The main thrust of the present research is to understand and analyse the administrative system of Satra institution of Assam. It is the Satra institution through which the neo vaisnavite movement initiated by Sankardeva was manifested and developed exercising tremendous influence on the spiritual, cultural, social and community life of the Assamese people. The credit for the rich and varied socio cultural life of Assam along with Bordowa and Barpeta region goes to the personality and geneous of Sankardeva who started the great religious and cultural movement which is popularly known as neovaisnavite movement in Assam. The background of the neovaisnavite movement was characterized by intra group conflict, cultural heterogeneity, political instability and tendency for dominance. Through his multifarious activities Sankardeva tried to create an atmosphere of cohesion and equality among all sections of people. His main ideals was to teach the common people about the real concept of religion. Along with his new faith called Ek Sarana Nam Dharma Sankardeva made also many reforms in socio cultural fields. Therefore the importance of neo vaisnavite movement in Assam does not lie in its religious aspects alone. It also made immense contribution to the social reforms, unity and cultural development of the Assamese society. It gave a rich culture, literature and introduced a new type of music, dance, drama and contributed much in other fields also. The main objective of Sankardeva’s neo vaisnavism was to establish a classless society by throwing out the existing barriers amongst different sections of people in
the society. So neo vaisnavism was so popular both amongst the rural as well as urban masses from the very beginning.

The media through which Sankardeva tried to give a new outlook among the Assamese community is Satra. Besides, the religious functions the Satra institution acted as aids in the task of social reform and as repositories of vaisnavite tradition and culture. These institutions play an important role for the upliftment of the backward communities and minimize the gap of caste distinction. The backward classes were free to avail of the charities extended by Satras and their entry was free inside a Satra unlike temples of some other faiths in India. In this respect Satras functioned more or less on the line of modern Christian Missionaries in India.

Nearly five centuries ago Sankardeva conceived India as our motherland and laid a strong foundation for national integration by introducing the concept of one India. Through the Satra and *Namghars* he introduced unity and integrity of whole mankind on a permanent basis by initiating to his faith from all sections of people. Therefore, the Satra institutions can be used as an effective tool to combat the present unrest arising out of ethnic conflict and social intolerance.

In the initial stage of the neo vaisnavite movement Sankardeva and Madhabdeva provided one faith and one religious institution. During that time the established Satras and *Namghars* administered the whole society. The established Satras and *Namghars* able to strengthen the unity among the diverse ethnic groups of Assam by eradicating the caste distinction and recognizing the equality of all beings. But in the post Sankara period the "Ek Sarana Nam Dharma" of Sankardeva got divided into four different branches or sects. As a result some differences arose among the vaisnavite Assamese people and one Satra or *Namghar* has been replaced
by many on the basis of this four sects. This multiplicity of denominations and sects have replaced the common faith of Sankardeva. Now differences on the basis of such feelings as Brahmanic and non Brahmanic are evident in Satra arena and it makes distinction among the followers of Sankardeva. As a result it has reduced the power of religion in the Assamese society. It is well known by all that truly religious society has one faith and one institution. Therefore it is desirable that there should be a movement towards the unity of Satras and follow a common programme and uniform policy. This may reverse the trend towards religious pluralism in Assamese Society. Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra can take the lead in formulating a few broad principles which are based on Sankardeva’s ideals because only a single religion can effectively reinforce social norms and values and integrate society.

While studying the physical structure of Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra it is noticed that some changes have taken place during the long course of its existence. Originally, the Kirtanghars and the other houses were constructed with materials like straw, bamboo, timber, cane and sil having colour and architectural designing them. But due to the development of technology modern techniques are applied at the time of reconstruction and renovation of the Kritanghar and the other houses. It may be noted that, though modern techniques are applied at the time of reconstruction of the Kirtanghar and the huts of the disciples (Bhakatas) yet the traditional style which was introduced by Sankardeva is also maintained into some extent. In order to accommodate the growing number of devotees it is essential to establish some buildings with sophisticated facilities in both the institutions.

At present some Assamese people are seen to have taken shelter under the banner of some alien religious preceptors. It is desirable that Satradhikars should take
the initiative to solve this problem. They should go out side the Satra campus and
teach the common people that our vaisnavite apostles and the idea of their doctrine are
not less imitable than those of others. But normally, the Satradhikar confined their
responsibilities in religious matters and problems directly related to their Satras.
Under the leadership of Satradhikar every Satra institution must enlighten their
disciples, devotees, followers and well wishers to understand the basic ideals of
Sankardeva and the activities of their respective Satra. Beside the Satradhikars of all
Satras should try to mix among the tribal people those who are living in the
neighbouring places of Assam. So that these tribal people patronize Hindu religion
and will develop feeling of one nation.

If Satradhikars of the Satra make it a routine programme to spend some time
with these people to spread the basic ideals of Sankardeva and his neo vaisnavite faith
then they will develop a cordial relationship with the vaisnavite people and not try to
conversion themselves with other alien religions. To combat this religious problem
the Satradhikars must played a significant role because the future of Satra institution
depends upon the quality, efficiency, cleverness, dedication and presence of mind of
the respective Satradhikars of the Satras concerned.

While studying the social organization of both the institutions it is noticed that
some changes have taken place during the long course of its existence. From the
beginning in most of the principal Satras the celibate devotees were a class of people
having a distinct devotional life style and lived within the Satra boundary. In the
changes circumstances at present the number of persons leading such a devotional life
is diminishing. Like the celibate devotees traditional functionaries are also an integral
part of a Satra. In Barpeta Satra the traditional functionaries maintain their close
relations with the Satra since the days of Mathura Das Burha Ata and performing their duties even today. At present also the traditional functionaries of Barpeta Satra maintain an over all supervision on all matters of the Satra. But in Bordowa Thaan, except the Satradhikars family the other traditional functionaries is diminishing with the changing circumstances. Unlike the Barpeta Satra the religious functionaries of Bordowa Thaan are appointed on the basis of their efficiency not on the traditional family basis.

Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra, the venue of this research study have been playing a most distinct and significant role as an initiator and transmitter of Assamese culture and social structure to nook and corner of the state of Assam. Both Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra took the leadership in adoption of various reforms. There are socially backward people near both the Satras. The relationship between these people and the Satras are very cordial. These so called backward people sit along with other people in the Kirtanghar of Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra and taking part in daily nama-prasanga. People of all categories irrespective of their caste and creed can entered in to the Kirtanghar. An interview was held among the disciples residing in and out side both the institutions in the form of questionnaire (the question are given annexure – 1) it is found from the answers that almost all the disciples have their freedom of speech and expression. They are in a position to speak freely and frankly about their necessity and wants and grievances without facing any discrimination. It is also found from the investigation that there is no religious office bearers from this socially backward people in the both the institutions. Although Sankardeva conferred religious portfolios to the socially backward people but this principle seems not to be reflected in both the cases. The participation of socially backward section is not
significant as office bearers in the Satras. It is seen that all the office bearers of both the institutions are high caste Hindu. However, this may be because of not having expertise or capability among those people.

Being a religious institution in the Satras prayers have occupied the foremost position among the list of observable duties around which all other activities are arranged. Except the religious services various religious festivals are held within the Satra in which the neighbouring Hindu people actively take part. Cohesive influence of the Satra on the society is evident in these festivals. Besides the religious functions these institutions performs certain other functions. Its social functions includes in keeping the society clean and disciplined. Through the staging of Bhaona and dance performances the glory of goodness over the evil is shown and encourage the people to follow the right path. As a socio religious institution the Satras acted as an agent of social control and exerted its character building influence on the local people and its purview extended to the other.

Some researchers have seen religious institutions and activity associated with them as the key element in religious behaviour. From this view point they have measured the importance of religion in society in terms of factors such as Satra attendance and cultural activities performed in Satra. Statistics on Satra attendance indicate a steady decline over the past few decades. This trend applies not only to the Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra but to all the principal Satras of Assam. The decline in organized religious participation indicates a way in which the Satras are losing direct influence over the ideas and activities of man. It is found from observation that the absence of the people from the Satra may have nothing to do with a change in their religious beliefs. A survey among the local people of both the Satras
over the 5 years reveal that a high portion of those who regard themselves as vaisnava do not see regular Satra attendance as a necessary part of being a vaisnava or follower of Sankardeva. It is also found that the decline in institutional religion cannot be taken as an indication of a decline in religious belief and commitment. Religion today may simply be expressed in a different way. At present it is noticed that there has been a move from collective worship to privatize worship and from clinical to individual interpretation of doctrine.

It has been mentioned earlier that the diffusion of democratic outlook was interrelated with the entire teaching and practices of neovaisnavism in Assam. Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra are the only two leading Satras of Assam vaisnavism where the ownership of the Satra collectively belongs to the community of the devotees and the Satradhikars act simply as the guides. This has been practically brought in to action by implementing all the democratic devices in respect of electing the Satradhikars and the office bearers of the Managing Committee by vote of members of Samuha on the basis of adult franchise which is still current in Barpeta Satra. In Bordowa Thaan also except the Satradhikars all democratic devices are implemented.

At present encroachment is the most difficult problem that the Satra institutions have to face. It is found from the sources that there is deep encroachment in the Satra lands under the Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra. By examining questionnaire it was also found that the state government is not taking interest in this serious matter. In the opinion of the people of the Satra, the state government along with the Managing Committee of Satras should take immediate steps to restore the descent environment in and around of the Satras.
Due to the lack of proper financial resources the Satra institution have not developed. Although there are certain sources of income but the yield from them is not sufficient to run the Satras smoothly. However, it may be noted that a few Satras receive annuity grant from the government for acquisition of their lands. In addition to this, adhoc grants are provided to some Satras for their socio-cultural activities. In considering the role of Satras in the development of literature and culture and to make Satras heritage centers, the government should offer adequate financial support for these purposes. Therefore, adequate budget provisions be made by the government with the modalities of sanctioning grant. The government should also take sincere steps for the monitoring the utilization of fund and implementation of programmes. It is unfortunate that most of the Satras of Assam have been gradually deteriorating due to the lack of financial assistance of the government.

During the long course of their existence various changes have taken place in Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra. Such changes are noticeable in organization, management and so forth. Though the Satra is maintaining its traditional character in religious activities very important changes in the management of the Satra came in to existence. After the independence in Bordowa Thaan a drastic change has taken place in its management when the Narowa Satra and Salaguri Satra unified under the banner of Bordowa Thaan. In case of Barpeta Satra very important change in the management of the Satra came as a result of the judgement of the scheme case during pre independence period. It is seen that a remarkable change have taken place in character building influence of the society. At present time their influence in the society is not strong as it was in the past. It is found from the observation that there is
some disregard for these institutions among the young generations due to impact of modernity.

In respect of status of women in Assam vaisnavism women were given their due in the society. Both Sankardeva and Madhabdeva exhibit more liberal and positive approach and had given initiation to women into Mahapurushiya fold. During their life time, the female devotees took active part in religious affairs of the Satra with due honour. Besides, there were some instances that woman acted as religious head in the history of neo vaisnavite movement in Assam. Ai Kanaklata, Bhubaneswari and Padmapriya were the best example in this regard. But inspite of all those meritorious services rendered by women to the neo vaisnavite movement, they have not been enjoying the same religious privileges as have been enjoyed by their counterpart. In some of the important Satras they are still denied of their right of entering the Kirtanghar. Women are not allowed to enter the Kirtanghar of Barpeta Satra even today. The plate bearing “No admittance for female” is a sheer violation of Sankardeva’s ideals and democratic principles. Therefore, it is the duty of the authority of Barpeta Satra to encourage women to enter the Kirtanghar and participate in Nama-Prasanga with men which was introduced by Sankardeva nearly 600 years ago.

I have studied the administration of Satra institutions in Assam specially the Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra. During the Ahom period Satra institutions were patronized by the kings. The visit to the Satra by the king was mandatory. Such visit helped in redressing some of their difficulties and inspire the Satra. But in the present time such visits are rarely made by the government officials. The Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioners who are the inspecting officers of the religious institutions
continued to be neglected in this matter. Regarding the state control and supervision over Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra it is found that they are not benefited by the government officials. Therefore the long standing demand of Satra Mahasabha to establish a separate Directorate for Satras is well just and need of the time for the all round development of Satra institution.

The Satra institution enriched the Assamese life socially, culturally, educationally and spiritually. These institutions are the integral part of the Assamese society. Therefore, Satras of Assam including Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra should be developed as heritage sites. In view of the recent policy initiatives by the government for the tourism development of the state, it will be welcome step. In both the institutions a state of the art and cultural museum and exhibition centers be set up providing sufficient financial help from the government.

The study reveals that how the centuries old religious institutions Bordowa Thaan and Barpeta Satra maintain their democratic setup and original character even though certain charges have taken place in its management, organizational and physical aspects.