INTRODUCTION

The bhakti movement of medieval India had a great bearing on shaping Indian society, culture, religion and literature. In north as well as in the south, in the east and west, all over then, a large number of mystics and saint-poets took to writing and social reform. Almost all of them were sadhakas (meditators) and wanderers in the name of God and in the service of the people. They were often opposed to the establishment, and all authoritarian monastic order. They also strongly criticised all sectarian zealotry and the caste discrimination in society. All of them claimed relevance for religion in social life, in the sphere of real human aspirations and social relationships.

What is remarkable about the medieval Indian saint-poets is that most of them belonged to the lowly classes and it was among these classes again that they preached. Kabir, the most outstanding of them was a weaver of Banaras, and Ravidas, his contemporary, a cobbler of the same city. With Nanak, who was a grain merchant, they formed a kind of trinity among the leaders of the monotheistic movement. Another contemporary of theirs was the saint Sain, a barber and village menial. Dhanna was a Jat peasant from Deoli in
Rajasthan. Dadu, a contemporary of Akbar and the teacher of the Dadu-panthis was a cotton-carder. Haridasa (dated A.D. 1645), the teacher of Niranji's was a Jat slave. And Namadev, a calico-painter from Maharashtra who lived in the 14th century was apparently recognised by the monotheists as one of their precursors. They had, indeed, the conscious feeling that they had opened the path to God for the poor.

In the present work I have endeavoured to analyse various aspects of the socio-religious movement of medieval Orissa. The medieval Oriya saint-poets also hailed from the lower order of society and propagated the ideas of bhakti, sunya and nirguna using the popular dialects. Their discontent against the contemporary society, priests, ruling class and their sincere effort for scholarly inquiry are clearly discernible in their writings. Their struggle has been characterised as a "Social Protest and Popular Movement in Medieval Orissa". They protested against authority of the "four pillars" of the contemporary society. First of all, they protested against the (a) social structure (i.e. caste, untouchability, low status of Sudras and women and their deprivation of knowledge). Secondly, they strongly opposed the intellectual hegemony of (b) the Sanskrit language and as a mark of protest they created parallel vernacular literature. Thirdly, they criticised (c) the religious impositions and its various externalities like priesthood, ritu-
als, pilgrimage and idol-worship. Fourthly, they raised their voice against (d) the political authority and exploitation of the ruling class. They, however, worked for the common people and wrote in the peoples' language, advocated equality between the Raja and Praja and propagated bhakti for worshipping the personal deities.

The nature of their protest can be understood better with a socio-cultural background of the period. The scriptures remained entirely under the domination of Sanskrit, which served the official and professional language of a minority group in society that had monopolised education. Sanskrit enjoyed absolute primacy in the hierarchy of language. For a long time it was the only written language, but even when its monopoly had been broken and literary vernaculars developed alongside it, Sanskrit maintained a privileged position. It was seen as the sacred language guaranteeing unity of faith and salvation. The God could specifically be addressed in the medium of the debabhasha, i.e. Sanskrit. Layman did not know Sanskrit and to be literate, one had to know Sanskrit. Accordingly, the division of people into literate (the Brahmins) and illiterates or semi-educated, a notion of late antiquity remained decisive. The former were the educated, those who knew Sanskrit; the latter were largely illiterates and few semi-educated, was understood as a person knowing merely his
crude native tongue. In spite of Sanskrit education acquired by a few non-Brahmins were not considered to be knowledgeable, or educated, since the value was attached to birth but not to merit in Indian society.

The elites of medieval Orissa succeeded in barring the common people from education and the means of recording their thoughts and mood. The common people were often referred to as the Sudras, hina-jana and mlechha, for direct access to scriptures was denied them. In consequence, an elitist view of medieval culture, based only on the thoughts of so-called high-born - theologians, philosophers, poets and historians became firmly established and dominated scholarship. Bharata Muni of the first century A.D. attributed to the language of the common people of Odra as bibhasha (sub-language). The name he called to it Oudri or Udrabhasha. The Sanskrit scholars considered Oudri, a bibhasha till as late as the 15th century. The pundits of Orissa, the celebrators of Sanskrit, took about one thousand five hundred years to recognise the real language of the people and the land as a language. The mode of worship was changed accordingly and the king used to grant lands to Brahmins for performing the puja.

The Brahmins, besides performing religious ceremonies, acted as the foci of culture. It was they who held out to
the people the immense benefits of listening to the Puranas. Since the common people were not allowed to read Puranas the Purana-Pandas read out and explained them the contents of Puranas which were all written in Sanskrit. Apart from the supernatural elements, the Puranas emphasized social norms as well as social sanctions or penalties for violating them. This was a clever and convenient way of maintaining social cohesion, and also of socializing young minds in the traditional social system. Over and above was the Mukti-Mandap, an assembly of orthodox Brahmin pandits within the premises of the Jagannatha temple. This was the highest authority in socio-religious matters, and its verdict was enforced, if necessary under the authority of the king. Mukti-mandap was also a place of intellectual discourse which only the Brahmins could carry on and which only their brethren and the king listen.

The saints of medieval Orissa played the most vital role in generating the movement of equality and human dignity. They broke down the established tradition and started writing in vernaculars to communicate their message to the common men and women. They smashed down the superstition preached by the orthodox priests and propagated that God could also be worshipped in their colloquial language, if their heart and mind concentrated with bhakti. Sudramuni Sarala Dasa, the pioneer of the movement composed the Oriya
Mahabharata in Jhankar village of the Cuttack district (15th century); Balarama Dasa wrote the Ramayana in Puri, Jagannatha Dasa wrote the Bhagavata in Puri (both in 16th century) and Achyutananda Dasa (16th century) composed the Harivamsa, in his Nembal village of Cuttack district, quite far away from the royal court. The orthodox pundits of medieval Orissa resisted these efforts to render the main epics and puranas into vernaculars. The saint-poets had to face a lot of criticism and humiliations from the learned Brahmins, and to protect themselves against all hostile criticisms they appear to have dedicated all their writings to Gods and Goddesses they believed in. They have also characterised themselves with due humility as illiterate, uneducated, unknowledgeable, low born, sinner, born to the Sudras etc. and have requested to the wise elites of the contemporary society to forgive them for their works. The saints did not remain satisfied only by rendering the Sanskrit works into Oriya, they also attempted to participate in the Vedanta discussions held at the Mukti Mandap of the Jagannatha temple of Puri. Amongst them the most outspoken and revolutionary, namely, Balarama Dasa and Achyutananda Dasa challenged the Brahmin pundits as regards to the right of Sudras to study vedas and dharma-sastras, was a complex and contradictory synthesis of two different levels of culture. There is an attempt to analyse both the traditions in their dialectic and historical mutual influence, for they existed as
the inseparably linked poles of a single cultural universe.

Advent of Sri Chaitanya to Orissa in 1510 A.D. and his long stay in Puri till he breathed last in 1533 A.D., marked an important period of the resurgence of the bhakti movement in Orissa. He popularised the degenerated Radha-Krishna cult and externalised the movement through samkirtan (collective worship and recitation of hymns) and nagar-kirtan (religious processions from city to villages). The prema bhakti propounded by him gained momentum and made Orissa a strong-hold of the faith. There was a flow of two schools of Vaishnavism in the land of Orissa, one was the Utkal Vaishnavism led by Panchasakhas and the Gaudiya Vaishnavism led by Chaitanya on the other. Both the groups of Vaishnavas respected and influenced each other in course of their movement. This had a remarkable impact and change in socio-cultural life of the people of Orissa.

The bhakti cult was extremely popular as it laid stress on issues like egalitarianism, unity of God-head, dignity of man's actions, simple devotion and protest against ritualism and priest-hood. All the schools of thought belonging to the genre of bhakti believed in the existence of a God super-naturally revealed to man. The chief attribute of this movement was the attitude of the soul with regard to the Supreme Being.
There were two eminent schools of bhakti cult popularly known as sagunas and nirgunas. The teachers of the saguna school of thought believed in the presence of God with all human attributes. According to him, God is like a man with supernatural qualities. Sagunas, who enriched Hinduism, believed in the authority of the Vedas and did not like to challenge the traditions of the past. Chaitanya can be cited as a rare exception. Perhaps he was the only saguna bhakta who had actively led an anti-caste movement despite his adherence to the conventional religious modes connected with Vaishnavism. But the nirguna teachers preached the formlessness of God. According to them God has no human attributes, it is nirakara or formless. They challenged the traditions of the past and tried to bring about a change in social order. The panchasakhas, although they believed in nirguna school of thought, had actively participated in the bhakti movement of Sri Chaitanya.

The period of our study is limited with the second half of the fifteenth century and sixteenth century as well. This period is remarkable in the history of Orissa which witnessed the decline of the later Eastern Gangas and rise of the Suryavamsi Gajapati kings (1435-1540 A.D.). Gajapati Kapilendradev founded the Suryavamsi dynasty and during his glorious rule (1435-1467 A.D.) the Orissan empire was extended from the Gangese in the north to the Kaveri in the
South. The importance of the period of the Gajapati kings should not be judged only from the viewpoint of their aggressive imperialism. The period is extraordinarily important for the rise of an awakening movement in the field of Oriya language and literature, devotional music, painting and sculpture etc. which are closely associated with the bhakti movement.

Regional state formation in late ancient Orissa was closely linked with the patronisation of local deities in the conquered areas and the construction of huge temples for the royal legitimization. The temple of Lord Jagannatha (12th century) of Puri was constructed during this period and in course of time it became a great centre of learning and education in medieval times. A large number of Sanskrit scholars from the different corners of India came to this place and participated in various aspects of theological and philosophical discourses. In the 11th century, while Chodagangadev was ruling over Orissa, Ramanuja, the founder of the Vishistadvait philosophy, came to Puri and preached his ideas. Jayadeva composed his 'Gita Govindam', during this period, which was one of the perennial streams of Vaishnavism. Chodagangadev also took interest in the construction of the Jagannatha temple in the 12th century. According to traditions, Vidyapati a great poet of Mithila, also came to Orissa during this time. Ramananda came to Puri at the end
of the 14th century and preached his philosophy. Kabir visited it in the early 15th century and preached his doctrine of equality based on lofty humanism. Tulsi Dasa and Guru Nanak also visited Puri during the early phase of the 16th century and preached their respective ideas. In the middle of this century, Guru Nanak's son, Sri Chandra, the founder of the "Udasi Sampraday" and Vallabhacharya, the founder of the Suddhadvaita (pure monism), also arrived at Puri to preach their view points. Thus, Puri had acquired to be a great pilgrimage and centre of religious significance by sixteenth century, and therefore, the Panchasakhas and Sri Chaitanya made it the nucleus of their movement.

The sources on which the present study is based were created by the contemporary saint-poets in vernaculars, along with the inscriptions and some archaeological evidence of the period under review.

The epigraphic source of the period consists of the copper plate grants and temple inscriptions. I have used the relevant copper plate grants from the period of Ananta-varman Chodagangadev, dated A.D. 1082 to Gajapati Kapilendradev, dated A.D. 1456. Notable among the temple inscriptions are the Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar, the Jagannatha temple at Puri and temples of Mukhalingam, Drakshashram, Palur, Srikurmam and Simhachalam, the places which were the spheres of influence of the Ganga and the Gajapati rulers.
The inscriptions, generally, are written in Sanskrit words and we find, they are sometimes mixed with the Oriya terms. Almost all the epigraphs are dated, years are more often regnal years or refer to the Saka era. Their paleography also helps to determine their period. The contents of the copper-plate grants follow a definite pattern where the details of the donor, donee, conditions of the grants and years of the grants are mentioned. The Orissa State Museum has published four volumes of inscriptions under the title "Inscriptions of Orissa" which are very much helpful to study the socio-economic and political history of Orissa.

Besides political aspects, the inscriptions provide information on the territorial expansion, Brahminical settlements, development of trade and urban centres. They also contain references to land tenure, land measurements, land-grants and land revenues. Evidences regarding social life available in epigraphic sources is rather meagre. A few scattered references to the social structure and different castes and communities are found on them. The archaeological sources are mainly the sculptures depicted in the temples of Lingaraj (11th century A.D.) at Bhubaneswar, Jagannatha temple (12th century) at Puri and the Sun temple (13th century A.D.) at Konark. These sculptures provide us information of dress, ornaments, music and dance of medieval Orissa. We have also got some references to the Vaishnav
Monuments and sculptures in the Mayurbhanja district of Orissa.

The vernacular literature of the period is the principal source of our study. The literature of the period generally is scattered in a variety of Oriya, Sanskrit, Bengali and Persian literatures.

Madalapanji (16th century A.D.), the chronicle of the Jagannatha temple is an important literary source for depicting the socio-economic life of the people as it contains some references to state's income, expenditure, land administration and faminies of Orissa.

The Mahabharata of Sarala Dasa (15th century A.D.) is a remarkable source of information for the study of socio-economic life of medieval Orissa. It contains information regarding the glorious victories of Kapilendra Dev, origin of the cult Lord Jagannatha, economic condition and socio-religious life of the people. Besides this, there is an attempt to discuss various aspects of socio-religious, political and economic thoughts of Sarala Dasa which are enormously relevant to our present days. Some topographical and geographical information of the period are also available in the Sarala Mahabharata.
Next important Oriya literatures of the period are the works of the Panchasakhas who flourished in the first quarter of 16th century. Among these works Jagamohan Ramayan and Luxmi Puran of Balarama Dasa (16th century A.D.) provide information about the social life, conditions of women and Sudras and the poet's attitude towards the king, priests and the common men. The Srimad Bhagavat of Jagannatha Dasa (16th century A.D.), mainly a theological work, throws light on society, religion and culture. This work also influenced remarkably the society, literature and culture of the later period. Govindachandra of Yasovanta Dasa deals with the philosophy of Natha Yogis and it is still sung by the natha mendicants. The malikas (prophecies) of Achyutananda Dasa shows conflict and tensions in society which he wrote in the styles of predictions for future. The Harivamsa, the Gopalanka Ogala, and the Kaivarta Gita of the same author were composed to enhance social status and self-respect of the lower classes.

Besides this, Divakara Dasa's Jagannath Charitamrita (17th century), Rama Dasa's Dardhyata Bhakti (17th century), Iswara Dasa's Chaitanya Bhagavata (early 17th century) and Vrindaban Dasa's Chaitanya Bhagavat (17th century A.D.) and Madhav Dasa's Chaitanya Vilasa (16th century) provide biographical details about the saint-poets of contemporary society. Bhima Dasa's Bhakti Granthavali, Chaitanya Dasa's
Nirguna Mohahatmya (17th century) and Salabega’s Bhakti poetry (17th century) are the indispensable sources of bhakti movement of the period under review.

Many Sanskrit literary texts of the period contain rich references to the socio-religious life of Orissa. Jayadeva’s Gita Govinda (12th century A.D.), Viswanath Kaviraj’s Chandrakala Natika (14th century A.D.) and the Saraswati Vilasa ascribed to Purshottam Gajapati, Murari Gupta’s Chaitanya Charitamrita, Kavi Karunapura’s Chaitanya Charitamrita and Ray Ramananda’s Jagannatha Vallabha are important of them.

The Bengali works, namely, Chaitanya Charitamrita (16th century A.D.) of Krishnadasa Kaviraja and Chaitanya Bhagavat of Vrindaban Das are the biographical sketches of Sri Chaitanya. Lochana Das’s Chaitanya Mangal (16th century) and Jayananda’s Chaitanya Mangal throw light on the reign of Pratapradra Gajapati and his association with Vaishnavism.

The Persian accounts such as Al-Biruni’s Tarikh-ul-Hind (11th century A.D.) gives us informations about the social organisation, caste, communities, religion and beliefs of 11th century India and some stray references to Orissa as well. Tabaquat-i-Nasiri (13th century A.D.) of Minhaj-ud-din-bin-Siraj-ud-din and Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi (14th century A.D.) of Shams-i-Shiraj refer generally to the Muslim inva-
sion of Orissa, but they also make incidental references to the economic condition of the people. Abul Fazl in his Ain-i-Akbari (16th century A.D.) has given an account of the rent-roll, land assessment, economic data regarding output and price and administrative units of the then Orissa. On these materials also we have drawn usefully for some discussion on the social and economic history of the period.

The present work has been divided into five chapters. In Chapter I, I have analysed the socio-economic and religious background of the regional state formation in late ancient or early medieval Orissa, and examined various factors responsible for the transformation of tribal chiefdoms into the monarchical kingdom. I have discussed the crown-priest relationship, growth of priestly power in the Gajapati era (1435-1540 A.D.), divine theory of kingship and constant land grants to Brahmins and other state officials which led to the rise and growth of monarchical kingdom.

In another section, various aspects of the medieval Orissan social structure have been lucidly illustrated. Medieval Hindu Social Order was caste-ridden and legitimised by the dominant Brahminical religious doctrines. The continuity of land-grants helped to rise an intermediary class consisting of the priests, nobles and temples. Establishment of tax-free Brahmin sasanas, a remarkable feature of
the medieval Orissa, implies the alliance between the Brahmins and Kshatriyas to have share over administration, economic resources and political power. I have also analysed the condition of primary producers, system of learning and education, royal patronage to the Sanskrit literature and also the causes of social inequality, exploitation and deprivation which led to the rise of protest movement in medieval Orissa.

In Chapter II, I have elucidated the background to the emergence of the rise and growth of the written Oriya literature from the Oral tradition. Sudramuni Sarala Dasa, the pioneer of the protest movement broke down the established tradition of writing the epics in Sanskrit and started composing them in the vernacular, very much closed to the crude spoken language of the people. Oriya Mahabharata (15th century) was his magnum opus, in addition to other creations like Vilanka Ramayan and Chandi Puran. I have characterised the deviation of writing Puranas and dharma-sastras in vernaculars and coming faraway from the set pattern of puranic compositions as a form of social protest. Sarala Dasa's socio-religious outlook, his resentment against the social order, his theory of the Jagannatha cult, his political philosophy, his attitude towards kingship, priesthood, women and Sudras and his contribution to the moral upliftment have been presented. His popularity and
impact on later saint-poets has been also underlined. Arjuna Dasa, the author of Ramabibha, Chaitanya Dasa, the author of Nirguna Mahatmya and Markanda Dasa, the author of Keshav Koili immediately followed the foot-prints of Sarala Dasa and contributed to the growth of Oriya literary consciousness.

In Chapter III, there is an attempt to discuss various factors leading to the rise of a non-conformist movement against the established social order. The panchasakha movement which gained momentum following the tradition of Sarala Dasa during 16th century, has been the mainstay of discussion in this chapter. I have brought to light the socio-religious and political views of the Panchasakhas, their criticism against orthodox religion and sastras; authoritarianism and impositions and their contribution to shape the society and literature. The role of the Panchasakhas in uplifting women and sudras and acquiring 'self-respect' to them has been enumerated in detail. However, they endeavoured to establish a new social order based on universal brotherhood, equality, reason and humanism. Thus, the objectives of their teachings and significance of their protest have been given special attention.

Chapter IV explicates the spread of prema-bhakti of Sri Chaitanya and his popularisation of the degenerated Radha-Krishna cult in Orissa. Sri Chaitanya accepted the disci-
people from all sections of society, irrespective of their caste and creed. The panchasakhas, who identified themselves to be Sudras, became his disciples and preached bhakti as a medium of worship. Sri Chaitanya reached out to the common people through samkirtan, nagar kirtan and his creative devotional music. The people of all denominations were able to assemble at one place for the purpose of samkirtan. Chaitanya's attitude towards caste, priesthood, disciples and his samkirtan consisting of mass-singing, chanting, dancing, common prayer and nagar kirtan has been critically appraised. I have also compared the similarity and difference between the schools of Utkal Vaishnavism and Gaudiya Vaishnavism, which spread over Orissa under the period of my study.

In Chapter V, I have shown that the Panchasakhas who made most notable contribution towards the development and efflorescence of Oriya language and literature, influenced the writings of the later poets from Divakar Dasa and Rama Dasa (17th century) Dinakrushna, Abhimanyu Samantsinghar and Upendra Bhanja (18th century) to Utkalmani Gopabandhu Dash of 20th century Orissa. They encouraged and promoted regional literature so that the people could read and understand the religious scriptures by themselves. Jagannatha Dasa's Oriya Bhagavata became widely popular and the Bhagavata Gharas were set up in each and every village where the
people could read and listened to it in the evening. The Bhagavata Ghar had a multi-faceted functions like a village school, community hall, club and the place to settle the village disputes. The Panchasakhas also influenced the saint-literature of the later period. Apart from the tremendous growth of regional literature, the period also witnessed development of pala, gotipua dance, melam festival and devotional music. Chaitanya's bhakti cult had also a deep impact on the religious doctrines, music, state systems and ruling classes.

Thus, sixteenth century has been a remarkable era in the history of Orissa, which witnessed a cultural resurgence and awakening movement. The writings and teachings of Panchasakhas invoked the wrath of the dominant vested interests and therefore, some of them were imprisoned, and a few even tortured, whereas some others were banished from their own areas. But they endeared themselves to the common folks by their genuine emphasis on egalitarianism. They did not want to founded a new religion, nor they advocated a particular sectarian zealotry; they protested against the evil features of the contemporary social order and struggled to reform it with the objective of bringing about social harmony, universal brotherhood, social equality and stability.