

CHAPTER III
SUNDARIDIA SATTRA

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3.1 Origin and History of the Sattrra

Sundaridia Sattrra (Latitude:26°20'13.28" and Longitude:91°1'37.04") is one of the very important religious places which is well known as "*Sattrra*" of Assamese Vaishnavism. It is situated about 2 K.M. away from Barpeta Town, in its North-East part. In the east of the Sattrra Barbila village, in the west Suharpur village, in the north Kalaya bill and Barpeta-Bhabanipur p.w.d. road and in the south Barpeta-Guwahati p.w.d. road is situated. Sundaridia is a historically famous village. It is not only the place of vaishnavism of Assam, but also a place of unity and integrity.

Barpeta has been a central place of Vaishnava religious movement. In Barpeta there are various types of Sattrra institutions. Barpeta is no less than Mathura and Vrindavan and that is why Sundaridia Sattrra is known as Mathura and Barpeta Sattrra is known as Vrindavan. The Koch King Naranarayan founded Barnagar (Sorbhog) and the present district formed an inevitable part of the Koch-Hajo and the Ahom kingdom till the British rule. From the ancient time Sundaridia Sattrra of Barpeta witness the rule of Varmans (380-654), the Salasthamas (655-985), the Palas (985-1260), the Kamatas (1260-1509) and the Koches from 1509. The main historical development took place during the Kamata and Koch rule. Number of villages placed under a Bhuyan which was patronized by the Kamatas. The Bhuyans hailed from eastern part of India like- Kanauj, Gauda and Bengal who later became general Assamese caste and adopted the Vaishnava belief under influence of Srimanta Sankaradeva (Talukdar, 1996, p.83).

The Koch king Naranarayan set up his temporary capital at Barnagar where he met Sankaradeva and the king, he accepted Vaishnavism. This saint established different Sattras in Assam to spread socio-religious faith. The Koch and Ahom kingdom came to an end with annexation by the Mughals.

Srimanta Sankaradeva transformed the area of Barpeta with numerous Sattras. So, the Barpeta town is known as 'Baikunthapuri Dham'. The Sundaridia Sattrra of Barpeta is

one of the remarkable places. The Ahom rulers offered a large number of land grants to the different Sattras including Sundaridia Sattra through copper plate inscriptions (Photograph on page 113). These are the valuable sources of history.

The various types of grants especially land grants rendered by the Ahom kings particularly from the time of Jayadhwaja Singha (1649-1663) helped the Sattras in making sound economic booting. Land grants to the religious institutions were of three broad categories namely *Lakheraj* (revenue free), *Nisf-kheraj* (half revenue) and *Kheraj* (full revenue). *Lakheraj* grant in respect of Sattra was made in the name of the chief shrine which owns all lands and other possessions of Sattra. The Adhikar or Satriya being the trustee only. Such grant in the Satriya tradition is known as Devottar. The land granted in the name of the chief priest comes under the category of *Nisf-kheraj* and both in the Vaishnavite and Tantric religious organisation it is generally known as Brahmottar instead of *Nisf-kheraj*. In Assam most of the land occupied by the Sakta and Saiva temples belongs to Brahmottar category.

There is another type of land under the category of *Nisf-kheraj* named Dharmottar. This type of land was dedicated to religious purpose. Sattras lands are found mainly in the form of Devottar and Dharmottar. The other category of land was *Kheraj* or revenue land.

The plot of land of Sundaridia Sattra was *Nisf-kheraj* or *Nishpikheraja*. No tax was collected by Ahom rulers from this land that means it was a tax free land. But after the Yandaboo treaty (24th February in 1826), the British Govt. surveyed the lands of Assam. In 1833-34 British Govt. created new revenue circle and in the month of March in 1841 Barpeta was declared as sub-division. British Govt. collected land revenue tax through the Mouzadar and Sundaridia Sattra's lands was also came under the revenue circle. From that time till today the sattra managing committee pays revenue tax every year for the lands of the Sattra (Talukdar, 1996, p.83).

During Maan's invasion, some of Sattras of Barpeta were razed to the ground and Sundaridia Sattra became the victim of this invasion. But British army was able to drive away all the invaders.

Sundaridia, one of the Sattras of Assam, reflects its character in the name itself.

Sundaridia is the gifted place where the river *Brahmaputra* and *Manas* joined. Anybody can feel the meaning of the name of the place *Sundaridia* after reaching the place. Its environment, land, water and surroundings are not only beautiful but also the women of that place are also beautiful. Sundaridia, which related to beauty, has its mythological believe. According to myth in *Dwapar* period, *Lord Krishna* killed *Narakasur*, the king of *Kamrup* and released sixteen thousand beautiful women, took them with him towards *Dwarka*. On their way three of them lost themselves in this place. Later on from these three beautiful women lots of beautiful girls were born. That is why, the place is known as *Sundaridia*.

The sattrā is known to be established by the most famous disciple of *Sankardeva*, i.e. *Madhavadeva* in the year 1570 A.D. It was the first sattrā of *Mahapurusha Madhavadeva*. From the sources of history it is known that Guru Sankaradeva never wanted *Madhavadeva* to come to this place. Because, according to the legend *sundaridia* was famous for beautiful women and Guru Thought that *Madhavadeva* will be motivated by these women might be diverted from the aim of his duty. But *Sankaradeva's* wife *Kalindri Aai* urged him to come to this place and make the place a pious one (Pathak, 2008, p.2)

Madhavadeva first came to *sundaridia* in 1570 and started staying in the house of *Ram Charan Thakur Aata's* mother *Urvashi Aai*. After that he made friendship with the son of one of the aristocrate person of the area known as *Khiramoral*. As an honour of friendship *Madhavadeva* achieved a plot of land from *Khiramoral's* family. Thereafter he started staying there building a house. This house is known as "*Adi Vithi*". Later on with the help of Government of Assam and collection of fund from various sources a new building is constructed on this place, where sattrā's religious practice is going on till date regularly.

The main matha (temple like structure) was constructed by the Ahom ruler *Swargadeo Pramatta Singha* in the year 1771. It was constructed in the shape of starfruit as like the *Siva Doul* of *Sivsagar*. There are twelve small type temples in the outside surrounding of the main temple. These twelve small temple structures are the symbol of

first twelve *Vaishnavas*. In the corridor wall of the main temple also there are sculptures of twelve *Vaishnavas* sculptured in cement.

The plate of the door of Sundaridia Sattrā is made of brass; it is the sample of very ancient door. This door was donated by Sri Bhakta Charan Atoi and made by Late Layan Kahar (1769 saka or 1847 A.D.). There is a speciality of this door of brass as an example of engraving the name of the donor.

Sundaridia Sattrā is not only a famous sattrā of *vaishnavism*, but also it is very important sattrā from the side of Madhavadeva. Because, it is considered as the first sattrā established individually by Madhavadeva after the demise of *Sankaradeva*. With the help of Khira Maral along with Narayan Das Thakur Madhavadeva made Sundaridia Sattrā a very beautiful and pious place. In the place of small *Namghar*, they built big *Namghar*, where one thousand people can sit together and do their *Nam Kirtanas*. For the bhakatas of distant part four hatis (rows of huts) were built. Narayan Das Thakur brought a lot of new Bhakatas (disciples) from various places. Madhavadeva decided to stay there permanently. Sri Sri Madhavadeva stayed at *Sundaridia* for fourteen and a half year and during these times he established the Sattracharming and composed many Bargeets, Bhaonas, hymn or lyrics etc. and various religious scripts. He engaged himself in looking after the spiritual side and also became busy with *Sarana-Bhajana* process for the new bhakatas. The combination of new and old bhakatas and the sound of *naam-kirtan* transform the *Sundaridia Sattrā* to heaven.

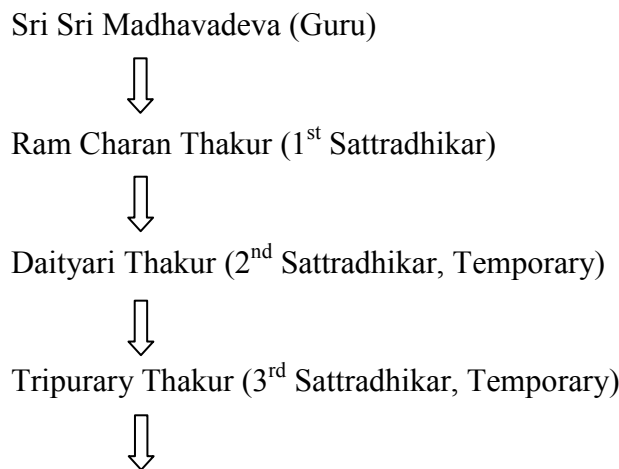
After the demise of *Guru Sankaradeva*, the people of remote villages from *Patbauchi* never knew that, after *Guru Sankaradeva*'s demise Madhavadeva became the *Dharmadhikar or Guru*. As a result in those villages the preaching of *Marg Dharma* (Path of Religion) decreased to some extent. After then, Narayan Das Thakur went to those villages and informed them about Madhavadeva and the establishment of Sundarudia Sattrā. Knowing this, people from *Bamonagaon*, *Tatikuchi*, *Bhatokuchi*, *Hajo* and *Bhabanipur* etc. places came to the Sattrā and took religion from Madhavadeva and became his disciple. Among these bhakatas Madhavadeva taught some special path of religion and honoured them with the name of 'Ata' or "Aata". The meaning of the term

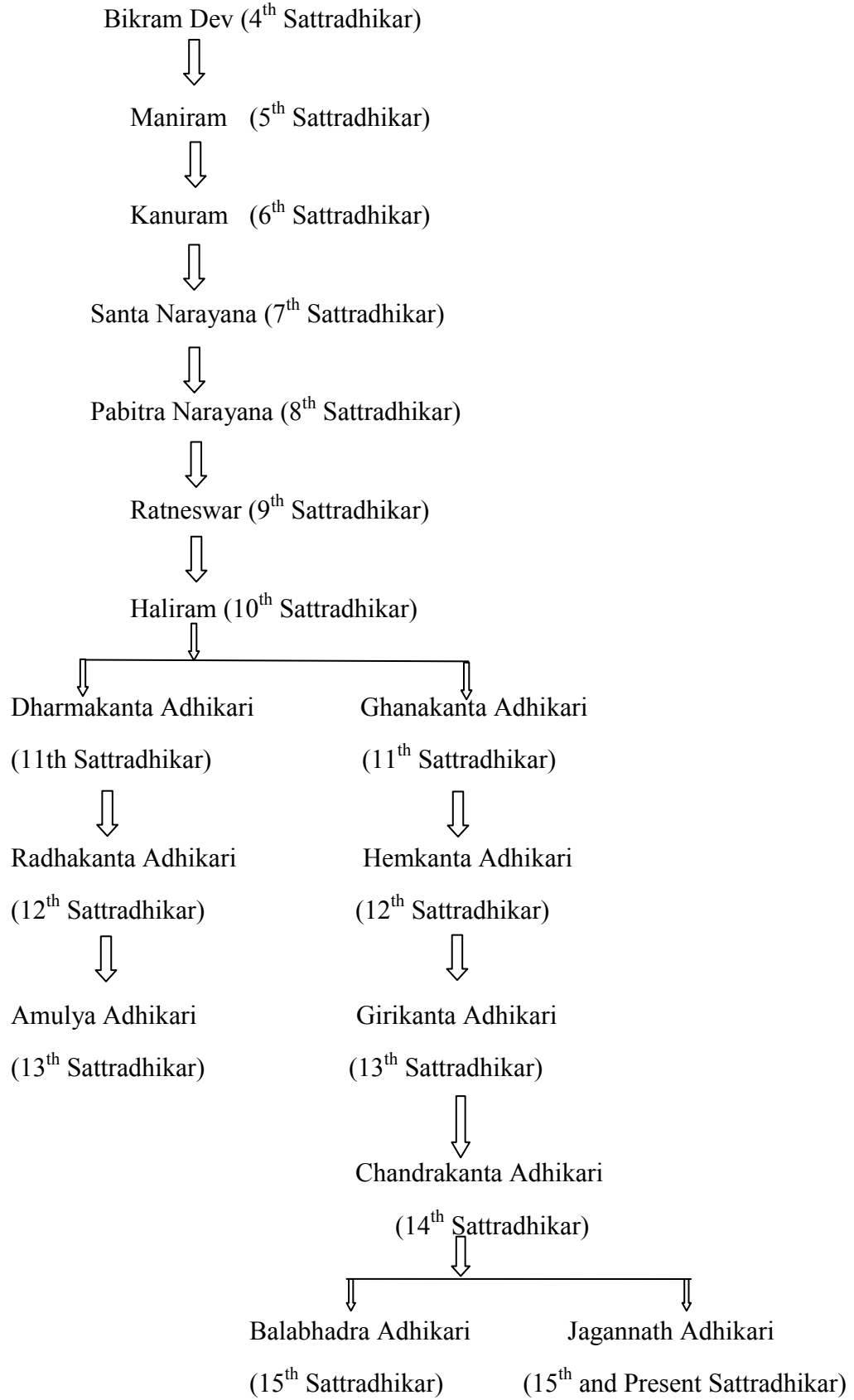
‘Aata’ is *Mahanta* or *Dharmacharya*. The person presenting himself in the name of *Bhakti Dharma* and preaching continuously about *Vaishnavism* was considered as ‘Aata’ or *Mahanta*. In the time of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, instead of calling their disciples names they were calling them as ‘Atoi’. Later on in the place of ‘Atoi’ they used another term as ‘Baap’, which became very popular.

On the other hand the relatives of Sankaradeva like his sons and grandsons were known as ‘Thakur’. In the same way the nephew of Madhavadeva Ram Charan Thakur and his relatives, Narayan Das Thakur and his sons were called as ‘Thakur’.

In Sundaridia sattra, the families of Ram Charan Thakur are known as ‘Medhi’ (*Adhikar*) till today (1597 A.D.). They are not only sitting in the position of Medhi but also reading scriptures, *Oja Pathak* etc. They have lots of potentiality in *Sankari Kala Sanskriti* (Art and Culture). The nephew of Kanuram, Santa Narayan was the Sattradhikar of Sundaridia. It is said that once *Ahom* King invited him to their kingdom and there Santa Narayan solved a puzzle which was unable to solve by other people. Because of his quality and talent he became favourite person of the king. As a result, he established several sattras near the capital of Ahom kingdom that is *Gargaon*. He founded a lot of new rules to manage the Sundaridia Sattra and today also those rules are followed. In the year 1907 Pabitra Narayan became *Deka Adhikar*. From this branch Haricharan Thakur went to Tezpur. He started staying there by establishing a Sattra in the same name as ‘*Sundaridia*’.

Fig.5. After Sri Sri Madhavadeva the Medhis (Adhikar or Sattradhikar of the Sundaridia Sattra are-





At his stay in Sundaridia Sattrā, Madhavadeva honoured twelve bhakatas as ‘Ata’ and made them eligible for *dharmadhikar*. Out of the twelve Atas were- Bar Bishnu Ata from Malacha, Gopal Ata from Bhabanipur, Mathura Das Ata from Bhatokuchi, Hari Ata from Laiati, Parhiya Ata from Urpot, Harihar Ata from Majuli, Lakshmikanta Ata from Hajo and his nephew Ram Charan Ata and Hari Charan Ata. These twelve Mahantas later on established various Sattras in the different parts of Assam. Madhavadeva recognized them as Gurus for giving *Saranas* (Religion) to the bhakatas and send them in different directions.

A numbers of *Atas* from different parts of Assam took religion near Madhavadeva in Sundaridia Sattrā. Among them were Mathuradas of Tatikuchi Barpeta, Keshab Charan Ata of Bhatokuchi (Upper Assam), Narayan Das Thakur Ata, Javan Joyhari of Muslim community. This sattrā was once known for the religious practice of ‘*Bhakatas*’ like the sajjans of Bamuna Vashi, Gopal Ata of Barnagar, Subhankar Tati, Chaturbhuj Atoi of Dangarkuchi, Krishna Atoi and his brother Bishnu Atoi of Manikpur, Harekrishna Atoi of Bijoypur and his brother Jodumoni Atoi, Mathuradas Burha Ata, Barbishnu Ata etc. They all involved in ‘*Ekasharan Harinaam Dharma*’ and started campaigning for their religious faith. As a result Sundaridia Sattrā became the main centre place of *Neo-Vaishnavism* of Assam.

The oldest bhakatas who were not interested for the material desire and who were having plenty of knowledge about religion were given the authority known as ‘*Burha-Bhakata*’. Burha-Bhakatas did the *Charit-Tola* (Recitation of Gurus Activities), gave religion in their baha and also they gave advice towards any kind of important works of Sattrā. For their work *Burha-Bhakatas* were honoured and preached by the people of Sattrā from the time of the Gurus.

When the Sundaridia Sattrā was established, at that moment the houses of *Keula Bhakatas* were constructed. These houses of *keula bhakatas* are known as “*Baha*”. Keula bhakatas are those bhakatas who remains unmarried and never wanted to attach with the common family life. They are completely devoted to God. Actually, it is said that these keula or disinterest towards family life system is first established in this *Sundaridia Sattrā*.

In fact *Guru Madhavadeva* himself was the first devotee of this system. The *bahas* of the *Atois* were known by their names like *Sri Ram Atar Baha*, *Krishna Atoir Baha*, *Harikrishna Atar Baha*, and *Jodumoni Atoir Baha* etc. Later on in the Sattrā five *bahas* were established for the *Keula Atois* like *Dakshinor Baha*, *Pubar Baha*, *Bor Baha*, *Major Baha* and *Pachimor Baha*. There are two parts of the *Bor Baha*. They are east and west part. In every baha there were the systems for staying two *keula bhakatas*. One is Guru and the other is helper. The Guru is known as *Burha Bhakata* and the helper or assistant is known as *aldhora*. After the death of Guru, his assistant becomes the *Burha Bhakata*. At that time the *bahas* were the centre of Sankaradevas *Bhakti Dharma* discussion. These process or culture and tradition are still followed by the people of *Sundaridia*.

In this Sattrā *Mahapurusha Madhavadeva* categorized the four pillar of *Neo-Vaishnavism*– *Guru* (Preacher), *Deu* or *Dev* (God), *Naam* or *Nam* (Chanting of hymns) and *Bhakata* (Devotee). He also classified the position of *Gyan* (Knowledge), *Vigyan* (Science), *Tadanga* (A mode or means of attaining salvation), *Rahasya* (Mystery) and *Prasanga* (Prayer).

It is said that the tradition of “*Thio-Nam*” (Congregational prayer in standing position) is started from this Sattrā by the enterprise of Madhavadeva. Madhavadeva started following the “*Pal-Nam*” (Nam-Prasanga or prayer perform by various groups in one sitting) of Guru Sankaradeva in the year 1572-73 at Sundaridia Sattrā. During the proceeding of *Pal-Nam*, some of *Bhakatas* started singing “*Ghosha*” by walking towards the *Barbila Ghat* (Beel bank of Barbila) from Kirtanghar of the Sattrā and again returned to the Kirtanghar in same way. This practice was later on popularised as the famous ‘*Thio-Nam*’ or ‘*Thiya-Nam*’ of lower Assam. From that time in this place in the month of *Jeth* (May-June) every year is celebrating “*Gopal Bhog*” programme with *Thio-Nam* is celebrated in Sundaridia Sattrā. *Gopal bhog* is prepared by mixing of rice powder with banana, milk, sugar etc.

In former times there was no system of sitting in rows inside the Kirtanghar. Once Madhavadeva gave two marks on the ground from his seat with the help of thump in front of the *bhakatas* and arranged the rows of *naam* or *naam-khola* (sitting lines of the

bhakatas). Till today the system of sitting in rows systematically has been prevalent among the Oja-pathaka, pathaka, Bhagabati, Medhi Atoi and the bhakatas. The design and system of naam-khola and chaidhya-prasanga (fourteen services) of Sundaridia Sattra is obeyed by other Sattras. The thio-naam system was first introduced in this Sattra by Madhavadeva and still it is being continued on the bank of *Barbila* every year where *Yaksha-kheda* (chasing away demon) *vithi* (residence or house) has been established.

In the time of demise of Guru Srimanta Sankaradeva every desciple of Guru was surrounded with depression. At that crucial time in the year 1572-73, Mahapurush Madhavadeva tried to remove depression from his disciple and in the north-west corner of the main Kirtanghar which is known as “*Bherbheri*” started uninterrupted seven days “*Krishna Kotha Charcha*”. In this programme Bhakatas and Sajjans of different parts of Assam participated. In other words this programme can be considered as the first *Vaishnava Sanmilan* of ancient Assam.

Now a day Sundaridia is known with its five Hatis. They are *Pub Hati*, *Pachim Hati*, *Uttar Hati*, *Dakshin Hati* and *Kalaya Hati*. In present day almost all the people of this hatis are literate.

After the demise of Guru Sankaradeva, his wife *Aai Kalindri* started staying at Sundaridia in request of Madhavadeva, his friend Madhab Maral, Khira Maral, Burha Aata and Thakur Aata. Kalindri Aai stayed in Sundaridia till her death at the age of almost 140 years. The “*Vithi*” of Kalindri Aai Goshani is now situated in the south-west corner of the Sattra. Still now some day today peripheral (materials) of Aai Goshani is preserved in the Sattra. Today also the Sattra celebrate her death anniversary by the people of Sundaridia. There is a ‘*Pat-kuwa*’ (earthen well) in the southern side of the Kirtanghar which was explored (dug) by Madhavadeva with the help of Bhabanipuria Gopal Aata. The earthen well is today also in a usable state and preserved by the Sattra authority.

There is a pond at the Sattra which is known as *Kalaya Ganger Ghat*. Regarding this ghat (bank) there is a myth that once in the night Guru Madhabadeva and his followers were busy with *nam-prasanga*. At that moment they heard a very loud and crushing sound. As soon as thunderclap was heard outside the temple, the

Bhakatas were so deeply involved in naam kirtan that they had no idea about what happened in the outside. In the morning time when they came out as advised by their Guru *Madhavadeva*, they noticed a big pond on the place which is known as *Kalaya Gangar Ghat*. After noticing this big pond *Guru* said to his *Bhakatas* that *Srimanta Sankaradeva* had once descended the *Akashi Ganga* from the heaven, like that by the mercy of God this “*Kalaya Ganga*” is also emerged. So, the water of this big pond will be as pure as the *Akashi Ganga*. Today also the water of *Kalaya Ganga* is considered as heavenly water and people use it as the blessing of God. *Ghat Seva* (River bank devotion or worship) festival is observed on the bank of the *Kalaya Ganga* on the day of *Bar Domahi* of the month of *Magh* at where it is the women devotees who predominate the scene. They chant *ghosa* and verses as they enter the *Kalaya Kirtan Ghar* followed by marking of earthen bindi and distribution of *prasada*. It is believed that *Madhavadeva* participated in a congregation there and the barks of bananas thrown away by the devotees turned the place into lake which was later known as the sacred *Kalaya Ganga*.

At the time of both the Gurus (*Sankaradeva* and *Madhavadeva*) Charit literature was not in written form. According to Neog (1999, p. 32) in ‘*Gurucharit-itikotha*’ *Madhavadeva* was the first orator and later on all streams are the sources of main stream. The followers of *Madhavadeva* spread that as the first pace-setter what he introduced. In later periods it became intimate with the relevant of ‘*Charit-tola*’ or ‘*Charit-charcha*’. In the *Sattras* Charit reading was performed in the form of prose than verse. After *Guru* the *burha-bhakatas* performed *charit-path* in the *bahas* and other religious devotees were highly pleased by listening to them. In *Sundaridia Sattr*a on the day of *bor-domahi* (day between two months) of Assamese month of *Magh* *charit-patha* or *charit-tola* is performed in the bank of *Kalaya Ganga*.

On 12th June of 1897 there was a great natural disaster in Assam. Because of the very devastating earthquake the main “*Matha*” of the *Sundaridia Sattr*a dropped down under the ground about ten feet, as a result the sculptures which were sculpted on the outside wall of the *matha* became noticeable only from its neck side. One of the unique examples of architectural art that is found in the *Sattr*a is known as “*Doul*”. The present

day doul ghar is constructed in the year 1369. The base of this doul is constructed following the structure of the “*Sapta Baikuntha*” (Seventh Heaven). Though there are four entrances in this doul, only three are open now, the northern entrance is now kept closed.

In the west side of this doul there is a community hall which is known as “*Jogmohan Ghar*”. This hall is used for *naam prasanga* and also in the beginning day of *Deul Jatra* here the “*Adhibash*” (Bathing of the idol of Lord Krishna with rituals) of “*Bangshi Gopal Dev*” (Lord Krishna) is celebrated here. In this community hall the *Jatra Bhaona*, *Oja Pali* etc. are performed from ancient time.

In the left side of the *Jogmohan Ghar* the main entrance of the Sattrā is situated. This is known as “*Batsora Dalan*” or “*Korapat*”. There are entrances of this dalan from its front side. The base of this dalan is established in the same structure like the *doul ghar*.

The main *Kirtanghar* which is considered as the centre place of the Sattrā was covered with thirteen rooms till 1850. And they were made of thatch. Later on these houses were replaced with bamboo pillar and tin roof. In the year 1860 the people of *Sundaridia Sattrā* started building the *Kirtanghar* (length near about 105 hands or almost 160 ft and breath 42 hands or almost 65 ft) consisting of 11 rooms and completed it in the year 1910. In the later part the pillar and walls of the *Kirtanghar* was reconstructed in the year 1961.

This *Kirtanghar* or *Namghar* (Prayer Hall) is imagined to be the physical structure of God. The roof of the *Kirtanghar* is designed like a triangle. In the top of the roof there is a ‘*koloshi*’ (pitcher) made of brass. In the front side of the *Namghar* there is a “*Manikuta*” (Shrine or the house of jewels) which is known as “*Bhajghar*”. The design of the *Bhajghar* is like a bow. Inside the *Bhajghar* the idol of “*Bongshi Gopal Dev*” is placed. In this *bhajghar* the various things of the *Sattrā* are preserved. Inside the *bhajghar* there is also a well which is known as ‘*Pat-nad*’ (earthen well). Its water is used in all the religious washing including the washing of the “*Gohai*” (God). In closet within the *bhajghar* there are some religious manuscripts written on “*Sashipat*” kept preserved. In the *Kirtanghar* there is *doba-ghanta* (drum-bell) and the *asanas* for *Sattradhikar*, *Pujari* and *Bhagabati* are specified. There was only one *Guru Asana* in the *Sundaridia Sattrā* at the

time of *Madhavadeva*. Guru means the *Lord Krishna*. There are two different opinion or believe related to the three *Guru Asanas*. According to one believe afterwards *bhakatas* have established three asanas for worship of three states, such as *Asom, Kamrup and Bihar (Cooch-Bihar)*. It was the main worship place of “*Tinio Rajya*”. On the other hand the second believe related to the *bhakatas* worshiped these three *asanas* considering them as the *asanas of Srimanta Sankaradeva, Sri Sri Madhavadeva and Badala Padma Aata*. It is believed that *Sundaridia Sattr* is the *Sri Krishna*’s birth place like *Mathura* and *Barpeta Sattr* is the *Brindaban*, the *Lila Bhumi* of *Sri Krishna*. From the sources of *Charit Puthi* it is known that *Mahapurusha Madhavadeva* give religion (*Sarana*) to his desciple infront of this *Guru Asana*. The *Guru Asana* of *Sundaridia Sattr* is made of wood.

3.2 Environment and Physical Srtucture

The climate of *Sundaridia* area is hot and humid with the tropical monsoon rainforest climate. The temperature in summer maximum at 95-100° F or 35-38° C and winter minimum at 43-46° F or 6-8° C and experiences heavy rainfall and high humidity in the summer season. The climate is characterized by heavy monsoon downpours reducing summer temperatures and affecting foggy nights and mornings in winters frequent during the afternoons. Spring (March-April) and autumn (September-October) are usually pleasant with moderate rainfall and temperature.

3.3 The Internal Plan of the Sattr Campus

The internal plan shows that the magestic *kirtanghar* stands in the middle of the area. The other additional structures are on the northern, southern and eastern ends of it. Perpendicular to the *kirtanghar* and equal to the breadth of it is the *bhajghar* (arched house) or *manikuta* (the house of jewels). Just adjacent to the northern end of the *bhajghar* there is a concrete structure, which is called ‘*Matha*’, other structure with raised plinth called *deul* along with the house without wall called as *Jogmohan Ghar* or *Sabhaghar*. On the southern side of the *Kirtanghar* there is a *Patkuwa* (earthen well) which was explored by *Madhabadeva* himself. In the southern corner of the *Kirtanghar* the *Adivithi* (the house where *Madhavadeva* lived) is located. It is about 5 mtr away from the *Kirtanghar*.

On the north-eastern corner of the Kirtanghar the Sattrā guest house is located. On the south-western side of the Kirtanghar the *Aai Goshanir Vithi* (Kalindri Aai i.e. wife of Sri Sri Sankaradeva) is located. *Aai Goshanir Vithi* is the place where *Kalindri Aai* lived during her stay in Sundaridia.

3.3. a. Dalan or Karapat (Gate way)

The main entrance (gate way) of the Sattrā is known as the *dalan or karapat*. From the front side, there are three entrances of the dalan. A number of small mathas are present on the upper part of the dalan. These mathas give a wonderful look to this *dalan* or *batsora*. The base of the dalan is established on seven steps (on the symbol of seven baikuntha). This dalan is also known as “*hastidwar*” (Elephant door).

There are four doors in four sides inside the Sattrā campus. The east side door is known as ‘*Singhadwar*’, the west side door is known as ‘*Gajadwar*’, the north side door is known as ‘*Balidwar*’ and the south side door is known as ‘*Yamadwar*’. The west side gateway was constructed in the Assamese year 1373. The construction of other doors is still going on.

3.3. b. The Kirtanghar (Prayer Hall)

Kirtanghar is a substantial well-built building with a majestic look. It is 120 ft. long and 60 ft. in breadth. Though modern techniques were applied specially in making the plinth and concrete pillars at the time of reconstruction, yet the traditional style of the same has been retained to some extent. There are 10 pairs of concrete pillars which are plastered round. The walls of the *Kirtanghar* are fitted with ornamental iron cornices with sufficient space on the sides of the building under the *Varanda*. Through these spaces the congregated sound of prayer from inside the Kirtanghar comes out. The other sides of the three walls of the Kirtanghar are decorated with images carved on wood and cement. Various coloured wooden figures are fitted on the walls. These figures are expressing the stories from the Kirtan Puthi.

Inside The Kirtanghar

The central object that comes to sight inside the Kirtanghar are the three *Asanas* (seat) or *Singhasana* (seat with lion motifs) or *Guru Asanas* (the seat of the guru, i.e. Sankaradeva or Madhavadeva identified with the Supreme Being). In the beginning time when the Sattrā was established, there was a single *Guru Asana*. But later on it was increased to three *Guru Asanas*. The *Guru Asanas* of Sundaridā Sattrā are made of wood. The *asanas* are dedicated in the names of *Sankaradeva*, *Madhavadeva* and *Badala Padma Aata*. From the sources of *Charit Puthi* it is known that *Mahapurusha Madhavadeva* delivered religion to his disciple in front of these *Guru Asanas*.

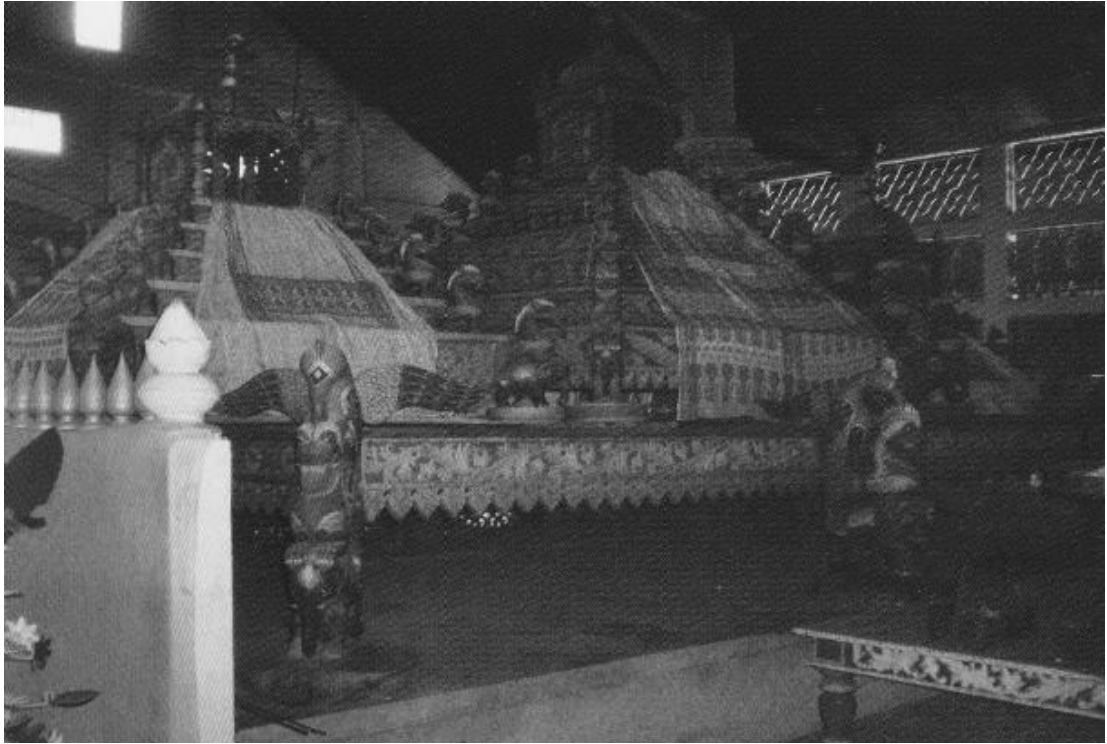
There are seven *bedis* (steps) in these *Guru Asanas* which symbolised the *Sapta Baikuntha*. In the top of each *bedis* there are *Kaso* (tortoise), *Hati* (elephant), *Singha* (lion) and *Garura* (a kind of bird) are placed. These are symbolization of *Brahmo*, *Apabrahmo*, *Parama Brahmo* and *Brahmogyan*. Simply *Kaso* (tortoise) is the symbol of age, *Hati* (elephant) is the symbol of gravity and truthfulness, *Singha* (lion) is the symbol of strength and *Garura* (a kind of bird) is the symbol of transport of *Lord Krishna*. These are the raised decorated platforms on which the Holy Scriptures like *Bhagavata*, *Naam Ghosa*, *Kirtan Ghosa* etc. are placed. Daily *prasangas* (prayers in the form of recitation from the sacred books by a single individual or chorus) are offered in front of these *asanas*. There are particular seats for the *Pathakas*, i.e. *puwar pathak*, *biyalir pathak* and *ratir pathak*. It is said that these seats were arranged by *Mahapurusha Madhavadeva* himself. In front of the place of *Nam-prasanga*, there are two statues one is *Hanuman* and the other is *Garura*. These statues are made of wood. On the other side of the *asana* there is the seat of the *Satradhikar* on which particular place the first *Satradhikar* i.e. *Madhavadeva* used to sit. The space just behind the *asana* is used for arranging and preparing the *prasada* in times of various festivals. Near the *asana* on the eastern side the *daba* (the kettle drum) is placed overhead, which is sounded to indicate the hour of various performances.



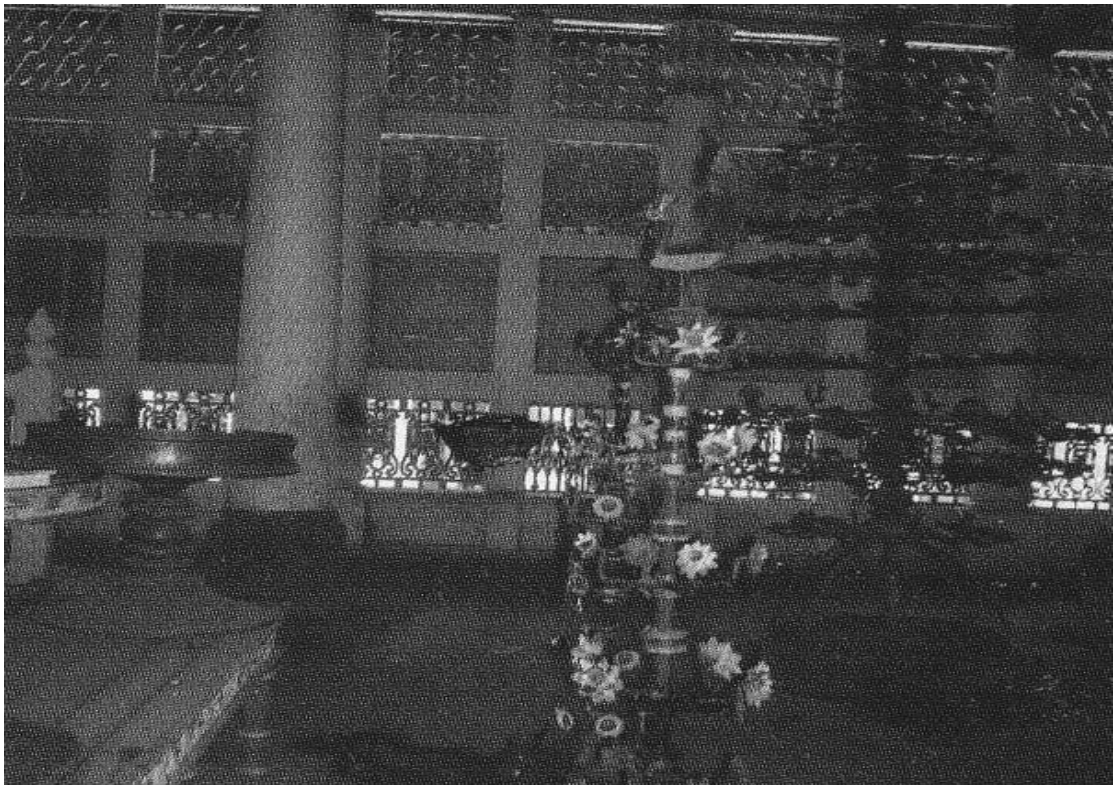
Dalan or Korapat of Sundaridia Sattrra (Gate way)



Kirtanghar (Prayer Hall)



Guru Asanas



Akshay Banti (Devine Lamp)

3.3. c. Bhajghar or Manikuta (The Shrine where the Sacred Scriptures or the idol of the deity is installed)

Adjacent to the Kirtanghar to the east (front side of the Nam ghar) is another house whose length roughly equals the breadth of the Kirtanghar. This house is known as '*Manikuta*' (*Shrine*). But in Sundaridia Sattrā it is called '*Bhajghar*'. The design of the bhajghar is like a bow. Inside the bhajghar the idol of *Bangshi Gopal Dev* is placed. The idol is made of gold (actually not fully gold, it is washed in gold water). In this bhajghar various valuable properties of Sattrā include old manuscripts written on Sacipat (bark of aquillaria agallocha) and various things of the Sattrā are kept preserved by the founding fathers themselves. Inside the bhajghar there is also a well which is known as pat-nad (earthen well). Its water is used in all the religious washing, prasadas of daily prasanga and including the washing of the idol of the Bangshi Gopal every day.

3.3. d. The Matha (Place for keeping religious Scriptures)

On the northern side of the eastern end of the Kirtanghar there is concrete brick walled concical structure which is called '*Matha*'. The matha was established by the time of *Ahom King Swargadeo Pramatta Singha* in the year 1771. The diameter of the matha is nearly 80 ft. The length of the corridor of the matha is nearly 15 ft. and the breadth is 10 ft. The ceiling of the matha is approximately 10 ft. high. In order to smooth out the bricks the albumen part of the duck's egg was used. Instead of cement, gur (molasses), matimah, silsun (lime stone), samuk sun (sell lime), baralimas (Sheat fish), teldhuna etc. were used. These are called korhal. The body of the temple is devided into four parts vertically. These are –

- i. Pada or Pristha or Adhisthan (Foundation)
- ii. Jangha, Kokal or Sarir or Ber (Wall)
- iii. Kandha (Shoulder) or Gondi (Neck)
- iv. Sikhar or Sastak (Head or upper part of the matha)

Although the *trishul* is placed on the top of the *kolosi* (Pot), the pattern actually is designed after Vishnu temple. The *matha* was constructed with the help of bricks. It was constructed in the shape of starfruit as like the *Siva Doul of Sivsagar*. There are twelve

small matha in the outside wall of the main matha. These small mathas are known as *darikona matha*. These twelve small matha are the symbol of twelve *Vaishnavas*. In the corridor walls of the main matha also there are sculptures of twelve vaishnavas. In the upper part of the corridor gate of matha, the sculpture of Lord *Vishnu* is present. On the other hand, on two sides of the gate two sculptures of *Vishnu bhakta* i.e. *Jay* and *Bijay* is present. Both of the two sculptures are standing like the *dwarpal* (gate keeper) of the matha. In the middle part of the outside wall of the matha the sculptures of *Krishna*, *Balaram*, *Garura* and *Narada* are present.

In the time of Maan's attack, the bhakatas of Sundaridia Sattrra ran away to the forest of the bank of the river Chaulkhowa and Manash. At that time the Maan soldiers (from Burma or Myanmar) took away the Kolosi (golden pot) of the matha. At present this Kolosi (pot) is made from bronze and little bit of gold.

3.3. e. Deul Ghar or Doul Ghar (The house where the idol of Lord Krishna is placed at the time of Holi Festival)

One of the unique examples of architectural art that is found in the Sattrra is known as *Deul ghar* or *Doul ghar*. The present *deul ghar* is constructed in the year 1980. The base of this *deul ghar* is constructed following the structure of the "*Sapta Baikuntha*". Though there are four entrances in this deul ghar, but the northern entrance is now kept closed.

3.3. f. Jogmohan Ghar or Sabhaghar (Meeting Hall)

There is a community hall in the Sattrra campus known as *Jogmohan Ghar* or *Sabhaghar*. There are no side walls of this hall. On the first day of the doul festival (Holi) which is known as '*gondh*', the *gosain* is taken out of the manikuta for an *adhivas* in this hall. The representative of each hatis performs different types of bhaonas and sometimes *Ojapalis* performed in this hall.

3.3. g. Bigras or Murti (The Idol)

Inside the manikut or bhajghar the main idol of Krishna made of gold (actually not

fully gold, it is washed in gold water) is kept. The idol is known as *Bangshi Gopal Dev*. It was gifted by Koch king Raghudev Narayana. Every day some rituals are performed in front of this idol.

3.3. h. The Akshay Banti (The Eternal Divine Lamp)

Infront of the *Guru-asana* there is one *Akshay banti* (eternal lamp) and a *Sarai* is placed. From the time of the establishment of the Sattras, it is believed that the lamp has been kept burning, that means, since the days of Madhavadeva. It is a mustered oil lamp. The eternal lamp of the other Sattras of Barpeta is lighted towards west i.e. Barpeta Sattras but the eternal lamp of Sundaridia Sattras faces towards the east from the time of Madhavadeva. The container of this lamp is made of copper (nearly 10 inches in diameter) placed on a decorated silver stand of nearly 4 feet high. The container is poured with mustered oil and there is a cotton wick (of 1 inch diameter approximately) on end of which comes through the lamps (container) lids while the rest remains in the oil held by the container. Surrounding this Akshay Banti there are eight gosa (lamp stand), where thousands of earthen lamps are lightened in the time of Krishna Mohotsava and other occasions. In Sundaridia Sattras one type of huge size lamps made of iron are used which are generally not found in the other Sattras's. This type of iron lamps is called 'sahasra banti' (several lamps). In these types of lamp different figures of flowers and snakes are decorated.

3.3. i. Adivithi (Residence of Sri Sri Madhavadeva)

The Assam type house inside the *Sattras* campus where Madhavadeva stayed is known as "*Adivithi*". When Sri Sri Madhavadeva first came to Sundaridia, he stayed in Urbashi Aai's house. After few days, his friend Madhab Maral, son of Khira Maral, built a house for Madhavadeva. Later on, Madhavadeva transformed this house to a *Sattras*. The house where Madhavadeva lived is known as "*Adivithi*". From here Madhavadeva spread his religion "*Ekasarana Naamdharma*". In this house he wrote lots of *Bargeet*, *Naam Ghosa* and many dramas like *Pimpura Gusowa*, *Bhojon Bihar*, *Bhumi Letowa* etc.



Bhajghar or Manikuta (Shrine)



Matha (Place for keeping religious Scriptures)

3.3. j. Keuliar Baha or Kevaliyar Hati (Unmarried male or celibate devotee's hostel)

The *keulia hati* was established by Madhavadeva. It is situated on the northern side of the *Sattr*a campus. This *hati* is locally known as *keular baha*. *Keulia bhakatas* are a class of devotees who lead an intensely devotional life, by keeping a close relation with the *Sattr*a, living usually within the four walls of the *Sattr*a compound and sometimes outside it. The celibate devotees sever all connections with their families for the sake of devotion and they always maintain certain differences from other people in respect of their mode of living, dress patterns, way of living etc. They are indifferent to any worldly attraction and the solo object of their life is the absolute devotion to god. Such devotees are called *keula* (*kevaliya* in Assamese) in Sundaridia circle that are never married.

In the time of *Madhavadeva*, these houses are called as “*Baha*”. These bahas are named after the names of “*Samuha Aatas*”. In the earlier times Sundaridia *Sattr*a has five different *bahas*. A large numbers of *keulia bhakatas* lived in these *bahas*. But now, only one *keulia bhakata* is present in the *Sattr*a. Automatically the numbers of bahas also decreased. Now days there are only two *keuliar baha* (*keular baha*) in this *Sattr*a. These bahas were used for recitation of *kulupia Ghosa*, *Bhatima* and also for giving *saran-bhajan* also in earlier times. Till now also traditionally *Charit-path*, *Saran-bhajan* and *Ghosa path* is also done in these *bahas*.

3.3. k. The Pat-Kuwa (Earthen-well)

On the west side of the Kirtanghar there is an earthen-well (*pat-kuwa*). It is believed that this *pat-kuwa* was explored by Madhavadeva himself. It still remains usable. Its water is used in all the religious washing including the washing of the idol of god. On the seventh day of Bohag Bihu all the villagers take the water of this *pat-kuwa* on their heads. It is well preserved inside a pakka house (concrete building).

3.3. l. Aai Gosanir Vithi (Residence of Kalindri Aai Gosani)

The house where Sankaradeva's wife *Kalindri Aai* lived is known as *Aai Gosanir Vithi*. This house is situated in the south-west side of the *Sattr*a. She lived here till her



Doul or Deul Ghar



Jogmohanghar or Sabhaghar (Meeting Hall)



Idol of Hunuman and Gaduda



Daba (Drum), Ghanta (Symbel) and Sarai



Pat-kuwa (Earthen Well) explored by Madhavadeva



Adivithi (Residence of Madhavadeva)

death. In every year the death anniversary of Kalindri Aai is celebrated by performing some religious rituals.

3.3. m. Atithi Sala (Guest House)

The guest house of Sundaridia Sattrā is located in the north-east corner of the Sattrā. The visitors coming from different places can stay here. The arrangement of the guest house is very good.

3.3. n. Khula Mancha (Open stage or platform)

In the year of 2014 with the help of tourism department and government of Assam constructed a khula mancha (open stage) inside the Sattrā campus. On this stage different cultural activity of Sattrā like *Bhaona*, *Ojapali* etc. are performed.

3.3. o. Sastra Adhayanagar (Library)

There is a *sastra adhyanagar* (library) in the north corner of the Sattrā. In this adyanagar lot of valuable old manuscripts, *puthis* and other books are kept preseved. Some of those are written by Madhabadeva and other Bhakatas.

3.3. p. Sattrā Parisalana Samitir Karjyalaya (Sattrā Managing Committee Office)

The Sattrā managing committee office is also situated in the north corner of the Sattrā. Here the members of the managing committee do their duties. From this office the whole official work regarding the Sattrā is supervised.



Kevaliya or Keulia Bhakatar Baha (Residence of Celibate Devotee)



Ai Gosanir Vithi (Residence of Kalindri Ai)



Pat-Nad (Earthen Well)