(a) Introduction: The existing close relation between Assam and Orissa has influenced the socio-cultural development of Assam. From the ancient period of history up to the present century, there has been considerable migration of people of Orissa to Assam. Initially they came here in search of livelihood and over the years made Assam their second home and contributed a lot towards the socio-political-cultural progress of the state as well.

The relation between Assam and Orissa is not merely political or historical; there is intimate cultural relation too. From time immemorial the ancient kingdom of Kāmarūpa or present Assam has been swept by a wave of Hindu civilization, which has maintained its cultural homogeneity with the rest of India. Monarchs have reigned here whose exploits and achievements have been recorded in the Hindu Epics and Purāṇas. Physically isolated Assam was not outside the cultural hegemony with rest of India.¹

The history of Assam bears the testimony that the saint, poet and social reformer Šaṅkaradeva visited Śrīkṣetra, Badarikāśrama, Haridvāra, Prayāg, Kāshi and other holy places of Northern India during his religious tour. It should be noted that when

Sāṅkaradēva composed his creative writings like *Baragīta, Aṅkiyānāta*, he was much travelled man having led a long life for twelve years visiting most of the pilgrimage places of Northern and Southern India. It may be surprisable that he had seen the dramatic performances like *Rāmalīlā, Rāsalīlā, Yakṣagāna, Bhāgavata-melā, Pālā-gōṇa Dāskathiyā*, popular at the time in other regions of India. On his return home he immediately seized the opportunity of turning the *Kāvyā* type of entertainment into dramatic and put stories of *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* into the action by living performance.\(^2\)

Sāṅkaradēva initiated the *neo-Vaiṣṇavite* movement or *Bhakti* movement in Assam and gave an enduring shape to the religious, social, cultural and literary life of the people as well as he laid a solid foundation of the Assamese literature and culture by dint of his unique contributions in *Baragīta* and *Aṅkiyānāta*. Simultaneously the same movement of *neo-Vaisnavite* was going on in the other parts of India through several saints of great repute at different times. In Orissa Jayadeva and Narahari Tīrtha are worth mentioning in this respect.

Besides it can be mentioned that the *Operā*, i.e., *Yātrā* and the *Kīrtana* style of singing current in Assam, Bengal and Orissa

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seem to have been influenced by the dramatic style of Mithila of Bihar.\(^3\) There is a close relation between *Ai̍k̍yi̍a Bhōonā* of Assam and *Rāmalīlā* of Mithilā; and between *Bhajana* of Orissa and *Baragītā* of Assam. *Bhajanas* of Orissa are associated with Lord Jagannātha, i.e., Śrī Krishna and the *Baragītas* of Assam are also based on the life and glory of Lord Krishna.

From the above discussion, it is clear that Assam and Orissa have been maintaining historical, political and cultural relations from the fairly past. Further, the Assamese people consider their life incomplete if they fail to have a *darśana* of the idol of Lord Jagannātha before their death. They used to visit the region even before there had been any means of transport. So also the Oriya people bear reverence for the Temple of Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā situated at the Nilachal hill of Assam.

In the field of oral tradition also, both the provinces bear similarities to some extent. Kamrup is still believed to be the homes of spells and charms of magic and witchcrafts, *Tantra-mantras* and stories are circulated all over India attributing to Assamese women the supernatural power of converting a man into a lamb.\(^4\) The charms and spells still prevail here. The Oriya people also believe in

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Tantra-mantras. In the next chapter we are reproducing a few examples to assert their faith in Tantra-mantras. The most exciting example that can be cited here is Mr. Lokanath Mishra from Orissa who had been the Governor of Assam showed interest in learning Assamese Tantra-mantras.

(b) Land and the people:

Assam

As India presents a picture of great variety; so is the case with Assam. Here people of diverse religions, languages and customs have been living through the ages.

Assam is more or less centrally located in the North-East region of India. It is the eastern most state of India subcontinent. In the past her boundary was extended from Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal and from Sadia to the Karatowā river. At present it is extended from 28° 18 east and 24° north latitude and longitude. 80° 49 and 97° 4 east, resting between Himalaya and the Patkai and Naga ranges. The total area of the state is 96274.88 square km. The population figure according to the 1991 census is 315,12,070. She is connected with the rest of Indian union by narrow corridor in West Bengal that runs 26 km. below the foothills of Bhutan and Sikkim.5

5 Rajguru, S.: Medieval Assamese Society, Nagoan, 1988, P.21
Assam is bounded by hills, forests, rivers, streams, plain land and wide valleys and in a real sense it seems to be a India in mini nature. On the north it is bounded by Bhot, Aka, Dafala, Miri and Mishimi hills of sub-Himalayan ranges; On the east Mishimi Singpho, Patkai and Naga hills and Burma. On the southeast Bangladesh and on the west Bangladesh and North Bengal. Right across the land from East to West stretches the Brahmaputra valley, an alluvial plain about 120 km long and 80 km broad. The mighty Brahmaputra flows through the heart of the province.

The province was differently called in different historical periods. Its most ancient name was Prāg-jyotiṣapura. By this name it is referred to in the two great epics – the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata and the principal Purāṇas. In classical Sanskrit literature both Prāgjyotīṣa and Kāmarūpa occur as alternative names of the country.

According to Kālikā-Purāṇa, immediately after Naraka of Mithilā became king and was placed in charge of the Goddess Kāmākhyā, the name of the land was changed from Prāg-jyotiṣa to Kāmarūpa.

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6 Ibid. : P.22
However the origin of the name of Assam is uncertain. To some scholars the name Assam is derived from the Sanskrit word asama meaning peerless, uneven, unequalled, or unparalleled. To some others, the Shan invaders called themselves Tāi. They came to be known as Asam, Asom and Acam. It is also believed that the term Āhom has been derived from the word Acam or Acham. Gait writes that the local people applied the term in the sense of peerless to the Shan.9

The earliest inhabitants of Assam according to the epics and the Purāṇas, were the Niśādas, Kirātas, Cinas and other tribes commonly designated Mlecchas and Asuras. Narakāsura was the first known mythical monarch of the land. He was an adopted son of Janaka, an Aryan king of Videha who killed Ghatakāsura, a Mongaloid hero and king of Prāgjyotīṣa. During his period the boundary of the country was extended up to Bihar.10

According to Kālikā-Purāṇa, formerly Brahmā staying here created the stars, so the city is called Prāg-jyotiṣapura. Following the etymology, Sir E. A. Gait writes: Prāg means former or eastern and jyotiṣa, a star, astrology, shining.11

10 Kakati, B. : The Mother Goddess Kāmākhya, P. 43.
11 Ibid. : P. 4.
Like Prāgyotisapura, the name Kāmarūpa is also associated with a few legends and myths. As stated by scriptures, after the death of Sati, her husband Lord Śiva wondered in the world carrying Sati's dead body in great sorrow. To save the world from Śiva's wrath, Lord Viṣṇu cut Sati's body into pieces with his Sudarsana Chakra. Various organs of her body fell at different places in India. The genital part of her fell at Nilachal. It is significant that there is no image in the present Kāmokhyā temple. Within it there is a cave and below a block of stone which is the symbol of Yoni. Since then this area has come to be known as Kāmapīṭha or Kāmokhyā pīṭha.12

Assam is considered by the anthropologists as the museum of races. Various races from different parts of the world migrated to Assam, made their settlements and contributed to the building up of the Assamese society and culture. Assam is situated on one side of the main routes of migration. From the north and the east came the Alpines or non-Vedic Aryans, the Austries, the Tibeto-Burmans and the Thai-Chinese people. From the west came Negritos, the Dravidas and the Aryans.13

The geographical factor has made Assam a museum having the diverse races and tribes living in the hills and plains. Yet

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geographical barriers have not been obstacles to successive streams of migration into the land through the various ways. Assam has been a place of diverse racial strains and culture and intermingling assimilation and synthesizing have been proceeding through the centuries, slowly but surely making Assamese life and culture of distinct, typical strain in the great pattern of variegated but basically unified Indian way of life and culture.\textsuperscript{14}

**ORISSA**

Orissa is a coastal state which is situated on the eastern coast of Indian Peninsula. It extends from 17° 49 N to 22° 34 N latitude and from 81° 24 E to 87° 29 E longitude. It is encircled by Midanpur district of West Bengal and Singbhum district of Bihar on north, Raipur, Madhya Pradesh on the west and the Bay of Bengal and Srikakulam district on the south. It has an area of 15,5780 sq. K.M and has 402 KM coastline. About 42\% 40 percent of its geographical area can at best be available for cultivation owing to vast area being covered by forest (nearly 35.93\%) and hill rock barren land and wasteland (nearly .22 \%). For administrative point of view the state has been divided into 30 districts including very recently notified districts of Jharsuguda, Boudh and Deogarh.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Choudhury, P.C. : \textit{op-cit}, P. 5.
Geographically, Orissa may be divided into five regions; the coastal plains, the middle mountainous country, the rolling uplands, the river valleys and subdued plateau. The coastal plains stretch from the Subernarekha river in the North to Rushikulya river in the south. The Eastern Ghats constitutes the middle mountainous zone. The mountainous regions cover about three fourths area of the state. The South most of Koraput district, the Western portion of Ganjam district, Phulbani districts and large portion of Kalahandi and Balangir districts form rolling uplands. The major river valleys in Orissa are the basins of the Mahanadi, Brahmani and the Bansadhara rivers. The subdued plateaus are almost Flat River and resemble the peninsular tablelands, which are higher than the rolling uplands.¹⁶

As per 1991 census, the provisional population of the state has 31,51,2070 comprising 3.73% of the total population of India. The density of population per sq kilometer has 202 in 1991 as against national average 267. The distribution of population over the area is very uneven. It is seen while the fertile coastal districts are very densely populated and the intensity of population in hilly interior districts are very low. The ratio of male and female population is nearly 1:0.982. The population is mainly concentrated

in the village and only 11.82 percent of the total populations live in town.\textsuperscript{17}

The history of Orissa dates back to antiquity, its most famous old names being \textit{Kaliṅga}, \textit{Utkal} and \textit{Oḍra} when its boundary extended far beyond the present one. By the time of \textit{Mahābhārata}, \textit{Kaliṅga}, \textit{Utkal} and \textit{Oḍra} had entered into Aryan Polity as powerful Kingdoms. Frequent references are made to Kalinga in \textit{Mahābhārata} and there are some references to \textit{Oḍra} and \textit{Utkal}. By the time of Mahavir and Buddha, the \textit{Kaliṅga-Utkal} region on the East coast of India had acquired recognition and fame.\textsuperscript{18}

There are some interesting points in connection with the name Orissa. When Hieuen Ts'ang visited Orissa round about 638 A.D. he called the country by the name \textit{Uḍa} or \textit{Wuda}, which is now pronounced in modern Chinese (pecking speech) as:

\textit{U-cha} = (\textit{Wu-ṭśa}).

This \textit{Uḍa} is evidently a form of the name found in Sanskrit as \textit{Uḍra}, \textit{Uḍra} or \textit{Oḍra}. Though nothing is known about \textit{Uḍra} people but it was this people who gave the name to the state of Orissa. The word though not a Sanskrit, but not unlikely that it is a

\textsuperscript{17} Das, K. B. and Mahapatra L. K. : \textit{op-cit}, P. 4.
sanskritisation of some Prākrit or non-Aryan name like Uḍḍa or Oḍḍa. Not being Sanskrit, it can be either Austro or Dravidian. The word Uḍḍa in Prākrit was Oḍḍa and this form was current in early Ancient Indo-Aryan and in the modern Indo-Aryan languages. The word became Oḍḍa and then Oḍ and in Tamil the word Oṭṭan (singular masculine) Oṭṭar (plural). Now throughout the whole of South India there is a class or caste of people known as Oṭṭa or Oḍḍa. In South Indian (Tamil and Telugu) inscription of the times immediately after the second century A.D. Oṭṭar or Oḍḍar is used to mean the Oriya or Orissa people also. In Orissa there is a class of agriculturist people known as Oḍa-Tasā or Oḍa-Casā.¹⁹

The name Orissa has been quoted by medieval writers particularly the early Tibetan Historians of Buddhism in India who wrote the name as Oḍdivisā or Oṭṭivisā. This is based on a proto-Oriya word like Oḍdivisaa or Oṭṭivisaa. From this Oḍdivisaa or Oṭṭivisaa we have the modern name Oḍisā. This name goes back to a Sanskrit compound Aućri or Oḍrivisaya. The word Visaya means a province or a tract of country, in Eastern India, in pre-Muslim Times, is quite well known.

(c) Problem of the study

The people of Assam and Orissa have an unending cycle of festivals throughout the year. A popular saying is \textit{būra mōhat tera uchab}, i.e., thirteen festivals are celebrated in a year. The saying is applicable both in Assam and Orissa. Assam is happened to be a land of multi languages and multi cultures. The link language of Assam is Assamese. But varied tribal people like Boro, Rābha, Mising, Kōrbi, Dimāsā, Tiwā are scattered all over the state. These communities have their own languages and cultures. So also in Orissa though, the link language is Oriya, but tribal people living in the Districts of Kalahandi, Sambalpur, Balangir, Sundargarh, Kendujhar, Mayurbhanj etc, have their own languages and cultures. So it is a most tedious task to compare the multi festivals of Assam with the multi festivals of Orissa. Secondly it is not easy to collect all the folk songs related to \textit{Raja} festival of Orissa, as it is far away from Assam and all colloquial Oriya dialects are not easily understood by an Assamese-speaking student. Further, all the folksongs found in Oriya dialect may not come to the purview of our study. Only those songs, which bear link with our study, have been taken into consideration. Another problem is to translate the saying, proverb, song etc., related to the festival to another language specially maintaining its rhythm. So, our principal job would be to retain the Original meaning of the saying, proverb, song etc., without
responding to its rhythm. This kind of study would help to trace out cultural link between the two regions.

Secondly, although both the festivals are related from the view points of symbol, purpose and social function, nevertheless comparative study of these two festivals was not conducted by any body till now. Hence, this is the first study of its kind, which has tried to focus light on the various aspects of the two festivals.

(d) **Significance and objective of the study**

It is fact that 70% of the population of India lives in villages and the villagers are treated as the folk, so the Indian society is by and large a folk-society. If we are to study the Indian culture where the real picture of Indian mind can be found, folk literature should be given outmost importance. Due to the advancement of the modernity and urbanization, the traditional life and the aesthetic creation of the folk are going to be lost day by day. Even rural people who are the creators of folk songs have been influenced to some extent by the modern civilization. Now-a-days it is essential to preserve the folklore material specially the oral folklore that is still to be preserved. We should try to collect and preserve the material of folklore; otherwise these will lose their existence and significance in course of time. Not only the collection and preservation but a detailed study of the folklore of other languages and also to see if
their traditional literature and culture has some similarities with the culture of other races. The objective of the present study is to show the similarities of the festival with reference to Ambuvāci and Raja current in Assam and Orissa respectively. Both these regions are identical to some extent in respect of language and culture.

Such type of studies may surely be helpful in understanding national integration and unity in many respects. We do not know properly the cultural norms of other communities, which may stand as great barrier in proper understanding of the Indian life and culture. But this type of study will help us in this regard.

(e) Methodology :

For the purpose of the proposed study, the following methods have been adopted:

(a) Observation method,
(b) Interview method, and
(c) Case study method.

Since adequate research materials are not available in printed form, so I have to depend mainly on participation with the people. As I am an inhabitant of Assam, it gives me the opportunity of coming into direct contact with the people of concentrated areas. The rest of the materials on which I am not directly involved have been witnessed on different occasions. I have visited Orissa several
times during Raja festival and got directly involved on different aspects of the festival.

The materials from the field study have been collected through interview method. For this purpose many villages of Assam and Orissa are visited. I interviewed a number of families and active bearers at Kēmōkhyōdhām, Sualkuchi, Hajo, Barbhag of Assam. It is the case with Orissa also. I have visited and interviewed a number of families at Nimapara, Puri, Khordha, Cuttack, Bhadrak, Chandbali and so on. For this, electronic equipments such as Camera, Tape-recorder are used for photographs and to record songs, sayings and proverbs related to the festivals. I have also met few Scholars, who helped me with advices and relevant documents.

Moreover, the library work has been done at different libraries of both the states for collecting the secondary data. In addition to that some published papers have also been studied intensively.

(f) Works done so far in this field

No systematic study has been attempted so far in the comparative study of Ambuvēci of Assam and Raja of Orissa. Of course a very few articles and papers may be found in separate aspects. Further more, these articles and papers are not systematic and research oriented. Few folklorists like B. Datta, N. C. Sarma, P.
C. Bhattacharyya, K. C. Sarma, H. K. Sarma and so on have given brief account in the field of *Ambuvāci* and *Sāthā barat*. Likewise D. Patnaik, K. B. Dash, S. Mangaraj, L. K. Mahapatra and so forth have given brief account in the field of *Raja*.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that nobody has written a systematic monograph on comparative study on *Ambuvāci* and *Raja*. It is hoped that the present study will bring to light many aspects of the traditional festival, *Ambuvāci* and *Raja* and also the similarities exist in both the states in other fields also. Further, it is hoped that the proposed study would be the first attempt to focus significant light on this topic.