Barpeta: Location and Areas:

Before specifying the exact geographical area meant for the coverage under our present study it must be pointed out that the name Barpeta is attached to three different units:

(i) The temple-town that originally grew around the famous Barpeta Satra and that subsequently developed into the modern town of Barpeta.

(ii) The former Barpeta Sub-division of undivided Kāmrūp district which has since been converted into a district.

(iii) The "Cultural Zone" centering round the temple town which extends much beyond the town boundaries but which does not cover all the areas within the administrative unit of erstwhile Barpeta Sub-division or present Barpeta district.

It is this "Cultural Zone" of Barpeta which has been taken as the focal point for the purpose of this study. Although the boundaries of this Zone are not clearly defined, it includes all those areas which are marked by the distinctive linguistic features, socio-cultural norms and artistic features, that go by the appellation "Barpetiya". Since this "Cultural Zone" roughly covers the whole of Bāusī Parganā and some

1. Parganā is a Revenue Division.
parts of Cāparā parganā, Bhawāni and Kāljār Nagars (Towns), we have accepted the boundaries of these areas as that of our area of study and taken the statistical and other quantitative data of those units for the purpose of analysis.

Now, the Cultural Zone of Barpētā can be divided into (a) the core area and (b) the peripheral area. The chief links between the core and peripheral areas are the various Satras operating in this Cultural Zone since they, were established by the neo-Vaisnava Gurus and their apostles. In fact the socio-cultural history of the whole area is very strongly connected with the satras and their activities.

The following tables give the break up of the core and peripheral areas of the various satras located therein:

(a) Core area: The satras that constitute the core area of the 'Cultural Zone' of Barpētā are shown in the table No. I with names of the founders with date and location far from the Barpētā Satra, the centre of the 'Cultural Zone'.

(b) Peripheral area: The satras that constitute the peripheral area of the 'Cultural Zone' are shown in the table No. II.
### Table No. I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of satras</th>
<th>Founder</th>
<th>Date of foundation</th>
<th>Distance from Barpeta (the Centre)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bāmunā</td>
<td>Dāityāri Thākur</td>
<td>1625 A.D.</td>
<td>3 K.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bārādi</td>
<td>Mādhavadeva</td>
<td>1548 A.D.</td>
<td>1(\frac{1}{2}) K.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Barpetā</td>
<td>Mādhavadeva</td>
<td>1583 A.D.</td>
<td>Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Gānakkuchi</td>
<td>Mādhavadeva</td>
<td>1551 A.D.</td>
<td>1(\frac{1}{2})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Nīj-Pāṭbāusi</td>
<td>Śāṅkaradeva</td>
<td>1550 A.D.</td>
<td>2(\frac{1}{2})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Pāṭbāusi</td>
<td>Dāmodaradeva</td>
<td>1560 A.D.</td>
<td>2(\frac{1}{2})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sudarādiyā</td>
<td>Mādhavadeva</td>
<td>1569 A.D.</td>
<td>2 K.M.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table No. II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of satras</th>
<th>Founder</th>
<th>Date of foundation</th>
<th>Distance from Barpeta (the Centre)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bhawanipur</td>
<td>Gopaladeva</td>
<td>1575 A.D.</td>
<td>16 K.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. (a) Janiā</td>
<td>Nārāyaṇa Thākur</td>
<td>1575 A.D.</td>
<td>8 K.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Janiā</td>
<td>Puruṣottam Thākur</td>
<td>1572 A.D.</td>
<td>8 K.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Kāḷjār</td>
<td>Gopaladeva</td>
<td>1600 A.D.</td>
<td>8(\frac{1}{2}) K.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Māneri</td>
<td>Harideva</td>
<td>1560 A.D.</td>
<td>16 K.M.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A. **General Historical and Topographical Account of the Area under study:**

(i) **History:**

In the pre-Śāṅkara era Bāusī parganā was not so well reputed for the places mentioned in the tables No. I and II above but for Lehidāṅgarā, the birth place of the born poet Dāk-Puruṣa who had been considered as the first Assamese towards the eighth century A.D. Lehidāṅgarā was a group of villages consisted of Lehi, Daṅgarā, Kharki-daṅgarā, Pām-daṅgarā and Hābi-daṅgarā. Now, except Lehidāṅgarā other constituent villages have been eroded by the Brahmaputra. In respect of the village Lehidāṅgarā there are two different popular sayings.

"lehidāṅgarā dākar gāon
tinisā tinikuri pukhurīr nāo

lehir tīrī paṅsarāg buje"²

The first two verses means that Lahidāṅgarā, the birth place of Dāk, a born poet, had three hundred sixty big ponds of different names equipped with trading boats which gives us the pen picture of a vast and prosperous village. The third verse of the sayings gives us an account of the women who could understand the five primary modes (rāgas) of music. It

². Dandinath Datta (ed.) : Dākar Vacan, p. 15
Indicates that Lehidangara was a centre of rāga music.

But with arrival of Śaṅkaradeva the satra institution gained a good ground in this 'Cultural Zone' one after another. The satras of Cūnporā, Komārkuchi, Pātbāusī, Ganak-kuchi, Bārādi, Sundarīdiyā, Barpetā, Māneri, Bāmunā were established in the Bāusi paraganā by the great saints and his associates. The satras of Janiā established by Nārāyandās Thākur and Puruṣottam were within the jurisdiction of Čāparā paraganā. On the other hand, the satra of Bhawānipur and Kāljar were situated in the town of Bhawāni and Kāljar. The two towns (nagars) were said to have been established by Koch king Nāranārāyan [1540-1585].

But the area under our study in addition to the pargana of Cakābāusī, Barnagar and Nagarberā had been with the British annexation of Assam taken into one administrative unit making Barpetā as the head quarter of it.

The entire region including the 'Cultural Zone' had been under the administrative control of the Ahoms, the Koches the Mughals, the Burmese and the English till 1947 at different periods of time.

3. M.C. Mahanta (ed.): Mahāpuruṣ Gopāldevar Carit, p. 98
(b) **Topography**:

The topographical features of this area have been undergoing changes from time to time. The natural features which have been found during neo-Vaiśnavite movement recorded in the *Guru-caritas* are no longer available, now-a-days except few of them.

The river Brahmaputra which is considered as the backbone of Assam valley flows by the southern side of this area. But its tributaries like Cāulkhowā, the Polla, the Beki, the Pomārā, the Nakhāndā have been flowing throughout this region. The Nakhāndā is the name of that portion of the Cāulkhowā which is flowing by the east of Barpetā and the west of Bārādi and Pātbāusi. Another name of Cāulkhowā, particularly that portion which had been flowing by the north-east of Sundarīdiyā is Budhāluit. This name is found generally, in the *Guru-carit-kathā*, the *Guru-caritas* of Rāmacarana and Daityāri Thākur and now, that very Budhāluit is popularly known as the Marānadi (dead river). All these rivers other than the Brahmaputra have their sources from the mountain ranges of Bhutan.

As it appears in the *Guru-caritas* there were large number of *bils* in this areas. Mention may be made of some

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4. *Bil* means a small lake.
such bils: the Kataktali, the Dhenukhāndā, the Galayā, the Barpetā, the Chāgmārā, the Kalayā, the Janiā, the Barbil, the Sarubil and many more bils which were the breading ground of fishes and fowls. Now-a-days, there are only a few bils in living condition and the others are dead and gone. At present the bils that we find today are the Bhellā, the Bheleñgi, the Cilaci, the Vairā, the Tābhā, the Čukmānāh, the Roumāri, the Āgarbil, the Chāgmārā etc.

The Bāghbar is the only hill of the Bāusi parganā and even in the whole district of Barpetā situated towards southwest of Barpetā town at a distance of nearly sixteen Kilo metres. Most of the villages situated on the foot of the Bāghbar hill have been the victims of erosion of the Brahmaputra and as a result of the erosion the inhabitants have started to evacuate the villages.

This "Cultural Zone" is situated in the low land area and the satras are situated mostly either on the bank of river or by the side of a bil. There may be two main reasons of such establishment:
(i) In those days of Vaiṣṇava movement in Assam water transport played a major role on the day today life of the people specially in the rainy season.
(ii) Secondly, the better and easy provisions of water, climate, fish and fowl, sufficiently available in the rivers and bils, attracted the initiators to the side of a river or a bil.

II. The various satras situated in the Barpeta Area:

It is said that the Barpeta Satra has been the nerve centre of the Vaiṣṇavite states of Assam. Even then, the importance of the other satras surrounding that of Barpeta could not and should not be left without proper discussion because the roles that have been played by these satras since the days of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and other Vaiṣṇava Saints add immensely to the greatness of Barpeta as a centre of Assamese Vaiṣṇavite culture. Therefore, the historical and socio-religious accounts of these satras have also been taken up for discussion here in this chapter along with those of Barpeta one by one as earlier shown in table No. I and II. The satras lying in the core area of Barpeta apart from the one at Barpeta itself are (1) Pātbāusī, (2) Ganakkuchi, (3) Sudarīdiyā, (4) Bārādi, (5) Rāmunā while (6) Janīā, (7) Kāljar, (8) Bhawānipur, (9) Māneri etc. are in the periphery of it.

5. M. Neog (ed.): Guru-carit-Katha, p. 413
6. M. Neog: Śaṅkaradeva and His Time, p. 9
Khatkhatir jān with the scene of Kāliyadaman
The cement clay-made image of Gadurōn the right

Bhīthī of Būghā Ātā attached with deer-park

Math and its cotal of Barpeta satra with portion of satra-
Kīrtāṅghar and the bhaįghar

Mulṭorāṇ (Main gate) of the satra
(B) Accounts of the various satras situated in the Barpeta Area:

(i) Barpeta Satra:

There is a popular saying - 'behare madhupur, Kâmrûpe barpetâ, ujanit kamalâbâri'.

(a) Early History:

From all available accounts of the time around which Śaṅkaradeva come to Barpeta, there was not a famous place Barpeta by name but there were a number of small villages and bils in the area. These villages and bils that later come to constitute present Barpeta were Pâlengdi, Tētikuchi, Ichâkuchi, Galayâ bils, Barpetâ bil etc. within the jurisdiction of Bâusî parganâ under Koch rule. Other neighbouring villages like Sundarîdiyâ, Bârâdi, Kumârkuchi, Baralchung, Daṅgarkuchi, Châparâ etc. were not so important as these are today. The fact that Charpateswar village had a Śiva temple that points to the prevalence of Saivism. But soon after the arrival of Śaṅkara rapid changes of socio-religious aspects took place throughout the whole region specially in the Bâusî parganâ.

In respect of Barpeta it is said that originally there were two small villages on the northern and western banks of

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7. Which means Madhupur in Koch-Behar, Barpetâ in the Kâmrûp, Kamalâbâri in the Upper Assam are the three centres for holiest for the followers of the Śaṅkarite Vaiśṇavism.

8. Râmacharan: Gurucarit, p. 538 edited by B.K. Bhattacharya
of the Barpetā-bil. The village Pālengdi was situated on the northern side of the bil while Barpetā was on the south-west of it. On the other hand, there were Tātikuchi, Ichākuchi and Kalbārikuchi by the side of the Galaya bil. Ichākuchi was situated towards the south of Tātikuchi while Kalbarikuchi was on its north. Tātikuchi was so called because almost all of its inhabitants were Tātis (weavers) who had originally migrated from Khonā khokara of present Sibsagar district. In course of time with the increase of population, people started to settle on the banks of the bils and as a result two separate villages grew following the names of the bils. One of the two was Barpetā following the name of the Barpetā bil and the other was Galaya or Galiā following the name of Galaya bil.

Of course, it is said that Tātikuchi was a bigger village than Barpetā comprising the present satra compound - Nahāti, Galiāhāti-I, and some portion of Dakshin-hāti. Tātikuchi was famous for its handloom industry and had become well known far and wide. It is also said that this excellence of Tātikuchi had drawn the attention of Śaṅkaradeva and even of the Koch king Naranārāyaṇ. Śaṅkaradeva visited the factory of Tātikuchi along with Mādhavadeva for the first time when Naranārāyaṇ requested the saint to prepare the

9. M. Neog (ed.): Guru Carit Katha, p. 219
10. Tilak Das: Sabhapatir Bhāṣan, Ambikāgiri Šatbarshiki Utsab, Barpetā 1986, p. 1
famous Vṛndāvani Vastra.\textsuperscript{11} In this connection, it is also referred to that Śaṅkaradeva was put in-charge of the Kenduguri handloom factory as a gomastā (supervisor) by king Naranārāyaṇa for which the saint visited Tāṭikuchi to supervise the factory frequently.\textsuperscript{12}

Some explanations regarding the origin of the names of Barpeta and some other places associated with it are offered as follows:

(i) According to a popular explanation at the place where the present town of Barpeta is located there was a big (bar) marshy lowland (pit or pitani). In course of time people settled down there and from the term Barpit (big marsh) came the name Barpeta in the long run.

(ii) Another interpretation is that Barpeta was the Barpat of Bāusī parganā. The meaning of Barpat is grand seat or capital. The word Barpat became Barpattā and finally, transformed to Barpeta.

(iii) One more explanation is that Barpeta was situated by the side of the Barpeta bil. The bil had been drying out gradually and lost its importance too. On the other hand, the village Barpeta had been gaining good ground.

However, the most plausible explanation is that Barpeta got its name from the Barpeta bil. Because, it is seen that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} M.C. Lekharu (ed.): Kathā Guru Carit, p. 264
\item \textsuperscript{12} Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva Carit, p. 184
\end{itemize}
many other places of this region have traditionally been named according to the topographic features such as, Galiahāti following Galaya bil, Bilartāri meaning of which is high land near a bil and so on.

Again, in the later period, that is after the final departure of Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, Barpetā came to be called by the different names. They are Barpetā, Tātikuchi, Ichākuchi, Porābhithā, Choukhutīsthān, Puṣpāk-Vimān, Vrindāvan, Mathurā, Kāmpur and Navaratnarsthān.13

Among these names the followings are most popular within the circle of Bhakats (devotees).

Tātikuchi :

This was the village where almost all of the villagers were tātis. There lived one hundred and twenty families of which the family of Ram Laḍūa Budhā alias Rāmacharan was one. The land necessiated for the initial satra of Mādhavadeva was donated by him. As the satra was situated at Tātikuchi, the people called it Tātikuchi Satra though in the later period the name of Barpetā replaced it.

Porābhithi :

It is also another name by which Barpetā Satra has been known. This name is more popular within the Vaiṣṇava circle. It is so called because, the famous Rangiyāl grāha erected

by Mādhavadeva at Tātkichi had been burnt to ashes by wild fire and thenceforth this name was added to Barpeta.

**Navaratnasthān :**

During the stay of Śaṅkara-Mādhava-Dāmodara at this 'Cultural Zone' the learned scholars of that area assembled here. They held discourses, debates and discussion on various subjects pertaining to religion, literature, social norms, etc. Thus Barpeta had turned into a great seat of learning. Devotees, thus, came to refer to it as the Navaratnasthān (the place of the nine jewels) likening it the legendary court of Vikramāditya or may be, to the great religious assembly of Naimишāranya.

**Coukhutisthān :**

The literal meaning of the term is a place surrounded by four posts in four delections. But in case of Barpeta it is said to have a special meaning associated with Śaṅkaradeva and neo-Vaiśṇavism. It is said that the great saint marked the area of Barpeta by fixing four posts in four directions\(^{14}\) and since then that demarcation of the temple town has been maintained with great regard even today as far as the satras influence is concerned. The area marked by the four posts is still regarded as a preserve of the satra-likened Vaiśṇavas.

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The orthodox followers of the tradition inhabiting this area consider it to be sacred and desire to breathe their last here. The popular belief is that one dying within this sacred area goes to heaven. Perhaps, it is for the reason that the people of this *satra* do not like to leave this place as far as possible. It is assumed to be one of the reasons that leads to the high density of population in the temple town. It is also said that many people of Barpeta living outside do not want to sell their landed properties here as if in doing so, they would be in committing a sacrilege.

The other names like Puṣpak-Vimān, Vrindāvan, Mathurā, Kāmpur, Ichākuchi etc., are reverential appellations given by the disciples of the Vaiṣṇava order based on the faith that Śaṅkaradeva was the incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa with whom the above sacred places associated.

*Cinpara*:

Without an account of Cinpara, the description of Barpeta will remain incomplete as it is the part of greater Barpeta and the great saint had chosen this place of Bāusi Parganā first for settlement. Various explanations have been offered regarding the origin of the name of Cinpara. Even in the *Katha-Guru-Carita* (KGC) there are four different explanations as to the origin of the name Cinpara.

(a) In the first instance, it is said that there was a big Parali tree in the north eastern side of Pāleṅgdi under which Śaṅkaradeva and his disciples had taken rest and finally settled down for few months. The tree was the place of shelter for various kinds of birds as it was a very tall in the area. The birds made the branches and leaves white with their droppings and it looked as if lime (cūn) had fallen in the area. So, the name of the place became Cūnparā, which means falling of lime.

(b) Secondly, while the disciples of Śaṅkaradeva were at work in order to prepare the ground smooth to erect dwelling houses, Nāmghar etc., they found an earthen pot full of lime under a grove when the same was rooted out. The lime in the pot was made by burning the shells of snails. So, the name Cūnporā was coined from cūn (lime) and porā (burning).

(c) Thirdly, it is said that, there were some Camār and Hirā families in that portion of Pāleṅgdi. They burnt snails there to produce lime. So, the place was called Cūnporā meaning lime-burning.

(d) In the fourth place, there goes a story that lime fell here from the lime-box of Rukmīdevī, the wife of Lord Kṛṣṇa when she took betel-nut here at this spot on her way to Dwārakā with her husband. As lime fell, the place was called Cūnparā meaning lime-falling.
According to one view this place had its name from some good signs or omens (Assamese-<Cin, Sans. -< Cihna). It is said that when Śaṅkaradeva arrived here he saw four good omens or signs at this place and as a result this place was called Cinparā - marking of good omens. The people of this locality are proud of using the name Cinparā instead of Cūnporā.

Of all these explanations put forwarded regarding the origin of the name Cūnporā (or Cinparā) the most plausible seems to be the one that links it with the productions of lime out of burning shells of snails. There are some Mukhi families even today who are traditionally suppliers of lime to the satra. They had carried on the profession of supplying lime to people in general. Even today, the Mukhis are to supply lime necessary for the satra following the old tradition though they have left the profession now-a-days. Again the word "bhithi" (raised bed of earth) is, sometimes, added after Cūnporā-bhithi17 or kiln. It may be assumed that the Mukhis used this bhithi for the purpose of burning shells of snails throughout the year. Because, there were sufficient snails in the Barpeta bil hereby as raw materials for the preparation of lime.

17. M. Neog (ed.): Pavitra Asam, p. 264
There is an additional point. It is said that Sañkaradeva had to leave Cûnporâ for Kamarkuchi after his stay for six months there, because of the bad smell coming out from the burning snails.  

Establishment of the satra:

Gopâl Tâti was the man without whom one cannot talk about the establishment of the satra at Barpeta. Gopâl Tâti became Mathurâ Dâs alias Budhâ Atâ of this satra in the later period after being initiated by Mâdhavadeva. Mathurâ Dâs escorted Mâdhavadeva bag and baggages to Tâtikuchi when the latter was annoyed with the behaviours and activities of the people of Sundarîdiyâ towards his disciples and left it.

Soon after the arrival of Mâdhavadeva at Tâtikuchi, he started his satra in a plot of land donated by Râmâduâ Budhâ, a relative of Mathurâ Dâs in 1570 A.D. In respect of taking over the land Mathurâ Dâs helped his Guru immensely from the beginning to the end. Mâdhavadeva erected the famous Rângiyâl gpha here at the request of Thâkur Atâ of Janiyâ with the help of his associate disciples. Mâdhavadeva stayed in this satra for seven and half years till he left for Koch-Behar. At that time there were nearly twenty to thirty

19. Daityari : Sañkaradeva-Mâdhavadeva-Carit, p. 185
S.N. Sarma : The Neo-Vaiñâväite, M.S.I.A, p. 225
inmates bhakats (devotees) in the satra as reported by Mathurā Dās when Madhavadeva enquired at Bhela Satra about the number of disciples in Barpetā Satra. Moreover, Mathurā Dās brought the sad news to Madhavadeva about Raṅgiyāl gṛha which was gutted in his absence. On hearing all about it the saint encouraged Mathurā Dās to rebuild the same and accordingly he rebuilt it with the help of its devotees. Madhava nominated Mathurā Dās as the first Satrādhikār of Barpetā Satra and accordingly he paid rupees two as Kar (tax) and mālā (religious chaplet) as a mark of respect to both the satra and the Satrādhikār.  

Hāti system:

During the time of Mathurā Dās Budhā Atā Barpetā Satra took a new shape. Budhā Atā was a man of parts with good foresightedness and religious zeal. It was at his initiative that Barpetā Satra was first divided into three main hātis viz., (1) Uttar hāti, (2) Na-hāti and Dakshin hāti. Later on for the rapid development of the satra Budhā Atā, again, sub-divided the entire satra into smaller hātis. Each and every hāti has its own melcora or hāitār ghar (assembly house of a hāti).

21. M. Neog (ed.): GCK, p. 413

22. It is a row of houses attached to religious institution, the new meaning of the term hāti locality.
The names and the present position of the hātis:

At present the satra has twenty two hātis including the original three.23


Now, with the growing population, the hātis have lost their former shape and size making the separate identification difficult though not impossible.

Development of the temple town of Barpeta:

From the above description of the establishment of the Barpeta Satra it becomes clear that the township at Barpeta

23. Gokul Pāthak: Barpeta Satra Itiḥās, p. 25
grew centering round the great kirtanghar. In this connection the following factors responsible for the growth of the township in Barpeta may be taken into account.

(b) Centre of a satra complex:

At the time of Šāṅkaradeva there were only a few satras headed by the Pātbasī Satra. But during the time of Mādhavadeva there were satras at Pātbasī, Ganakkuchi, Sundaridiyā, Bārādi, Cūnporā, Kamarkuchi, Jāniā, Bhawanipur, Kāljār and a number of others headed by Barpeta Satra under the initiative of the Vaiṣṇava saints and their disciples. Though Barpeta Satra had to face ups and downs in the course of its religious history, yet it could manage to stand unaffected in preaching Vaiṣṇavism. In the later period, the satras went under defaction and split up into saṃhātis though such division were not experienced earlier. Inspite of some differences among satras, Barpeta has been the central guiding force of all the satras of this 'Culture Zone' — since the days of Mādhavadeva, the founder of the satra. Mathurā Dās Budhā Ātā, an worthy disciple of Mādhavadeva, was able to create a satra complex' in Barpeta as a whole and formulated some new methods of socio-religious practices. In view of that he paid frequent visit to the neighbouring satras.
(c) Centre of pilgrimage:

It has been mentioned earlier that Tātikuchi was a famous village for her handloom industry during the reign of Koch kings particularly in the reign of Naranārāyana where the Vrindāvani Vastra (a piece of cloth depicted the early life of Lord Kṛṣṇa in Vrindāvan) had been woven under proper initiative and guide of Śaṅkaradeva. The devotees started considering Tātikuchi a holy place since then. They started paying visits to this holy place as a mark of great respect to their Guru. Moreover, Mādhavadeva's satra with Rāngiyāl grha drew the attention of the people to Tātikuchi. Mādhavadeva became the head of the order after Śaṅkaradeva and, so the Vaiṣṇavas came to his satra to take advice on all sorts of religious matters. As Mādhavadeva and his Barpetā satra became the central guiding force of Vaiṣṇavism, people from different parts of Assam visited this satra in all seasons of the year.

Again the religious functions held in connection with Daul-Utsav, Spring time and winter bihus, Janmāṣṭami of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Birth and Death anniversaries of Śrī Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva etc. and the bhāonās staged on those occasions have been attracting thousands of people to the satra of Barpetā from various corners of Assam throughout the year since those days.
(d) Specialised professional groups and other various crafts developed:

After the nomination of Mathurā Dās Budhā Ātā by Mādhava-deva as the Satradhikār of Barpeta Satra\(^ {24} \) he divided the satra into a good number of hātis on the basis of different professional groups. They are gāyan (singer), bāyan (player of musical instruments), khanikār (painter, sculptor), baniyā (Goldsmith), Kumār (potter), Kamār (blacksmith), Sutār (carpenter), Sutradhārī or Sutradhār (interlocutor in the prelude to each scene of an Assamese āntiyā drama) Rāngidhobā (washerman of the satra necessaries), Teli (oilmen), Sāloī (sweet-meat maker), Tātī (weaver), Mukhi (one who burns lime) Khātanīyār (principal attendant on Satriyā).

There also developed a number of crafts in the town with growing needs of the people in general. As a result of that there grew a new era of small industries in the temple town of Barpeta. The most important of these industries are wood carving, iron work and work in other metals, gold and silver works, ivory work, pottery, fire-work, handloom etc. which attracted people from far and near to Barpeta. It caused an increase of population to a great extent.

(e) Centre of trade and commerce:

Water transport is another factor that contributed much to the growth of township and to the development of trade and commerce. Barpeta Satra is surrounded by the rivers like the Brahmaputra and its tributories. The tributaries are the

\(^ {24} \) M. Neog (ed.): GCK, p. 413
Beki, the Cāulkhowā and the Nakhāndā. People from different walks of lives might come to Barpeta easily and the people of Barpeta also went out on trade and business through these rivers in all the seasons of the years. In those days road communication was practically absent in Barpeta. So, in absence of road communication these rivers played the major role in the day-to-day life of the people.

(f) Centre of education and fine arts:

Though initially the satras have been established as seats of religious instruction and practice, in course of time they were used for organising social and educational lives of the people too. Even at times in absence of organised political institution, the satras had brought unity among the people of various ethnic groups by establishing nāmghar in the village level. In the words of Dr. B.K. Barua "the village nāmghars further serve as panchāyat hall where villagers gather to discuss and solve many of their day-to-day problems. The community centres have been found even to play political and judicial role." The nāmghars create religious enthusiasm among people of all ages and sexes, and become the main centre of attractions and cultural activities.

The satras have also been providing education for their disciples in the tols set up in the precinct of the satra.

25. B.K. Barua: Śāṅkaradeva, Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam, pp. 107-08
Because in those days there were dearth of educational institution before the British occupation in Assam. Most of the Vaiśṇava saints of Assam imparted education to their disciples. Mādhavadeva and Bhaṭṭadeva undertook the task of teaching some monk-pupils in such tols. The bhaona is another output of these satras which have been a regular feature on the ceremonial occasions. Along with Bhāonā gave birth to a class of artisans and they were known as Khanikar, Sutar (carpenter) etc. The art of painting developed in these satras that have been bearing the evidences on the walls of the kirtanghars.

(g) Centre of literature:

Vaiśṇava literature is the cornerstone of Assamese language and literature. In respect of literary contribution, the satras have been playing a major role since the days of Śaṅkara - Mādhava. Most of the literary works of Mādhavadeva were completed in this satra. He also composed many of his bargaits here. It is said that Mādhava composed two devotional songs in the Dallidobār pāthār, near Cūorporā. Moreover, it was the custom of those days for every Satriya to compose atleast one drama in order to prove his qualifications as the head of a satra, whatever literary value of these

26. U. Lekharu (ed.): KGC, p. 618
27. Ram Rai: Gurulīlā, 207
28. A.C. Das: Mahāpuruṣiyā Dharmar Panḍaratna, p. 12
29. Satriya means Satrādhikār, in the Barpeta region generally the Barpetias like to use a short name as far as possible instead of long one eg. satrādhikāras, satriya, bilaniya (distributor) as blleni etc.
30. S.N. Sarma; The N.V.M.S.I.A., p. 165
compositions might have. Lessons in dance have also been imparted in Barpeta Satra along with those in the devotional songs which are the great gifts of the satra and a good contribution to the store of Assamese language, literature and culture.

Taking Barpeta and all other neighbouring satras of different samhatis under one umbrella it can be claimed that the satras have been contributing to almost every aspect of culture to Assam in general and to the Assamese society in particular.

In conclusion it can be summarised as follows: That Barpeta is a 'satra complex' with the presence of so many satras in and around it. Secondly Barpeta has been playing the role of a 'socio-religious complex' where education and learning, language and literature, fine arts and crafts have been cultivated over and above religious aspects. It has also been a centre of trade and commerce.

(II) Growth of the Modern Town of Barpeta: Administrative Headquarters:

As has been mentioned earlier that Rama candra gave only a few bighas of land to erect the kirtanghar of the satra in the initial stage on request of Madhavadeva and Mathurā Dās. In addition to that the entire plot of Barpeta Satra, as it appears in the copper plate inscription preserved in the satra, was donated by Ahom King Śiva Singha (1714-1744 A.D.). In the
words of E. Gait: "Siva Singha made many and lavish presents for
the support of temples and of Brahmins to avert the alarm pro-
dications of the astrologers." The area of the land so donated,
covered the Barpatā biḷ in the east, Galayā biḷ, in the west,
Harijān in the south and Cūnporā-barirda in the north. Over and
above that plot of land, the king donated 280 families of bhakats
(initiated disciples) and 17 families of pāiks for smooth running
of the regular services of the satra. Moreover, the king left
the ownership of four villages placing them under the control
and supervision of the Barpatā Satra. These were Baradi- I,
Dighirpar- I, Jāti- I and Khābtc gaon- I. The aforesaid copper
plate was given on the 4th of Āshār (later part of June and
early part of July) in 1654 saka.

But with change of time, the temple town of Barpatā has
been undergoing changes in respect of its pattern and prospect.
Almost with the advent of the British rule after Yandaboo treaty,
1826 Barpatā became a Sub-divisional town. As a Sub-division,
Barpatā had been taken under proper functioning in the year
1653 A.D., though the district of Kāmrūp along with Goālpārā,
Darrang and Nawgaṅṅg including both the banks of the Brahmaputra
was created in 1834 A.D.

32. Edoward Gait: A History of Assam, p. 392
33. Ibid, p. 298
After a long gap of 33 years from the creation of Barpeta Sub-division, the town was brought under second class Municipal Board as per the Bengal Municipal Act 1884 A.D.\textsuperscript{34} The Municipal Board covers the whole area of the Sub-divisional town including the area of the temple town. Under the Municipal administration the entire town area has been divided into twelve wards and each wards is represented by a ward commissioner.

Again, in the course of recent administrative reorganisation of the state of Assam several new districts have been created by the government of Assam. As a part of this reorganisation process the status of a district was conferred on erstwhile Barpeta Sub-division on the 1st of July, 1987 placing her as the head quarters of the district vide government notification No. GAG. 211/83/4 dated 14.6.83.

(III) \textbf{Topographical feature}:

Against the situation of the past as mentioned earlier, the present Municipal town of Barpeta possesses an area of 3.86 Sq. kilometre and it is located on 90°(E) longitude.

The boundary of the town as district head quarters exceeds the boundary of the temple town as it appeared in the copper plate inscription. At present the Municipal area is the area of the district head quarters. Its northern boundary is marked by the \textit{Marā-Nadi} including a part of the Cāulkhowā river while a portion of the \textit{Marā-Nadi} and Na-Khāndā are

\textsuperscript{34} V.V. Rao: \textit{A Hundred Years of Local Self Government in Assam}, p. 50
flowing through making its eastern boundary. Ganak-kuchi and Gandhi Road mark the southern boundary while Metuākuchi and Gandhinagar embankment stands as the marking line of the western boundary.

In this connection it is to be mentioned here that the area of the proposed extended town will include the approaching point of Daṅgarkuchi across the Cāulkhowā bridge, the eastern bank of Marā-Nadi, Cilāpāthār, Ganak-kuchi, the District Jail, Jātipāthār and Gandhinagar embankment. In that case the area of the proposed town will be approximately 8 Sq. kilometres as it appears in the record of Barpetā Municipal Board.

(IV) Demographic features:

Regarding the informations of population in Barpetā and some of the satras in this cultural zone have been observed in some caritas, copper plates and later writings. The informations can be studied as follows:

(1) It is said that during the time of bhāonā performed under the direction of Mādhavadeva on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the newly constructed Raṅgiyāl grha in Barpetā Satra was attended by thousands of people. It may indicate that Barpetā was a populous satra even in those days.

(2) Again, satras like Barpetā, Pātbāusī and Sundarīdiyā have copper plate inscription of Śiva Singha on the 4th Āsāra.

1654 Saka, Lakshmi Singha in 1694 Saka and of Siva Singha in 1660 Saka respectively. The copper plates had recorded the number of families. So, the exact number of population can not be assessed thereby.

(3) On another occasion E.T. Dalton, the then political Assistant Commissioner of Kāmrūp in 1815 A.D. prepared a note on 'Mahāpurusiyās, a sect of the Assamese Vaiṣṇavism' and published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* Vol. No. 6. According to him Barpeta was the most densely populated village of this region and according to the Census report of 1847-48, there were 7368 people in an area covering 175 acres of land.

But from the beginning of the twentieth century a regular national census in India has been carrying on after a gap of every tenth years duration. Accordingly, the total population of the town was 8747 in 1901 and it went upto 26,479 in 1971.36

The growth rate of population in every census report in respect of Barpeta can be studied in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Percentage of growth rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>8,747</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>10,739</td>
<td>22.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>11,730</td>
<td>9.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>13,777</td>
<td>17.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>18,466</td>
<td>34.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>21,137</td>
<td>14.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>22,207</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>26,479</td>
<td>19.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36. *Census Diary of India*, 1971
In the Municipal area excluding the satra area, people from different religion have been residing together. Out of the total population of the town in 1971 as a whole, there are 25595 Hindus, 859 Muslims, 23 Christians and 2 Sikhs. These heterogenous groups are merged with the main stream of the Assamese. The Hindus are mostly Vaiṣṇavas and only a few of them are Sāktas particularly the people living in the Śivabāri. The total male population is 14342 while the numbers of female is 12127. From the educational point of view the total number of literate people is 16138, out of which female literacy numbers to 6030 and the percentage of literacy is 62 which is an encouraging number against the percentage of Assam as a whole.

Now, an assessment of the population of the greater Barpeta (i.e. the 'cultural zone') is made here so that the comparative relation among the people in respect of religion, literature, culture etc. can be studied more correctly. The total population of the entire 'cultural zone' according to census report of 1971 was 52998 out of which male members were 28769. The literate males and females were 17037 and 9870 respectively.

A short history of the satras located in the core area of Barpeta Satra will be given in the succeeding pages one after another, so that a clear picture of the 'cultural zone' can be obtained.
BĀRĀDI SATRA

Daul-grha and a landscape of satra

Kirtanghar of Bāmūnā Satra
Location and early history:

Barādi is a village as old as that of the Bāusī paraganā. It is situated at a distance of one and a half kilometre from the Barpetā Satra towards the east. The river Nakhāndā has been flowing between Barpetā and Bārādi. Barpetā is on the west bank of it while Bārādi is on the east bank. There is Keotkuchi towards the east of Bārādi while a grazing reserve called Cīraliyyā pāthār covers the whole northern boundary. The Kāmārkuchi Satra marks the southern boundary of Bārādi Satra.

Regarding the significance of the name Bārādi there is an old saying that this place was a bālār (of sand) diyā (a high land formed by deposit of sand and silt by river) formerly. But in course of time, people had chosen it for habitation and a village a grew thereby. Hence, it was called Bālārdīyā Bārādi is a corrupt form of Bālār-diyā. Bārādi is also called Māhmari Gossain Thān by the disciples of Mādhavadeva.

Establishment of the satra:

Śaṅkaradeva had left Kāpalābarī for Cūnporā owing to massive death of his followers. Mānoramā Āi, the mother Mādhavadeva was also one of the victims at Kāpalabarī. But according Dāityārī Manoramā Āi’s death occurred at Bārādi.

38. R. Nath (ed.): Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-Carit, p. 116
Madhavadeva, on the advice of Śaṅkaradeva performed his mother's Srādha at Bārādi with the help of Chakiya Māji, a notable person of the Bāusi parganā and a native of Bārādi. From that time Madhava resided there for nearly 2 (3?) years along with his sister Urarvaśī and brother-in-law Hāmdāsa alias Gayāpāni. During his stay he erected a nāṁghar there at Bārādi in order to perform his routine prasaṅga. It is said that Madhavadeva performed the bhāonā, Patni prasāda at Bārādi Satra with the help of the local people on the occasion of his mother's ādyā-srādha. This dramatic performance attracted people greatly and as a result, many people accepted Śaṅkara's Vaiṣṇavism. Perhaps, this was the first bhāonā staged by the saints in our zone of study.

It may also be mentioned here that famous carit writer Rāmcaran Thākur was born at Bārādi and Madhavadeva adopted him to his Gotra (clan) on the request of Urbaśī. He shifted his residence from Bārādi to Tāmadhawjbār: When Śaṅkaradeva permanently settled at Baralcuṅg in 1550 A.D. The route from Bārādi to Baralcuṅg was a bit time consuming as a result of which Madhava found it difficult to attend on his Guru timely and to take part in regular prayers. After Madhavadeva's departure the inheritors of one Kāhāpāni Bhaṭṭācārya took the

39. Ramcaran : Gurucarit, p. 537
40. Ibid, p. 399
41. M. Neog (ed.) : G.C.K., p. 81
42. Ibid, p. 36
initiative in the matter of Barāḍi Satra. It is claimed by
the local people that the grove of Raṅgiyāl flower in the
satra campus was planted by Mādhavadeva himself. This is the
first satra established by Mādhavadeva.

Present condition of the satra:

In the days of Vaiṣṇava revival Barāḍi was a small
village. Now it is divided into two parts – one is Bāmun Barāḍi
and the other is Satra Barāḍi. Perhaps, the name Bāmun Barāḍi
as the locality is inhabited by Brahmin families who claim
themselves to be the inheritors of Kāhāpāni. Satra Barāḍi is
called that part of the village where the satra of Mādhavadeva
is located. This satra has no Satrādhikār of its own; but all
the religious functions of the satra have been traditionally
carried on under the guidance of the Satrādhikār of Barpeta
Satra.

The main religious functions:

This satra has been observing all the ceremonial
functions which are observed in the Barpeta Satra with slight
variations in duration. The tithis (death anniversaries) of
Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and Budhā Ātā are observed in this
satra for five days, ten days and five days respectively. Other
tithis like Thākur Ātā, Badalā Ātā, Bar Viṣṇu Ātā etc. are
observed for one day only. The Bihu festivals and Daul-Utsav
are observed in this satra as in the Barpeta Satra.
Among the relics preserved in the manikut of the satra, the most noteworthy is the Nāmghoṣā written on sācipāt. It is said that this manuscript was written by Mādhavadeva himself.

Bāmunā Satra:

This satra is situated towards the north east of the Barpeta and Sundaridiyā satras at the distances of four kilometres and one and a half kilometres from them respectively. The Barpeta-Bhawānipur road passes through the village. It is said that there were a few Brāhmin families at this place originally and that is why the village was called Bāmunā though there is not a single Brāhmin family at present. The Sarpateswar village which was famous for her Śiva temple was situated towards the north at a distance of one k.m. Perhaps, the priests of the temple resided in the nearby village of Bāmunā in the past.

Establishment of the satra:

The founder of this satra is Daityāri Thākur, the famous carit writer of Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Daityāri Thākur left Sundaridiyā for Bāmunā and founded his satra there in 1625 A.D. Perhaps, Bāmunā is the first and only satra established by him. He stayed here nearly for twenty five

43. Ramacaran: Guru Carit, p. 538
Abode of Mahava with the grove of Raṅgiyāl flower bounded by pacca walls

Main door of the Kāṭaṅghar with wooden images of Jaya and Bijoya
years up to the age of 52 years. He wrote his famous carita of Mahāpuruṣ Śrī Śrī Sāṅkaradeva Āru Mādhavadeva in between 1619 and 1648 A.D. From this point of view, it can be noticed that Daityārī wrote his carita at Bāmunā. R.M. Nath in his editorial note mentions the composing date of the carita to be not later than 1542 Saka (1620 A.D.) which is perhaps a bit earlier date because Daityārī was only 24 years old at that time. The writing style of the Carita seems to be of later age. However, his carita is a very valuable contribution to the stock of Vaiṣṇava literature.

There are the images of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa preserved in the satra. Bāmunā Satra is also popularly known as Phāṭā-Gossair thān.

3. Ganakkuchi:

Early history:

Mādhavadeva remained at Bārāḍi so long as Sāṅkaradeva was at Cūnporā and Kamārkuchi. But when Śaṅkara settled at Pāṭbāusī, it appeared difficult for Mādhava to attend the prasāṅgas (daily prayers) at Pāṭbāusī punctually as the route through the Barpetā-bil was a round about one. So, he had to shift his residence to an uncle's house of Tāmadhajbāri for a period of four months. But there he found inconvenience somehow, and hence he moved to one Digholā Kāith, a non-Vaiṣṇava where

44. M. Neog: Sāṅkaradeva and His Times, p. 7
45. R.M. Nath: Sāṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-Carit, p. 5
46. Information given by Shri Shashi Dhar Adhikari, present Satriya
47. G.C.K., p. 86
also he was not well behaved. Ultimately, under the arrangement of Śaṅkaradeva he came to reside in a newly constructed house of a Ganak (astrologer) accompanied by one Mahākāli Rāma. In due course he permanently settled there and established his satra sometime in the year 1550 A.D. As the satra was established in the house of a Ganak, the satra came to be known as Ganak-kuchi Satra. It is said that Rāmdās and his family also lived with Mādhava there at Ganak-kuchi Satra.48

It is noticed that there are differences of opinion regarding the establishment of this satra. Bhuṣan Dvija is of the opinion that Śaṅkaradeva erected the house at Ganakpārā and settled there till he started for Kamārkuchi.49 But almost all of the caritas are silent regarding Śaṅkara's settlement at Ganak-kuchi. However, it is unanimously said that Śaṅkaradeva with Rāmānanda resided at Ganak-kuchi for a night only when he left Bāusi for Koch-Behar and that very day Śaṅkara appointed Mādhava Chief Apostle of the order in his absence.50 Perhaps, Bhuṣana was wrongly informed regarding the settlement of Śaṅkara at Ganak-kuchi.

Location of the satra:

Ganak-kuchi is situated at a distance of one kilometre from Barpetā Satra towards the south and two kilometres from

48. M. Neog : Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva, p. 81
49. Bhuṣan Dvija : Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva, p. 116
50. Daityāri, pp. 222-25; GCK, p. 181; Bardowā Carit, pp. 166-67
the Pāṭbāūsi Satra towards the north-west. Now-a-days, though
the distance from Ganak-kuchi to Pāṭbāūsi is not taken into
account, yet in those days of Śāṅkara-Mādhava it was a peri­
lous way. Because the route ran through the dense forest and
was the dens. of wild beasts and it became risky for Mādhava
to attend his Guru at Pāṭbāūsi twice daily. So, Śrīrām Ātā
was engaged to accompany Mādhava throughout the way regularly.
The river Nakhānda is flowing through the east of Ganak-kuchi
and the west of Pāṭbāūsi. In the north of Ganak-kuchi there
are Ichāpuwhāti and Pāṭhārhati, in the south Bagalāmāri reserve
and Nasatra while Bhakatpārā marks its western boundary.

A unit of the 'Cultural Zone' :

Ganak-kuchi is the second satra established by Mādhava-
deva, Bārādi being the first. It is said that he stayed at
this satra for a long period of 18 years till he resided at
Pāṭbāūsi nearly a year according to the advice of Kālindā Ātā.\(^{51}\)
Another most important figure of the Vaiṣṇava order was
Nārāyandās Thākur. He was a regular visitor of this satra and
came from Manthoi almost every day. From Ganak-kuchi Mādhava
and Thākur Ātā both together attended the prasāṅga at Pāṭbāūsi.
It may be said that Ganak-kuchi serves as the gateway to
Pāṭbāūsi.

It is to be noted here that Mādhava was the first person
to make use of a Kath (mat)\(^{52}\) which he prepared at Ganak-kuchi

\(^{51}\) M. Neog (ed.): Bardowa Carit, p. 174
\(^{52}\) A mat made of the dried stems of the plaintain tree.
Satra and presented the same to his Guru. It is said that the Kath has been used by the Vaiṣṇava bhakats since then.

All the literary works performed by Madhava, during the period of Śaṅkaradeva's stay at Pāṭbāusi, were completed at Ganak-kuchi Satra. Madhava composed one hundred and ninety one bargits (devotional songs) on the advice of his Guru in the later part of his stay at Ganak-kuchi. Moreover, here he worked out the nāts of Dadhimathana, Rasajhumura, Pimpara Gucowā, Bhumiletowā, Bhus-anherowā, Kotorā-Khelowā etc. according to Śaṅkara's advice. But carit writers are not unanimous in this respect. However, if these works were done on the advice of Śaṅkaradeva, in that case these were perhaps, the products of Ganak-kuchi. Because Madhava was at Ganak-kuchi so long as Śaṅkara was at Pāṭbāusi Satra and there was hardly any physical meeting of Śaṅkara-Madhava while the former stayed at Koch-Behar till death.

Present position of the satra:

Now, Ganak-kuchi has not been maintaining its separate identity but has become part of greater Barpeta. Of course, geographically Ganak-kuchi has its own existence covering a land area of 630 acres. The satra compound is surrounded by family quarters within the reach of nearly 50 metres. The kīrtan ghar and the manikut (shrine) are of C.I. sheet roofs

53. GCK, p. 178
54. M. Neog (ed.): Bardowā Guru Carit, p. 165
with pacca plinth. By the side of the manikut, towards a bit north, there is a small house roofed with C.I. sheet, where Mādhavadeva is said to have dwelt. Between the kīrtanghar and Mādhava mandir there is a large grove of raṅgiyāl flower which is said to have been planted by Mādhava himself. The flower grove is maintained with great care and is encircled by a pacca wall. Towards the north a bit remote of the kīrtanghar there is another tin roofed house where Śrīrām Ātā is said to have dwelt. The melcarā and the daul-griha are located towards the west of Mādhava mandir (house). There is also a keoliā hāti (row of residential huts for celibates) towards the extreme north.

At present there are two such celibates in the satra campus who look after the satra and perform daily prasaṅgas.

There are some relics preserved in the satra compound and the manikut which are kept for the benefit of visitors. Mention may be made of (1) a Pirā (low wooden stool) used by Mādhava (ii) a pātnād (ring well) of the days of Mādhava (iii) A grove of raṅgiyāl flower (iv) Some books written on Sāncipāt (v) Some masks of bhāonā etc.

The satra is managed by the body of bhakats under the supervision of the Satriyā of Barpeta Satra, and it has no Satriyā of its own. All religious services including Daul-Utsav and the three kirtanas are being observed traditionally as done in Barpeta Satra.
LANDSCAPE OF PATBAUSI SATRA WITH A PORTION OF THE MATH

WOODEN SANDALS OF RAMANANDA (LEFT) AND SANKARA (RIGHT) PRESERVED IN NIJ-PATBAUSI SATRA

MATH IN THE ADIDHAM SATRA OF DAMODARADEVA
The position of women in religious matters is not much
congeneal and liberal. As in Barpetā Satra they are not
admitted to enter into the kirtanghar and manikut.

4. Patbāusī Satra:

Introduction:

Śaṅkaradeva entered Kāmrūp i.e., Koch-kingdom, along
with his disciples including Mādhava and Rāmrām Guru approxi-
mately in 1463 saka (1543) A.D. as he got various obstruct-
ions, both from the Ahom king and his detractors in carrying
on his religious mission freely. The saint resided in many
places of Koch-Kāmrūp temporarily as those places could not
provide him a healthy atmosphere. Then he came to Bāusī
parganā and finally chose Patbāusī for permanent settlement.
At the time of his settlement the place was known by various
names but not as Patbāusī, about which we discuss in the
succeeding pages.

Location:

Patbāusī Satra of Bāusī parganā is situated towards the
south-east of the Barpetā town and satra which is three
kilometres far from Barpetā. The river Nakhāndā flows by the
western side of Patbāusī Satra and the village Kāhikuchi
marks southern boundary. On the eastern side of it there is
the Gaherpām (perhaps, the agricultural firm of Śaṅkara and
Dāmodara) while Kamārkuchi and Na-satra occupy its northern
Early history and satra establishment:

According to Rāmarāi the name of Patbāusī was not known at the time of the arrival of Śaṅkara and his associates. The place of this satra came to be known as Patbāusī after many years. Guru Carit Kathā explains that formerly this place was known as Baralcuṅg (full of nests of wasps) or Baraljār (jungle of wasps).

In the later period, as it is said, Patbāusī had replaced the above names. The following explanations are offered regarding the name of Patbāusī.

(i) There is a saying among the bhakats that Śaṅkara-deva had found mukhāṃśta (Krishna's left over food which as it were, was nectar itself) of Lord kṛṣṇa at the time of digging pits to erect the Kirtanāhar there at Baralcuṅg. He distributed a portion of the mukhāṃśta among the disciples and kept the remaining portion covered (pāt-mārā) there under the ground again, the phrase 'pāt-mārā' got prefixed to Bāusi and it was called 'pāt-mārā' Bāusi or Patbāusī.

(ii) There is another explanation regarding the name Patbāusī. According to this, it is said that Śaṅkaradeva had
brought the tree of 'ekāśarana dharma' to the earth. The tree of ekāśarana dharma grew up fully with leaves (pāt) here at Bāusi. So this place Bāusi was called Pātbāusi prefixing the word 'pāt' to Bāusi.

(iii) It is also said that the Koch king Naranārāyana (1540-1587 A.D.) appointed Śaṅkara the Gomastā (administrator) of Bāusi parganā and the saint carried on the administration of Bāusi from this place or seat (pāt = throne). In due course of time, therefore, this place was known as Pātbāusi.

(iv) Another explanations given by Banamāli Mis'ra and others that the famous Vaiṣṇava saints- Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva, Dāmodaradeva and Bhaṭṭadeva had established the altar (Śrī pāt) of Assam Vaiṣṇavism here in this place of Bāusi parganā. As a result, this place of Bāusi became wellknown as holy place of the parganā and came to be considered as central or capital (pāt) satra of Assam. Therefore, this place was called Pātbāusi.

The last explanation perhaps, has the most solid ground in respect of the origin of the name Pātbāusi. In the third phase of his career at Pātbāusi the principal Brahmin saints like Dāmodaradeva, Harideva and Ananta Kandali came to Śaṅkara's influence for the first time. Moreover, all the

56. M. Neog (ed.): GCK, p. 86
57. J.N. Das (ed.): Sāhitya Samāroh Granth, 1969, p. 96
religious activities of Vaišnavism were controlled from Pāṭbāusī and it had been the radiating centre of socio-religious life of the people of Bāusī as well as of the people of the faith.

The present Pāṭbāusī is the amalgamation of two villages — One is Baralzőurı or Baraljār and the other known as Vyāspur or Chandraratīpur. A stream called Dhanukhāndā jān separates them, Baralcunj is on the west bank of the jān (stream) and Vyāspur on the east bank of it.

Establishment of satra:

(1) After the entry into Koch-Kāmrūp Śaṅkaradeva and his followers had to change their abode several times. They remained at Kāpalābari for six months and after that they stayed at Cūnporā of Pāleńgdi for nearly six months. But after six months they again shifted their residence to Kamārkuchi where they remained for nearly a year and then Śaṅkara removed his abode to the placed called Baralcunj, later known as Pāṭbāusī where he finally settled perhaps, in the year 1948 A.D. But according to S.N. Sarma the foundation period of Śaṅkara's Pāṭbāusī Satra is supposed to be 1550-1568 A.D. However, kīrtāṅghar and shrine along with cārihātis (four rows of houses) having been erected at Baralcunj, religious discussion and...

58. S.N. Sarma: The Neo-Vaiśnavite Movement and Satra Institution of Assam, p. 224
recitation of the *Bhāgavata*, dramatic performance and congregational chanting of prayer were held regularly. It is traditionally accepted that Śaṅkara passed the most valuable 18 years 6 months of his ripe age here in this *satra*. Of course the *Guru Carit Kathā* mentions the period of stay at Patbausi to be 14/15 years only. It is noticed that the portion of Pāṭbāusi where Śaṅkara established his *satra* is known as Nij-Pāṭbāusi, particularly among the *bhakats*. Perhaps, it may be so because the name Patbausi originated from the *satra* of Śaṅkara. When Dāmodaradeva and the other member of his family left the Ahom kingdom, they after some wandering came to Pāṭbāusi ultimately and settled very close to Śaṅkara's *satra* where Dāmodar's religious life began. It has been unanimously admitted by the earlier biographers of Dāmodaradeva that he was inspired and influenced by Śaṅkaradeva. Nilakantha stricly states that it was from Śaṅkaradeva that he received the impetus for adopting the life of a proselytiser. As a result he established a *satra* of his own on the eastern bank of the Dhanukhāndājan just opposite of Śaṅkara's *satra*. The place where he founded his *satra* round about 1590 A.D. was known as Vyāspur. It was the first *satra* established by him and that is why this *satra* is known as Ādi-dhām of Deva Dāmodara.

59. M. Neog (ed.): *GCK*, pp. 86, 186
60. Nilakantha: *Dāmodara Carit*, pp. 71, 87
61. S.N. Sarma: *The Neo-Vaisnava Movement*, p. 21
Achievements of the satras of Pātbāusī:

It was the period of Śaṅkaradeva's stay at Pātbāusī Satra that had seen much of the attainment of the achievements of religious and social missions of Śaṅkaradeva. Over and above Mādhava and other disciples, Śaṅkaradeva got Nārāyan Dās Thākur Ātā into his fold at Cūnporā. He was most influential and well to do merchant. He was instrumental in bringing large number of people to the religious fold of Śaṅkaradeva. Moreover, people began to come in large numbers into his new order attracted by his personality as well as by the mode of his preaching. As mentioned earlier, here at Pātbāusī Harideva, Dāmodardeva and Ananta Kandali, three of the principal associates came for the first time under Śaṅkara's influence and the recruitment of these Brahmins to his faith helped him to attract the sympathy and co-operation of the Brahmins who as a class had remained so long outside the sphere of his influence.

It is noticed that Śaṅkara's life at Pātbāusī was more peaceful in comparison to his life in Ahom territory. As a result he had the opportunity to fulfil the religious, literary and cultural mission of his life. Now, Śaṅkaradeva resumed his customary works of holding congregation, receiving neophytes, and writing books. During that period Budhā Doloi, an officer of the Koch king and his brother joined the Vaiṣṇava camp. Among the converts mention may be made of the king of Heramba territory and Cāndsāi, a Muslim tailor.

63. Bhusana: Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva, v. 660
Sankaradeva composed all his major poetical and dramatic works while he was at Pātbausī sattr. He wrote here the last portions of the Kīrtan-ghosā, and the Bhāgavatā was rendered into Assamese verses. These two are considered to be most holy books of Assam Vaiśṇavism. The local tradition at Pātbausī is that Sankaradeva composed and produced almost all the dramas in course of his stay in the Pātbausī sattr. Other works of this period are: The Bhāgavata I, II, IX, XI, and XII, the Anādi Pātana, the Bali-chalana, the Kurukṣetra, the Nīminava Siddha Sanvāda, the Uttarāskānda Rāmāyana and some bārgits and bhatimās. Sankaradeva got the Vrindāvani Vastrā prepared at Tātikuchi while he was at Pātbausī. On the whole, Assam Vaiśṇavism attained the fullest development at the third phase of Sāṅkara's life at Pātbausī. A list of notable disciples who were with Sāṅkara at Pātbausī is given by Dr. M. Neog with authority to Rāmcarana. They were Mādhavadeva, Nārāyana Dās Thākur Ātā, Rāmrām Guru, Sarbajay, Paramānanda, Udārgovinda, Balorām, Budhā Govinda, Harivipra, Bhobarā Dāmodar, Balāi, Haridhan, Budhā Daivajna, Haridas Baniyā, Ketāikhā, Rāmarāi, Ratikānta Doloī, Mahākālirām and Vyāskalāi.

On the other side the achievements of the Ādi-Satra i.e., the sattr of Dāmodaradeva were in no way less important than those of Sāṅkaradeva. Within a short time, Dāmodaradeva could attract a band of faithful followers mainly

64. M. Neog: Sāṅkaradeva and His Times, p. 202
drawn from the Brahmanical section and began to take active part in Vaiṣṇava movement. Even his growing popularity and influence had terrified the exponents of the Śakticūlta who brought allegations against him in the court of Parīkṣita-
nārāyaṇa.

Dāmodaradeva disowned the leadership of Mādhavadeva after the death of Śaṅkaradeva and came out from the orthodox Mahāpuruṣiyā cult. Perhaps, Dāmodara did not like the nomination of Mādhava as the head of the order. So, he started a new sub-sect claiming complete independence from the sect founded by Śaṅkara. This he did by modifying the religious teachings and practices of the parent cult by making a compromise between the path of devotion and Brahmanical rituals traditionally followed. As a result the number of Brahmin disciples began to increase by leaps and bounds. Dāmodara's satra became the radiating force of the sub-sect with the initiation of some eminent scholars like Bhaṭṭadeva. A host of twelve disciples attended Dāmodar's satra regularly over and above some casual disciples. The names of the twelve were Rāmarāya, Kṛṣṇananda, Rāmanandadeva, Hari Āta, Raghunāth Misira, Jagannāth, Rāmdās, Viṣṇudās, Payonidhi, Ratulcarana, Madhu and Parbānanda.

In respect of literary works of Dāmodaradeva at Pāṭhāusi few mention may be made of devotional songs composed by him.

Moreover, while Dāmodara left for Koch-Behar under the pressure of Parikshitnārāyana he nominated Bhaṭṭadeva as the Satriyā of his Pāṭbāusi Satra. He also selected a few zealous and scholarly young disciples whom he sent to different direction of Kāmrūp where they were installed as local heads. According to Nilakanṭha,67 he sent Santadeva to Garemārā, a place to the south of the Brahmaputra, Bhagavāndeva to Nīmisā, Gopāl Misra to Kudiyā, a place east of Barpetā, Arjundeva and Manohara Kāyastha to Locā and Palwā respectively. Vāṅgśigopāldeva was sent to further east.

Bhaṭṭadeva rendered into Assamese prose the three most important Vaiśnava scriptures viz., the Bhāgavata, the Gitā and the Ratnāvāli and Patbausi was the place of literary works. Bhakti-viveka, the Sarana-saṅgraha and Prasāṅga-mālā are his important works where fundamental principles and practices of Dāmodara's cult have been setforth. He maintained a regular Sanskrit tol in the satra precinct where he produced hundreds of young men well-versed in Vaiśnavite lore and sent them to various places of Kāmrūp entrusting them with the responsibility of spreading the cult. In this way Bhaṭṭadeva established a net work of satras throughout Kāmrūp and after him there has been no personality of this sub-sect having such scholarship, status and dignity. That is why Rāmarāya68 rightly

67. Nilakanṭha: Damodar Carit, p. 153
68. Rāmarāya: Gurūlilā, p. 41
remarked that Pātbāusī of the last decades of the sixteenth century had turned into Naimiśāraya with the presence of Śaṅkara, Mādhava, Dāmodara and Harideva of Māneri. Now, Pātbāusī is far from maintaining the former tradition in both the satras. Of course it is noticed that both the satras are able to replace threshed roofs by C.I. sheet and pacca buildings with the aid of Assam Government.

Present satra properties and management:

It is said that king Lakshminārayana had donated 64 puras (4 bighas = 1 pura) of tax free land to the Niz-Pātbāusī satra in the name of the then Satrīyā Rāmdeva Adhikāri along with seventy seven bhakats and the satra at present has been deriving the benefit of 176 bighas of land.69

The Satrīyā of Narowā Satra is also in charge Satrīyā of Niz-Pātbāusī but in respect of satra management it has been carried on by the local disciples in the name of the former.

On the other hand, Ahom king Gourināth Singha donated 156 bighas of land to the Ādi-Dhām Satra of Dāmodara. There is an old math of 40' high similar to the shape of Jayadol which have been constructed by Promotta Singha in 1069 saka (1757 A.D.). The management of this satra has been carried

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69. J.N. Das (ed.): Sāhitya Samāroh Grantha, p. 98
70. M. Neog (ed.): Pavitra h sam, p. 263
on by the hereditary Satrādhikār i.e. this satra follows the system of hereditary headship which is perhaps, followed in the later period after Bhaṭṭadeva.

Satra festivals:

The most important festivals of Niz-Pātbāusi satra is the tithi of Śaṅkaradeva which is popularly known as Kirtan Māhotsav. This Kirtan has been observing in collaboration with the Barpeta since the days of Budha Ātā. According to custom the instrumentals of Barpeta go to Niz-Pātbāusi Satra along with gāyan-bāyan (Singer and drummers) in order to observe the tithi in the midst of the disciples of the satra even to-day. Other functions are observed as these are done in the Barpeta Satra.

But in the Ādi-dham, the tithis of Dāmodara and Bhaṭṭadeva are seemed to get priority in comparision to others. It has been noticed that the woman are not allowed to enter into the Kīrtanghar of Niz-Pātbāusi while such restrictions are not imposed, except in the case of the shrine, in the Ādi-dham of Dāmodaradeva.

Relics available are - (a) footprint marks of Śaṅkaradeva on a piece of stone, (b) a stone which was used by the saint for bathing, (c) plinth area of the dwelling house of Śaṅkaradeva and Kālindi Āī with a small house thereon, (d) bedstead of Kālindi Āī with few pieces of clothes she used, (e) The Bhāgavata X, Ādi and the Gunamālā of Śaṅkara
SUNBARIDIA SATRA

Math with its cotāl and a portion of the Kirtanghar and the Bhādghar

Maneri (Bahari) Satra's Kirtanghar
written on sāncipāt, (f) some wooden masks of bhāonā, (g) a ring-well (pāt-nād) which is considered by the devotees to have been used by Kālindī Ai excavated recently.

5. Sundarādiyā Satra:

Sundarādiyā is one of the most important centres of the Neo-Vaiṣṇava movement within the core area of this 'Cultural Zone' where Mādhavadeva stayed for nearly fourteen years and six months as traditionally accepted.

Location of the satra:

The Sundarādiyā Satra is situated towards the north-east of the Barpeta Satra at a distance of nearly two kilometres. Sundarādiyā is surrounded by the Kalaya bil in the north, the Barpeta-Guwahati Road in the south, Barbilā in the east and Suhārkur in the west.

Early history:

Tradition traces the origin of the village back to the reign of Narakāsura of Pragjyotiṣapura (The city of Eastern astrology). When Śaṅkaradeva arrived at this village on his way to Koch-Kāmrūpa he is said to have been told about the speciality of the place. According to that account two beautiful ladies (sundari) out of the sixteen thousand queens were given to king Narakā from this village and that was the reason for which the village was called Sundarādiyā. 71

71. Rāmacarana: Guru Carit, p. 536
But according to the Guru Carita Kathā, there are four more explanations regarding the name Sundarīdiyā. Two of these explanations are selected to mention here:

(i) The water, land and soil of this diya were very nice (Sundar) for habitation and hence this place was called Sundarīdiyā.

(ii) This was a very beautiful (Sundar) Cāparī or diya formed by the Budhā Luit and ultimately the cāparī was selected for habitation and as a result there grew a village which was known as Sundarīdiyā.

Even to-day the village is noticed like a river island surrounded by the Nakhāndā and the Marā-Nadi. So the name seems to have been derived from the two terms Sundari (beautiful) and diya (island capari) as the place was bounded by rivers and bils on all sides.

Establishment of satra:

After the death of Rāmānanda in 1570 A.D. (approximately) Mādhava was advised by Kālindī Āi to stay at Pātbāusi and to look after the bereaved family and he stayed there nearly for one year. But according to the Bardowā Carit Mādhava stayed at Pātbāusi for five years which seems to be rather too long a period in view of the fact that the opponent group had always

72. Diya means (Sansk. = Dwip) River-island (cāpari) and in the dialect of Kāmrūp it is called diya; GCK, p. 195
73. M. Neog (ed.): GCK, p. 193
74. Ibid, Bardowā Guru Carit, p. 174
been trying to find fault with Madhavadeva there and possibly the duration of Madhava's stay at Pāṭbāusi may not be more than one year. In such a situation Madhava was annoyed and determined to leave Pāṭbāusi. So, he started for Sundarīdiyā with Śīrām Āṭā and others on the advice of Kālindī Āi, even against the prior advice of his Guru. ⁷⁵

According to the Guru Carit Kathā, Madhava resided first in the house of some Khirā Maral and then moved to Rāmacarana's house at Sondarā. After his stay for six months there he moved to the newly constructed house of his own satra. ⁷⁶ Perhaps, he founded his satra at Sundarīdiyā nearly in 1972 and he passed the most valuable period of his life at Sundarīdiyā. It is said that Madhava nominated Rāmacaran as the Satriya of his Sundarīdiyā Satra while the former moved to Koch-Behar. ⁷⁷ Even to-day the successors of Rāmacaran Thākur have been inheriting the Satrādhīkārship of Sundarīdiyā Satra.

The landed property of the satra is twenty purās (1 purā = 4 bighā) of revenue free land which had been donated by Ahom King Śīva Singha in 1660 saka (1738 A.D.) by a document of copper plate (still preserved in the satra), where mention was made of sixty one families, along with land gift, of different castes in order to serve the satra.

⁷⁵ M. Neog (ed.): GCK, p. 195
⁷⁶ Bardowā Guru Carit, p. 175
⁷⁷ M. Neog (ed.): Pavitra Asam, p. 261
The present Sundaridiyā Satra is bounded by pucca walls almost on all sides. Within the satra compound there is the kirtanqhar in the middle along with the Manikut (vestry). There is the beautiful math by the northern side of the kirtanqhar which is said to have been built by the Ahom king Pramotta Singha in 1771 saka.78 The math looks like the famous Siva-daul of Sibsagar. On the southern side of the kirtanqhar there is a ring well housed by C.I. sheet roofs which is said to have been used by Mādhavadeva himself, and towards the west of it there is a small pucca house known as the Gosāni grha.79 It is said that Kālindī Āi passed the last days of her life in the same place where the house has been erected. The store house of the woman devotees is in the east of the well. The bharālgāhar (general store house) of the satra is located by the northern side of the math. There is a small park bounded by pucca walls just towards the east of the math and the bharālgāhar. The bhāonā stage and the daul grha are situated in a raw towards the west of the bharālgāhar. There is also an old bhāonā stage in the northern corner of the kirtanqhar. The keoliāhāti (housing rows of celibates) is located all along the northern boundary of the satra where celibates have been dwelling. There are only two such celibates at present in the keoliāhāti.

78. M. Neog (ed.): Pavitra Asam, p. 261
79. Ibid, p. 261
Some rites and occasional observances:

It is noticed that there are some striking features in this satra which can be explained in the following manners:

(i) The Satradhikār of the Sundaridiyā Satra is either hereditary or nominated while the holder of the same position is elected in the Barpeta Satra. Moreover, there are two Satradhikārs in this satra after Rādhākanta Adhikāry.

(ii) The aksaya-banti (ever lighting lamp) of this satras has been placed facing towards the east while in all satras of this area, including Barpeta Satra, it faces towards the west.

(iii) It is the tradition of this satra that the idol of Vaniśgopāl is taken round the satra on the 6th day of Bahāg (April-May) every year while the same function is performed in the last day of the Daulotsav in the Barpeta Satra. This is known as suweri phurowā.

(iv) In Sundaridiyā Satra there is another festival known as ghat-sevā (homage to Kalayāghāt). It is conducted in the kalaya-nāmghar in the month of Bahāg annually to commemorate the gathering for paināma held under the initiative of Mādhava-deva. The Vaiṣṇavas believed that the Kalayāgaṅga or bil was the outcome of that holy nāma-prasaṅga. In cases of other occasional observances of this satra follows the rules and customs of the Barpeta Satra.

80. A.C. Das: Mahāpurusiyā Dharmar Pancaratna, p. 318
Position ofwoman:
The women are not equally treated in religious matters. Even they are not allowed to get into the kirtanghar in regular course; but on the day of initiation of a woman to the order she is allowed to enter up to the second compartment of the kirtanghar. Perhaps, such treatments were not done in the initial stage as no case like this is mentioned in the biographies of the saints. Of course, the woman devotees have been carrying on an annual nām-prasāṅga on the first day of the month of Māgha (January-February). It is held not in the satra kirtanghar but in the Kalaya nāmghar which is situated by the northern side of Barpeta-Bhayānipur Trunk Road. It is said that this nāmprasaṅga has been performed to commemorate the occasion of Madhava's seven days' nāmprasaṅga held in collaboration with the renowned bhakats like Thākur Atā, Gopāl Atā etc.

The relics in the satra:

There are a few objects of veneration for the disciples in this satra. There are (1) one bronze icon known as Vamśi-gopāl which is in the math and it is said to have been donated by the Koch King Raghu Deva Nārāyan (1581-1603 A.D.), (2) one copy of theNamghosā said to have been written by

81. A.C. Das: Mahāpuruṣīyā Dharmar Pancaratna, pp. 316-17
82. M. Neog (ed.): Pavitra Asam, p. 261
BHAMANIPUR SATRA

Sankaradevar Mandir

Guru-āsana of the satra

Gopaladevar Mandir

Madhavadevar Mandir
Mādhava himself on Sāncipāt, (3) a small stool used by Kālindī Āi while spinning cotton and a few balls of cotton, (4) one piece of keru (earring) worn by Kālindī Āi, (5) the ring well used by Mādhavadeva. Most of all these items bear the quality of the artistic specimens of the remote past.

Moreover, it is said that Sundarīdiyā after passing away of Śaṅkaradeva, became one of the most attractive religious centres, the other being Jāniā, where renowned Vaiṣṇavas met and discussed matters relating to Vaiṣṇavism. 83

Satras in the periphery of the 'Cultural Zone':

6. Bhawānipur Satra:

This satra is one of the most important units of the 'cultural zone' of Barpeta that played a most significant role in the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva.

Location:

Bhawānipur is situated towards the north of the Barpeta Satra at a distance of nearly Eighteen kilometres. The North Eastern Railway line passes by its north nearly two kilometres ahead of it. The Bhawānipur-Simalāguri P.W.D. Road marks its southern boundary.

Satra establishment and early history:

The original satra of Bhawānipurīyā Gopāl Āṭā was devasted in the great earthquake that struck on the 20th Jetha

83. M. Neog: Śaṅkaradeva and His Time, p. 9
(May-June) of 1819 saka (1897 A.D.). After the earthquake the satra was removed to a nearby village which came to be called Bhawanipur following the earlier name of the satra and its people. As it is said that since the establishment of the new satra, the original Bhawanipur is being called Puran Bhawanipur. Another source says that after the departure of Gopal Ata and most of his disciples, (which we discuss lateron) Bhawanipur was a deserted place and people started settlement in nearby places. They gave the name of their new settlement as Bhawanipur and the satra Bhawanipur was known as Puran (old) Bhawanipur which is perhaps a more or less correct account.

Now, whatever the case may be we shall be dealing with Puran Bhawanipur which was the Bhawani nagar of Koch King Naranarayan and also centre of Neo-Vaisnavite movement.

Early history:

Bhawanipur is not a legendary name rather it has its own history related with the Koch kingdom.

It is said that Naranarayan established four towns (Naigars) in the eastern portion of his kingdom to rehabilitate the people of various walks of life taken from the jurisdiction of Garing Raja. Bhawani nagar was one of the four nagaras where Gopala and his family were settled.

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84. M.C. Mahanta et al. (ed.): Gopal Devar Carit, p. 98
In the meantime Gopāla, somehow, came in contact with the king Naranārayana. The king had become highly pleased with Gopāla's mild and benign nature. Moreover, he possessed a handsome physique which was also a cause of king's attention on him. It is said that king Naranārayana would have appointed Gopāla his Tāmulī but one Kaliyā Dolo restrained the king from doing so. However, Gopāla became the leader of the Kumārs (potter in the nagar) at the behest of the king. He also obtained the title of Mahājan among the Tātis of Bhawānipur. Another account says that Gopāla with his mother had carried on the business of weaving cloth for the king and his family with the help of the Tātis.

Satra Establishment:

Bhawānipur is the first satra established by Gopāladeva, where he was settled by the Koch king after he entered this kingdom from the Ahom territory. It is noticed that there were influences of two different orders of Vaiṣṇavism in Bhawānipur. Some of the inhabitants followed Śaṅkara's order. The notable disciples of Śaṅkara was Amritkar, the Baruā of Bhawānipur under Koch king while his brothers Madhukar, Puṣkar and Raṣmikar were disciples of Mādhava. On the other hand, Gopāla's mother and some of their relatives and neighbours were followers of the Vaiṣṇava order of Caitaya of

85. Gopāla Devar Carit, p. 98
86. Ibid, p. 144
87. Nagar or pura carries the same meaning in Sanskrit and the English equivalent word is town.
88. Gopāla Devar Carit, p. 155
89. Ibid, p. 13
Gopal-deva had four chances to meet Śaṅkara at Pāṭbāusī Satra. He was more and more attracted by Śaṅkara and his order. Finally he prepared to accept Śaṅkara's Vaiṣṇavism and had decided to get initiated by Śaṅkara. But it was a matter of great misfortune for Gopal-deva that he could not be initiated by Śaṅkaradeva in the latter's life time. However, he was ultimately proselytised to Śaṅkara's order by Mādhavadeva at Sundarīdiyā, perhaps in 1570 A.D., since then he had devoted himself whole heartedly and he established his satra at Bhawānipur with other twelve disciples initially.

It is also said that Gopāla had been overwhelmed with great sorrow at the news that Śaṅkaradeva whom he regarded as his spiritual Guru was no more in this world. So, as a mark of respect to the Guru, he with the help of his Tṛtis erected a namghar at Bhawānipur in the name of Śaṅkara- Mandir, before he had been finally initiated by Mādhava to Śaṅkara's Vaiṣṇava order and accordingly he started to carry on nām-prasanga (congregational prayer) therein. Even to day the namghar at Puran Bhawānipur has been known as Śaṅkara Mandir. In course of time under the initiative of Gopāla, Mādhavadeva converted almost all of the people of Puran Bhawānipur into Śaṅkara's fold from their former order of Caitanyadeva. This time

90. Gopāla Deva's Carit, pp. 3,101
91. Gopāla Devar Carit, p. 16
92. Ibid, pp. 35-38
Mādhava stayed for four days giving all necessary instructions to the newly converted disciples pertaining to religion and social life. On another occasion, Mādhavadeva remained in the Gopāla's satra for six months having been annoyed with the calumny spread by a few people of Sundaridiya against him and his disciples. It is to be mentioned here that during the period many bhakats from Barpētā (Tātikuchi) had come to Mādhava and requested him to settle down there and it is said that he had accorded their prayer to come to Barpētā where he established his satra with the help of the local people. But many of the caritas are of the opinion that Mādhava had settled at Barpētā coming directly from Sundaridiya Satra which was perhaps more reliable.

Kathār Sāgar:

Gopāl Ātā had become an apostle of the order. He could attain at a decision of any problem due to his eloquent power. Moreover, he could convince any person by giving solution with argument politely. So he was called Kathār Sāgar. It happened when Mādhava left Barpētā for Bhelā Duār in Koch-Behar. Mādhavadeva had sent Śrīrām Ātā to Bhawānipur conveying the message by which Gopāla had been appointed Saranacārya. In the absence of Śaṅkara-Mādhava, Bhawānipur Satra under Gopāla's

93. Gopāle Devar Carit, pp. 56-57
94. GCK, pp. 285-86
congenial guidance had become the confluence of the Vaiṣṇava devotees coming from all over Assam. Special mention may be made of Nārāyanadīś Thākur Ātā of Jāniā, Barjadumani of Gajalā, Dwija Purusottama of Kāyasthapur etc., who had assembled to discuss critical matters with Gopāl Ātā at Bhawānipur.

However, in course of time Bhawānipur lost its former glory. Natural calamities had come crowding to this satra. Amritkar Baruā and his brothers died away. Many of Gopāla’s disciples had been the victims of epidemics. Naturally, Gopāl Ātā had became upset. Therefore, he made up his mind to move elsewhere. In the mean time, he was invited by some disciples of Mādhava headed by Ekādasa Ātoi to Kāljār where Gopāla established his satra leaving Bhawānipur and his family behind.

A centre of small Industry:

Naranārāyana had made settlement of men of various trades in the Bhawāni nagar e.g., Kamār (Blacksmith), Kumār (potter), Sonārī (Goldsmith), Kundār (turner), Tātī (weaver), Camār (cobbler), Citrakār (painter) etc. Among these men of different trades, the Kumārs (potters) and Tātis (weavers) had thriven well in comparision to others. The pottery and ring-well making of the Kumārs were well-known to entire

95. Dwija Purnānanda: Gopāla Devar Carit, pp. 145-46
96. Dwija Rāmānanda: Gopāla Devar Carit, p. 98
Bāusī Parganā. It is said that Mahāva solved the problems of Kālindī Ai's drinking water at Pātbāusī by making the provision of a ring-well. The ring-well was properly set by the Kumāras of Bhawanipur, the rings having been carried under the initiative of Gopāla. According to L.N. Bezbarua the ring-well was set at Kamārkuchi on demand of Śaṅkaradeva. But this seems to far beyond the truth as Gopāla was too young to shoulder such responsibility at that time.

On the other hand the handloom industry of the Tātis attained a good reputation. As mentioned earlier that cloths woven by the Tātis under the initiative of Gopāla and his mother were supplied to the royal family and the same was highly appreciated even by the king Narānārayana.

**Position of woman:**

The satra of Gopāladeva had produced the educated lady like Padmapriyā, the daughter of Gopāladeva. She devoted her whole life to the cause of Ekasara Dharma, the inspiration of which she inherited from her parent. Perhaps, she remained unmarried because of her ardent devotion to God. She composed some verses and devotional songs. She was also a champion of communism in religion. This satra has been traditionally observing non-prohibition to the kirtanqhar. The door of the Śaṅkara-Mandir is open to all irrespective of a taste and creed even now.

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97. GCK, p. 210
98. Śrī Śaṅkaradeva Āru Śrī Mādhavadeva, p. 176
99. Ratneswar Goswami (ed.): Gopāladevar Kathā Carīt, pp. 26-27
Present condition of the satra:

Gopaldeva's satra, now at Puran Bhawanipur had been reconstructed in 1886 saka with the aid of Assam Government in a modern style on the ruin. It is done after a gap of nearly seventy years. The kirtanghar along with the mapikut is known as Saṅkar-Mandir. In the northern corner of Saṅkar-Mandir there is the Gopaldeva's Mandir where he has been said to be living in his life time. In the south-west corner of Saṅkara-Mandir there is the Mādhava-Mandir where the temporary dwelling house of Mādhava was located.

Satra rites and ceremonies:

Regular prayer services have been carried on since the day of its reconstruction. But the traditional four hātis of the satra are no longer found in the satra campus. As it is learnt - a paid devotee is put in-charge of cleaning and lighting the Akshay-vanti of kirtanghar. In absence of permanent Satriyā or Mahanta everything is carried on under the guidance of the Mahanta of Dihing Satra.

The main ceremony of the satra is that of the death anniversary of Gopaladeva which has been being celebrated annually on the 6th day of Bahāg (April-May) in the bright-moon. Paul utsav and the tithis of Saṅkara-Mādhava are also observed annually. In conclusion it can be said that there is satra without Satriyā and devotion without devotees at present.
7. **Jania Satra:**

This was one of the most famous centres of this region towards the last quarter of the sixteenth century A.D. Specially when Madhava settled at Bhelā Duār.

**Location:**

Jania is situated nearly 8 kilometres away from the Barpeta Satra towards its western side. At present the location of Jania is that the Chālekurā village is in the east of it while Cunpurā village in the west, Dāukmāri village is in the north and Mahammadpur village is in the south. The village marks the westernmost boundary of the present Barpeta revenue circle which has been covering an area of nearly 750 acres of land.

**Early history of the satra:**

There are popular sayings regarding the name of Jania-
(a) one such popular adage is that the people of the village have their separate and independent views almost in all respects which means that they were of different opinions. Due to this attitude they never could be of one opinion. In Assamese Jania, sometimes, carries the meaning of 'each for his own'. So the village was known as Jania.

(b) Secondly, there is another story in vogue according to which there was a *bil* (small lake) in that locality which
caused the death of at least one individual in every calendar year. That is why the bil was called Janiā and as the village was just by the side of the Janiā bil people called it Janiā after the name of the bil. Now the bil is no longer found except the village. Whatever the case may be, the second explanation seems to be more acceptable as the name of many places or traditions seem to grow following the names of rivers, lakes etc.

Establishment of satra:

There are two satras at Janiā - one is that of Thākur Ātā and the other is of Puruṣottam Thākur, the grandson of Śaṅkaradeva.

(a) After the death of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhava had to face some troubles in the organisation of his religious activities. So, he requested for Thākur Ātā's constant help in this regard. Accordingly Nārāyandās Thākur had been in search of a nearest place from Barpetā. So that he could devote himself fully to organising religious activities. Ultimately he decided to settle at Janiā and so he shifted his residence from Nanthoi to Janiā. He founded his satra there in 1975 A.D. At his arrival and settlement, Janiā village turned into a reputed seat of religious discussion. It is said that Mādhavadeva and

100. CCK, p. 332

101. S.N. Sarma: The Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and Satra Institution of Assam, p. 223
Sriram Ata had paid a visit to Thakur Ata's Jania Satra twenty times and had necessary socio-religious discussion there. He had been the instrument of the order. Kamsari alias Barvisnu Ata was initiated by Madhavadeva under the initiative of Thakur Ata while the former came to bring cinā-dhām (a variety of millet) from the latter. It is noticed that Padma Ata alias Badula Ata, on the advice of Madhavadeva, came to Thakur Ata's Jania Satra to know all about his Guru through the latter. Accordingly Thakur Ata imparted all sorts of religious teaching to Badula Ata in his satra along with that of Majialisukh through the medium of three hundred and sixty maxims.

(b) There is another satra at Jania which had been founded by Purusottam Thakur after having been handed over the charge of the leadership of the Vaishnava order by Madhavadeva, what he had received from his Guru Sankaradeva, at the great religious sabhā (function) convened by Amritkar Doloi at Mahekhābari near Bhawanipur. At that time he was sixteen years old and he remained there at his Jania Satra only for five years. After the death of Purusottama at Bhellā Satra

103. Which means bliss of dining floor but here it means the discussion of Thakur Ata and Madhavadeva regarding the relation of the soul with the perishable body and their existence when both of them sat together to eat cirā on the eleventh day of the lunar half of the month (Ekadasi).
104. A.C. Das: Mahapurusiyā Dharmar Pansaratna, p. 131
105. M. Neog (ed.): GCK, p. 273
of Koch-Behar on the 15th 1541 saka (1619 A.D.) Lakshmi Ai with her son-in-law came to Janiā Satra on her way to Upper Assam and stayed for a few years.106

Place of Janiā in the movement:

Janiā occupied a key position in the neo-Vaiṣṇava movement. It is remarked that after the passing away of Śaṅkara the Janiā Satra, had become one of the most attractive centres wherein Vaiṣṇava saints from different parts of greater Assam got together and discussed all socio-religious matters relating to the order and its originator.107 Bhusana108 states that Bhawānipuriya Gopāl Ātā, Lakshmikānta, Mathurādās, Viṣṇu Ātā of Dakṣinpar, Haridās Baniyā and other leading members of the cult used to come to Janiā to listen stories of Śaṅkara told by Nārāyandās after Mādhava had left for Koch-Behar. The Janiā Satra of that time was not only a religious centre but also a reputed centre of agriculture. Thākur Ātā himself was a famous cultivator and had carried various types of cultivation at Janiā. Puruṣottam Thākur composed his Na-Ghoṣā here at Janiā when a dispute arose with Budhā Ātā relating to the Nām-ghoṣā. Even today prasaṅga (prayer) includes the singing of

106. M. Goswami: Nāti Śaṅkara Śri Puruṣottama, p. 107
107. M. Neog: Śaṅkaradeva and His Time, p. 9
108. Bhusana: Śri Śri Śaṅkaradeva, pp. 186-87
109. M. Goswami: Nāti Śaṅkara Puruṣottama, p. 49
the verses of the Na-ghośā particularly in the Janīā Satra of Puruṣottam Thākur. Thus Janīā Satras of Thākur Ātā and Puruṣottamaa had become a well reputed centre of religious discussion as well as a centre of literature, a great centre of agricultural activities and a centre of trade and commerce too.

Present condition:

The original satra of Thākur Ātā had been devasted in the famous earthquake of 1897 A.D. Now, a new satra—kirtanāghar has been started by the zealouus devotees in the name of Thākur Ātā by bringing a bucketful of soil from the plinth of the original satra where he had breathed his last in the month of Pausa, 1512 saka (1590 A.D.). The kirtanāghar is under construction in the easternmost portion of the village. The satra of Puruṣottam Thākur is located in the middle of the village with a spacious compound. The old satra kirtanāghar is being remodelled now, with financial aid from Assam Government. Besides, the kirtanāghar and the manikut, there are one store house and a math. On the northern side of the kirtanāghar there is clear marks of a hāti of the celibate devotees where two old ring-wells have been excavated recently. The wall paintings depicting the dasa-varatāras (ten incarnations of Viṣṇu) have been bearing the greatness of traditional fine arts.
Math of the origin satra of Gopāl Āta

at Kāljār
Satra ceremonies:

Both the satras are under the management of local body in absence of bonafide Satriya. Of course, a pathak has been taken from Sundaridiyā Satra who claims himself to be a lineal member of Rāmacarana's family. He has been performing the regular nām-prasaṅgas in the satra of Puruṣottama. Over and above these prasaṅgas the satras have been observing the death ceremonies (tithis) of Sāṅkara, Mādhava, Thākur Ātā and Puroṣottama regularly on the specified days. The bihu festival particularly the Bahāg and Māgh bihus are being observed traditionally though eagerness and spiritual fervour seem to have been lessened now-a-days. The relics preserved in Puruṣottama's satra are reported to have been stolen away recently except the Nāmghoṣā and pada-śilā.

8. Kāljar Satra:

The Kāla Samhati owes its origin to the Kāljar Satra as it had been the head quarters of Gopāl Ātā for several years till his death. From this point of view this satra occupies a pivotal position in the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement.

Location:

Kāljar is within the radius of ten kilometres from the Barpetā Satra towards the north and eight kilometres from the Bhawānipur Satra towards the south-west. At present the satra is situated on the east bank of the Pollā or Porolā
river perhaps, due to the changes of its course as the original satra was said to have been on the west bank of this small river. Now the No. 37th National High Way passes by the northern side of the original satra and by the southern side of the present satra kirtanghar. There is a nice math in the original satra erected few years back. According to the local people the shifting of the new satra kirtanghar took place as a measure of escaping from the havoc of flood as the area was situated in the low land.

Early history and satra establishment:

Kāljār was one of the four nagaras (towns) founded by king Naranārayana in his region of his kingdom. Regarding the name of Kāljār Purnānanda Dwija is of the opinion that there were two dense and dark forests on the western bank of the Pollā river called Bara-mar and Saru-mar. It is said that one who entered these forests could not distinguish the existence of day and night so long as one stayed inside them. That was the why Naranārayana called the place Kāljār (dark forest land).

It is said that, in course of time, Bhawānipur Satra had become almost deserted owing to various natural calamities. Moreover, most of the staunch devotees of the cult were victims

110. M.C. Mahanta etc. (ed.) : Śrī Śrī Gopāl Deva Caritra p. 146
111. Ibid, p. 147
of premature death. In such circumstances Gopal Ātā had become up-set and had lost incentive too. On the other hand the disciples of Kāljār also had been urging him to settle there. In the mean time, as the tradition goes, some tax-collector had come to Bhawānipur and ill-treated some of his disciples which made Gopal Ātā and other disciples very sad. So, ultimately Gopal Ātā decided to leave Bhawānipur. In the mean time, Ekasāraṇa Ātoi, a disciples of Kāljār had brought the proposal before Gopal Ātā that the devotees of Kāljār including himself would be highly pleased if Ātā agreed to settle there. Side by side, Ekasāraṇa Ātoi offered his help with land, labour and capital needed for the establishment of the satra there at Kāljār. Perhaps his religious zeal for the spread of the order together with the above mentioned reasons induced Gopal Ātā to move for Kāljār and to establish his satra there in 1600 A.D. (approximately) with four ḫātis.

It is noticed in connection of Kāljār Dwija Rāma Gopāl had given a description of Kāljār Satra along with the names of the various professional groups living there. They were Parhiyās (makers of nap-cloth) Tātis, Baniyās or Swarnakārs (goldsmiths), Karmakārs (blacksmiths), Curnakārs (dealers of lime), Mālis (gardeners), Johlās (weaver), Dhubās (washer man), Telis (oilman), Carmakārs (cobbler), Kumbhakār (potters), Brahmins, Daivajnas (astrologer) and others.

112. Rāmānanda: Gopāl Devar Carit, vv. 622-27
113. Dwija Ramagopāl: Gopāl Devar Carit, v. 374
Kaljär in the movement:

Kaljär soon became a radiating centre of the Vaiṣṇava order. People from different parts of Assam came to Gopāl Ātā's satra to take sarana. Famous devotees like Sanyāśī Rām Candra Ātā of Ākarājān, Bar Guru Kṛṣṇa Ātā, Anirudha Ātā of Māyāmārā, Rām Candra Ātā of Kourāmacarā, Murāri Ātā of Carāibāhi, Sanatan (Doloipo) etc. were initiated by Gopāl Ātā at Kaljär Satra.114 Occasional bhakat-sabhās were held at Kaljär Satra under the initiative of Gopāl Ātā, wherein they discussed various religious matters. As for instance, at the time of Gopāl Ātā's illness he sent one of his disciples to Barpeta Satra in order to invite Mathurādās Ātā and other bhakats to Kaljär Satra for bhakat-sabhā (religious gathering), and accordingly Mathurādās with other bhakats paid visit to Gopāl's satra115 praying for his early recovery. Gopāl Ātā composed many bargits and wrote the Mandōtsava nāṭ here at Kaljär at his ripe old age. At Kaljär Satra he breathed his last on the tenth of Bhādra, 1533 saka at the age of seventy (70), leaving behind his son and disciples.

Present condition:

As mentioned earlier, the present Kaljär village is nearly one kilometres away from the original satra of Gopāl Ātā. Now, there are only three families near the math. They

114. M. Neog (ed.): Pavitra Asam, p. 266
115. Dwija Rāmagopāl: vv. 567-76
have been lightening the akṣay-vanti. It is said that king Śiva Singha had donated 1894 bighās of dharmottar land to this satra in the name of Vaikunṭha Bhuvan Goswami, the then Satrīyā of Dihing Satra in the absence of its own Satrīyā. There is an Āmuktār\textsuperscript{116} in hereditary process to look after the landed property of the satra. A memento of Gopāl Ātā has been constructed on the place where the saint's perishable body had been cremated.

Satra ceremonies:

The Kirtan-Utsava (Death anniversaries) of Śāṅkara, Mādhava and Gopāl Ātā have been celebrated annually. The women devotees (Āyatis) of this region have been performing nām-prasaṅga on the Second Māgh Bihu in Dhuparguri than near the satra to commemorate the divinity of Gopāl Ātā.

9. Māneri (Bhari) Satra:

Māneri is the first and foremost satra of the Harideva, a sub-sect of Brahma Saṅhati championed by Harideva with a Catholic spirit. It is said that Śāṅkaradeva with his disciples went to Harideva's devāśram\textsuperscript{117} in order to celebrate a festival in honour of the latter, which continued for seven days.\textsuperscript{118} For this reason his satra came to be known as Māneri (Assamese Mān = honour).

\textsuperscript{116} Which means a life agent.
\textsuperscript{117} Banagayāgiri : Śrī Śrī Harideva, p. 170
\textsuperscript{118} Dhaneswara & Bāneswara Dwija : Harideva Carit, p. 99
Location and the satra establishment:

Maneri is situated in the Bausi pargana of the present district of Barpeta. It is within the radius of 5 kilometres from the Pathausi Satra towards the east and 8 kilometres from the Barpeta Satra towards the south-east. The Maneri Satra had been the victim of erosion of the river Brahmaputra. So, the satra had been shifted to Dantapur (Bahari), a nearby village where Harideva settled temporarily on his way to Koch-Kamrup from the Ahom kingdom in 1559 A.D. approximately. He founded his Maneri Satra round about 1560 A.D.

A centre of Vaisnavite movement:

Though in the later period Maneri (Bahari) Satra had been included in the Brahma samhiti such schism was not experienced during the life time of Harideva. Harideva's biographers\(^\text{119}\) hold that Sankaradeva explained everything on the knowledge and devotion to Harideva in order to release people from the bondage of the world. Accordingly he used to come everyday from his Maneri Satra to Pathausi Satra in order to attend the prayer services. He devoted himself to the cause of preaching and spreading the Vaisnava order. It is said to have been composed two books by him with the titles of Bhagavata BhaktirasatAraangini and Sarap Siddanta which are preserved in

\(^{119}\) Banagayagiri: Harideva Carit, p. 37

\(^{120}\) Ramana, v. 859; Baneswar and Dibakar: Haridevar Carit pp. 54, 94.
the Bahari Satra. Harideva appointed a few heads of satra for the propagation of the teachings and practices of the order. They were Yadumanideva of Maharā, Haricaranadeva of Jāgarā, Nārāyanadeva of Subhā (Sāntipur) Jagannātha of Baniyā-kuchi etc.

Position of women:

Māneri Satra (Bahari) occupies a unique place in respect of the position of women. The tradition here has been to instal woman on an equal footing with man. Even it is said that Harideva nominated Bhuvanesari, his daughter as the Head of Māneri Satra which seems to be the first such instance in the Vaiṣṇava history of Assam.

Ceremonies:

The Bahari Satra observes the birth and death (tithi) ceremonies of Harideva annually, Bihu and pacati-utsav are also being observed as regular features of the satra.

121. Bāneswar and Dibākara : p. 59
122. Ibid, p. 61, Banagayāgiri, p. 210