CHAPTER VI

THE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF PREPARATION OF THE BIOGRAPHIES OF THE VAISNAVA SAINTS

The names of the great men are worthy to be remembered in the morning. At the very beginning of the day, if we can remember those names with respect, we can achieve their blessings. But if we cannot preserve them within ourselves with homage, it is better not to worship their stone-images at all. The main object of writing the life-history of the great men is only to guide the progeny, so that they can uphold their life by following the foot-prints of those great men. According to Rabindranath,

"The great men left behind themselves certain ideals for us so that we are attracted to follow up those principles to achieve the greatness of their life"¹.

In Europe, the distinction between the power and the supremacy are about to be ended. There perhaps a great effort to write life-history of the powerful men. Europe can be termed as a nation devoid of rationality. Whatever they get in the lives of powerful men, they take it into account, even in their writings, letters and stories, they take initiative to write their life-stories. But the great men, who have shown the ideals to lead the journey of life, their life-stories are worthy. Their lives are only debatable those who have done great works throughout their lives. So, Rabindranath rightly opines,

¹ "Cāritrapūjā"; "Rabindraracanāvali" - Vol XI, P. 329.
It is very regrettable and shameful too, to present one's devoted person in the midst of all imposters and to act what is complete reverse to the ideals.2

There is no wonder that one who is actually devotee, will adorn the great. Greatmen alone will live for ever in their great deeds. It is true that the Bengalees do not perform the birth-day ceremony of Mahakavi Krittivas, but still they remember him with great devotion. The best life-history is limited in the literature of the world. The main defects of the general life-history are that it is onesided and keeps the person free from any defects. Moreover, a single ideal is preached through the media of his life-history. In the Western literature, St. Francis of Assisi has been shown as the first preceptor of Christianity and biographies were written aiming other Christian preceptors. But such books cannot be termed as real biographies. We can call them hagiographies, because of the characters are alike the legends of the saints.3

The Indians had a different idea about any personal life. From ancient times, the Indians did not give any importance to the worldly life and activities of any person. In some cases, they have shown a saint as a god. Moreover, their activities have been shown as something supernatural.

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2 Ibid., P. 330
3 Debipada Bhattacharjee, "Bāngalā-Carit-Sāhitya", P. 34–35.
It was quite natural to establish Caitanya as god during that time, the reason behind this is that all the writers were the devotees of Caitanya. So, none of the writers saw him in a new focus. They all confirmed him as god and tried to show him as god. But it is not our prime object that he has not been shown anywhere as man. However, biographies of Caitanya, Advaitācārya, Narottoma, Śaṅkara and Madhava which have been written, were to some extent sactarian or related to a particular group. By this time, many Vaiṣṇavas had written many biographies. Their main object was to establish their respective guru as the incarnation of god or god himself. Rāmārāṇa Thākur describes all the events of Śaṅkaradeva's life as repetition of Kṛṣṇa's līlā. Daityāri, Ramānanda everybody, like the other carita writers, regard Śaṅkaradeva as an incarnation of God. So, these caritas also helped in the spread of Vaiṣṇavism through the stories of the saints. So the carita-writers who were devout followers of the gurus took the help of unbridled imagination as well as supernatural elements so that they could attract the general public towards the superhuman qualities of these Vaiṣṇava saints or gurus. It is true that to establish a new religious sect as an anti-Hinduism based on Brahmanism, it was inevitable to ascribe them as God.

Advaitācārya worshipped Caitanya as a complete incarnation of god⁴. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāj also took the help of supernatural elements but his main purpose was to explain the Caitanya-cult

than the biography of Caitanya. Because if they are not shown possessing supernatural power, then none would fear them or show them respect or honour. So, it was inevitable to establish the religious reformers as supermen.

It is also possible to get some idea about Caitanyadeva, Śaṅkaradeva and other renowned religious reformers from these biographies. Though their lives are fitted with miracle, they form a rich mine of information concerning the life and customs of the people. But we cannot expect from the Vaiṣṇava writers of medieval age, the same angle of vision of humility applied by Bankim Chandra while writing 'Krṣnacarit' or 'ṢrīKrṣṇa' by Padma Gohain. These are all free from supernatural events.

In the middle ages due to gradual development and culture of provincial languages, writing of biographies started in different languages. Among these books, 'Caitanya-caritāmṛta' by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāj is considered to be the best from all sides. From the Vaiṣṇava era, we get the biographies of all the religious preachers of Vaiṣṇavism serially.

Only some of the biographies of Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva and Madhavadeva have been published till now. There are some supernatural events in some of them to a greater extent and in some cases, it is less. Practically the writers being their disciples,

5 Debipada Bhattacherjee, op.cit., P. 45
could not exhibit their impartiality. Vyāvahāra also had placed all the events of Caitanya's childhood to the youth in the same ideal with Bhāgavata.

Again, due to the zealously of communalism, many a times the writers deviated from the actual purpose of writing the biographies by placing distorted explanation. Among the biographers of the Mahāpurūṣiyā and Dāmodariā community this mentality was greatly extended.

The other object of compiling the biographies was only to evaluate their social value. It is considered unavoidable to go through the biographies in order to know the circumstances both of Assamese and Bengali literatures. Moreover, from the literature of this middle age, we come to know the social and devotional manners, festivals and different cultural aspects. It is also clear that during that period the Hindu or Arya religion had spread widely all over Kamarupa.

In these biographies also, for the purpose of writing, one can find both the important and unimportant events of the hero's life of that time which are available as social customs and religion. Except Saṅkaradeva, all other religious preachers were common people.

6 Asit Kr. Bandyopadhyay, "Bāngla Sahityer Itibṛtta," Vol II P.356
7 Maheswar Neog, "Purani Assamīyā Samāj āru Samāskṛti", P. 138
Over and above this social conditions, we get a little touch of political situation. The "Kathā-Guru-carita" is well-known not only for its religious information, but also for giving us the idea of economic, social and political situation of that time. There is a clear description of the events which the Vaiṣṇava movement faced at the first stage. It is referred in these biographies the problems created by the Kacharis, while Śāṅkaradeva was at Bordowa. In the similar way, we get the story in Vṛndāvana Dāsa's 'Caitanya-bhāgavata' the outrage of Kājī Sāheb at Navadvipa. The Kājī on hearing the Kīrtanas of Yavana Haridāsa, became furious and took charge against him.

"Yavanahaiya kare Hindur acār,
Bhālamate tāre āni karaha bicār "

(Being a Muslim, he acts like a Hindu. So, he should be forced to stand in the court and face his trial).

Vṛndāvana Dāsa in his book has skillfully and with great efforts drawn social life and different materials of the Vaiṣṇava sect of the 16th century. All these have been discussed separately. These biographies are very essential to know the Vaiṣṇava religion and history of Assam. Not only the deeds of the saints but also the deeds of their disciples and grand-

8 Satendranath Sarma, "Asamiyā Sāhityār Samiksātrāk Itibṛttā", P. 249
9 Vṛndāvana Dāsa, "Caitanya-bhāgavata", Ādikhandā, P. 87
10 Asit Kr. Bandyopadhyay, *op-cit.*, P. 367
disciples have been described. Over and above, the history of the satras of Assam are available in these biographies.

The main purpose was only to recover the real picture of the life of the saints and this was the necessity of the biographies. Moreover, the other main object was also to flash a clear picture to the people of the then society.

THE PLACE OF THESE WORKS IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF DIFFERENT SECTS

Obviously during the Middle Bengali period, Hindu poets introduced a large number of themes and created a large volume of literature. But all of them composed on subjects directly related to gods or goddesses and whatever the biographies were written, the heroes were religious minded (bhaktivadīs). These saints did not abide by any particular religious methods, they were all against idol-worship and did not observe any customs. The writers also did not confine their literary efforts to religion. It also appears from the history of literature that Muslim writers had a more secular outlook than either Buddhists or Hindus. They, however, composed poems on their religious themes. As a result it helped in uniting the Hindus and the Muslims.

Now, the question arises, what is 'Bhakti'? The term Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Bhaja' which is one of its uses means adoration, devotion, service, humble solicitation etc. This bhakti is the basis of all religions. 'Srīmad-bhāgavata' enjoins

11 H.C. Baroa 'Henkosa', P. 754
nine kinds of bhakti for a Vaisnava devotee, viz, Sravana, Kirtana, Smarana, Arcana, Padasevana, Dasya, Sakhitya, Vandana and Dehasamarpana.

"In all the great religions current in the world and worth the name of pith and marrow is bhakti. Christianity may also be considered as based on bhakti, like Vaisnavism in India. Jesus Christ's teaching, love of God and love of humanity - is akin to the teachings of Vaisnavism."\(^{12}\)

Gradually, bhakti-vada and bhakti-cult grew up depending on the god and the devotee. The Indian religion laid stress on three paths - jñana, karma and bhakti. We can perform our religious rites by following any of these three paths. It is not correct to say that the karmayogīs (devotees to work) perform their rites through works only. A desired object can be achieved from god through oblations. But he is actually worshipping who performs his works with self-restraint both internally and externally, and enjoys the worldly affairs.

Jñānavāda means the efforts of deep thinking about the divine or spiritual truth and god. In bhakti-vāda there is no mention of work or knowledge. These lies only sincere devotion. So, bhakti is not simple love. It is deep meditation towards an honourable man. It is derived from constant meditation with effection.

\(^{12}\) Lakshminath Bezbaroa "The Religion of Love and Devotion," P.69
This bhakti-vādā is a very ancient thing. When there arose a great complexity in Vedic oblations and its performance, then gradually a separate doctrine grew up which emphasized on Brahma Vidya. In order to achieve it, there requires constant thinking, realisation and study. As a result of this, Upaniṣada came into picture for judgement over the controversy, side by side devotionalism also manifested. As soon as bhakti cult became strong with Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, devotionalism became the only source of prayer.

Bengal Vaiṣṇavism is a special characteristic of bhaktimārga. This doctrine has been established as a result of great penance of many devotees for years together. All the prayers pertaining to Viṣṇu-Nārāyan of the ancient ages, began from Mahābhārata era. We get from the holy Gītā about the religion of devotion. So, we find that the Śrīmadbhāgavata was composed for the purpose of establishing the Vaiṣṇava dharma.

This bhakti-vāda was uprooted in Northern India. This cult flourished there from the early years of Christian era under the impetus given by the Alvārs who preached bhakti and devotion to Kṛṣṇa in the local Tamil. Viṣṇu with all his avatāras and particularly the Kṛṣṇa-avatāra, was the object of their deep veneration. The teachings and works of the Alvars were based on the Bhāgavatagītā and Bhāgavata. They represented the devotional and emotional side of the Vaiṣṇava faith.

Sāṅkaraśāra was an illuminative vaishnava scholar. His doctrine is known as 'Māyāvāda'. It is said in his 'Māyāvāda' that this world and all the creatures have been created by Brahma but these are neither everlasting nor true. The only truth is Brahma. He is like our consciousness. This world is transitory but due to illusion, we consider it as truth only by seeing the outward existence. The power of Brahma is known as 'māya' or illusion. We consider the false as truth only due to illusion. So, the creature assimilates with Brahma by cutting all the relations with illusion.

But the Vaiṣṇavas disagree to this explanation of māyāvāda. They first fought (agitated) against Sāṅkaraśāra māyāvāda. According to them, when creature and material things are the creation of God, then why should we call them as 'illusion'? So, they are equally true as Brahma.

But Madhyācārya said that though Brahma is one, but there lies some differences between creature and material things and it is His manifestation. As there is difference between the two, so, Madhyācārya is called dualist. According to him, Brahma is truth. Viṣṇu or Hari is Brahma. When the creature will realise the reality of Brahma, then he will feel happiness. It is called mukti. This mukti can be achieved only with devotion.
Vallabhācārya discarded the idea of the doctrine of Śaṅkaras mayāvāda, but he accepted the existence of Brahma, like him. He was the founder of Rudra Sampradāya. He was born around 1749 AD in Jelengana and settled in Muttra, Balagopāla or the child Kṛṣṇa is the object of worship for the devotees of this seat.  

Nimārka cārya was the eldest among the Bhāgavata Sampradāya, the follower of bhakti vāda. He flourished later than Rāmānuja and is said to have lived at Nimba, a village in the Bellary district. The philosophical basis of his system was similar to that of Rāmānuja. He gave an important place to Rādhā in his religious teaching.

There is similarity among the Nimārkīyas and the follower of Caitanya to accept Rādhākṛṣṇa as their deity. But Caitanya did not give much importance to the worshipping of Rādhākṛṣṇa. He gave stress on "Kṛṣṇa nāma" and "Śaṅkīrtana". According to Caitanyadeva, Rādhā was not only a married wife but the manifestation of his strength.

Rāmānanda, a religious teacher, born about the beginning of the 15th century, had great strength and persistence. He sought through the use of the vernacular to bring religion down to the common people and the message which he preached was

15 Lakshminath Bezbaruah, op. cit., P. 8
16 John Mckenzie, "Hindu Ethics", P. 170
addressed to all, irrespective of caste. He gathered around him disciples from various castes, even from among the out castes. One of them was a woman and the greatest of all, Kaśīr, is said to have been a Mohammedan. In Kaśīr, we have one of the loftiest and purest influences in the whole history of Indian religion. He was also against the caste system.

Nānak was born at a village name Talbandi under Sīkhpur district in Punjab. He gave instructions to abandon worldly pleasure. He gave stress on the purity of life. He also blamed about the caste system.

Dādu was another saint of the medieval age. During the period of Indian religious calamity, he manifested and united the men of the country, with the theme of love and unity.

In the Marathā country, these has been in process for many centuries a Vaiṣṇavite movement which has deeply influenced the life particularly of the common people. The most outstanding leaders of this movement were Nāmadeva and Tukārāma. In both, there was the same sense that his worship expresses itself in purity of life. Tukārāma was not only a systematic thinker, but also a religious guide.

It cannot be correct to state that all the Vaiṣṇavism found in Northern India was imported from the South. But it
cannot be denied that Vaisnavism in the North received a fresh impetus from the South from the great Ācārya Rāmānuja and his successor’s teachings and powerful propaganda.17

In Northern India, Rāmānanda, Vallabhācārya, Nīmādītya, Śaṅkaradeva, Caitanyādeva were the Vaisnavite reformers of great repute. These Indian and Sūfidevotees of the medieval age did not try to keep the existence of god in any particular area with any particular name. They realised god as an humble friend and lover. During that time, devotionalism was spread all over in the nature.

There are four main sampradāyas, viz, Rāmānuja, Viṣṇusvāmin, Madhyacārya and Nīmādītya. Other minor sects are said to have been included in these four main sampradāyas. Rāmānanda had twelve disciples from various lower castes, Ruidāsa was a cobbler, Sen — a barbar, Pipā — a Rajput, Kavi — a Mohammedan, Rāmānanda and his disciples (famous Tulsidāsa also) wrote their books in current language of the people.

Jaydeva’s renowned work ‘Gītagovinda’ gave a great impetus to Caitanya during his life and cult in the beginning of the 16th century, Kavi made protest against the current Hinduism and Mohammedanism and wanted to reconcile both the religions like Nānak — the founder of Sikhism in the Punjab. Kaviḥpanthis

17 Lakshminath Bezbaroa, op. cit., P. 6
do not give much importance to follow the forms and modes of
current Hinduism. The chanting of religious hymns is their chief
method of worship. During that time, mysticism amalgamated
with the Sufi doctrine. These Sufis were the Muslim mystic devotees. They wanted to be absorbed in the love of god. They
accepted bhaktivāda in their meditation of god. They realised
the similarity of bhaktivāda with their own doctrine.

Rabindranath also opined that Caitanyadeva, Nānak, Kavīr,
Dādu, all of them tried to unite the people of different
provinces and different religions in one devotional unity as they
were all theists.

(A) ASSAM

In Assam, the Assamese biographies have occupied a
prominent place. These biographies were the main branches of
Vaishnava literature. But yet these biographies may not be termed
as the best life histories, because these maintained truth and
devotional feelings. For this reason, the number of best
biographies are rare in this world.

The main theme of the Vaishnava literature was religion.
So, in order to propagate their religious views, they wrote those
biographies. The main defect of these biographies is that a

18 Ibid., P. 7
19 "Rājā-prāja," "Rabindraracanāvalī" V.XIII, P. 979
single doctrine is circulated through these books. So, these life histories of our Vaiṣṇava preachers can be compared with the hagiographics or the legends of the saints. Here the individuality of each man is not demarcated.

Before Vaiṣṇava era, we do not find any example of biographical literature. From this particular age, we get the biographies of the Vaiṣṇava preceptors and propagators. The life history of Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva have since been published, we also get number of biographies of Dāmodaradeva, Gopāladeva, Harideva etc. etc.

In this way, in the Middle Ages of Assamese literature, the carita literature or hagiographical literature became very rich. But in proper sense, these are not biographies. Because every sect tries to show its guru as superior and for that only the good sides have been reflected in their eyes. And in this, they gave free play to their imagination using even miracles and supernatural elements. The Vaiṣṇava preaches also urged man to bow down before all even man and animal not because they were good or great in themselves, but because the souls of all of them were Rāma or God. In Śaṅkaradeva’s ‘Kīrtana-ghoṣā’ we find,

"Kukura caṇḍāla gardavaro ātmā Rāma,
Jāniyā śabāko pari karibā praṇāma".  

(Bow down to the dog, caṇḍāla and the ass because souls of all of them are Rāma or God only)

20 Satyendranath Sarma, op.cit., P. 202
21 P. 496
Man then had no value as a man, he had his significance only as a part of God. No wonder, the Vaiṣṇava hagiographers tried to lay stress on the divine aspect of their subjects following this Indian brand of religious humanism. For this reason, these biographies have become somewhat unsubstantial.

The 'Kathā-Gurucarita' is a remarkable compilation. It serves as asplendid commentary upon the works of the early Vaiṣṇavite poets. We also come to know that Vaiṣṇava literature was mainly the out come of the religious experiences of our saint poets. Further, the book incorporates incidents relating to the popularity of the Vaiṣṇavite authors and other works in their own time.

These caritas help us to know that Kamarupa was then disunited through various religious sects and practices. 22 Other faiths such as Śāktas, the Tāntrics and the Buddhists were prevalent in the country. Śāktism became the biggest religion of Kamarupa. Moreover, we find the name of Bāmacāri, Tāntric, Tārṅkik etc. as a opposing force of Vaiṣṇavism. Thus a peculiar atmosphere was created in the country for the admixture of both Hindu and the Buddhist Tāntric, cults. The "Kathā-Gurucarita" also incorporates incidents relating to the popularity of the Vaiṣṇavite authors and their works in their own time.

Though the customary of writing and exaggeration of

22 Maheswar Neog "Śaṅkaradeva", P. 2
events has become a bar to treat these caritas as real biographies, but it must be accepted that literature of the seventeenth century progressed following the path of the sixteenth century.

At the medieval age, it may be said that the people of Assam were 'broadly divided into two classes - one Arya Sanskriti and the other was ĀdiVāśi. The Vaiśnavite reformers at that time laid stress on propagating the Hinduism. Though the reformers had to face untold miseries, but as a result of this, the common people adopted Vaiśnavism. The carita-putthis had shown us the examples how the tribals took initiation into Vaiśnavism. At that time, the casteism in Hindu Society was very rigid. The Brahmins used to give religious instructions in the society. A kind of priests created obstruction in spreading of Vaiśnavism, that was also revealed from the caritas. But inspite of all these, the Vaisnava preaches were greatly helped by the patronage of the kings in spreading their religious views.

The caritas also help us to know how the Vaiśnava poets composed their books for propagating Vaiśnavism in the country. Secondly, we know how the common people eagerly remembered or recited the songs or the poems composed by the Vaisnava poets.

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23 Satyendranath Sarma, op.cit., P. 218
The history of Assam Visnavism is one of many conflicts and persecutions. The course of political history of this Eastern part of India also has been changing considerably from time to time. But the renaissance, which had its beginnings in the activities of Sankaradeva has wrought itself into fulfilment in many ways. So, it must be said that these biographies occupied a special status because they were accepted by the people of different religious sects. These compositions, in one side can be termed as biographies and religious books, and in the other side can be treated as historical deeds and documents for the present and the future.

(B) BENGAL

Caitanyadeva did not establish any philosophical doctrine of his own. He taught through eight Sanskrit slokas—they are called 'Siksastaka'. The main theme of this Siksastaka is—

"Na dhanam, na janam, na sundaram kabitamba jagadisa kamaye,
Mama janmani janmanisvare bhavatad bhaktir haitukTvame"\(^{24}\)

(Oh Lord! I don't want anything from you, neither wealth, nor fame or beautiful women or reciting ability, but only selfless devotion to you).

Moreover, he advised to Rupa-Sanatana about Krsna-cult, Radha-cult, Gopi-cult and Rasa-cult. Whatever the scholars of that time

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24 Sukumar Sen, op., cit., P. 313
achieved from his supernatural life and knowledge is known as 'Gaurīya Vaisnavadharma'.

There is relation between 'bhakti' and 'nāma'. Caitanya propagated the usefulness of 'nāma'. According to him, there is no other alternative way in this Kaliyuga except 'nāma'. The devotionalism of the Vaisnavas got circulation through chanting nāma and līlākirtana.

The Bengalee devotee Caitanya once propagated his prema dharma in Bengal and his main aim was to protect the brightness of religion in every sense. His sacrifice was an extraordinary one in the social and cultural life of Bengal. So, he was accepted as an incarnation of god during his life time. His fame and character was celebrated through Sanskrit ślokas, poems, dramas and songs of Bengal. Before this time, the subject matter of national literature was conventional. For example, the stories of Purāṇas, the greatness of gods, Kṛṣṇalīlās and the padāvalīs. From the 16th century a living personality became the subject matter of literature. From his character, people got the taste of enjoyment and freedom. So, the Vaiṣṇava poet sang:

"Pranamaho kāliyuga sarbayauga sār."

(I am saluting the Kaliyuga which is the base of all the yugas).

Murālipūpta first started to culture the life history of Caitanya in the form of ślokas, then Svarūpa-Dāmodora. Only
through the help of these biographies, the efforts have been successful to bring them in the fore-front with devotion.

Vṛndāvanaḍāsa in his kāvyā, though described Caitanyadeva as a man, yet he recognised him as an incarnation of god. Not only he, but Locana, Jayānanda, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāj and Īśāmani,—every body explained him as an incarnation of Kṛṣna of Kaliyuga or god himself. Because they observed all the qualities of Kṛṣna in Caitanya. Vṛndāvanaḍāsa also brought for the future generation, a clear picture of the life of this greatman. We can also know about the cultural and social structure of that time.

Murāri Gupta described Caitanya as god from the very beginning of his birth. Murāri and Kavi Karpūra etc. composed their poems just like the ideal Sanskrit great epic and Purāṇas. It is remarkable that there are ample supernatural events in the Purāṇas. So, they have shown the divine power of their heros, which has been discussed previously. We can also observe the spirit of 'Maṅgalakāvyā' in 'Caitanya-bhāgavata' also. So, these biographies became the 'Maṅgalakāvyas' in the hands of the Vaiṣṇava poets.

At the end of the 16th century, Jayānanda in his "Caitanya-maṅgala" presented "Mahākālī". Narahari Chakravarty

25 Debipada Bhattacharjhee, op. cit., P. 33
in his kāvya "Narottoma-Vilāsā" took the help of goddess Bhāgavatī in order to give punishment to a teacher.²⁶

Krṣṇadāsa's "Caitanya-charitāmṛta of 17th century is not a kāvya only. Along with the life history of Caitanya, there is mentioned the devotional and spiritual themes also. We also find the vivid descriptions about the amorous play of Caitanyadeva. This kāvya is famous from all sides in respect of its historical base, emotion and philosophical solutions. We have been successful to find out Rādhā of Vaiṣṇava-padāvalī through his kāvya.

CūrāmaṇiDāsa sometimes addressed Caitanyadeva as "Viṣṇupriyānātha" in his kāvya. Other writers did not follow him. He in his "Gaurāṅga-Viśvājaya" did not try to establish Caitanya as an incarnation of god.²⁷ Only CūrāmaṇiDāsa gave the description of Caitanya's family. There is no remarkable substance of the minor biographies written by different Vaiṣṇava writers. These only help us to find out the time of the writers.

When the union between the Vaiṣṇava society of Gaurmandal started, from that time the Gosvāmīs were established at Vrndavana in Bengal. Following this path Caitanya-Caritāmṛta and other biographies were circulated throughout Bengal.Śrīnivāsa

²⁶ Ibid., P. 37
²⁷ Sukumar Sen, op.cit., P. 367
Acārya took the initiative part in this matter. He took the responsibility for propagating these type of books in Gauḍa. There are much inner devotional feelings in his writings.

BIographies — 'AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE PROPAGATION OF RELIGION

Towards the beginning of the 12th century at the establishment of the Muslim rule in India, the system of absolute monarchy started, along with the spread of Islam. Thousands of backward Hindus started to convert themselves into Muslims. And with this, the need for bringing about reforms in society became a must. At that critical juncture, it was only with the help of Vaisnavism and Vaisnava reforms, that the love for non-violence, peace, trust, unity etc. were instilled among the people. Leaders such as Saṅkarācārya, Rāmānanda and others, on the basis of Bhaktimārga, propounded their religious views before the masses.

We have seen that all Neo-Vaisnавite sects believe in the oneness of god. They consider Viṣṇu or Narāyaṇa to be their only god. Though the Rāmāmuji, Nimākṣā and Caitanya sects believed in Rādhāhood, yet they had worshipped Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu as the symbols of Rādhā. This Vaisnava movement laid stress upon the equality of all sections of people. Even people from the lower castes were given due importance. Reformers like Kaviyar, Dādu, Rāmānanda, Saṅkara and Caitanya helped them to adopt
Vaisnivism and thus brought about a new religious sensation among the people.

Thus with the combined efforts of leaders like Śaṅkaradeva in Assam and Caitanyadeva in Bengal the system of translating the Bhāgavata and writing the biographies of the saints gained ground. In Orissa, Balaramaḍāsa wrote "Rāmāyana", Saralāḍāsa wrote "Mahābhārata" and Jagannāṭhadāsa wrote "Bhāgavatapurāṇa" and propagated the Vaiṣṇava cult in the 15th and the 16th century. In North India the contribution of leaders like KaVīrdāsa and Suradāsa goes without doubt. Tulsīḍāsa wrote "Rāmacaritamanasa".

A COMPARATIVE STUDY:

These biographies were the most important medium of propagation of Vaisnivism and specially the new cult of Vaisnivism. In the earlier days, literature had been monopolised by gods and goddesses, but now it took real and living human beings for its subject.

In Assam, the Vaiṣṇavite movement gave birth to a new branch of literature in the form of Caritaputhis. These caritas may be considered to be the most valuable sources of information of Vaiṣṇava faith and movement. They throw light upon the special conditions of Assam during the last four hundred years.
In Bengal also, during the medieval period, the works of Hindu poets fall into two main categories: Narrative and Lyric. Hindu narrative poetry again falls into three streams: Mahākāvyya, Maṅgala-kāvya and Biography. These biographical poems which form the third stream narrative poetry are concerned with the life and teachings of the saints Caitanya, who came to be regarded as divine. These poems contain, in addition to the narrative material, lengthy expositions of the Vaiṣṇava cult preached by Caitanya.

Though most of the biographers acknowledge the divinity of Caitanya and write from the devotional point of view, beneath all these, we have a picture of great human interest and appeal. Purely devotional aspects of Caitanya's career is depicted with sincere and loving care with all the attending details and circumstances. These devotional biographies gave an impetus to the bhakti movement which was ultimately responsible for the spread and propagation of Vaiṣṇavism throughout the length and breadth of Bengal.

Both the group of the biographers help us to give a clear picture of the society. The main object of their writing was the glorification of their deities and the propagation of their religious doctrines and they did not deviate from this tendency. These philosophical and theological works have not been confined only within the rigid walls of religion but its effects are far-reaching in moulding the character of the people.