are sung. On that occasion, usually ‘Arjuna bhanjan’ or ‘dadhi mathan’ Bhāonā is presented at the Narowā sattras.

Death anniversary of Adhikāra

In Narowā-Bālisattra and Bardowā the death anniversary of Dāmodara is traditionally celebrated on the Śukla poāncami day in the month of Kārtik (November) with a two daylong large variety programme. On the previous day or day of gandhikā or the Adhikara’s tithi, at the derpariyā prasānga instead of uttering jaydhvani it ends with a nāma. At Bālisattra where Dāmodara Atā breathed his last, the day is considered to be a most auspicious one by the sattra clerics and laities. At Narowā-Bardowā and Kuji sattra, the death anniversary is equally celebrated in a grand way. Korcung sattra, which had been maintaining a close liaison with the Narowā group of sattras, celebrated

447 K D. Goswami, PSVFCA., p 150
448 Aniruddha Carita, v. 377
the death anniversaries of the Narowa Ātās. However, the tradition discontinued from
the tīthi day of Bhagavan Ātā of Korcuṅ g sattra from the time of Rāmacandra Ātā
following a rift of bhakatas.\textsuperscript{449} Anniversaries of the two founders of the Puruṣa Sārīhati
and some of the earliest and chief preceptors of the Narowa sattras being celebrated on
the following dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date Description</th>
<th>Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puruṣottama Thākur</td>
<td>on fourteenth dark moon of the month of Pauṣa</td>
<td>Pauṣa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caturbhuj Thākur</td>
<td>on fourth bright moon in the month of Pauṣa</td>
<td>Pauṣa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dāmodara</td>
<td>on fifth bright moon of the month of Kārtika</td>
<td>Kārtika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāmakānta</td>
<td>on first bright moon of the month of Vaiśākha</td>
<td>Vaiśākha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāmacandra</td>
<td>on fourth bright moon of the month of Āśāḍa</td>
<td>Āśāḍa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rāmadeva</td>
<td>on ninth bright moon of the month of Jáśṭha</td>
<td>Jáśṭha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhadradeva</td>
<td>on fourth dark moon of the month of Pauṣa</td>
<td>Pauṣa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakṣmīdeva</td>
<td>on second bright moon of the month of Āśāḍa</td>
<td>Āśāḍa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Jaṅmāṣṭamī}

One of the major celebrations of the month of Bhādra at Narowa sattra is
Jaṅmāṣṭamī festival. In the morning sessions of the prayer or prasaṅga, dihā-nām of
women folk, some episodes taken from Kīrtan are included in the routine. In the
forenoon session two gītas of Mādhavadeva and Gopāla Ātā and a ghoṣā from Kīrtan

\textsuperscript{449} Keśava Carita, v.407-407
\textsuperscript{450} Bhakat-mālā
are sung. In the derpariya prasanga, bhakatas sing a nāma-candra ghosā which follows eight another such ghosās and two kīrtanas extracted from the Śīsulilā part. The celebration is concluded with the performance of 'Jayma yātrā', a play composed by Gopāla Ātā.

Pāceti

Pāsati or Pāceti observed on the last day of Bhādra or generally after few days from Janmāštami is a major festival celebrated at various sattras and nām-gharas of Assam. Somehow, this domestic function being performed for the welfare of the child on the fifth day of his birth was transformed into a festival associated with Child Kṛṣṇa in the Vaiṣṇavite sattras. The peculiarity of the Pāceti traditionally held at Narowā or its allied sattras is the two separate celebration of male and female devotees are arranged. The festival is also called as bokā Yātrā or bokā bhāonā at Narowā sattra where women folk celebrated the occasion of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s birth anniversary by playfully and joyfully throwing and distributing lavaṇu singing in their assembly. At Narowā Bālisattra one can see how the illiterate gopini (woman folk) can sing flawlessly some of the difficult gītas of the famed Janma-yātrā nātt of Gopāla Ātā. According to some locals, the celebration is said to have received uniformity and observed as a major festival since the time of Lakṣmīdeva when Bālisattra became one of the major centre of neo-Vaiṣṇavite activities.

451 Drama narrates the birth of Kṛṣṇa and celebration of its rites by the womenfolk of Vraja, Kṛṣṇa’s native.
452 The festival is celebrated on the fifth day from the day of birth of Kṛṣṇa, hence it is called Pāceti (Sk. parica), vide, S. N. Sarma, op. cit., p 183
453 P. Dutta Goswami, Festivals of Assam, p.44-45

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The observation of various religious prayer services and devotional activity covering the entire month of Bhādra (August-September) comes to an end ritually with a common function called nām-sāmarā or conclusion of nāma prasāṅga. The ceremony is taken place usually in the last day of the Bhādra or in a suitable day of early weeks of the month of Āśhina. It is usually celebrated in the evening time. On that occasion in derparīyā-prasāṅga two hymns taken from Rāsalīlā chapter of Kīrtan-ghoṣā are sung at the Narowā sattra. This follows Khol prasāṅga and presentation of a gīta composed by Śaṅkaradeva. To make it an attractive one, twelve ghoṣās are specially presented accompanying by twelve different forms of dances. On that occasion, performance has been considered as a unique feature of the nāmsāmarā ceremony specifically observes at Narowā- Bālisatri. Finally, the party engaged in the concluding prayer session start running following one another headed by one nāmlagu in a crisscross way on the floor of the Kīrtana-ghar exhibiting their rhythm of wonderful foot-works. The entire function is concluded with a prasāṅgas of nāma as stated earlier.454

Phalgutsava or Doul-yātrā

Another important Vaiṣṇavite festival is Phalgutsava or Doul yātrā. This festival popularly called ‘Doul-yātrā’ has been celebrated under the joint management of Narowā and Salaguri sattras at Bardowā with great devotion and mirth by all the Vaiṣṇavas of the state on the full moon day of the month of the phālguna (Feb-March). The procession taken out on the occasion bears some similarities to the ‘Ratha yātrā’ of

Jaggañāth Puri. The previous day of the festival is called gandh or gandhikā, when preliminary purificatory rites connected with the worship of the deity of lord Kṛṣṇa and installation of the image are usually done. This follows performing of Rām-dhemāli ⁴⁵⁵ by the gāyana-bāyangas of the sattra who sings two special yātrā gītas ⁴⁵⁶ that follows the installation of the statue of Vamsi gopāla, outside the Kirtana-ghar after being taken out from maṇikuta-grha by large number of devotees assembled on that occasion. Token burning of a goat called mesh- dāh confined within a temporary shade or hut erected in the courtyard of the Kirtana-ghar is a special feature of the day.⁴⁵⁷ Prayers cited and prasaṅgas recited on the occasion are taken from Oresā -varṇana episode described in Kirtan-ghosā.⁴⁵⁸ Streets parades are arranged with the image of Vamśivadan Kṛṣṇa, which involves lay participation where the Adhikāra of both the sattras play the leading roles. The image is taken out in a grand procession on an altar on a specially built litter, it is accompanied by gāyana-bāyana, āioṭi (woman-folks) and hordes of devotees, which makes three rounds around the Doul-mandir symbolizing Kṛṣṇa’s visit to Ghuṉusā’s site. On the return march, the idol is taken into the bohās and the courtyard of the Adhikāras of the sattras when simple ritualistic worshipping like offering of dāna

⁴⁵⁵ While presenting Rām-dhemāli in front of maṇikuta the gāyana-bāyangas are refrained from wearing usual head gears called pāɣurt showing deep reverence or dāsyā bhakti, one of the essences of the cult.

⁴⁵⁶ Two special gītas called doulār gītas are rendered in the day of gandh or gandhikā at Bardowā. This gīt rendered first by Ramākanta Ātā narrates rituals observed on the eve of the Phalgutsava. They are I) ‘Karal gandha bidhi bihār gopāla / Sakala gopa gopi nandā jośodā ādi mangal kare sabe bhāla //...’  
   ii) Bahir huiya ∞e dekho soi sundara nandara bāla / hāte vangsgi mukhe hāsi galāya kadambara mālā //vide; K.D. Goswami (ed.), ‘Ṣaṅkarottar git Saṅkalana’, p.19

⁴⁵⁷ S.N. Sarma, op. cit., p.183

⁴⁵⁸ M. Neog, op. cit., p.184 quoted from the Kīrtana.
**dakṣinā and gosāin-kāpor (clothes) are made. S. N. Sarma opines that some of the aspects of the Rath-Yātrā festival have merged with the Doul yātrā in Assam.**\(^{459}\)

In certain occasions observances like Purīṇimā, Amābyasyā, ekādaśī of the month of Bhādra, a ghōṣā is sung at the forenoon prasanga. In the ekādaśī tiṃṭhi which falls on any month, one additional Kirtana is added at the deraṇīyā prasanga. On the Ambubāśī day, the nāmlaguṇā of the sattra offer prayer by playing only the cymbal accompanied with dobā, kāh, ghanṭa etc. During that period Yogān or prasāda is not served when the Pāṭhaka only reads script of Ratnāvālī.\(^{460}\)

On the first day of Bohāg Bihu or the day of samkrānti, seven kirtans are recited in the deraṇīyā prasanga. On the second day of the festival (mānuḥ Bihu) two kirtans are presented. And on the third day, which is called gosāin bihu the idol of gosāin is fanned by playing musical instruments of the sattra like dobā, kāh, ghanṭa and recitation of Kirtana. Other festivals like Rāsa-yātrā, rath Yātrā are not observed in Narōwā group of sattras. However, these are being observed in some other sattras and village nām-gharas in less conspicuous way from the last centuries only. In Vāsudeu Thāān a special melā is organized in the time of Bohāg Bihu where large numbers of devotees assemble, among them, some belonging to Nepal and Bhutan also participate.

**Investiture Ceremony**

At the investiture, ceremony when the junior Adhikārs or Dekā- Adhikāra is formally raised to the headship of sattra is considered as one of the major functions.

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\(^{459}\) S.N. Sarma narrates how a certain aspect of 'Doul Yātrā' festival of Assam merges with 'Rath Yātrā', NVMSIA., p.185

\(^{460}\) Nāmar- pātālī (Ms.) composed by Śivendra Āṭā of Narōwā-Bāḷisattra
Maniram Dewan gives detailed of the ceremony, which is called dhup or nirmalī – lowā praṭhā. For this, in Purusa samhāti sattras three holy months of Hindu calendar namely Māgh, Bohāg and Bhādra are taken. The nominee for the Adhikārship is to observe fast on the previous day of the ceremony. On the day of the ceremony, special nāma-kīrtana is held where followers of the sattra and other special invitees assemble in the Kīrtana-ghar and the novice offer a sarāi or holy offerings. As soon as preliminaries are over one senior or expert of the concerned sattra starts describing the detailed account and origin and history of the samhāti with particular references to the sattra. In this introductory speech, he narrates an account of the genealogy of the previous Adhikāras and the recording of their investiture ceremonies along with their dates of birth and death, names of other bhakatas etc. Finally, nirmalī is offered to the nominee by the gosāins of other sattras declaring him as the new Adhikāra when auspicious sattrīyā music is played. Ascending in to the seat of the new Adhikāra he usually offer a brief speech. One of the significant feature of the ceremony held at Narowā and its allied sattra is that a Bhaona of the newly appointed Adhikāra should be presented on that night. It is customary that the new Adhikāra has to prove his expertise and proficiency in sattrīyā culture on his first day of office.

While giving an account of common features of the installation ceremony M. Dewan writes-

461 S.N. Sarma, op. cit., p.187
462 K.D. Goswami, SSRR, p. 62
463 Ibid., p. 64
“When the time of the death of the Adhikārs of a sattra approaches the elderly bhakatas and officials usually make a general announcement about it. They inform the people that Adhikāra take incarnation from time to time to salvage the souls. As soon as they complete the time allotted for their earthly stay they wish to go for Vaikuntha. At the moment of departure they hand over or transfer the image of nāma-dharma to his successor. With the permission of the reigning King, Nirmālya can be brought for the new successor. When the elderly bhakatas informed if you think the time is proper you may procure nirmālya. The chief Deuri of the sattra brings out in a big sarai two special types of rosaries (head and neck). The Deuri then touches the head and neck of the dying and be blessed him to stay at heaven with the Lord serving him as sewak by uttering the names of the goddess Candra, Surya, Bāyu, Baruṇa etc. to be witness on that occasion.”

However, observances of rituals associated with the procedure are different from one another. Santāvoolī gives an account of the investiture ceremony of Dāmodara at Viṣṇupura sattra on the death anniversary of Caturbhuja. The ceremony was said to have graced by the heads of twenty-four sattras both, Bar-bārājaniyā and Saru-bārājaniyā groups. At first, the Adhikāras of the senior twelve offered nirmālya on his head followed by the juniors. It implies that the appointment of Dāmodara Ātā required to be approved by the heads of two groups. Kanakalatā appealed them to install Dāmodara

464 BVR, p. 84-85
465 Santāvoolī, v. 34-35
like that of Niranjana.\textsuperscript{466} While Kanakalata organized a similar ceremony for installing fourteen new Adhikārs, as per existing tradition Dāmodara initiated the procedure by offering the nirmālī first on Haricaran at Bardowa.\textsuperscript{467} In one such occasion at Korcung sattra Rāmacandra Ātā, Anantarāma and twelve other ācāryas were present and offered nirmālī to Bharat Ātā, the successor of Bhagiratha.\textsuperscript{468}

Apart from these six other rituals are also observed by the Kayasthas of neo-Vaiṣṇavite sattras namely Jātakarma, nāmakarana, anaprāsana, Cudākarana, Karṇavindana and vivāha.\textsuperscript{469}

3. Devotional Practice

There is no such authoritative manual wherein the devotional practice of sattras are codified and granted.\textsuperscript{470} Different types of devotional practices were introduced in the daily routine of sattras. In the religion of nāma-dharma requires emphasis in signing and reciting of holy lores. In prasāṅgas (prayer session) of earliest time to present the original Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Gita were read out and recitals of Bhaṭimās, Lilā-mālā and guṇamālā are organised in small concourses cantered on God and His deeds are known as hari prasāṅga or hari-kathā prasāṅgas. According to Kaṭhā-guru Carita, Mādhava after installation of the guru-āsana at Sundarīdiyā sattra systematized the prasāṅgas dividing into fourteen or caudha. Citing some verses from Vaikuṇṭha

\textsuperscript{466} Niranjana was the Sister in Law of Caturbhuj
\textsuperscript{467} He was the teacher of Dāmodara, Santāvaoli, v.19
\textsuperscript{468} Keśav Carita, v. 430-435
\textsuperscript{469} KGC., p. 23
\textsuperscript{470} S.N. Sarma, A few aspects of Assamese literature and Culture, p.50
Dvija, M. Neog says that Mādhava first fixed the order of the fourteen prasāṅgas. In 
Puruṣa sanhitai sattras in the months of Bhādra fourteen number of daily prasāṅgas as 
laid down by Puruṣottama Ṭhākur are observed. It is to be mentioned here Puruṣa 
sanhitai lays special emphasis on nāma-prasāṅga which is one of the four reals in the 
practice of devotion and its codifications were done by Puruṣottama and his brother 
Caturbhujā Ṭhākur.

Codification and introduction of a separate set of prasāṅga to be observed by 
devotees of the Puruṣa sanhitai has been narrated by Candracāru in Keśava Carita. 
While staying at Viṣṇupur sattrā Keśava Ātā was advised to introduce chanting of 
seven nāmas in the Morning Prayer services and to sing a ghoṣā without rendering of 
Kārtana. At the end, assembly will utter ‘cārī-jai’ without cymbals after completion of 
Nava-ghoṣā without clapping. A song describing Bardowā and its early tradition refers 
observance of four prasāṅgas. The daily services of a sattrā can primarily be divided 
into four sections starting from the early morning to night hours.

They are enumerated as such:

i) Puvār-prasāṅga (morning service)

ii) derparīyā prasāṅga (fore-noon service)

iii) biyalīr prasāṅga (afternoon service)

471 Vide vv. 291-92
472 PSVFMA., p.144
473 NVMSIA., p.132
474 ‘Cariphale cārī hāti mahā bhakta gaṇa
 cārī prasāṅga kare nāmar Kārtana’
 ‘Thāān barṇanar gī’

(171)
iv) sandhiyar prasanga (evening service)

Within these four, fourteen sub-sections or prasangas are found to have incorporated.

The Thākur-Carita narrates a picture of the earliest mode of daily activities and prayer services observed by Ramākānta Ātā of Narowā sattra like this-

‘In the time of daily prayer services he always got deeply engrossed in silent mood, when his tears flow down from his closed eyes. While singing Kirtana alone, he used to play cymbals and quite often danced with the tune by raising a special rāga named behār.\(^{475}\) Seeing these devotees assembled for congregation prayer had a vision of Kṛṣṇa playing with the gopīs. Other bhakats who joined the nāma-kīrtana also said to have elapsed their earthly desires.’

As an ardent devotee of nāma-dharma, his successor Rāmacandra Ātā who was also a fine artiste of repute equally immersed in regular nāma-kīrtana at the nām-ghar of the sattra.\(^{476}\)

It is not possible to describe the detailed of different prayer services and related customs that developed and prevailed in the entire Narowā group. Here, we shall try to give some observances that practices until today in two Narowā sattras in Nagaon district, Bardowā and Bālisatra.

Matins\(^{477}\)

\(^{475}\) Tāl dhari kato Git āponi gāonta
behār rasat tāna bhāba upajānta., TC., v. 509

\(^{476}\) H.N. Dutta Baruah, PKKS., p.196

(172)
The day begins in a Vaiśnavite sattra with the playing of Tāl or cymbal called ‘Tāl-Kobuwā Prasaṅga’, by an elderly monk. The person used to move round the Kīrtana-ghar and hāṭi (cloister of huts meant for bhakatas on the four sides of the sattra) making them alert to get up and to assemble for the prayer. The gāyana (singer), is to sing one bargī and four couplets from nāmghoṣā which started with the alarm like sound ‘bhakata bāndhava haribol, haribol haribol, haribal.’ At the end also the same holy wordings are echoed and uttered by the assembly.

**Manjira nām**

This type of prayer or nāma have been performed in Narowā sattras where the name leader use to perform it by playing a pair of small cymbal along with other singers (doharas). In this prayer session held in early hours other bhakatas support the nāmlagū only with rhythm of clapping. The small kind of cymbal used in the prayer is called manjīrā. These three services are to be performed before sunrise.

**Buḍhī bhakatir puwar Prasaṅga**

The women folk of the Narowā sattras used to perform prayer services independently and separately twice a day. On certain occasions they use to sing dihās in the midst of signing verses of Kīrtana. Sometimes they sing narrating the genealogical account from Śaṅkaradeva to the last deceased sattrādhikāra. Some dihās provides the

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477 The word 'Matins' is derived from matutinum or matutinae, respectively neuter singular (qualifying 'tempus', time) and feminine plural (qualifying 'vigiliae', vigilis) of the adjective matutinus, meaning "of or belonging to the morning". It was at first applied to the office of celebrated at dawn, but later became attached to the prayer originally offered, according to the fourth-century at cock-crow. Matins, Catholic Encyclopedia, New York: Robert Appleton Company. 1913

478 Cited in a footnote of PSVFCA, p. 170
activities of earlier gurus. Women folk also perform *Nandufsava* or *pāceti* separately at sattra *nām-ghar*. They usually assemble in the *Kirtana-ghar* for the morning session of the prayer and use to sing one *gīta* without cymbal, which follows a prasaṅga in the style of their male counterpart of the sattra. Notably, three prasaṅga have to be finished before the sun rise.

**Derpariyā-Prasaṅga**

The forenoon services are considered as the main services of the day which is called at Narowā sattra ‘*der pariyā prasaṅga*’. It begins with recital of a *gīta*, seven *ghośās* and signing of *Kīrtan* usually with striking of big cymbals (*Bhor-tāl*) by singers and his fellow bhakatas assembled at the prayer hall. With the end of the session the sacred offerings made before the altar are distributed among the bhakatas and devotees.

**Pāṭh (Upadesā):**

In this session, one section from the works like *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Ratnawalī* or any other compositions of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva having full narrations of virtues of Almighty and his activity is read out in the assembly of devotees. The person engaged in expounding the scripts is called *Pāṭhak* or *Bhaṅgati*. Sometimes instead of reading admonitions, some portions of the works of two Gurus are cited from memory. It is noteworthy that excepting Narowā *sattra* all other *sattras* of Puruṣa sarīhati use to sing the rāgas based on the words like Kṛṣṇa, Śaṅkara Hārī, Rāma.479 It is learnt that

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479 *Sāntijānate morai Cālīdhore*
*Pākhie mārile cāti*
*Mathura Katha pāri bahi name lole*
*Māhāpuruṣara nāti*

(174)
Adhikāra of the Korcong sattra replaced the wordings Kṛṣṇa-Śaṅkara. The session ends with the distributions of prasāda among the assembled bhakatas at the end.

**Afternoon services (biyalir prasaṅga)**

It begins with another session of yorā or khol prasaṅga played with drums or khol by a group of elderly gāyana bāyana in sitting position in the midst of the Kirtana-ghar. Here Kīrtān follows a couplet of duladī ghoṣā. The second part consisting of nāma-chanda, one Kirtana, two Duladī ghoṣās four other ghoṣās. This session ends with a recital from the Kirtana again.

As in earlier presentation the second session of the Āi sakalar nāma or Budhī Bhakatir biyalir nām prasaṅga continues with the same way with presentation of number of gītas, four ghoṣās, one Kirtana, two duladī ghoṣā and ends with jaya dvani and hari-dhvani.

The conclusion of the fourth sessions called Tāl kobowā prasaṅga. (Playing of Cymbals). Immediately after sunset evening recitation or Sandhiyar guri-gowa starts. Here one section from ‘gunamālā’ of Śaṅkaradeva is taken for recital. Some portions of Līlā mālā taken from Kīrtān is recited next, follows by admonitory words incorporated in any one chapter from Bhāgavata. The main part of this session is called gun-guwā made of recital of one each of capaya, ṭoṭaya, Deva-Bhaṭima, and guru-Bhaṭimā (a composition of Mādhavadeva). This follows actual prasaṅgas of the session comprising

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480. Keśava Carita ,vv.,402-403
of five sections of ghoṣa, one Kṛṣṇa, two dulaḍhī and finally uttering of the six 
jayas. The session finishes with the hari-dvani of bhakatas.

Following this as described elsewhere one Yorā prasaṅga and one ghoṣa 
prasaṅga have been fixed for evening sessions of the twelve out of the thirteen 
prasaṅgas of daily prayer services.

Finally, in the concluding prasaṅga; known as the ‘caudhya prasaṅga’ (fourteen 
sessions) of the day ends with the observance of Śes pāl-yorā by gāyana-bāyana 
accompanied by tāl and khol. The entire function concludes with ‘hari dvani’.

On the eve of a devotional festival or tithi or death anniversaries of 
Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and other Adhikāras, the evening yorā-prasāṅga is usually 
performed, but a ghoṣa is also sung with khol and tāl just after the rendering a bargīt, as 
an additional item. Here many complicated tālas are employed to make the recital 
enjoyable and melodious. That is called gandh-gowā. The word gandh might have some 
relation either to gandha compared or Gandharva gāṇa of the days of yore. On the eve 
of the Doul-Yātra, the Yātrā gīt of Ramākanta Āṭā ‘Karata gandha vidhi…’, composed 
in rāga Basanta, is presented by devotees at Bardowā till date.

The above discussed facts have been derived from some interviews with the old 
nām-lagūs, elderly bhakatas, gāyana-bāyamas of Bardowā Bālisattrā and especially 
with K.D. Goswami, an exponent of satṛṣṭrī dance and music. It is to be mentioned here 
the prayer services or fourteen prasaṅgas of the Puruṣa-saṅhihi sattras had been

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[^481]: At the end of any prayer service held in the sattrā or nam-ghar assembly of bhakatas utters 
six ‘jai’ which are - jaya hari Jai Nārāyana, jaya jaggaṇāthā, Jaya Gopināthā, Jaya Kṛṣṇa and 
Jaya Śaṅkara. Meaning, victory to six namely Hari, Nārāyana, Jaggaṇāthā, Gopikāntā, Kṛṣṇa and Śaṅkara
systematized and codified by some preceptors of the Narowā and Salaguri sattras within this period of review.

4. Hierarchy

At the early stage of its development, the office of the head of a sattra or a certain set of functionaries could not be expected to have existed. The Adhikāra conducts the management of the sattra with the help of a number of subordinate functionaries attached to different departments might have begun only from the time of Dāmodardeva. In eastern Assam, organisational aspects of the sattras developed under the leadership of Varnāgopāl Deva. In Western Assam Mādhavadeva and Dāmodardeva, played an important role and systematised the management of the Sattra by allotting definite functions to different individuals like Bhāgavati, Mukṭiyār, edhi, pācani etc.

Freedom from economic worries gave an opportunity to the sattras patronized by kings and nobles to devote them whole-heartedly to propagation of religion by appointing ecclesiastical officers like medhis, Sājitolās and Pācanis etc. Hence, we have seen little differences in functioning of the Narowā-sattras with that of the royal cāri sattras in the islet Mājulī. While describing salient features of the cāri-satras of central Assam Dutta Baruah observes that under Ahom period economic condition of these sattras, which includes Narowā, was satisfactory. However, in comparison with the royal cāri sattras, properties of this group (non-celibate) were much less in number.482

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482 Dutta Baruah, PKKSI, p. 87
In its formative stage some elements of the *Rajāghariyā cāri sattras* and some of the inherited elements observed in western Assam might have crept into the Narowā group.

The *sattras* established by descendants of Śaṅkaradeva, Puroṣottam and Caturbhujā such as Narowā, Kowāmorā, Dīghalī and Cāmaguri are the principal monasteries under *Puruṣa samhāti*. After sometimes there was a no male child to succeed as the *Satrādhikāra* and consequently the children's of the daughters of this group had to act as the head of this order. Until today, there has been a preponderance of succession by the children of the daughters in these *sattras*. Between these Narowā and Kowāmorā were prominent that followed the original tradition. The organizational side of *sattras* owes a great deal to its founder Dāmodara who brought about many changes from the time of reclamation of Bardowā.

5. Sattra Functionaries

For conducting the religious services and smooth management of a *sattra*, several functionaries are appointed by the *Adhikāras* assigning respective duties. They are usually selected from amongst the devotees to hold different department under their control. Few functionaries existed during the time of Śaṅkaradeva were mainly concerned with the management of prayer services. Mādhavadeva and Dāmodardeva who systematized the system by allotting definite functions to different individuals devised the earliest set up of management. The last phase attained when royal patronage were offered in the beginning of the 17th century. The group of *sattras* usually consists

483. ibid., p.18
484. S.N. Sarma, op. cit, p.149
of three constituent elements viz. 1) Adhikāra and Dekā Adhikārs 2) Bhakatas or devotees 3) Śisyas or disciples or lay votaries residing in villages. Presenting a gradation list of functionaries M. Neog gives a list of nineteen sattra functionaries namely Mahanta, Bhāgavati, Pāṭhak, Śravaṇī, gāyana-bāyana, natuwa and Sutradhāra, Ojā-pāli, Deurī or Bilaṇīyā, Thāi-macā, Deurī or Pūjarī and Bardeuri, pada-śilār-baṇuvā, Bharūli, Likhak, Khānikār, Hāṭi-matā, Pāḷādharīyā, Dvārī, Āldharā and Majumdar.

The sattra of our concern affiliated to the Puruṣa samhati do not uniformly maintain or appoint some of the functionaries like that of a monastic sattra. However Aniruddha Carita refers to some functionaries when some of its Adhikāras became influential and maintained monastic style while functioning in eastern Assam. However appointment of these functionaries became obsolete when the sattra started functioning in central Assam cantering round Bardowā in later period.

In the course of our study in Narowā group of sattras, we have come across the following functionaries with specific duties and responsibilities engaged.

Adhikāra and Dekā Adhikāra:

The head of the sattra, commonly known as sattradhikāra or Adhikāra is the principal and the most honorific functionary of a sattra. Following schism, when Mādhavadeva, Dāmodaradeva and Harideva appointed and sent out some apostles to

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486 A dancing boy in sattra dressed as a male or female, *Hemkosha*, p.598

487 M. Neog, op. cit., pp. 332-340

(179)
proselytizing, they started sattras of their own and became their heads. Thus they came to be known as Adhikārs, Adhikāris, satrīyās and medhi. Heads of the four sattras of Narowā, Kowāmorā, Dighalī and Cāmaguri of Puruṣa samhati are called and known as Ātā.489

Being the head of the institution Adhikāra whether celibate or non-celibate had to lead a pious and devoted life full of simplicity. In early stage, succession was either by nomination made in consideration of intellectual attainments or by general consent of all the clerics. Later on, it became hereditary and confined to particular families in most of the sattras. The custom of appointing a deputy or Dekā satrīyā or Adhikāra was prevalent at Narowā.490 At Bardowā–Narowā sattra, Bhagirath Devmahanta was appointed as the Dekā-adhikāra when Bāmdeva was functioning as the Adhikāra in A.D 1876.491 For the second post in the hierarchy, a boy within teens from a married sattra of the same samhati or sect is selected. In order to qualify him in all ways some trainings for a considerable period is imparted.492 Since the time of Dāmodara Ātā, the tradition of appointment or succession at Narowā sattra continued on hereditary lineage.

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488 M. Neog cited from KGC and Dāmodardeva Carita, p 333
489 BVR., p. 82
490 One account records name of Naranātha, son of Lakṣmīdeva as the Dekā-Adhikāra at Bardowā–Narowā.
491 Vide a plaintiff; Nagaon archives.
492 S. Rajguru, Medieval Assamese Society, p.269

(180)
**Bhāgavatī**

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa is the central authoritative scripture in Assam Vaiṣṇavism. It was customary that the work in its original form should be recited and expounded repeatedly in the *sattra*\(^{493}\). We come across many such persons named as *Bhāgavatī* or *Bhāgatī* who recite and expounds the metrical translation of the Bhāgavata and other such scriptures. Naranāṭh, the founder of Talibil- Narowā *sattra* was an expert expounder of Bhāgavata popularly known as *Bhāgavatī Āṭā*. In Bhakat-*mālā* and other literary sources, we find several some names like Bhagavatī of Vāsudeva Thāān, Bardowā and Bālisattra etc. We also find names of some laities with the previously mentioned designation. In *Thākur Carita*\(^{494}\) we find references of three *Bhāgavatis* of Narowā *sattra* namely, Asit, Rangācaran and Mukunda who served in expounding the Holy Scriptures. Other such persons are Bhāgavata ācārya, Śwarupā Bhāgatī, Harimishra Bhagavatī, Krishnadutta Bhagavatī belonging to the Brāhmaṇ caste.\(^{495}\) Name of one *Kamālā Kānta puwar Bhāgavatī*\(^{496}\) found among the laities suggest the existence of a Bhagavati appointed for recitation at the morning session of the day.

\(^{493}\) Vanāṣi Gopāldevar *Carīta*.

\(^{494}\) *TC*., v. 517-518

\(^{495}\) Bhakat-*mālā*

\(^{496}\) Bhakat-*māla* records the functions of a Bhāgavatī who read out the holy script of Bhāgavata in the morning session at Narowā *sattra*.

(181)
Pāṭhaka

The business of Pāṭhaka is to recite metrical rendering of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and other religious scriptures in the congregation.497 We find both the names Pāṭhaka and nāmlagūa to mean the same functionary of the sattrā appointed for this purpose. When Pāṭhaka has his assistants, he is called Bar-pāṭhaka. Name of one such Bar-Pāṭhaka Bhakatram is found among the disciples of Lakṣmīdeva. Two eminent nām-lagowās of Narowā group of sattras were Sabhāi and Narām. Sons of one Raṅgāi Āldharā of Jālbharī village, these two pious devotees had been rendering services for a long span of time at Bardowā-Narowā and Vāsudev. In Bhakat-mālā, some persons assigned to the said function are found under a different designation ‘nāndakūā’. Usually we come across two kinds of Nām-lagowās-sīrār (the principal) and dohārār (the assistant to help the former)498

Gāyana-bāyana

Each sattrā has a band of orchestral party called gāyān-bāyān, headed by a person or expert known as gāyān. The sattrā orchestra chiefly constitutes of two sets of persons employed in performances who give musical recital in prasāngas and dramatic representations. The gāyānā-bāyānā team is formed with a numbers of drummers (bāyānā) and singers. In Śaṅkaradeva’s first dramatic representations with paintings called Cihna-Yātrā, the name of the first bāyāna (Bhīmā) was found at Bardowā. The Aniruddha Carita refers to one of the earliest gāyana-bāyana orchestra or yorā at Narowā sattrā when dramatic representation of ‘Kāliya Daman’ was organised at the

497. KGC., p.310
498 K. D. Goswami, PSVFCA, p.157
**sattra.** This account gives the names of the first three expert such artistes of the sattra or Gāyana- Bāyana namely Arjun, Satānanda and Dwij Rāṅgācaran.499

**Natuwā and Suttradhāra**

*Suttradhāra* and *natuwā* are the central character of any dramatic performances of a *sattra* or *nām-ghar* that provided dance performances. The *suttradhāra* played the role of the stage master. Among the disciples of three earliest *Adhikāras*, (Dāmodara, Rāmākānta and Rāmādeva) we have come across three earliest *suttradhāras* at the Vasudeu Thāān Narowā *sattra*. The first group includes Niranjana, Satānanda and Nārāyana. Among them Niranjana was the eldest one who performed the role of *suttradhāra* during the time of Dāmodara.

**Medhi**

*Medhi* is an officer appointed by *gosāin* of Assam except the Dihingiya *gosāin* to collect annual contribution from their disciples.500 The word *medhi* is derived from *medhā* meaning intelligent. The *medhi* or *bar-medhi* is the chief executive of the *sattra* administration who represents the institution outside the *sattra*. In some respects, *medhis* are even acted as the head of the *sattra*.501 He had to maintain personal contacts with all disciples residing inside and outside the *sattra*. The position of *medhi* in Narowā *sattra* is unique like some other *sattras* of lower Assam where the lands grants were issued in the name of the *medhi* as well.502

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499 Anuruddha Carita ,v.379
500 Hemkosha (ed.), p.910
501 B. Sarma, Dakshinpat *sattra*, p. 15
502 Lakshmi Sirthha granted one royal charter in the name of Saṅka medhi of Narowā *sattra*. (183)
Deuri

In some sattras where the practice of image worship forms an indispensable part of the daily routine, functionaries like deuri, bardeuri, pujarī are usually found. In Vāsudeu Thāān where some functionary were found employed for this purpose.503 In one of the Copper plate grant of the Narowā sattra 504 reference to assigning of five Brāhmaṇs by Āhom king Śiva Siṃha as the pujarīs for worshipping of Sri Śri Vāsudeva is found. In neo-Vaiṣṇavite, sattras of our concern deuri is appointed to prepare and distribute sacred offerings (prasāda or māh-prasāda) among the bhakats after daily or occasional prayer services at sattrā and village nām-ghars. They are also called bilaniyās or distributors in some sattras and village nām-ghars of Assam.

Āl-dhārā

Āl-dhārā is a personal attendant who carries mattress and essential belongings of the Ādhikara. Āl meaning difficulties, trouble, and dhārā meaning to look after. Āl-dhārā was appointed at the service of prominent servitors of a sattrā more particularly the Adhikara, Dekā Adhikāra and Burhā Bhakat etc. We derive lot of such names from literary accounts of the Narowā group of sattras. Three earliest such personal attendants or Āl-dhārās appointed at Narowā sattrā were Rangāi, Bibhu and Ishwar. Among them the most celebrated names in this group was Rangai Āl-dhārā, who played a pathfinder role in reorganizing the Vāsudeu Thāān, when Laksṇīdeva left the sattrā following the

503 Two literary accounts of Narowā sattrā viz., Bhakat-mālā and Thākur Carīta furnishes some names of disciples of Rāmadeva Ātā belonging to the Brāhmaṇ caste. They are Śri Ram guru, Čāru guru, Hari guru, Nandi guru, Śrimanta guru and Krishnai guru. Harimishra is an associate of Ramākānta Ātā. They are presumed to be appointed as priest (pujarī) for conducting daily rituals of Vāsudeva.
504 Land and servitor grant of Śiva Simha, Śaka 1656

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third Burmese aggression. Later on, he extended support to Laksmldeva’s grandson Achutyadeva in re-establishing the sattra in his advanced age. Işhwar and Dedham were two such Al-dharâs who witnessed the funerals of their guru, Naranâtha Ātâ of Talibil-Narowâ sattra along with his brother Bholânath, solemnised at Bâlisatra. 505

**Muktiyâr**

A Muktiyâr remains in-charge of settling revenue free lands with different parties. 506 He works like as a Majumdar of sattra. Usually his duty lies in keeping the accounts and issue general orders in the name of the general body or laity. Sometimes Muktiyârs are entrusted to settle affairs of revenue free land in places where the sattras possesses their khâts. In the Bhakat-mâlâ two such Muktiyârs Ânguti and Râmapada were found to be the close associates of Laksmldeva Ātâ. One such mofussil functionary of the Narowâ-Bardowâ in early decades of the 20th century was Ramâkânta Muktiyâr, popularly known as Muktiyâr Ātâ. 507 He said to have worked with tremendous capacity in spreading the religion of nâm-dharma among various backward classes and ethnic groups living around Bardowâ and some interior areas in central Assam during the time of Varîngsidhar and his son Purṇacandra, the last two renowned Adhikâras of Narowâ-Bardowâ of last century.

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505 Bhakat-mâlâ
506 S.N. Sarma, op. cit., p.156
507 Ramâkânta Ātâ was a Muktyâr who acted as the representative of Varînsidhar Ātâ, the Ādhikâra of Narowâ-Bardowâ and conducted important functions of the five Narowâ sattras viz., Narowâ sattra (Vasudeu Thâân) Râmpur Sattra, Bâlisatra and Pâṭbâusî and Bardowâ in 20th century. Later on he founded the Śrimanta Šaṅkaradeva Sangha in 1930 at Palaśanî village in Nagaon district of Assam., vide, Jagatguru Śrimanta Šaṅkaradevar Bālyallâ aru Janmabhumi Batadrava Thâân Carita.
Khāṭaniyār

To maintain relations with the royal court a special functionary, known as Khāṭaniyār is employed. Renowned Historian of Assam Benudhar Sarma refers him as the minister of the *sattra*. They are made of two categories viz., *Bar* and *Saru Khāṭaniyār*, who are assigned to the task of attending royal court in *sattra* related matters.508 Name of one such functionary was Becāi Khāṭaniyār when Bhagirath Ātā was the *Adhikāra* of Narowā-Bardowā *sattra*.

A few more such names of minor functionaries or manuals assigned to the task of conducting some specific purposes of the *sattra* are also found. A vibrant cottage industry came into being where Khanikars, the Likhaks and the Patuās - whose subsidiary means of livelihood was the transcription and illustration of manuscripts. Amongst them Khanikar is a class of artisan employed in the service of paints manuscript, engrave and decorate walls, posts and thrones of *sattras*. They are primarily employed for decoration of *Bhāonā grha*, artiste and illustration of manuscripts of *sattras* for which Narowā house was well known. This *sattra* group houses a large number of manuscripts including some illustrated copies copied and painted with the service of the *khanikars*, *Likhak* and *patuas*. We find one class of people mentioned as *Bapuā* in the list of laities in Narowā *sattra*. They might be employed for maintenance of worshipping *murti* or idols of the *sattra*.

Some of the *moffusil* functionaries existed in the royal Cāri *sattras* like Rājmedhi, Barmedhi and Khāṭaniyār (who had to maintain a close contact with the royal court) are not common in Narowā *sattras*. Although some persons named as

508 B. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p.16
Khataniyār were found at Narowā, their functions were not at par Khataniyārs employed in the royal sattras. In the same way three separate grades of functionaries, called bar-manowāi, and saru mānowāi, which constitutes the advisory council of Adhikāra, exists in monastic sattras, are not found in the Narowā group. However, two classes of laities Ātōi and bhakatas are found in good number in this sattrā. Some sattrā functionaries exist in royal sattras are not found in our concern group.

Names of some sattrā functionaries existed at the Narowā group of sattras in 19th century were Sewacaluā, bheṭi dhara, deuri, bhāgati and Nāmlaguā. Which are derived from a copy of Vākalatnāma of Narowā sattrā issued in September 15, 1896 by the civil court of Lashimpur district. Three mukteras appointed by Bāmdeva Adhikāra of Narowā sattrā by this order empowered to appoint and dismiss such sattrā functionaries.509

Considering the rights, duties and responsibilities, the functionaries of the Narowā group sattras may be divided into some groups. We have come across the following three sets of functionaries assigned to maintenance and management of pecuniary, religious and manual services of the Narowā group of sattras.

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509 A Vakalatnama (1896 A.D) made by Bāmdeva Goswami of Narowā sattrā is derived from the record room of Deputy Commissioner Nagaon district in July 12, 2009.
These functionaries may be broadly divided as such:

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<td>Management</td>
<td>Religious</td>
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<td>Adhikāra</td>
<td>Medhi</td>
<td>Bhāgavatī or Bhāgati</td>
<td>Khanikar</td>
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<td>Muktiyār</td>
<td>Paṭhak</td>
<td>Lekhak</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hātimatā</td>
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<td>Banu(^{510})</td>
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<td>Khāṭaṇiyār</td>
<td>Sutradhār</td>
<td>Āl-dharā</td>
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<td>Sātolā</td>
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6. Disputes and Settlement

It is almost suffice to say that the internecine rift that surfaced between the descendants of Dāmodara and Kanakalatā in later half of the 17th century continued for more than two centuries resulting further division and multiplication of the original sattra group. Most of the disputes originated on the question of right ship of Bardowā and succession to the post of Adhikāra of Bālīsattra, Rāmpur and right ship of heritable property etc. in 19th and 20th centuries. The Copperplate Inscription of Kamaleswar Sinha of śaka 1727 (A.D. 1799) contains recording \(^{511}\) of a dispute over Bardowā,

\(^{510}\) Benudhar Sarma refers them as manuals of the sattra who are provided some raw provisions called śiddhā from the sattra bharāl, vide; Dakshinpat sattra, p.18

\(^{511}\) M. Neog (ed.), PŚ, p.84
evidently speaks gravity of the problem. With the intervention of the Ahom court, the long-standing family dispute of Narowā and Salaguri families originated from the right ship of the Barliowa nām-ghar and landed property could be resolved. Soon after the death of Dāmodara in 1655 A.D, a dispute between the two families was planted when Kanakalatā, the co-discoverer of Bardowā advanced the claims of her two-year's old grandson Anantarāya. This may be described a dispute planted between the lines of Govindrapriya, called Narowā vaṁśa and the lines of Suvadra called Salaguri vaṁśa. However the infighting is found to be intensified in the time of Rāmadeva, the great grandson of Dāmodara when he was at the helm of affairs in the Narowā sattra in 1761 A.D. Emboldened with two royal endowments of Lakshmi Sirīha he first came to Bardowā and set his separate sattra at Rāmpur and finally engaged in a direct conflict with Ramacharana, the great grandson of Kanakalatā who was functioning as Adhikāra at Bardowā at that time. The Ahom king Kameleswar Sirīha considered the dispute to be a major problem as this could lead to a bushfire in the state as both the preceptors had a good number of followers. Considering the gravity of situation, he deputed chief of the Judiciary, Purmananda Buragohain and Bhadrakanata Barbaruah of the Sandikoi family to settle the dispute arose between Ramcaran Āta of Narowā Vaṁśa and Rāmdeva Ātā of Salaguri Varna who claimed equal right over the site of Bardowā. They detailed the services of three other subordinates, Lambo Dolākāsariyā Baruah, Caudang Bihu Saikia, Tekela Borah, and Cakardharā Hemodara who brought mahantas, bhakatas, civil population (chahariyā) celibate and non-celibate clerics of the two sattras to the trial. Evidences and statements made by the witnesses were thoroughly examined and with reference to ancient usage (prācina bhupa rādha) final decision was taken. During the time of enquiry they showed the old boundaries of the shrine

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demarcated by the Ahom kings and the Padasila, the venerated relics and other such articles of Sankaradeva's time possessed by the two contenders. The findings ascertained that Narowa and Salaguri's rights were at on par with each other and Rāmdeva Ātā encroached a little upon Salaguri Ātā's land.  

Royal decree was issued with the following effects:

1. *Nām-ghar* built by Rāmadeva on half of the Salaguri Ātā's land is to be demolished.

2. The partition of the disputed land shall be properly demarcated with boundary posts. The seedling of *Kathal* (Jackfruit) (east), *Simal* tree (Indian Cotton) wood (west), *Cadamba* tree (north) and Jackfruit (south), would bound the site.

3. Out of the disputed total land (1 Bigha, 4 katha, 10 lecha) on which the *sattra* stands are to be shared equally by Rāmadeva and Rāmacandra.

4. Each *sattra* is now asked to build their new and separate *nām-ghar*.

5. The *Padasila* of Sankaradeva is also shared between the two.  

On the question of succession of *Adhikāra* of Bardowā an internecine conflicts was developed in the Narowā *vamsa* in the early decades of the 9th century. It resulted the first bifurcation of the Narowā *sattra* when Harendarnārayana, the grandson of Lakṣhmīdeva established a separate *sattra* at Bhetiyāni. He was alleged to have deprived of the post of *Adhikāra* by Bāmdeva, his eldest uncle in A.D. 1863. It is learnt, Dāmdeva, the eldest son of Lakṣmīdeva died at Guwahati and following prevailing tradition his eldest grandson, Harendra was appointed *Adhikāra*. Knowing it Bāmdeva, Lakṣmīdeva's second son who was then stayed away from home, after coming to the *sattra* forcibly installed himself in the post of *Adhikāra* on 16th September, 1863 A.D. Before installing

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512 ibid., p.181
513 Asom Sahitya Sabha Pratiks, 1.2. p.74.
in the post, he seemed managed to have obtained an interim order by filling an appeal in the sub-judge court of Nowgong on September 7, A.D. 1863. In this, appellant Bāmdeva claimed the post of the Adhikāra and sought freedom from the decree passed earlier dated April 7, 1863 A.D. by Radhakanta Baruah Sadar Amin installed Harendra.514

In the appeal, Bāmdeva stated that Dāmdeva and his son Harendra was not appointed as Adhikāra and Deka Adhikāra of the sattra during the lifetime of Lakṣmīdeva as was claimed by him. Hence, being the eldest living son, Bāmdeva ought to deserve the post of Adhikāra of the sattra. The Collector of Nowgong issued an order on January 18, 1861 A.D. declaring Bāmdeva to be the senior living son and asked to treat him as the head of the sattra. The Judge also anticipated learning on what ground Harendra was installed Adhikāra in the post of Lakṣmīdeva despite the presence of Bāmdeva. The decree comes with the following conclusion ‘the description of the plaintiff seems to be true as nobody filed a complaint challenging his Adhikāraship within a period of 2 years (from the date of the funeral ceremony of Lakṣmīdeva solemnized on 9 Śrāvana, 1860 A.D till the installation of Bāmdeva on 5 Pausa, 1862 A.D. The final decree disapproved the order of Sadar Amen passed on April 7, 1863. The court failed to understand how Harendra to be called the Adhikāra designate despite the presence of Bāmdeva, the senior living son of Lakṣmīdeva as claimed by the respondent. The order of succession exists on seniority was admitted by the respondent. Dejected at this order widow of Dāmdeva, Cenehi Mahantani of Bardowā and Rāmpur filed a special appeal at the High Court of Judicature at Fort William, Calcutta seeking a revision of the

514 A plaintiff (no.5 of 1863 A.D) filed by Bāmdeva Mahanta of Rāmpur, Batadrava and Bālisattra; preserved in the record room of deputy commissioner, Nagaon district.
earlier decree of the Sadar Amin of Nowgong passed on April 7, 1863. Cenehi mahantani who appealed through his pleader stated that Harendra was deprived of the post of the head pontiff of Bardowā by the house court. She argued that it was wrong in holding in the evidence produced in the case that the succession to the office of Adhikāra in the Bardowā, Bālisattra is from father to son and not based on seniority and further urged that the decision of the lower court appellate is imperfect because it failed to consider the allegation upon which the plaintiff’s claim was based. However, the high court held that the objection made by her is wholly inconsistent with the fact admitted by both the parties that the succession theory is prevailed by the custom of the satstras from father to son. It is inconsistent with the statement of the plaintiff which shows that the Bhuggatas (bhakatas) had no voice in this matter, the judgement clarified. The final decree was passed as such: ‘there were no sufficient grounds for the admission of the special appeal made by Cenehi.’

On the question of order of succession of Adhikāra, we have found another important suit filed in 1892 A.D. Lakṣmīdeva’s fifth son of Jogendra Devadhiķāri Goswami, filed another suit against Bhagirath Devmahanta and Dhaneswar Devmahanta of Bardowā, Bālisattra and Rāmpur. He sought a declaration of his heritable rights and title of the Adhikāraship of the Bardowā Bar-hissā and other sattras and control and management over movable and immovable properties scheduled in a petition filed dated 17th February, 1892 A.D. He also challenged the rights of Bhagirath Dev mahanta, son of Bāmdeva of Bardowā Bar-hissā, the officiating Adhikāra and stated that in

515 Special appeals made by Cenehi mahantanī, widow of Dāmdeva on July 8, 1864, vide a document of the Archives of Nagaon district
516 Vide a suit (no. 3 of 1892 A.D), Archives of Nagaon district.
517 ibid
absence of the plaintiff, Bamdeva installed his eldest son Bhagirathdeva as per the order of heredity lineage. Now the Plaintiff’s brother Bamdeva raised his demand for the post of Adhikārship according to the theory of seniority. In this context, he referred to a specific document jointly signed by Bamdeva, Naranathia, Jogendraeva and Dhaneswar four sons of Laksmideva who agreed upon to follow the seniority order of succession deviating from the earlier custom. In this appeal, he pleaded as follows:

‘Being the elder member of the family the complainant filed the appeal in which prayer was made to register his name on the landed property of the sattra and he had collected taxes amounting to rupees 224 with the strength of that order. Knowing the fact that both the respondents had lost their rights, he alleged both of them filed another petition for registering their names in the same record on February 23, 1892 A.D. With the help of the document thus obtained, they forcibly occupied the sattra property depriving Jogendra (petitioner) from his shared right ship on July 23, 1892 A.D. Thus, they allegedly occupied and established their rights over murti, Bhāgavata, and Padasilā, the three inheritable religious properties of Narowā sattra as well as immovable and movable properties. A detailed list of properties that containing 49 items is found appended in that appeal. Earlier a verdict was passed in January 15, 1869 (Case no.5) in response to a petition filed in 1863 A.D. that resolved a dispute over succession to the post of Adhikāra at Bardowā when Bāmdeva was installed in the post. However, at that time, no complaint was found lodged challenging the order. After consulting the said decree and other available evidences, a new verdict was passed by the Judge, which stated that there was no recorded proof of the theory of seniority in the sattra as claimed by Jogendraeva.
Henceforth, the learned Sub. Judge Mr. G. Godjre passed an order dismissing the appeal with all cases against the plaintiff on 25th April 1893. The decree in original dated 7 September 1893 A.D. incorporates the following details:

i. That the custom and tradition approves the theory of succession to the office of Adhikāra in the Batadraba and Bālisattra is on the qualification of seniority.

ii. That the collector's order of the 18th January referred to the judgment of the house court have not been treated as evidence in this case and in no way be considered as res adjudicate of the matter. It further holds that the Lower court's presumption is not correct justifying succession to religious office is prima facie from father to son. The Adhikāra or high priest in a Hindu religious Institution being the object of veneration of all the members of families governed by the tenants would ordinarily be the eldest member. The decree ends with the following lines—‘the claim of plaintiff to deserve his post of Adhikāra from his father is bound by all his acts and is precluded from questioning their correctness or validity.’

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On 17 February 1928, A. D. Vanśidhar Devgoswami of Bardowā Narowā submitted a petition (no. 498) to the Collector of Revenue Circle, Dhinig in the district of Nagaon with a prayer to change the mutation of Śivendra Deva Goswami as the owner of the Dag and moṇiкуṭ of Kirtanaghar of Narowā Bālisattra to him. One Kandarpa Goswami of Bardowā alleged to be involved in the matter came to the spot of enquiry as

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518 The decrees in original suit, Court of the Sub-judge, Nowgong, vide; Case no. 3, 1892 A.D.
a witness in support of the petitioner. Fortunately, one Ponarama Nāmlaguā of Majuli staying at Bardowā and Dinanath Mahanta of Bālisattrā gave detailed evidence in support of the Śivendra Ātā. Hearing both the parties, Kalpa Narayana Majumdar, the Collector of Dhing revenue circle in the district of Nagaon delivered the verdict with the effect that the status quo should be maintained, on June 24, 1928.519

For more than a century, at Bardowā the two separate nāma-ghars were existed following the verdict of the royal charter in A.D. 1799. After a long gap of 159 years the much awaited unification of the shrine was completed in 1958 A.D. A unanimous resolution adopted in a general meeting of sattrīyā people, inhabitants of nearby areas where two presiding Adhikārs of Bardowā, Purna Ch. Devagoswami and Dharma Ch. Devagoswami resolved to work for unification and overall development of the Bardowā Thāān. It was due to continual and strenuous endeavour of some farsighted social workers and influential leaders of Assam including the former ministers Motiram Bora, Amiya Kumar Das, Haladhar Bhuyan, Debakanta Baruah, Harinārāyan Dutta Baruah and many more other well-wishers who chalked out a well devised plan for unification, beautification and development of the shrine. The new and common Kirtana-ghar of Bardowā was finally appeared in 1958 and for this H. N. Dutta Baruah devised a new management system and functioning under the heads of Narowā and Salaguri sattras.520

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519 Šankaradevar porā Śivendroloi (Ms.), Bālisattrā, p 153-154
520 Kamal Ch. Bora(ed.), Bardowā, p.21