

CHAPTER II

STRUCTURAL REMAINS: TEMPLES AND SATRAS

SECTION-A

TEMPLES

In the field of the structural remains of Assam not a single standing structure is found belonging to the pre-Āhom period. All the religious as well as secular buildings are found in the form of ruins, where are now seen the architectural works and sculptural objects in disorderly condition⁴⁸. The structural remains of Darrang and Udalguri districts belonging to the pre-Āhom period are in the same state as those of other parts of Assam. This was mainly due to natural as well as manmade causes. Epigraphic records confirm the structural activities of the rulers of Kāmarūpa. The epigraphic evidence and the structural ruins confirm that the rulers of Kāmarūpa were great builders. The Tezpur grant⁴⁹ of Vanamāla records the repairing of a Siva temple. Nowgong grant⁵⁰ of Vanamāla records the erection of *prasāda* (palace). Bargāon grant⁵¹ of Ratnapāla, also mentions building activity. The Āmbari inscription⁵² of Samudrapāla refers to the establishment of a *satra*. The CP grants of the Āhom and the Koch kings also confirm their building activities.

⁴⁸ Choudhury R.D: *Archaeology of The Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, Agam Kala Prakashan, 1985, First edition, p.131.

⁴⁹ KS,P.175.

⁵⁰ KS,p.183.

⁵¹ KS,p.192.

⁵² KS,p.227.

The Indian religious beliefs as found in Vedic literature indicate the worship of the natural phenomena. These texts describe, in a romantic poetic way, the anthropomorphism of the deities. The deities were identified with nature and were assigned abodes with the same imagination in which they were conceived⁵³. Their abodes were broadly demarcated by three divisions: *dyusthāna* (celestial), *antariksasthāna* (aerial) and *prithvisthāna* (terrestrial). The Vedic Aryans did not build temples to enshrine the images of the deities. They performed sacrifices to propitiate their deities but did not adopt the form of worship which became popular under the *bhakti-mārga* (cult of devotion)⁵⁴. But in course of time, when the Vedic sacrifices were on the decline as they were beyond the reach of the common man, the idea of crystallising their ideas in the form of image worship was conceived. In this way, the temple as an abode of the deity materialized and the craft of temple building began in the Indian sub-continent.

In Assam the term “temple” is popularly used in a number of colloquial ways. In upper Assam, in the district of Sivsāgar, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur, a temple is popularly called “*dol*”. In Darrang and Udalguri districts, to denote a temple, i.e. a shrine, terms such as *mandir* (from Sanskrit *Mandira*; i.e. Nārikali Mandir), *devālaya* (i.e. Tāmreswar Devālaya), *thān* (i.e. Burhāgosāinr *thān*), and *matha* (i.e. Mathājhār Matha) are popularly used. The term *devālaya* is derived from the Sanskrit word *devālaya* which means the abode of a *deva* or divine being. The word *thān* (Sanskrit: *Sthān* = a place) is equally popular. The word *Gosāinghar* is also much in use in Darrang and Udalguri to denote a temple. In the Assamese language *Gosāin Ghar* means an abode or house of God (Gosāin=God, *ghar*= a house). There are public

⁵³ Sarma, P.C.: *Architecture of Assam*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1998, p 1.1

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 1.

gosāinghar for common use. It is interesting to note that nearly every family of the locality has a *gosāinghar* for their private use. It may be a separate house or may be a room attached to the main residential building. In this study the word 'temple' will be used to mean a masonry structure in complete or ruinous form, bearing antique or historical value, which was used or is still in use for religious purposes.

Compared to some other states of India like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Orissa and Maharashtra, Assam is not very rich in the field of archaeology regarding either religious or secular remains. From the remote past it appears that Assam had her masonry building activities though traces of her archetypal edifices have failed to survive intact to the present time. No standing monuments belonging to the early period of Assam exists today. This is mainly due to two reasons - natural and manmade. Natural factors like earthquake, rains, floods and vegetal growth has destroyed many monuments. The invasions also caused great harm to the religious structures. For instance, mention may be made of Kālāpahar, the invader from Bengal, who destroyed the Hayagriva temple at Hajo. Earlier the Muhammadan Turks also attacked Kāmarūpa several times in the 13th and 14th centuries C.E. No pre-historic tools or relics are found in the area under study. However, the holy places like Kukurākāta, Nalkhāmarā, Murādewar, Deulpur etc. and the prehistory of the surrounding areas including the rest of Assam prove that this area was inhabited by the people mostly of the Tibeto-Burman stock since the remote past. A good number of temples belonging to the pre-Āhom and Āhom period have been found in the Darrang area. However, most of them are in a ruined condition.

The images of Brāhmannical Gods and Goddesses may be divided into two classes, namely Saiva and Vaishnava. The Goddesses associated with Siva and Vishnu

representing their various divine powers and energies are also worshipped. The images of Gods and Goddesses are worshipped by the Hindus not only in temples or public places of worship, but also in private homes. Most Hindu households of Darrang possess images of the family-deity (*ista-devatās* and *kula-devatās*) and worship is offered to them either every day or occasionally.

The Temple Ruins at Baman: Temple ruins are found at Baman, a small village just within the western boundary of the Darrang district. “Here, on the top of a small hill, ruins of an old temple and an intact stone plinth (Fig.1) from a *saptaratha* temple could be seen. The depths of the *ratha* projections of this temple are comparatively shorter than their front width and thus, resemble the plan of Ganesh Mandir at Abhayāpuri of circa 10th century C.E. A few stone blocks presumably from *janghā*, carry Orissan temple motifs. The shape of the *sikharas* is like that of the 11th century C.E. Muketeswar temple of Bhubaneswar. Existence of numerous stone pieces bearing *kirtimukha* motifs with beaded designs, floral patterns, stepped cantilevers producing light and shade, etc., show that the exterior of the temple was thoroughly ornamented. The survival of the ceiling slab with a double-petalled *viswapadma* (Fig.2) register the mastery of the bygone days. Two lions, cut in the round, with prominent cylindrical eyes, probably decorated the entrance of the temple. A door-jamb with three receding floral *sakhās* shows the precision in execution. The door-sill of this jamb also survives. It consists of wavy planes with a *kalpavriksha* at the centre. The temple appears to be 11th century C.E.”⁵⁵. The directorate of Archaeology of Assam has excavated two similar type temples, one at Abhayāpuri (Goālpara district) and other at Biswanāth (Sonitpur district). While the temple of Abhayāpuri was made of stone like that of Baman, the

⁵⁵ Sarma,P.C.: *Architecture of Assam*,1st edn., Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1988.p.76.

temple of Biswanāth was a brick built temple. It is interesting to note that the length of the *rathas* of Biswānath temple is almost same with the Baman temple. It is difficult to say the exact cause of the similarity between Biswanāth and Baman. But there may be some historical link. The temple of Baman may have been in a good condition during the rule of the Āhom king Pratāp Singha and the temple of Biswanāth was built after Baman type. Baman was the center of a number of temples and is situated on the bank of the river Brahmaputra as those of Biswanāth temple. There may be some link among the temples of Kāmākhyā, Dirgheswari, Baman, Mathājhār, Singri, Tezpur, Biswanāth all of which are situated by the side of the river Brahmaputra and are popular site of pilgrimage⁵⁶.

Jorpukhuri Ruins: Ruins of old temples exist at Jorpukhuri near Hātigarh in Udalguri district. Though badly intermingled, existence of at least two temples with a gap of half a kilometre between them could be traced. One of them was a stone temple and the other one was of brick. “On the basis of architectural style the former can be dated to circa eleventh-twelfth century C.E. and the latter to late medieval time”⁵⁷. “The ruins of the stone temple contains numerous stone blocks with a good number of carved ones among them, namely, a lintel (122cm × 33 cm) carved with sculptures and geometric designs, a few sculptures depicting human and animal figures (Fig.3), building blocks with floral and geometric designs etc. The ruins also contains a few structural pieces, such as one half of a *khopri*, *beki* and *kalasa* etc., the overall impression of the ruins being that of a small but well-decorated temple of circa 11th-12th century C.E.”⁵⁸. “The

⁵⁶ Sarma, Pradip: *Asom Sesh-Madhyajugiya Mandir-Sthapatya*, Publication Board Assam, 1st edn, Guwahati, 2005.P.40

⁵⁷ *Indian Archaeology*, 1970-80, A Review, p.12.

⁵⁸ Sarma, P: A Brief Report On Archaeological Exploration, 1979-80 in *Bulletin of the Assam state Museum, No IV*, 1982, p.59.

brick ruins point to the existence of a temple where a percentage of stone pieces were used for a specific purposes. The bricks measure 23cm × 15cms × 4cms each. Stone was used for the door-sill, *pranalā*, *mastaka* etc. The size of bricks as well as the decoration and craftsmanship of the stone blocks used in the temple point to the existence of a later medieval temple using stone blocks from early medieval ruins⁵⁹.

Ganesh Kuwari: On the way to Dumunichouki from Kuruā there is Ganes Kuwari temple. The present deities are appeared to be of second placement. There are two unique and valuable relics. One is the engraved Garuda Pakshi (Fig.4) on the big rock of the hill, walling the basement of the deities. The other is a line of scripts just about 11 feet above the rock cut bird. The writings are yet to be deciphered⁶⁰. A modern temple is built at the site and a good number of people regularly visit the temple with devotional offerings.

Deulpur Ruins: The area contains an old rectangular tank of roughly 60m × 60m size (excluding the bank). Its north bank contains brick ruins. The south bank contains the *garbhagriha* of a brick temple with a *Sivalinga* enshrined inside it. The temple has been assigned to the later medieval Koch kings of Assam⁶¹. The Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Assam, during the course of exploration brought to light at Deulpur a rectangular (60m × 40m) tank with ruins of brick structures on the northern

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.59.

⁶⁰ Sarma, Nagendra Nath: Few Archaeological Remains of Darrang and Udalguri Clues for construction of history in *Granthaban*, A souvenir of Darrang Book Fair, edited by K.K.Deka & L.S.Deka, 2008, Mangaldai, p.54.

⁶¹ Sarma, P.: A Brief Report On Archaeological Exploration, 1979-80 in *Bulletin of the Assam state Museum*, No IV, 1982, (ed) Choudhury, R.D., p.57.

bank and an octagonal *garbha-griha* of brick temple enshrining a *śivalinga*, probably belonging to the same time⁶².

Murādewar Ruins: The Koches as a power of the east remained dominant throughout the 16th century C.E. During the height of their power they had their capital at Koch Behar. “Ruling initially from their capital at Koch Behar in North Bengal, the Koches initiated their building activities in the Brahmaputra Valley by renovation in C.E.1565 of the Kāmākhya temple on the Nilāchal hill”⁶³. “Their architectural activities were mostly confined to the districts of Goalpārā, Kāmṛūp and Darrang”⁶⁴. It is learnt from the Darrang *RājVamsāvali*, a compilation of the eighteenth century C.E. that the Koch king Naranārāyan sent artisans and craftsmen from Koch Behar under Meghamukundam, probably an officer in charge of construction⁶⁵. He is mentioned only in the *Darrang Rāj Vamsāvali*, wherein he is said to have headed, under royal orders, an army of foot soldiers⁶⁶. He has been shown as a person enjoying full liberty in taking important decisions, such as using bricks in place of stone, changing the shape of the structure from the original one, and the like. He might have been a military general, but must have been a person conversant in architecture also⁶⁷. The existence of a brick temple from the Koch period has, of late, been discovered near Damarāpotā at a distance of seven kilometres from Kalāigaon in present Udalguri district, known as Murā Dewar (Fig.5). Regarding the temple Pradip Sarma remarked “The temple is

⁶² *Indian Archaeology Review, Excavation and Exploration of North East Region*, p11, 1979-80.

⁶³ Sarma, Pradip: Studies in the original source materials on the history and culture of North-East India; Archaeological Source in *JARS*, Vol.xxviii, (ed) Phukan, J.N. 1984-85,p.69.

⁶⁴ Sarma, P.C.: *Architecture of Assam*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1988, p.122.

⁶⁵ Neog has taken Meghamukundam as a military general in *Prāchya Sāsanāvali*, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Sarma Nabin Chandra (ed): *Darrang RājVamsāvali*, 1st edn. Bani Prakash, Guwahati, 1973, pp.110-111.

⁶⁷ Sarma, P.: *Architecture of Assam* pp.141-142.

believed to have been built by the Koch king Naranārāyan (1540-1585C.E.). This appears to be the only existing brick structure from 16th century C.E. The precinct of the temple contains building components from a stone temple of the earliest period, such as door-jambes, lintel, image pedestal etc”⁶⁸. “The Koches are credited with the construction of a few other temples in the Darrang district, of which only the dilapidated temple at Murādewar withstood the test of time. But though the temple exhibits external features which are not common to the other late-medieval temples of Assam, it has already lost most of its features due to heavy subsidence”⁶⁹. The temple retains only its *bāda*. It is *pancaratha* in its outer profile and possesses a square *cellā* of 2.63 metre sides. The temple contains a small *mukhamandapa* also. The most attractive part of this temple is a series of horizontal bands arranged proportionately over the entire outer surface of the temple⁷⁰. Constructed in high relief, each side of these decorative bands is engrailed in a graceful manner. The wall surface does not provide any *devakosthas* (niches) as are seen in the late medieval temples of Assam. The temple in spite of its loss and mutilation retains enough to prove the precise workmanship of a bygone period. In appearance it differs from the Āhom and the Kachāri temples. If the temple of Kāmākhyā and Hājo are rejected as only renovation work of the Koches, the Murā Dewar temple is the only example of the high architectural proficiency of the Koches⁷¹. However according to N.N.Acharyya, the architectural style and the sculptural designs

⁶⁸ Sarma,P.: *A Brief Report On Archaeological Exploration* , 1979-80 in the *Bulletin of The Assam State Museum, No. IV*, 1982, Guwahati, p.58-59.

⁶⁹ Sarma,P.: *Studies In The Original Source Materials on the history and culture of north-eastern India: Archaeological source in the Journal of the Assam Research Society*, Volume –XXVIII, (ed): Phukan, J.N. 1984-85, p 69.

⁷⁰ Sarma, P.C.: *Architecture of Assam*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1988, p.122.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*p.128.

of the temples can be traced to its Buddhist origins⁷². According to local legend Goddess Kāmākhyā beheaded Kendukalāi, the priest of king Naranārāyan. The Koch king built this temple to perpetuate the memory of his priest⁷³. There is a tradition that during the reign of Mahārāj Nārānarayan a person named Kendukalāi was working as a priest of the king. One day goddess Kāmākhyā had slapped Kendukalāi in anger, as a result of which his head, detaching from his body and fell at the very spot of this temple at his native village, Deorgāon. Since then the temple was known as Murādewar. People believe that the king Naranārāyan built the temple at the present site to commemorate the memory of Kendukālai. It may be perceived that the images of Kāmākhyā, Durgā etc. might be entered into the temple since then.

There are no Brāhmin priests in the temple of Murādewar. The *pūjā* and other rituals are performed without Brāhmin priests and Vedic rites. The *pūjā* and other functions are performed by non-Brāhmin persons with great sanctity and respect. All ceremonies are performed according to Tantric rites along with social traditions prevalent in the region. Similarly in a few other Siva temples of the district all rituals are performed by non Brāhmin *pūjāri* (priest)⁷⁴. There sacrifice of a goat, birds and other animals is also common in the temple. According to traditional lore human sacrifice was offered in the temple in early times.

Outside the main temple building, near its north-east corner images of other deities are placed in a small house with three rooms. One contains an image of *padma* (lotus) on a

⁷² Acharyya, N.N: The Legends and Archaeological Remains of Darrang: A Critical Analysis in *Bulletin of the Assam State Museum. No.VIII*, (ed); Choudhury, R.D. Directorate of Museum: Assam, Guwahati, 1986, p 28.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p 28.

⁷⁴ Nath, L.: *Darrang District through the Ages*, Jnanjyoti, Mangaldai, 1st edition, 2005, pp 160-70.

stone block. It probably formed part of the inner apex slab of a temple *sikhara*. There are two oblong stone blocks in the middle room. The images that the stone contained cannot be recognised. There are other stones and a sword using as a *dāo* (Fig.6) in human sacrifice⁷⁵. In the northernmost room there are two stones and a *Kalī Thān*. There lies, on the thresh hold, a stone carved and rolled in such a manner that it formed steps leading to the shrine. “Now a victim of heavy subsidence, the outer walls of this small brick-built temple still exhibits decorative features which probably made it one of the finest temples of the Koch period. Basically a *Nilācala* in style, the outer walls of this temple are ornamented with parallel horizontal bands”⁷⁶.

Bhangā-Baruā Ruins: Bhāngābarua is located at Bhāngābarua village of Silpotā *mouzā* and at a distance of six kilometres north east of Kalāigāon in Udalguri district. The area is strewn with ruined structures of brick and stone. The brick structure, though irregular, is of a temple, probably belonging to the Koch kings (sixteenth-seventeenth century C.E.). However the ruins of a stone structure belong to a small but ornate temple datable to tenth century C.E. Door-sills, monolithic *pranāla*, pedestal for images, lintel, door-jambs *kalasa* and images of a four armed Kārtikkeya, a seated Ganesa (Fig.7), *sivalingas* with *yonipitha*, etc are found in the ruins⁷⁷. Just outside the *garbha griha* or sanctum sanctorum, we find two images of elephants (Fig.8), carved on a block of stone and behind them stand two men, touching the tails of the animals. To the right of the block is a *sivalinga* and besides it a stone bearing beautiful carvings has been erected upright⁷⁸. Within the *garbha griha* there are images of different deities placed serially in

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* pp166-67.

⁷⁶ *CHA*, V-III, p.p.335-336.

⁷⁷ *Indian Archaeology, 1979-80, A Review*, p.11.

⁷⁸ Nath, Lokeswar.: *Darrang District through the Ages*, 1st edn., Jnanjyoti, Mangaldai, 2005, p.170.

three directions. To the north side two stone slabs are erected separately in east west direction, containing images⁷⁹. Towards the eastern side there arranged in north-south direction the main line of the images of deities erecting in the system best known by the persons engaged in the work. In the northern most of the set a *sivalinga* is kept erect on a block of stone, the second one is the image of Ganesa placed on a separate block of stone. The third, fourth and the fifth are blocks of stones which were made in such a manner that the front sides, leaving the middle portion untouched, were cut in steps to make both the ends pointed. The sides which have drains were more pointed. The third and fourth blocks have rectangular stone pieces fixed over it. The sixth one is another block of stone having two drains joining two adjacent sides making half rectangular in shape. The seventh one is a big block of stone containing three upright carved images. The two images, out of the three, standing on both sides of the main one, are smaller and on rounded stone. The eighth one is a *sivalinga* and next to it is a Visnu image. The tenth is also a *sivalinga*⁸⁰.

From the symbol of elephant it may be presumed that the sculptor while carving the image on stone had the intention to show reverence to Biswarkarmā, the god of sculpture and architecture and the *sivalinga* placed by the side of the elephants point to the probability of the temple being dedicated to Siva. The image of Vishnu might have been placed later on when there had been a wave of Vaishnavism⁸¹.

The Devālay was as old as the Murādewar Devālay. The Devālay was damaged and subsequent deposition of silt carried down by flood water of the river Bhutiā covered the carved images and stones dating to a period between the 11th and 14th

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p 171.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.171.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*p.171.

centuries C.E. As a result the monoliths and carved stones remained buried till recently when these are unearthed during excavations. There may be many such monoliths and other stone pieces of ancient sculptures and structures that still remain underground. However, the discovery of the ruins of ancient deities proves the Brāhmannical leanings of the people of the area in the remote past⁸².

Damarāpotā Siva Temple: This Siva temple is situated about five kilometres north of Kalaigaon at Bhangabaruā village in the Silpotā *mouzā* of Udalguri district. “At Damarāpotā, a modern temple was noticed to have built over the ruins of an ancient stone temple besides a square (60m×60m) tank. The *garbha-griha* of the modern temple houses a few sculptures and architectural members belonging to the ancient temple. Important among them being an image of Visnu (Fig.9) and a lintel with three decorative *sakhās* and full-blown lotus as *lalatā-bimba*, assignable to circa tenth century C.E. Visnu in *samapada-sthānaka* posture flanked on either side by Swaraswati and Lakshmi. The pedestal has a few lotuses, attendants and Garuda”⁸³. In an oblong stone piece of the size, 240cm × 260cm × 45cm, images of Siva, Ganesa and some other deities (mutilated) are depicted. There is also a Vishnu image in another stone slab. These image containing stones were unearthed from a tank of the same village, Bhāngābaruā to some distance east of the present temple site. These images were shifted to the present site, about fifty years ago, and the present structure (a wooden shed with corrugated iron sheet roof) was constructed by donation of an individual person some

⁸² *Ibid.*, p172.

⁸³ *A Source Book of the Archaeology of Assam and Other States of North-Eastern India*, KAS, Guwahati, 1984, p.78.

forty years back⁸⁴. Regular rituals are performed by priest appointed by the temple committee.

Barnagari: At Barnagari, an ancient tank (40msq) and ruins of a stone temple, such as pedestal of images *pranāla*, door-sill, three door-jambs with plain *sakhās*, stylistically datable to early medieval times, were noticed⁸⁵.

Rudreswar Devālaya: Rudreswar Devālaya in Māharipārā vilage in Dipilā *mouzā* enshrines a Siva image. Its original date could not be ascertained. In a copper plate grant of Āhom king Gaurināth Simha, preserved in the DHAS it is state that in 1786 C.E. Gaurināth Singha donated 160 *purās* of land for the maintenance of this temple⁸⁶.

Mathājhār Math: The Mathājhār Math is situated in Sipājhār *mouzā*. Only the plinth of the old temple is found. Many relics are scattered all around.

Tāmreswar Ruins: At Tāmreswar in Udalguri district we find the ruins of a big temple and small shrines which are also in complete ruins. The ruins are of stone and brick structures. They indicate the existence of a complex of structures, covering about six *bighās* of land. The main temple or shrine was probably surrounded by a brick wall. Various images of Gods, Goddesses (Fig.10), a small and very beautiful Ganesa head, flowers, creepers, big lotus are some of the significant stone remnants. Just near the complex there are three big ancient tanks⁸⁷. The *garbhagriha* of the temple noticed at the site appears to have been renovated at a later period employing the old chiselled stone blocks found at the site itself. At the site the chiselled stones used in the temple

⁸⁴ Nath, L.: *Darrang District through the Ages*, 1st edn., Jnanjyoti, Mangaldai, 2005, p170.

⁸⁵ *Indian Archaeology 1979-80- A Review* p12.

⁸⁶ Acharyya, N.N: *The Legends and Archaeological Remains of Darrang A Critical Analysis in Bulletin of Assam State Museum, No-VIII 1986*, (ed) Choudhury R.D. Guwahati, p.27-28.

⁸⁷ Sarma, N.: *Cultural Heritage of Sonitpur: Necessity of Its Preservation*, in *Bulletin of The Assam State Museum, Volume VI*, (ed) Choudhury, R.D., Guwahati, 1985, p.95.

are lying scattered. “Here a *dvārasirapatti* of a shrine shows a figure of Ganesa at the centre. Above the figure of Ganesa there is a row of seated crossed-legged two-armed figures holding a lotus each. To the extreme right of the *sirapatti* is seen a figure riding on a horse while to the extreme left is seen a miniature figure holding an umbrella. The *dvārasirapatti* is very interesting and peculiar from an iconographical point of view”⁸⁸. From the stylistic point of view the ruins belongs to 10th century A.D⁸⁹. There are bricks of different sizes. These are mainly of 23cm × 15cm × 5cm and 20cm × 20cm × 8cm. One piece of peculiar brick having step-cut measuring 18cm × 16cm × 5cm is also found. These are preserved in the site museum of the temple campus.

Umānanda Thān: The Umānanda Than having an old temple and situated in the Chinakonā *mouzā* under Kalāigāon police station in Udalguri district has been destroyed in the earthquake of 1897. A big bell is found at the site.

Mukteswari Devālaya: Mukteswari *Devālaya* is situated in the Ambāgāon *mouzā* of Udalguri. Lord Siva and Goddess Manasā are worshipped here. Sacrificial *dāo* belonging to early period is found here. The Devalaya is associated with the legend Beulā and Lakhindar.

Mādhagosāin Thān: Mādhav Gosāin than near Rowtā Railway station is an old temple destroyed by the 1897 earthquake. It enshrines a Siva image. All that remains is the brick plinth of the temple and relics scattered around the site⁹⁰.

⁸⁸Choudhury R.D: *Archaeology of The Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 1st edn., Agam Kala Prakashan, 1985, Delhi, p 243.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p.243.

⁹⁰ Acharyya, N.N: *The Legends and Archaeological Remains of Darrang: A Critical Analysis in Bulletin of the Assam State Museum. No.VIII*, (ed); Choudhury, R.D. Directorate of Museum: Assam, Guwahati, 1986, p.28.

Singimari Thān: Singimāri than, near Sipājhār in the Lokrāi *mouzā* presents the ruins of an old temple of Goddess Kāli⁹¹.

Sānpārā Devālaya: Sānpārā Devālaya near Sipājhār is said to be constructed during the Pāla period⁹² (990-1138 C.E.). It enshrines an image of Siva-Durgā

Nārikali: At Nārikali, 15 km. away from Mangaldai on the side of National Highway 52 a modern temple was built over the ruins of an ancient stone temple. It is a Siva temple. A few sculptures, stone block and architectural members belonging to the ancient temple is found in the temple campus. Thousands of devotees daily visit the temple with great devotion and offerings. Here Siva *Rātri* is observed every year with great fervour.

Deorāj Devālaya: Deurāj Devālaya in Lokrāi *mouzā* presents relics of an old temple. At present one big piece of sculpted stone is found here.

Jaljali Ruins: Recent discoveries at Jaljali, in Dāhi *Moujā* of Darrang district bears great significance. In January 2008, under the NREGA (National Rural Employment Generation Act) scheme of government of India, the renovation work of the ancient Jaljali tank was started. The temple was built on the bank of the tank. The tank was a huge one having eighteen *bighās* of land and associated with many legends. During renovation, a large number of stone remains were discovered. It is mostly a stone built temple. The ruins contains image of Ganesa, a Visnu like image, a huge *linga*, temple *sikhara*, Natarāja, *linga* with *yonipitha* (Fig.11), besides more than three hundred pieces of chiselled stone. Besides these, lotus-cut basements for the post and walls, very

⁹¹ Choudhury, P.D.: *Archaeology in Assam*, Department of Archaeology, Assam, Guwahati, 1964,p.53.

⁹² *Ibid.*:p.53.

smoothly engraved decorative creepers on doorframes, unique lock-joints for the pillars, iron nails (Fig.12) pointed at both ends for fitting and fixing the sculpted stones of the wall and basement of the pillars, decorative lotuses with sixteen petals, probably as fixtures over the deities, large and small *lingas* are found among the ruins⁹³. A *homabari* (Object generally used for offering oblations of ghee during *yajnas*) was also found which reveals the custom of doing offering in the temple. A cannon ball (Fig.13) was also found at the site. A large number of bricks were also found on the western side of the tank. From stylistic point of view the temple can be assigned to 10th-11th century C.E. The ruins clearly indicate that it was a Siva temple. Two male deities flanked by consorts, carved in stone are of very high artistic value. These two icons are yet to be clearly identified⁹⁴. The quality of the architectural designs and that of the sculpture, techniques of cutting the stone, standard of art, the proliferation of gods and deities open the door for a wider comparative study.

Dewālkhandā: Situated near Mājbat railway station Dewālkhandā enshrines stone icons and relics of an old Hindu temple. Ruins of old temple are found here.

Bhairabkunda: The famous pilgrim centre of Udalguri lies in the side of historic Gohāin Kamal Āli and is only about 14 kms from Udalguri railway station. Bharabkunda is a natural pond at the confluence of the river Dhansiri and the Rowtā and is surrounded by the Āmrigiri hills. Tradition associates Bhairabkund with the Pāndavas who are believed to have bathed in this pool enroute to heaven. The Koch king

⁹³ Sarma, Nagendra Nath. : *Few Archaeological Remains of Darrang and Udalguri Clues for construction of history in Granthaban*, A souvenir of Darrang Book Fair, edited by K.K.Deka & L.S.Deka, 2008, Mangaldai, p.54-55.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 55.

Naranārāyan built a Moth on its bank. It is regarded as sacred by the Hindus as well as by the Bhutiyās⁹⁵.

Nalkhāmar: Nalkhāmar temple is situated at Udalguri. This temple built by Naranārāyan is called 'Nalkhāmar Mandir'⁹⁶. The construction of the temple is mentioned in the Darrang *RājVamsāvali* in this way-

Parbatat garh bandhilanta jatna kari

Param durjai garh dekhi jak dhari

Trisul Devir purba par kari than

Ak gota Moth tate karilia nirman. 331

Devir pratima thapi kari namaskar

Mothar dilanta nam Nal je Khamar⁹⁷.

(The king constructed a temple and named it as Nal je khamar)

Lakhimpur Ruins: Worship of mother goddess in the district is prevalent from earliest times. There is a Kāmākhyā *Math* amidst the ruins of ancient stone built temple near Lakhimpur ancient tank, six kilometres west of Kalāigāon. The presiding deity is a full blown lotus. The site of the ruined temple shows that a temple of modern period, in the *garbhagriha* of which a *Viswa-Padma* (Fig.14) carved beautifully on a block of stone has been placed and worshipped by the local people as the deity. This is identified as the navel portion of Sati or Mother Goddess Pārvati and considered as a Sakti *Pitha*. This *Viswa-Padma* and other architectural pieces and chiselled stone blocks seen around the

⁹⁵ Acharyya, N.N: *The Legends and Archaeological Remains of Darrang: A Critical Analysis in Bulletin of the Assam State Museum. No.VIII*, (ed); Choudhury, R.D. Directorate of Museum: Assam, Guwahati, 1986, p.26

⁹⁶ Choudhury, P.D.: *Archaeology in Assam*, Department of Archaeology, Assam, Guwahati, 1964,p.52.

⁹⁷ *DRV*:p.67.

modern temple may be dated around 10th century C.E. These show that there was a temple belonging to the pre-Āhom period⁹⁸.

Features of the temples of Darrang and Udalguri districts: The study of the remains of the plinth of temples and some later temples that were constructed on the ancient plinth, reveal that the general lay-out of the temples consisted of the following: *Torana*, or entrance gateway, situated at a little distance from the main temple on the approach road; the door way at the entrance of the temple building; *Mandapa* (Assembly hall) and sometimes a *Nātmandir* (dancing hall), *Antarala* (ante chamber), and the *Garbhagriha* or the sanctum sanctorium or the *cellā*. These features are same as those of the temples of other parts of Assam. However, some small shrines consist only of *Garbhagriha* with an enclosed yard in front of it.

This study reveals some significant features of the temples. They have a rural setting and stand in isolation. Most of the temples contain one block. The shrines have a single storey, facing in an east-west direction. Use of both stone and brick is common. The interior and exterior of the brick built temples are plain. Stone temples are however adorned with sculptures, images as well as floral decorations of a high artistic value.

All of them are associated with history and rituals. Almost all of them were used in the past and are still in use. The threats to the property are natural as well as lack of care and consciousness of the people. All are facing the sign of deteriorations. However new temples have been erected over the old one. The plans of the temples are simple and most of them are square.

⁹⁸ Choudhur, R.D.; *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, Agam Kala Prakashan. Delhi, 1985, p. 242.

Thus, the study of the temple remains reveals that the architectural activities in the study area were highly developed in the past. The masons, engineers and artisans showed great skill in the erection of monuments and the execution of the artistic designs. On the basis of the archaeological wealth of the study area certain conclusions regarding the cultural link between the region and the rest of India can be drawn. “Though the heaps off ruins of our period do not help us much in rightly assessing the aesthetic achievement of the Assamese artists, it is evident that the fine arts of Assam tended to be closer to the art of the Guptas and those of the schools of Bihar and Orissa rather than to the contemporary Pāla school of Bengal”⁹⁹.

List of Temples

Name	Deity	District	Existing Remains	Date
Damarapota	Siva temple	Udalguri	Architectural & sculptural remains of temple	Circa 10 th century A.D.
Tamreswar	Siva temple	Do	Do	Do
Lakhimpur	Viswapadma	Darrang	Do	Do
Jaljali	Siva, Vishnu, Ganesh	Do	Do	10 th -11 th century A.D.

⁹⁹ Choudhury, P.C.: *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the twelfth Century A.D.* 3rd revised edn., Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1987, p.478.

Dewalkhanda			Do	Circa 10 th -11 th century A.D.
Baman	Siva linga	Do	Do	Circa 11 th -12 th century A.D.
Jopukhuri	Siva	Udalguri	Architectural & sculptural remains of temple	11 th -12 th century A.D.
Sanpara Devalaya	Siva-Durga	Darrang, Sipajhar	Temple relics	Do
Dhalpur		Darrang	Architectural & sculptural remains of temple	Do
Narikali	Siva linga	Darrang	Do	Circa 12 th century A.D.
Bhanga-Barua	Siva linga, Yonipitha, Ganesh	Udalguri	Brick/ stone temple	16 th -17 th century A.D.
Ganesh Kuwari	Siva, Ganesa	Darrang	Brick/Stone	
Deulpur	Siva linga	Udalguri	Brick temple	
Mura Dewar	Siva	Do	Architectural & sculptural remains of	

			temple	
Barnagari		Do	Stone temple	
Rudreswar Devalaya	Siva linga	Darrang		
Mathajhar Math		Do	Old temple relics	
Umananda than		Udalguri	Do	
Madhagosain Than	Siva linga	Do	Brick plinth of a temple and relics	
Singimari than	Kali	Darrang	Old temple of Goddess Kali	
Parijati Mandir	GoddessDurga	Do	Temple of Goddess Durga	17 th century A.D.
Deoraj Devalaya		Do	Old temple relics	
Garukhuti		Do	Architectural & sculptural remains of temple	

SECTION II

SATRAS

Satra is a Vaishnavite institution or establishment. The word *satra* is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit word *sattra*. In Sanskrit literature the word has been used in two senses, firstly in the sense of an alms-house and secondly, in the sense of a sacrifice lasting from a few days to a year or more. A religious sitting or association where the Bhāgavata was recited or explained was designated as a *satra* of the Vaishnavite movement. Later on the association of devotees began on a distinct line and ultimately emerged as a well-developed institution having a distinct structural feature and an elaborate paraphernalia and practices. The term *satra* denotes a distinct type of institution with its own characteristics¹⁰⁰.

Satras are examples of social solidarity. With spiritual, socio-economic and cultural activities, the *satras* have a great contribution in the formation of Assamese society. The rulers of Darrang offered royal patronage to the *satra* institution with a view to spiritual as well as cultural uplift of the people. *Satras* are seen to have different practices, depending upon local traditions, tastes and habits of the founding fathers. Within the Neo-Vaishnavite fraternity there are distinct variations. The *satras* of Assam are marked by diversities and categorized under four groups or *samhati*. After the death of Sankaradeva, his disciples were in disarray and they tried to perpetuate the ideas of the saint in their own ways, almost similar to what happened to the disciples, after the death of Gautama Buddha when a great schism had occurred in the Buddhist Church in the form of the Theravada and Achariyavāda sects. The schism in the Buddhist Church

¹⁰⁰ Sarma.S.N.: *The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement And The Satra Institution of Assam*, Department of Publication, Gauhati University, 1966, pp.143-45.

had continued to multiply. The Theravadas were ultimately divided into eleven sects and the Mahāsamghikā into seven¹⁰¹. In the first century C.E. another new sect emerged in Buddhism, which was known as Mahāyanism. In the same way after the death of Jesus Christ, different camps or churches had emerged in Christian religion such as Roman Catholics, Protestants, Baptists, Lutherans, and Calvinists and so on. The same thing had happened with the *satras* of the Neo-Vaishnavism movement initiated by Sankardev in Assam. After the death of Sankaradeva and his chief disciple Mādhavadeva there was no one to exercise discipline and restraint over the disciples who took personal initiations to interpret and explain what they received from their common mentor. After the death of both the saints a slow process of disintegration started within the *satra* culture¹⁰².

In this way classification of the *satras* started in the form of *Brāhma samhati*, *Kāla samhati*, *Nikā samhati* and *Purush samhati*. The term *samhati* is a synonym of the term *Sangha* which means an association. The mutual differences of the *samhatīs* lie only in internal practices and not their fundamental tenets or principles. After the death of Sankaradeva, his disciples founded *satras* in different parts of Assam and kept the ideals of the *guru* (preceptor) alive for posterity. As a consequence some of the glaring differences in their practices surfaced and the same found expression in their own *satra* management. Due to the predominance of Brāhmannical elements, the sub-sects of Dāmodaradeva and Harideva have been known as *Brahma Samhati*.

¹⁰¹Majumder. RC, (ed), *The Age of Imperial Unity*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1990, p 379

¹⁰² Pathak. D. (ed): *Bhakti Movement And Srimanta Sankardeva*, Department of Assamese, Pragjyotish College, Guwahati, 2007 p191.

The sub-sects of Gopāl Deva and his followers came to be known as Kāla *Samhati*. *Satras* founded by Purosattam Thākūr, the grandson of Sankaradeva are stated to belong to what is called Purush *Samhati*. *Satras* founded by Mathuradāsa Burhā Ātā, Keshab Ātā and their followers are described as Nikā *Samhati*. Some of the *satras* of Darrang and Udālguri districts belonged to Mahāpurusiyā sect. An interesting point in connection with the Vaishnavite *satras* of the locality was that, most of them were Dāmodariya *satra* and belonged to Brahma *Samhati*. In the Mahāpurusiyā *satra* also the *Ekasarana Nām Dharma*, in its purest form, could not flourish. The local people were more familiar with the term *nāmghar*, *gosāin ghar* etc. rather than the term *satra*. For example, the Khatarā *Satra* is popularly known as Khatarā *Gosāin Ghar* and the Devānanda *Satra* as *Anantar Nāmghar*. The earlier status enjoyed by the *satras* began to decline as a result of changing situation and thoughts of men. From the history of the establishment of the *satras*, it appears that many of the Neo-Vaishnavite *satras* were established on or near the ancient centres of worship. A number of *satras* of the study area had also existed from a period prior to the advent of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, for example, Porā *Satra*. Despite such divisions, which may be the result of local and situational adjustments, all the *satras* as an institute, constitute a single cohesive whole. They speak the same language. They profess the same ideals. They venerate Sankardeva as their *ādiguru* (prime mentor)¹⁰³.

The structural features of a *satra* generally consists of a *nāmghar*, a *manikuta*, a *karāpat* and two to four rows of *hātī*¹⁰⁴. However, all these features are not seen in all the *satras* of Darrang and Udalguri districts. Except Khatarā *satra* of Darrang the other

¹⁰³ Pathak. D.(ed): *Bhakti Movement and Shrimanta Sankardeva*, Department of Assamese, Pragjyotish College, Guwahai, 2007, p.193.

¹⁰⁴ Sarma, S.N. The *Satra* Institution of Assam in *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam* A souvenir, Reception committee Indian History congress 22nd session, Guwahati, dec,1959.p.50-51.

satras contain only the *nāmghar* and the *manikuta*. *Nāmghar* is the centre of all religious activities of a *satra*. It is a long open hall with gabled roof and an apsidal facade. It is used for all meetings and discussions. The actual shrine where the image of the deity and the sacred scriptures are kept is called *manikuta*. The prayer hall and the shrine are similar as those of structural pattern of Hindu temple which consists of a *garbhagriha* containing the image and a *mandapa* hall. The *hātis* are the residence hall of celibate *bhakats* or monks. The small entrance house is called *karāpat*.

Porā Satra: Probably the oldest among the pre-Sankaradeva era *satras* of Assam it was founded by Dharmadev Bipra Bhuyān at Bordaulguri in the first half of the eleventh century C.E. According to local traditions, a peasant discovered an image of God in his paddy field. Dharmadev Bhuyān established a ‘*deul*’ of soil and the image of God was installed in it. The ‘*deul*’ festival was held on the first day of Assamese calendar month of Bohāg (Baisākh). This was the first ‘*deul*’ festival to be held in the area of Mangaldai. After the ‘*deul*’ the image was kept at the *satra* for the rest of the year. This custom still prevails¹⁰⁵.

Bāmundi Satra: This *satra* is situated at Mishrapārā or Dvarapārā in Locrāi *mouzā* of Sipājhar. It was founded by Sri Rāmachandra Goswāmi in 1540 C.E. However, according to Maheswar Neog¹⁰⁶, the founder of the *satra* was Haribar Ātā. One of its branches was found at Dāhi Moujā and another at Pātidarrang Sālmāra of Kāmarupa. The Goswāmis of Bāmundi *satra* are Mahāpurusia Vaishnava¹⁰⁷. The *satra* received a copper plate land grant from Dharmanārāyan, the Koch King of Darrang. Formerly the

¹⁰⁵ Nath, A.K. (ed): *Darrangar Sahitya Sanskritir Rupkatha*, Sipajhar Sahitya Sabha, Darrang, 1997, p103.

¹⁰⁶ Neog. M (ed): *Pabitra Asom*, Lawyer’s Book Stall, Guwahati, 1969, p 218.

¹⁰⁷ Neog. M (ed): *Pabitra Asom*, Lawyer’s Book Stall, Guwahati, 1969, p 218.

satra belonged to Purush Samhati. *Tithi* (death anniversary according to the Hindu Lunar Calendar) of Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva are observed here. Reading of Bhāgavata is regularly held.

Bhabadev Satra: It was founded by Nārāyandeva in 1540 C.E. He was one of the five prominent Achāryas of Mādhavadeva. It is situated at Nāyakpārā village on the west of Sipājhār. After Nārāyandeva, Bhabadeva looked after the *satra* with great devotion and hence the *satra* came to be known as Bhabadeva *Satra*¹⁰⁸. The *satra* also received Āhom royal patronage. The Ahom rulers Laksimi Singha and Gaurināth Singha granted lands to the *satra*¹⁰⁹. The *Adhikāra* (Abbot) offered ‘*Sarana-Vajana*’ to the disciples. This is an initiation ceremony in which a neophyte is required to surrender himself absolutely to the four fundamental principles of Vaisnavism. An eight armed image of Vishnu is installed inside the *manikut* (sanctum sanctorum). The deity holds the *sankha* (conch shell), *chakra* (discus), *gadā* (mace), *padma* (lotus), *pāsa* (noose), *ankush* (elephant goad), *dhanu* (bow) and *sara* (arrow) in its eight arms respectively, starting from upper left in a clockwise direction. Lord Vishnu is riding on Garuda¹¹⁰. The *satra* has a library.

Māroi Satra: Māroi *satra* is situated under Sipājhār Moujā, near the National Highway No52. The *satra* was founded in 1562 C.E. by Krishnadeva, the nephew of Vaishnavite Guru Dāmodardeva. The copper plate granting land issued by the Āhom king Gaurināth Singha in Saka 1752 is still preserved in the *satra* premises. The Koch king of Darrang also offered royal patronage to the *satra*. The area was chiefly populated by the Hidā

¹⁰⁸ Saikia. D (ed): *Daranga Itihas*, Darrang Jila Sahitya Sabha, Mangaldai, 2005, p.212.

¹⁰⁹ Nath. A (ed): *Daranga Sahitya Sanskritir Ruprekha*, Sipajhar Sahitya Sabha, Sipajhar, 1997, p.102.

¹¹⁰ Sarma. K.: *Vaishnava Jibon Charit*, Dibrugarh, 2004, p.96.

community. Hence the Guru founded the *satra* to spread Vaishnavism among them by giving the *Sarana-Vajana* (initiation). The *satra* is being managed by Hirā-Gosāins on a hereditary basis. However the condition of the successor of Adhikāra Gosāin is not very sound. Besides, they no longer have any hold over the lands granted by the Koch and Ahom rulers¹¹¹. Māroi *Satra* was also known as Raghunāth *Satra*, as initially an image of Lord Rāma and Lakshmana was to be found here. At present a broken image of Lord Visnu (Fig.15) dating to the eleventh century C.E. and some stone relics are preserved by the Gosāins¹¹².

Khatarā Satra: The *Khatarā satra* (Fig.16) is situated at Dipilā under Dipilā *mouzā*. It was founded by Gobinda Ātoi, the chief disciple of Mādhvadeba in 1568 C.E. The area was dominated by some people known as Khat. They were Sākta worshippers. Gobinda Ātoi won them over with the ideas of Bhakti, by establishing a *satra* there. To attract the Khats, Gobinda Ātoi installed images of Rāma, Lakshmana, Sitā and Hanumān at the *manikut*, which can still be found in the *satra*. Presently the *satra* functions under a democratically elected managing committee. The *satra* belongs to the Mahapurusha sect. The rulers of Darrang offered large scale land grants to the *satra*. It is a meeting ground of the Vaishnavite and non-Vaishnavite community. Hundreds of devotees daily visited the *satra* with devotional offerings. *Pācati* is a significant festival of the *satra*. Besides this, *Janmāstami*, *Nandotsav*, *Bihu*, *Deul*, *tithis*¹¹³ of the Mahāpurusha (Sankardeva), and Gobinda Ātoi are also observed with great fervour.

¹¹¹ Nath.,A.K.(ed): *Darrangar Sahitya Sanskritir Ruprekha*, Sipajhar Sahitya Sabha, Assam, 1997 p.102-103.

¹¹² Saikia. D.(ed): *Darangar Itihas*, Darrang Jila Sahitya Sabha, Mangaldai, 2005, pp 214-215.

¹¹³ A *tithi* is the death anniversary of a person according to the Hindu Lunar Calendar.

Palāvithā Satra: Palāvithā *Satra* was founded by Gobinda Ātoi. The exact date of institution is not known but it was founded some years after the Khatarā *Satra* (1568 C.E.) This *satra* is situated at Bareri village of Deomornoi, seven kilometres away from Khatarā. The *satra* contain the images of Rāma, Hanumān and Sitā similar to those of the Khatarā *satra*. That is why this *satra* is also known as Raghunāth *Satra*. Besides, the images of Lord Krishna and Lava-Kusha¹¹⁴ are also found here.

Chaturbhunj Satra: Chaturbhunj is a Mahāpurushiā *satra* founded by Gobinda Atoi in 1572 C.E. The *satra* is situated at village Sitalābari under Sipājhar *mouzā*. According to a myth, prior to the establishment of the *satra*, the villagers were predominantly Sākta and worshipped the mother goddess Sitalā. To spread *Eksarana Nāma Dharma* of Sankaradeva, Lechakoniā Gobinda Ātoi, the chief *sisya* (disciple) of Madhabdeva, visited several places of Assam including Darrang District. Gobinda Ātoi founded the famous Khatarā *Satra*. Later on he visited the Sākta dominated Sitalābari area and managed to establish a *satra* there. The *satra* came to be known as Chaturbhunj, (four-armed, a synonym of Visnu) because the four armed image of God Vishnu was installed at the *satra*. This was mainly done to attract the Sākta people towards the new faith, i.e. Neo-Vaishnavism. Gradually the people were attracted towards Bhakti, and the image was replaced by the Bhāgavata. Initially, the Barpeta *Satra* of Assam asserted its control over the Chaturbhuj *Satra*. The Medhi¹¹⁵ of the *satra* gave *Sarana-Vajana* to the *sisya*. Nowadays the *satra* is managed by a committee selected by the common people¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁴ Saikia. D.(ed): *Daranga Itihas*, Darrang Jila Sahitya Sabha, Mangaldai, 2005, pp.210-211.

¹¹⁵ A functionary appointed by the *satra* to look after the affairs in a village.

¹¹⁶ Nath. A.K. (ed),: *Daranga Sahitya Sanskritir Ruprekha*, Sipajhar Sahitya Sabha, Assam, 1997 p.104.

The singing of hymns and songs, the chanting of prayers to the accompaniment of musical instrument and the discourses on the Bhāgavata and the Gita, constitute the chief features of this *satra*. The entire programme is called *nāma prasanga*, i.e. prayers and the functions connected with prayers.

Bhāgabati Satra: Bhagabati *Satra* is situated at Devānanda village in the Sipājhār locality. Bhagabati *Satra* is a Dāmodariyā *Satra* and was founded by Narottam in 1598 C.E. No idol is found here. Dwij Ramraya Charit “Gurulila” is the chief Charit of the *satra*¹¹⁷. The *satra* received land grants from Dharmanārāyan, the ruler of Darrang. However, people have encroached most of the *satra* lands. *Tithi* of Sankardeva, Janmāstomi, and *nāma -prasanga* are the chief activities of the *satra*.

Devānanda Satra: This *satra* is located at Devānanda village, at a distance of thirteen kilometres from Mangaldai. Due to paucity of evidence it is hard to determine the founder and exact date of foundation of the *satra*. However the date of establishment of the *satra* is given as 1625 C.E. in the *Darangar Itihas*. It is known from the *Vamsāvali*¹¹⁸ of the *satra* that Rāmānanda Brāhmachari initiated the *satra* and he came from Kanyakubja. The *satra* belonged to the Dāmodariyā sect. After Rāmānanda, Kamalā Kānta and Satananda became the Satrādhikār in succession. The *satra* came into prominence during the time of Adhikāra Devānanda and came to be associated with him. During his time the *satra* received land grants on a large scale from the Āhom king Siva Singha. But after the British occupation of Assam due to the change in the revenue policy most of the lands of the *satra* were confiscated by the State.

¹¹⁷Saikia. D.(ed): *Darrangar Itihas*, Darrang Jila Sahitya Sabha, Mangaldai, 2005, p.213.

¹¹⁸ A *Vamsāwali* is a genealogical list.

The chief festival of the *satra* is 'Matheni' which is observed in the month of Kāti (Kārttika, Oct-November). In this festival the people enact the *Sāgara-Manthan* (Churning of the Ocean). The people are divided into two groups: *Devatā* and *Asura*. This performance is a significant feature of the *satra*. This Damodariya *satra* is affiliated to the Brahma Samhati. Other festivals observed by the *satra* are *Pācati*, Janmāstami, Bihu, Rāsh-Purnimā etc. From a very early period people in the *satra* participated in *nāma prasanga*.

Chintāmoni Satra: Founded by Chintāmoni Devgoswāmi of Bharādhwaj Gotra in 1640 C.E. this *satra* is situated at Dhankhundāpara of Bartheckerabari village. The *Adhikaras* of the *satra* are the descendents of Surya Bipra. The images of Narasimha, Radha-Krishna, and Bangshi-Gopāl are found here. The Koch ruler of Darrang made grants to the *satra*. The popular belief of the people is that an offering made to the *satra* resulted in fulfillment of ones wish. It is a branch of Chaitanya sect. But it also follows the rules and regulation of the Brahma Samhati¹¹⁹. According to Maheswar Neog the *satra* is a Dāmodariyā *satra*¹²⁰. Again, in Mangaldair Buranji, Dineswar Sarma mentioned that the *satra* belonged to the Chaitanya sect¹²¹.

Viswa Satra: It is the only Sākta *satra* of Darrang District. It is located at Pithākhoā village sixteen kilometres away from Mangaldai, the district headquarter of Darrang. Chilārāi, the brother of Koch King Naranārāyana of Koch Bihar had invaded Gauda (Bengal). However, he was defeated and arrested by the Gauda ruler. When he was freed and returned home, he brought with him some Brāhmins from Gauda. Of them the most renowned was Bedvisarga Bhattācharyya, who served in Koch Bihar as the royal

¹¹⁹ Saikia. D.(ed): *Darrangar Itihas*, Darrang Jila Sahitya Sabha, Mangaldai, 2005, p.209.

¹²⁰ Neog. M.(ed): *Pabitra Asam*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati, 1969, p.219.

¹²¹ Sarma, D.: *Mangaldair Buranji*, Asam Prakasan Parishad, Guwahati, 1974, p.114.

priest. When the Koch prince Raghudev Narāyana left Koch Bihar for Koch Hājo, Bedvisarga also accompanied him. The descendants of Bedvisarga served as royal priests at the court of the Koch King of Darrang. Viswarupa Bhattācharyya was a Sākta worshiper and received the patronage of Bishnunārāyana, the king of Darrang. Viswarupa founded a *satra* at Pithākhoā (Swetā Madār) village, under the patronage of Bishnunārāyana. Hence the *satra* came to be known as *Viswa Satra* after the name of its founder¹²². Bishnunārāyana himself became a disciple of Viswarupa. The Koch King made *dharmottara*¹²³ grants of land to the *satra*, besides providing materials for worship and *pāiks* (servitors) to the *satra*¹²⁴. The Āhom King Rājeswar Singha also made *dharmottara* grants of land to the *satra*. A special characteristic of this *satra* is that it contains images of gods and goddesses. Generally no image of gods and goddesses are kept in a *satra*. But the *satra* has a *sivalinga*, images of Sālagrāma, Lord Vishnu, goddess Lakshmi, Swaraswati etc. in its sanctum. The devotees worship the deities by sacrificing birds and animals¹²⁵. Durgā Pujā, Siva Rātri, Lakshmi Pujā, Sarasvati Pujā etc. are observed here. *Ojā Pāli* (dance-music), *nāma prasanga* is also held regularly¹²⁶.

Haripur Satra: During the rule of the Koch King, Harideva Goswāmi founded the *satra* in 1682 C.E. Haripur *Satra* is situated at Haripur village under Dipilā *Mouzā*. The *satra* belonged to the Dāmodariyā cult and falls under the Brahma *samhati*. The condition of the *satra* is not good. However, *sarana-vajana* is still offered to the followers by the

¹²² Neog. M.(ed): *Pabitra Asam*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati, 1969, p.215-216.

¹²³ *Dharmottara* are revenue free land-grants for religious purposes; *Devottara* are revenue free land-grants for the support of a temple; *Brahmottara* are revenue free land-grants to the Brahmanas.

¹²⁴ Neog. M.(ed): *Pabitra Asam*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati, 1969, p.216.

¹²⁵ Nath, A.K.: *Darrangar Sahitya Sanskritir Ruprekha*, Sipajhar Sahitya Sabha, Assam, 1997 p.102-102.

¹²⁶ Sarma, D.: *Mangaldair Buranji*, Asam Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati, 1976 p.117.

Gosains. The deities of the *satra* are Sālagrama and Bangsi Gopāl. Some stone relics are also found in the *satra* premises. Nāma Kirtana, reading of Bhāgavata, offerings by the people is all regularly observed here¹²⁷. The Koch rulers of Darrang offered *Brahmottara* and *Debottara* land grants to the *satra*.

Pātidarrang Satra: The founder of Patidarrang *Satra* was Mahānandadev Goswāmi. He came to Pātidarrang from Vijayanagar, the capital of the Koch King Raghudeva, in the late sixteenth century C.E. Mahānandadev Goswami was an Agnihotri Brāhmin¹²⁸. Presently no *adhikāra* system is prevailing here. However the *sarana-vajana* is given by the Gosains. The *satra* belongs to Brahma Samhati.

Ratnāwali Satra: Ratnāwali *Satra* is situated at Sengārā village, a few kilometers away from the Khatarā *Satra*. The *satra* was established in the sixteenth century C.E. and belongs to the Mahāpurusiā sect. After Mādhavadeva, it became a uniform practice among the Vaishnavites of the Mahāpurushiā sect to install one of the four principal scriptures, viz, Dasama, Kirtana, Nāmaghosā and Ratnāwali composed by Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva respectively, on the sacred altar (*thāpana*) as the symbol of the deity and the first two Gurus. In this *satra* too a Ratnāwali of *sānchipāt* (aloe tree bark)¹²⁹ is installed on the *thāpana*. The *satra* was named after the scripture Ratnāwali, which is still preserved at the *satra*. It is managed by a committee. Tithi of the Mahāpurusha, national festival of the Assamese, i.e. Bihu, *nama prasanga* are observed in the *satra* premises.

¹²⁷ *DI.*:p.215.

¹²⁸ Sarma,D.:*Opcit.* p 114.

¹²⁹ Manuscript written on the bark of the aloe tree.

Borāgi Satra: Borāgi *satra* is situated at Jaljali village, eleven kilometres away from Mangaldai. Recently Jaljali came to light, when a large number of ruins of a temple were unearthed, as discussed in the previous chapter. The image of Natrāja, Vishnu, Tārā, Sivalinga, Yoni, Stone canopy, pottery etc. had been found. The archaeological remains belonged to the Pāla Dynasty, who ruled in Kāmarūpa in the 10th-11th century C.E. The discovery of the remains proves that previously the people were worshippers of Siva and Sakti. Later on Neo-Vaishnavism gained popularity under the active guidance of the Vaishnavite Gurus. The founder of the *satra* was Aniruddha Dev Goswāmi. The *satra* received grants from the Darrangi ruler Mahendranārāyan. This Dāmodariyā *satra* falls under the category of Brahma Samhati. The financial condition of the *satra* is not so sound. *Oja-Pali*¹³⁰, *nama prasanga* are held on a regular basis. The deity of the *satra* is Vishnu. *Tithi* of Dāmodardeva and Aniruddha Deva are its chief festivals¹³¹.

Kuruwā Dihing Satra: Situated in the south-west and 45 kilometer away from Mangaldai, the Dihing *Satra* was founded by Brindavan Chandra Deva (1694-1761 Saka or 1772-1839 C.E. It was a branch of Dihing *Satra* of Upper Assam, which was situated on the banks of the Dihing River¹³². The Kuruwā Dihing *Satra* was established in the period 1772 C.E.-1839 C.E. The *satra* received royal grants from the Ahom rulers.

Randhani Satra: Randhani *satra* was founded in early nineteenth century C.E. The *satra* is situated at Lojora village, under Deomornoi post office in Darrang District. It

¹³⁰ Choral singers; a choir; a kind of dance accompanied by music.

¹³¹ Goswami, Sunil; Darangar *Satra* Samuh-Ak Abalokan in Setubandha, Sovenir, Asam *Satra* Mahasabhar Setubandha Samaroh, (ed) Deka, Kamalakanta,2010,p.76.

¹³² Neog. M (ed): *Pabitra Asam*, Lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati, 1969 p.217.

belongs to Purush Samhati. There is no Satradhikar system in the *satra*. The religious works are done by the Mahanta family of the nearby Sagunbāhi *Satra* of Brahma Samhati¹³³. Devotional songs are performed by the followers. Tithi of Sankardeva, Mādhavadeva are the chief annual festivals. Village assemblies also held here to discuss various social issues.

Sagunbahi Satra: The *satra* is contemporary of Pātidarrang *Satra* and situated at Barigoān village, near Deomornoi. The condition of the *satra* is not sound. This is a Dāmodariyā *Satra*¹³⁴.

Features of the satras of Darrang and Udalguri districts: The following features have been noticed in the *satras* of Darrang and Udalguri districts - The *satras* of the area, like the temples also have great significance. All the traditional structural component of the *satras* i.e. *Nāmghar*, *Manikuta*, *Karāpāt*, *Hāti* are not found in all the *satras*. Most of the *satras* are facing financial as well as other problems. An interesting feature is that besides Neo-Vaishnavite community the worshipper of Siva and Sakti also visit some of the *satras* like Khatarā *satra*. These *satra* are the important centre of art and culture of the locality. Most of the *satras* are functioning through the *satra* managing committee, instead of being governed by the *Satrādhikār* (Chief Abbot). Most of the *satras* of the districts are belong to the Dāmodariā sect. Gobinda Ātoi was the pioneer in establishing the Neo-Vaishnavite *satras* in the region. Existence of pre-Sankari *satra* i.e. Porā *satra* was also observed.

Though the rulers of Darrang region were originally Siva and Sakti worshippers, they had equally followed the Vaishnavite faith too. It is noteworthy that the religious

¹³³ *DI.*:p.214.

¹³⁴ *DI.*: *Op.cpt.*p.215.

beliefs and religious policies of the Darrang rulers were closely interwoven, and they had contributed very conspicuously towards the maintenance of social harmony. The Āhom as well as the rulers of Darrang offered large scale land grants to the *satras*. King Gaurināth Singha granted land to Māroi *satra*. The Brahmancial character of most of Neo-Vaishnavite *satras* indicates that the kings of Darrang patronized the *satras* with a two-fold purpose: First, for the enrichment of the society, and secondly, for retaining the loyalty of their subjects. As a result of their patronage of the *satras* they received the respect and obedience from all classes of their subjects.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT OF THE SATRAS:

The *satras* have been playing an important role in the society of Assam from their very inception. Besides religion, the part played by the *satras* in other spheres of Assamese life is noteworthy. During the last few centuries of their existence they have enriched the moral, social and educational life of the people and have contributed to a large extent in the field of art and literature. But these cultural effects are not altogether independent of religion; rather these may be termed as the products of the Vaishnavite movement¹³⁵. Sankaradeva and his disciples like Mādhvadeba, Harideva, Dāmodardeva, and Gobinda Ātoi founded *satras* in various parts of Assam. Gradually these *satras* became important centres of religion, art and culture. Equally the *satras* became the centres of social and collective thinking of the villagers. The *satras* and the *nāmghar* had manifold contributions to the Assamese society, which have been discussed below:

¹³⁵Sarma.S.N: *The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement And The Satra Institution of Assam*, Department of Publication, Gauhati University, 1966, p.156.

The people, by participating in the discussions, were morally and spiritually uplifted. The spiritual obligations gave the people a dignity, a balanced view of life, and made them god fearing and moral beings. Besides these, the fairs and festivals were the manifestation of the fascinating culture, vigour, spontaneity and the outburst of the unrestrained joy of the people.

Regarding the institutional aspect of a *satra*, the annual and biennial festivals, when held under the auspices of the *satra* management, attracted people from various places for rituals and worship. Therefore, on such occasions people of different communities were united in these *satras* for a common purpose. It is in this way, that the *satras* served humanity and coerced the members of the community to adhere to some sort of discipline.

The *satras* have also contributed in the field of education. Prior to the advent of the British, the *satras* played an important role in the field of education. Education was not a concern for the State in those days. *Tols* and *pāthśālās* run by private individuals imparted knowledge of *vyākaraṇa* (grammar) and *kāvya* (verse). A *satra* served as a religious centre, a school and also as a library. Old manuscripts are still preserved in almost all the *satras* of Darrang district including Khatarā, Devānanda, Ratnāwali, Bhabadev etc. Along with religious scriptures, books on dance, music, literature, philosophy, medicine, painting etc. were preserved in the *satras*. The leaves of the manuscripts were generally made of two materials. The thicker variety was made from the bark of *sāci* tree (*Aquilaria agallocha* or aloe wood) and the thinner variety known as *tulāpāt* (hand made paper) was made by pressing cotton.

The *satras* had an enormous contribution in the field of literature. Devotional lyrics, dramas and religious *kāvya*s were composed. The *carit-puthis* or biographies of the Vaishnavite saints are also an important contribution of the *satras*. The latter provide important information about the contemporary socio-economic and religious conditions. “The task of translating Sanskrit scriptures into Assamese started by Sankaradeva and his colleagues continued unabated till the modern times under the inspiration and guidance of the heads of different *satras*”¹³⁶.

The *satra* also played the role of village courts or assemblies. Different types of social issues were discussed in the *satra* premises. This brought in cohesion, good will, mutual trust and collective decision making among the different members of society. Difficult problems of social and familial nature, that could not to be resolved in the community, were often resolved within the *satras*¹³⁷. Thus the *satra* also performed judicial functions.

In the *satra* premises the village elders assembled and adjudicated many of the social and familial disputes. Generally the solutions offered by this institution were accepted by the parties. With the introduction and institution of the British system of trial and dispensing justice, the holding of the village courts at the *nāmghar* gradually began to dwindle. But in religious and moral matters, decisions taken at the *nāmghar* by the elders and under the guidance of the agents of the *satras* are still being carried out.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.161.

¹³⁷ Pathak .D (ed): *Bhakti Movement And Srimanta Sankaradeva*, Department of Assamese, Pragjyotish College, Guwahati, 2007, p.188.

Thus the *satras* of Darrang and Udalguri districts along with their religious activities played the role of a village court and were able to maintain peace and order in the society to a great extent.

The *satras* developed into great cultural centres, providing entertainment to the rural populace. Cultural activities like dance, drama, music, painting and many other vocal and performing arts were regularly held to the delight of the masses. Music included playing of instruments, singing and dancing. For acting, actors were given training. Costumes for the actors had to be designed and stitched by a group of people. A section of the people was engaged in making different masks to be used in different roles by the actors. Sankaradeva introduced a new kind of dramatic performance known as *bhāonā* (Sanskrit Bhāva=sentiment, expression). It became very popular with the passage of time and became an integral part of the *satras*. One-act plays written by Sankaradeva, Mādhavadeva and other Vaishnava poets were enacted through the medium of the *bhāonā*. Although these performances primarily served as the medium of religious propaganda, at the same time they became a source of pleasure and recreation. *Bārgīta*, i.e. noble song or great songs, composed by Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva are the devotional songs of lofty sentiments and poetic beauty. During the course of time the *bārgīta* became so popular that the daily and occasional devotional services of the *satra* starts with a *bārgīta*. With all their lofty ideas, literary beauty and mind blowing music, the *bārgīta* not only became the spiritual solace of distressed hearts, but also attracted people towards Vaishnavism.

Another important achievement of the *satra* is that it developed a school of classical dance in Assam and this is known as *satriyā-nāch* (dance). The theme of the dance is religious. Another significant social contribution of the *satras* is the uplift of

the backward class. Every society of the world is marked by class distinction in some form or other and with varying degree. The same is in case of the society of Assam too. “The Vaishnavite *satras* (monasteries) established during the medieval period (16th century C.E.) was renowned for their catholicity of outlook and a *guru* (preceptor) or *sisya’s* (disciple’s) caste was considered unimportant”¹³⁸. The *satra* institution is open for all, without discrimination of caste and creed. As a result of its universal outlook, there are no distinction between the rich and the poor, upper class and lower class. “So-called untouchables and backward classes were freely taken into the religious fold and the portals to a better mode of living and a higher conduct of life were opened to them”¹³⁹. As in other parts of Assam, a large number of *satras* are established in the study area. Side by side with the spread of Neo-Vaishnavism, the *satras* of the region also influenced the social life of the people. With its social reforms, the *satras* of the locality had a great contribution in formation of an integrated, composite and culturally rich society in Assam. Gobinda Ātoi, the founder of the Khatarā *satra* and some other *satras* in Darrang and Kāmarupa played a very important role in this regard. In this way, the *satra* institution reached out to all fields of cultured and developed life in Assam, enriching them, and brought vitality to this part of Assam.

Another significant contribution of the *satra* was in the field of village economy. The daily rituals of the *satras* provided employment to some of the people as priest, florists, musicians, clerks, accountants, etc. As a part of their obligations to society the *satras* also emphasized upon the production of village handicraft. We find a number of artisans, specialist and non specialist workers engaged with the *satra* activities, who are

¹³⁸ Das. P. : *History and Archaeology of North-East India*, Agam Kala Prakashan, New Delhi, 2007, p 80.

¹³⁹ Sarma. S.N.: *The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam*, Department of Publication, Gauhati University, 1966, p.156.

provided livelihood. A group of people are also engaged in designing and stitching of costumes for the actors, while others in the making of different *mukhās* (masks) to be used in different by the actors in the *bhāonā*.

A large number of terracotta objects such as *chāki*, *gasā* (earthen lamps) and the like are necessary for daily use in the *satras*. A section of people known as *kumāras* (potters) were engaged in the process making of such objects. They sell these objects which have great demand in the market. A large number of people are also engaged in the farm land owned by the *satras*. They worked as peasant and labourers in the paddy field and in this way earn their livelihood. To provide the ingredients needed for devotional offerings like oil, ghee, *māhprasāda*, incense sticks, coconut, betel nut, flowers and the like for the devotees, a large number of shops have grown up near the *satras*. Besides these the shopkeepers also sold other commodities to the people of the local area. A large number of families are dependent upon such type of daily earnings. During the festive season, seasonal markets are also held in the *satras*. For example, in *pācati* of the Khatarā *Satra*, and *mathani* festival of Devānanda *Satra*, big markets are held where local products are sold by the villagers. Thus the *satras* contribute greatly to the village economy.

The Neo-Vaishnavite movement and the *satra* institution opened up a new chapter in the socio-religious history of Assam which had a profound impact upon the people. The significance of the *satra* institution does not lie alone on its religious activities. Besides religion, it has great contribution to the cultural development of the Assamese people. It gave a rich religious literature, revived and popularised the art of classical music and dance, introduced dramatic performance, encouraged handicrafts and introduced the art of manuscript painting.

Musical Instruments: Musical instruments generally associated with the *satra* institution can be classified into four types: - i) *Tāta-yantra*, i.e. string instruments, i.e. mainly *tokāri*. ii) *Ghana-yantras* are mainly *tāla* (cymbals), *bhor tāla* (cymbals of large size), *khuti-tāla* (miniature cymbals), *kara-tāla* (made of a split bamboo and the sound is produced by rubbing a *cowri* across the notches of a stripped bamboo), *rāma-tāla* (a kind of musical clapper made of two pieces of split bamboo and the sound is produced by clapping one against the other), *ghantā* (bell), and *kāh* (gong). iii) *Anaddha-yantras*, i.e. percussion instruments covered with skins are *dabā* (kettle drum), *nāgara*, *mradanga*, *khol* and *dhol*. iv) *Susira* or wind instruments used are *sankha* (conch) and *kali* (long pipes). The practice is known as *Nāma prasanga* or prayers and the functions connected with the prayer.

Festivals: It is observed from the study of the remains that the different kinds of festivals are closely associated with the religious life of the people. Generally the festivals associated with traditional religious beliefs, are invariably held in the temple and *satra* campus. It is generally found that the ritual functions of these festivals are concerned with a particular religious group but other groups also participated in the festivals. In this way the temples and shrines played an important role for promotion of cultural solidarity among various communities. For instance the temples, *satras*, *nāmgharas* etc, played a leading role for the preservation of the respective culture of the people. The festivals played an important role in bringing unity and solidarity among the people of different religious faiths. Thus it is found that the study area was a meeting ground of different religious faiths through the ages.

Daily devotional items observed in a *satra* can be divided into three categories- (i) morning service (ii) afternoon service and (iii) evening service. The other types of observations are

festivals, ceremonies connected with death anniversaries of saints and founder of the *samhatis* and the *satras*.

Janmāstami or the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna is celebrated in all the *satras* of the region. It is celebrated on the eight lunar day of the dark fortnight in the month of *Bhādra* (July-August).

The next day is known as *Nandotsav*, in which illumination takes place on the previous day and devotional services consisting of prayers, recitation and orchestral music continue throughout the day. A dramatic performance known as *Bokā-bhāonā* is performed¹⁴⁰. This is called *Bokā-bhāonā* i.e. mud performance, because colour and mud are sprinkled by the actors at each other representing the sentiment of joy owing to Krishna's birth.

Another important festival of the *satra* institutions of the region is called *pācati*, connected with Krishna's nativity. *Pācati* is celebrated on the fifth day of birth and that is why it is called *pācati* (Sanskrit: Panca or fifth). *Pācati* is celebrated at the *Khatarā satra* with great pomp and show. The festival recreates the joy and amusement that permeated the womenfolk of Gokul at the birth of Krishna.

Phālgutsav or *Doul* or Holi is also an important festival of the *satras*. It is held in the month of *Phālgun* (February-March). Generally the festival lasts for three days.

The *Tithis* or death anniversaries of Sankaradeva, Mādhavadeba, Dāmodardeva and founder of other *samhatis* and *satras* are also observed with due solemnity in all the *satras* of the region.

Bihu, the national festival of Assam is another important festival observed in the *satras*. *Bahāg* (Baisakh, April-May) Bihu, *Kāti* Bihu (Kartika, October-November) and

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.132.

Māgh Bihu (*Māgha*, January-February) are held on the last day of *Caitra*, *Asvina* and *Pausa* respectively. The word *Bihu* is connected with the Sanskrit word *visuva*. Originally it must have been exclusively used to mean the festival or ceremony connected with the heralding of the New Year with the approach of the month of *Vaisākha*. The *Bihu* festival basically is an agricultural festival in as much as observances connected with it remind us of primitive fertility rites. The term, later on, came to be applied to mean two other agricultural festivals observed in the beginning of *Kārttika* and *Māgha*. The *Kāti bihu* is marked by the beginning and the *Māgh bihu* is marked by the end of the harvesting crops. The *Bihu* festivals seem to be a synthesis or fusion of the Aryan and non-Aryan practices. The *Bahāg bihu* is celebrated by the people with gay music and dance and it lasts for three to seven days. On the day of *Māgh bihu*, people celebrate it with bonfires and feasts and the *satras* observe it with congregational prayers and music. Food prepared from newly harvested crop is offered to the deity. On the day of *Kāti bihu* basil plant (*tulsi*) is ceremoniously planted and offering of light (*dipadāna*) to the plant constitute the special function of the day.

Besides these, special devotional functions like *Bar-sabāh*, *Pālnāma*, *Bhakat-sevā* are also held in the *satras*. The word *Bar-sabāh* is derived from Sanskrit word *sabhā* meaning an assembly. In Assamese, the word is generally used in a religious context. Again, *Pālnāma* (Sanskrit: *Paryāya* = one after another) is a type of congregational prayer lasting for a few days and continues even for a month without any break or interval. *Bhakat-sevā* is a popular function held in a *satra*, where a few devotees are invited on a particular day and provided with food and offerings. On such occasions a prayer service is generally arranged.

Religious Rites And Ceremonies Observed In The Temples And *Satras*: The chief function of a *satra* is in the religious field, yet one cannot ignore its social context. It is the centre of many cultural and social activities. It is often the centre of fairs and festivals and it has helped in the preservation of traditional customs, traditions and values. Thus it evoked a sense of unity and solidarity among its adherents and devotees. This aspect is very clearly seen by the lavish and pompous observation of festivals like *Janmāstami*, *Pācati*, *Mathani*, *Bihu*, and *Tithis* (death anniversary according to the lunar calendar) of the Vaishnavite *Gurus* (preceptors) etc. The worship of *Sālagrama* and various images of Vishnu form the most important item of daily services of the *satras* under Brahma *Samhati*. As a part of the daily prayer -service, the singing of hymns and songs, the chanting of prayers to the accompaniment of musical instruments and the reading and explaining of the *Bhāgavata* and the *Gītā*, are the chief feature of the service.

Besides these, regarding the institutional aspects of a *satra*, the annual and biennial festivals, when held under the auspices of the *satra* institution, attract people from different parts of the land. Hence, on such occasions people of different social and linguistic groups are united in these *satras* for a common purpose. In this way the *satras* serve humanity and bring the diverse members of a community close together.

LIST OF SATRAS

Sl.No	NAME OF THE SATRAS	Founder	APPROXIMATE DATE
1	Porā	Dharmadev Bipra Bhuyān	11 th century C.E.
2	Bāmundi	Rāmachandra Goswāmi	1540 C.E.
3	Bhabadev	Nārāyandeva	1540 C.E.
4	Māroi	Krishnadev	1562 C.E.
5	Khatarā	Gobinda Ātoi	1568 C.E.
6	Palavithā	Do	1569 C.E.
7	Chaturbhunj	Do	1572 C.E.
8	Bhāgabati	Narottam	1598 C.E.
9	Pātidarrang	Mahānanda Dev Goswāmi	16 th century C.E.
10	Ratnāwali		16 th century C.E.
11	Devānanda	Rāmānanda	1625 C.E.
12	Chintāmoni	Rāmdev Goswāmi	1640 C.E.
13	Viswa	Viswarupa Bhattarcharyya	1681 C.E.
14	Haripur		1682 C.E.
15	Borāgi	Aniruddha Dev Goswāmi	17 th century C.E..
16	Dihing	Brindaban Chandra Dev	18 th century C.E.
17	Rāndhani		Early 19 th century C.E.
18	Sagunbāhi		Early 19 th century C.E.