Here, an attempt has been made to give a brief account of Assam Vaisnavism with its religious as well as philosophical traits and belief as in the context of neo-Vaisnava movement of Assam, a great literary movement came into being; especially devotional lyrics came to enjoy even a greater importance. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a powerful spiritual awakening occurred in India, particularly in the whole of Northern and North-eastern India, which is known as the neo-Vaisnava movement or medieval Bhakti movement. This movement threw a new light on the spiritual and cultural life of the people of India and at the same time also revived and re-established the political and social conditions of the country. Many Vaisnava saints led this movement and carried the message of bhakti to the masses. Thus Ramananda (1299-1410 A.D.) of North-India, Kabir (1480-1518 A.D.) of Banaras, Namadeva (1270-1350 A.D.) and Tukarama (1608-1649 A.D.) of Maharashtra, Nanak (1469-1539 A.D.) of the Punjab, Vallabhaçarya (1479-1531 A.D.) of Andhra and Vrajamandala, Tulsidas (1523-1623 A.D.) in the United Provinces and Caitanyadeva (1486-1533 A.D.) of Bengal and other leaders of the neo-Vaisnava movement promulgated the doctrine of bhakti far and wide in India. In Assam too, the great saint-poet Sankaradeva (1449-1569 A.D.) initiated this movement.

Owing to the mixture of various religious teachings and practices like those of the Vedas, the Upanisads, the purānas, Saktism, Tantricism, Buddhism, Sāivism etc. there were various gods and goddesses, ritual performances and religious faiths, at that time with the result that the social condition deteriorated to a great
extent. In fact, there was no definite line of a strong and stable religious trend, which could be easily followed and the society of that time was far from the moral ideas and thoughts, spiritualism as well as realism. This brought the society to a chaotic condition. This apart, by the influence of Tantricism, there grew up certain temples in different parts of Assam where inhuman rituals were performed. For example, we may cite the evil rituals, performed in the temple of Kāmākhyā and in Tamreswari temple near Sadia as well as in the temple of Jayantīyādevī at Jayantapur. It is said that even human-sacrifices were performed in those temples in the name of Tantricism. At this juncture, Sāṅkaradeva, the great Vaisnava saint of Assam, pronounced a religious system in the light of Bhakti cult of India, based on the Bhāgavata-purāṇa. It is a religion open to all and this religion is known as the neo-Vaisnavism—the Bhakti cult of Assam or Assam Vaisnavism. The great precursor Sāṅkaradeva and his chief apostle Mādhavadeva themselves composed a wide variety of literature including a good number of devotional lyrics wherein the theology and philosophy of the faith have been embodied. The wake of Sāṅkaradeva movement gave birth to a galaxy of Assamese Vaisnava poets from whose sacred pens also came out a great literature, especially numerous Vaisnavite lyrics.

Assam Vaisnavism is known as Śka-śaraṇa nāma dharma—the religion of surrendering oneself with intense and selfless devotion to the One and that One is Viṣṇu, Who manifests Himself in various incarnations in different ages. Of all the incarnations, that of ŚrīKṛṣṇa is the Supreme and as such, complete surrender to that Supreme One is the basic principle of Assam Vaisnavism.

Assam Vaisnavism is also popularly known as Mahāpuruṣīyā dharma. The word 'Mahāpuruṣīyā' has been derived from the term—'mahāpuruṣa' of the Bhāgavata-purāṇa. In the Nāma-ghosa, Mādhava-deva has termed it as—Mahā-
purusār sevaka (worshipper of Mahāpurusa). According to Śaṅkaradeva, Viṣṇu is the only Supreme God to be adored. He is known as Mahāpurasa, Parame-purusa, Purugottama, Paramesvara, Paramatman, Brahman, because He is the controller of prakṛti and purusa as well as above the both. The devotees of such a Supreme God are called the Mahāpurusīyās. However, according to some other scholars, the term Mahāpurusīyā has the relation with the honorific title of Mahāpurasa designated to Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva was called Mahāpurasa and as such the popular name of the Vaiṣṇavism founded by him is Mahāpurusīyā. So also, some scholars hold the view that as the propounders of Assam Vaiṣṇavism beginning with Śaṅkaradeva were great men (Mahāpurusas) by virtue not of birth but of faith in God, Śaṅkaradeva school of Vaiṣṇavism is called Mahāpurusa sect. But the first one seems to be plausible.

However, it may be mentioned here that the worship of Viṣṇu and His incarnations were prevalent in Assam in early times also. There are many archaeological remains of temples, dedicated to Viṣṇu and His different incarnations and icons of the deity throughout Assam. In the copper-plate inscriptions also there are mentions of the incarnations: Varāha (Nidhanpur grant, v. 4, Tezpur grant, vv. 3-4, Puṣpabhadra grant, v. 1), Jāmadagnya Rāma (Gauhati grant v. 13), Śri Rāma (Gauhati grant, v. 9, Kamaluli grant, v. 4) etc. Such mentions, proves that there prevailed the worship of incarnations of Viṣṇu which is another characteristic of Vaiṣṇavism.

The Vaiṣṇava influence also is noticed in the writings of the pre-Śaṅkara poets, like—Hema Sarasvatī and Mādhavakandali. Moreover, Vaiṣṇava temples—temple of Mādhava at Hajo, of Śeṣaśāyi Viṣṇu at Asvakrānta and

2. K.N., v. 650, p. 833
Vaśudeva temple at North Lakhimpur indicate the existence of the worship of Viṣṇu as well as of Vaśudeva or of Pañcarātra Vaisnavism in Assam. But, although there was a flow of Vaisnavism before the advent of Śaṅkaradeva, it could not however influence the people at large. On the other hand, the Cutiyās and Bāra Bhūyās, who were ruling in Assam before the coming of the Ahoms were staunch supporters of Śaktism. The admixture of Śaktism, Tantricism, Śaivism and Buddhism created a social disorder and with a view to preventing it, Śaṅkaradeva promulgated and preached a new system of religion which was based on absolute devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Śaṅkaradeva discarded the various expensive and dreadful ritual performances that had been prevailing from the past. He showed the best way for the realisation of God as well as to secure liberation (mukti) through absolute devotion based on Hari-nāma (listening and chanting the name of God). In one bārgīta Śaṅkaradeva sings:

"The scholar does not see the straightest path,
Nor does the performer of a million sacrifices attain Hari.
Both fall down to earth ever and anon.
All rites and rituals,
All pilgrimages to Gayā and Kāśī
Made round the years,
All yogas done and rhetoric learnt
Only cloud the vision.
There is no salvation without bhakti
The name of Rāma is
The blessedest thing on earth.
That is the highest knowledge."
In the age of Kali
Hari's name is the supreme religion
The scriptures and the lore
Do not enable one,
To know Hari.
Sayeth the servant of Krsna.
Human life is short and difficult to get (again).
Forget, therefore, the vanity of learning and rites,
And worship the feet of Hari
In your inmost soul.  

Assam Vaisnavism embraces the lowliest of the lowly. In devotion to Krsna there is no caste distinction. Sankaradeva's teaching proclaims the idea of equality of all including even the animals:
"Even the souls of dogs, Candalas (out caste) and asses are Rama.
Realising this, pay reverence to all living beings."

As the sacred door of his religion was open to all, irrespective of caste and creed, the flavour of Hari-nama which was like a river of nectar, flew through the universe (hari nama rasa/amrtara nadi/vae brahmāndaka bhedi) by his preaching. Sankaradeva brought the principle of eka-sarana (taking refuge with the One God Vishnu-Krsna only) from the Bhagavadgita, that of nama (uttering or meditating the name and attributes as well as activities of Krsna) from the 'Sahasra-nama-khanda' of the Padma-purana and that of sat-sanga (constant contact with the devotee) from the Bhagavata-purana and preached the Bhakti cult in Assam, Kamarupa and Cooch Behar.

6. K.N., Sec. XXIII, v. 40, p. 496.
According to the Bhāgavata-purāṇa there are nine modes of bhakti: śravāṇa (listening), kīrtana (chanting), smarāṇa (recollecting), arcana (adoration), pāda-sevana (dedicated at the feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa), dāsya (servitude), sakhitva (friendship), vendana (worshipping) and ātmānivedana (self-surrender). The kīrtana also Śankaradeva has referred these nine modes of devotion. Amongst these, Śankaradeva has laid stress on śravāṇa and kīrtana:

"Though devotion of Mādhava be of nine kinds, Listening and chanting (His name) are the best by far."9

Mādhavadeva also sings:

"He whose religion consists of—
Śravāṇa and kīrtana,
Reaches the side of Kṛṣṇa,
Even if he can't leave his ego."10

Assam Vaiṣṇavism lays emphasis on bhakti—the implicit love and faith in God. This school gives absolute devotion, superior place even to liberation (mukti). The absolute dedication towards God is called rasamayī bhakati, which is selfless and desireless and a Vaiṣṇava devotee absorbed in this type of divine devotion does not seek any reward or worldly gain in return. A Vaiṣṇava devotee when engrossed deeply in rasamayī bhakati does not ask for anything from God; he may forgo even liberation. So Śankaradeva proclaims:

"I don't beg for enjoying happiness— even liberation, 
Let me have devotion only Thy feet."\(^{11}\)

So also Mādhavadeva says at the outset of Nāma-ghoṣā :

"I bow down to that devotee—
Who does not crave even for liberation,
I aspire for only devotion—
Saturated with rasa (sentiment)."\(^{12}\)

Of the different aspects of bhakti, Śankaradeva school concentrates on that of the servitude (dāṣya bhāva). The devotee is to consider himself as the servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa and he is to know none other than Him. Śankaradeva also considers himself as the kinka (servant) of the Lord; desires to serve at the feet of the Master. In one bagīṭa he sings :

"Dhṛum — He is my Lord—
Who manifests Himself as Hari,
I am His servant—
Who recite His name
And contemplate His appearance."\(^{13}\)

Caitanya school advocates another attitude of bhakti that of erotic love (madhura bhāva). But such attitude has no place in Śankaradeva's faith. So in Assam Vaiṣṇavism, absolute devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa with a spirit of self-abnegation is not the sensuousness of Rādhā as found in Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, but the servant submission of Uddhava. There lies the difference between the two schools of Vaiṣṇavism. The attitude of friendliness (sakhya bhāva) also seems to be dim in Assam Vaiṣṇavism. Unlike Bengal Vaiṣṇavism either dual worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa or any sakti (energy represented in a female form) of Viṣṇu is

\(^{11}\) Ibid., Sec. VIII., v. 12, p. 144. 
\(^{12}\) Ibid., v. 1, p. 683. 
\(^{13}\) Bagīṭa, No. 10, p. 10.
not recognised in Assam Vaisnavism.

In the Bhāgavadgītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa advises His dearest friend Arjuna:

"Abandoning all ceremonies, take refuge absolutely in Me.
Be not grieved for I shall release thee from all evils."\(^{14}\)

Such a saying echoes also in the theology of Eka-sārana nāma-dharma.
In the belief of Śaṅkaradeva’s creed, the Supreme God is Kṛṣṇa, Who is the saviour of all. In Śaṅkaradeva’s writing, it has been expressed as follows:

"Abandoning all ceremonies, take refuge absolutely in Me,
0 My friend! have firm faith in Me.
Be not afraid, I promise unto thee——
I will release thee from all sins."\(^{15}\)

Mādhavadeva also proclaims in his Nāma-ghoṣā:

"(O Arjuna) concentrate the mind only on Me,
Be My devotee perennially,
Worship only Me with salutations;
Verily I tell unto thee,
Thou art the dearest friend of Mine."\(^{16}\)

Thus the worship of other gods and goddesses is forbidden in Śaṅkaradeva’s creed. Therefore, supreme surrender to Lord Kṛṣṇa amounts to the worship of all the gods and goddesses. The sanctity of such Eka-sārana dharma is degraded by entering into the temples of other gods and goddesses as well as even seeing their idols. Śaṅkaradeva writes in the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, II:

"Thou will not worship other gods and goddesses,
Nor partake of the offerings (prasāda) made unto them.

\(^{14}\) sarma dharmā parityajya māmakaṁ sāranaṁ vraja
daham tvāṁ sarvakāyābhy mokṣayiṣyāmi mā sucaha
Bhāg-gītā, 18/66.
\(^{15}\) Śaṅkara. Bhāg., XI, vv. 189-190.
\(^{16}\) K.N., v. 612, p. 822.
Don't see their idols even,
Nor enter their temples,
Else, bhakti will be vitiated
Bow thy head to the One God Kṛṣṇa,
Chant His name only,
Being His slave and partaking of His praśāda,
Only do His work with thy hands.  

So absolute devotion and total surrender to the One Supreme God Lord Kṛṣṇa, absolute dedication to the service of the Lord, listening and chanting His names and epithets are some of the basic religious traits and beliefs of Assam Vaisnavism.

Śaṅkaradeva himself pointed out the way unto the God through a very simple devotion of taking refuge at the feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The great preacher made his disciples recognize 'four reals or principles' (cāri-vastu) : nāma, deu, guru and bhakat initiating into which, they may reach the way unto the Lord. A brief explanation of cāri-vastu is given below:

nāma:
Utterance of the sacred names and attributes of Lord Kṛṣṇa is the only way unto God and to secure liberation. In the Nāma-phoṣā, Mādhavadeva says:

"I always adore in my heart—
That ever joyful and eternal Kṛṣṇa."  

There is mention of the utterance of the name (of Viṣṇu) in the Veda also:

"O the praisers!
Know Him to be the ancient, the origin and the
root of all.

17. Śaṅkara Bhāg. II, vv. 545-546.
And know Him to be the self-developed,
Be eloquent.
Should the knowers of Him—
Be eloquent in chanting His name.
O the great Visnu!
I take refuge in Thy benevolence (gumati)."16

dev (deva):

The main principle of Eka-sára dhármá is — eka deva, eka seva, eka vine náhi keva, meaning— There is One deity, only One to be saluted, there is none but One. Lord Krsna, Who is the manifestation of the unmanifested and qualitiless God is the only One to be adored with a spirit of self-abnegation:

"One only scripture is true (authoritative)—
That which the son of Daivakí had uttered,
One only deity— Who is the son of Daivakí.
Salutation at the feet of the son of Daivakí—
This is the only work,
The only incantation (mantra),
Is His magical name."20

guru:

The religious preceptor who evokes in the heart of the individual self (jiva) the ideal of bhakti and shows thereby the way unto the God is called guru. There are three chief gurus— the father, who is the cause of birth is the first guru, a pious and a well versed Brahman is the second guru and the giver of spiritual knowledge is the third guru.

In the belief of Assam Vaisnavism the third guru is equal to God and it asserts that without such guru the sentiment of devotion can never be properly developed. Lord Krsna is the guru of the world:

In the Carita-puthis, gurus have been, however, classed into: unakari, anjaniyā and guru. Sometimes īsta-guru is added to them.²¹

bhakat:

'There is no difference between Viṣṇu and Vaiṣṇava (a worshipper of Viṣṇu).²² In the Ratnāvalī Mādhavadeva says:

"Know it (for certain) I do not have—
The slightest difference—
From my devotees
Knowing this—
Let the people worship Me—
With my devotees (devout Vaiṣṇava)²³

In this way, taking these "four reals or principles" (cāti-vastu) as an indispensible parts of practicing devotion, Śaṅkaradeva preached the Eka-Śarāṇa nāma dharma in Assam.

The Bhakti cult preached by Śaṅkaradeva is not a new one—it is only the echo of the teaching of the Vedānta— the system of Indian thought. Śaṅkaradeva preached his creed in order to develop the social condition of Assam, through the spiritual upliftment of the people. He composed a wide variety of literary works in a simple manner, so as to be easily understood by the mass, without dealing with the complicated philosophical discussions.

While interpreting the existence of God, the preachers of Bhakti cult in Assam

²¹ Vide Neog, p. 349.
²³ Ratnāvalī, v. 442.
(from Śaṅkaradeva onwards) took the essence of the Upaniṣads as embodied in
the Bhāgavata-purāṇa. They did not take the help of the Vedānta-sūtra (second
century B.C.) in this respect. Unlike other schools of Vaisnavism, Śaṅkaradeva
and Caitanya schools did not feel the necessity of composing the commentaries
on the Vedānta-sūtra for their respective religious systems. The founders of
these two schools of Vaisnavism considered the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, as the essence
of all Vedānta (sarva-vedānta-sāram). Interpreting the philosophy of the Bhāga-
vata-purāṇa and that of the Bhāgavadgītā, Śrīdharaśvāmi composed two commen-
taries: Bhāvartha-dīpikā and Subodhini (c 1400) respectively. Śaṅkaradeva,
established his religious system based on these commentaries, of course, with
some alterations where he felt necessary. Śaṅkaradeva school has great faith
in and adoration for Śrīdharaśvāmi. There are remarkable influences of his
two commentaries in the interpretations of the Bhāgavata-purāṇa of Śaṅkaradeva,
Anantā Kandali (c 1500 A.D.) and Bhattadeva (1558-1638 A.D.) and so also in the
interpretations of the Bhāgavadgītā of Mādhavaśe (in Nāme-ghosa), Bhattadeva
and Govinda Miśra (born in the middle of the sixteenth century A.D.). Especially
in the Bhakti-ratnākara, Śaṅkaradeva made direct references to Śrīdharaśvāmi's
commentary while in other works he referred to the same with some alterations.
Bhattadeva also did likewise. Śrīdhara's commentary of the Bhāgavata is monis-
tical. But, although a monistical, he was a worshipper of Nṛsiṁha in his form.
He softened the hardness of absolute Monism, with the help of the emotionalism
of bhakti. There is great influence of such Bhaktism mixed with Monism on the
theology and philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva school of Vaisnavism. Of course it is
worth mentioning that the great saint Śaṅkaradeva nowhere tries to establish
an independent system of thought and as such the philosophical views of his
system have to be culled from the extensive literary works of Śaṅkaradeva and
his fellow poets.
For understanding the implication of Śāṅkaraśeṇa's philosophy, we are to trace back to the Indian thinking. The Brahmasūtra of Bādarāyaṇa "वासू" is the first theological treatise on the Vedānta — the main resort amongst the many systems of Indian thought and the commentaries (bhāṣyās) thereon gave rise to different schools of thought led by Śāṅkaraścārya, Rāmānujaścārya, Madhvacārya and others. According to Vedānta all is Brahman (सर्वं क्षत्रियम् ब्रह्म), the soul is Brahman (यत्मकं तत्त्वं ब्रह्म). There is no multiplicity here (नहं-नामस्ति किंचना). In the ninth century A.D. the great saint Śāṅkaraścārya (788-820 A.D.) promulgated the doctrine of Non-duality (Advaita-vāda). As against the purely monistic and idealistic teachings of Non-duality of Śāṅkara, there established several schools of thought associated with the names of Rāmānujaścārya (1027-1118 A.D.), Madhvacārya (1197-1276 A.D.), and others which led to a vigorous revival of Vaiṣṇavism in the subsequent ages.

According to Śāṅkaraścārya, the indeterminate (nirvisēga) and formless (nirakāra) Brahman is the only real (sat) and except Him all are unreal (asat) and delusions only (Brahma satyam jagannathyā jīvo brahmaiva nāpāraḥ). His view may be interpreted thus: Just as the waves, foams and bubbles are formed in one sea and after a moment they end in the same sea, similarly the individual self (jīva) and the material objects are born out of Brahman and end in Him. So, the individual self is not different from Absolute Brahman. The individual self and God are identical. This is Monism or Non-duality (Advaita-vāda).

To Rāmānuja, God is the only reality. Both the individual self and material objects exist in Him. Rāmānuja held that the created world is as real as God. His doctrine is therefore, not Unqualified Non-duality but Non-duality.

24. Opinion differs in regard to the time of Madhvacārya. According to some others he flourished in 1238 A.D.
of the one, qualified by the presence of many parts i.e. Qualified Non-duality (Vishistadvaita-vada). On the other hand according to Madhvācārya, the individual self and God are two different entities. This is Duality (Daita-vāda).

Unlike Rāmānuja, Śaṅkaradeva did not think of God as Qualified Non-duality. He believed in Non-duality. Śaṅkaradeva school echoes the teaching of the Vedānta as well as also the views of Śaṅkarācārya. To Assam Vaisnavism, God is the ultimate essence of the universe, called Purṇa Brahman, Paramātman, Bhagavanta and so on. All the creatures—mobile and immobile exist in Him. Just as the clay vessels or gold ornaments are nothing apart from clay or gold, the universe is born out of Him and also ends in Him.

"I am eternally immanent in all creatures,
The possessor of powers (Bhagavanta)
Every where inside or outside.
Like unto the clay pots—
Which in reality are nothing but clay;
I have been pervading—
In those three worlds.
Always see all creatures—mobile and immobile
Made of five vital elements (pañcabhūta)
In Me the Completed One." 25

In fact, God is the cause and effect of the sensate and insensate world. He is the only truth and the rest are delusions. However due to ignorance, caused by illusion (māyā), His true nature is not known. Māyā possesses two powers: the power of concealment (āvarana) and the power of projection (vikṣepa). By the help of these two powers, māyā concealing the real, projects

25. Sāṅkara Bhāg., X (Kurukṣetra), vv. 149-150.
the unreal. Just as a rope falsely appears as snake, likewise, owing to illusion, Brahman appears as the world (jagat). But the world cannot be real. The wrong sight of the rope as snake is illusory appearance (vivartta). This is due to superimposition (adhyása), i.e. the appearance of a thing where it is not. The created universe though unreal manifests always as real being born out of the real Brahman. But the minds of the people not understanding the aim of the Vedas and also being devoid of consciousness through restless activities absorb in it.

God remains in the hearts of all creatures (bhūta), but the ignorant not being aware of it, search for Him outside—but with no gain. However, the votary realising the truth meditate Him in their hearts. Here lies the essence of bhakti of Śaṅkaradeva school. In the 'Hara-mohana' (the enchantment of Śiva) section of the Kirtana-ghosa, Śaṅkaradeva has interpreted such high philosophy in simple and lucid lines so as to be understood easily by every body.

The realisation of God through absolute devotion to Him removes māyā. God is to be realised not through karma (rituals) and jñāna (knowledge) but through intense devotion to Him. To Śaṅkaradeva, bhakti, based on Hari-nāma is the best way to remove māyā and thereby to attain God and secure liberation (mukti). Absolute devotion leads to jñāna, perfect knowledge, and jñāna leads to liberation. The individual self tied up with the world in order to get rid of the worldly sorrows and sufferings should search for the ultimate truth—the God. The way is to be shown by a religious preceptor (guru) and as we find in Śaṅkaradeva school this has been nicely enumerated.

The truthful God (satya-pūrṇa Īśvara) is all-pervading. Everything one sees and hears, is His manifestations only. He is the only soul of the universe. He is the only conscious (caitanya). He is quality-less but the

26a. Ibid., Sec. VIII, vv. 8-ff, p. 143.
cause of all qualities.

What is called God is Brahman itself. Brahman is devoid of form and is indeterminate (nirguna), but for the votaries He appears as Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu bearing numerous names and forms and possessing infinite qualities. A man with low and torpid mentality (hīna-manda-mati), trifling mind (kṣudra-citta), distressed with the three afflictions (trīḍāpakliṣṭa), absorbed in worldly temptations which are unsubstantial, cannot conceive of the formless God, in their hearts. Śaṅkaradeva realised the fact that God with form is necessary for the common people and accordingly Lord Kṛṣṇa has been established in form by Śaṅkaradeva. Nevertheless, for the men of high intellect, the Supreme Being is nirākāra (formless) nirañjana (free from falsehood) sarvajña (omniscient) and sarvāyāṇaka (all-pervading)—the interpretations of these are found in Vaisnāvite lyrics of Assam.

Further Kṛṣṇa has so many epithets. He is called Nirguna (indeterminate), Bhagavāna (the possessor of powers), Puruṣa Purāṇa (primordial), Anādi (the beginningless), and so on. He is the eternal, conscious, and blissful (sañcidānanda) the beginning—end—middle (ādi-anta-madhya), the cause of the beginning (ādi-kāraṇa) and inner controller (antaryāṇa) and the Lord of the senses (ḥṛṣikeśa). In Nāma-ghoṣā Madhavadeva sings:

"Salutation to Thee, O the eternal free from falsehood,
Nāraṣyāna (Viṣṇu), Śiva (the good),
The primal, eternal, indeterminate, controller of the qualities,
Thou art that Supreme Absolute self,
Having no beginning and end—"
And Thou art that only conscious—

The only Being of the universe."

Likewise, in the devotional lyrics of Assam Vaishnavism Kṛṣṇa is propitiated by the various names and epithets as mentioned above:

"Dhrama: O Govinda, the Lord of the senses!
In the morn, I recollect Thee.
Thou art the conscious, blissful—
in the guise of a cowherd.

Pada: Thou art the only Lord—
The real, eternal, ever spotless God,
Who has no beginning nor any end.""

In this way, by taking the essence of the Upanisads as embodied in the Bhāgavata-purāṇa and adding to it the simplicity of the Bhakti cult as enunciated by Śrīdharaśvāmi, Saṅkaradeva interpreted the reality of God—the Lord Kṛṣṇa as well as indicated the way of adoring Him by chanting simply His holy names and epithets and singing songs in His glorification. As a result, numerous self sufficient devotional lyrics, characterised with new idea effloresced in the wake of the neo-Vaishnavite movement of Assam.

BACKGROUND:

(B) A SHORT ACCOUNT OF BENGAL (GAUDIYA) VAISHNAVISM
AS A BACKGROUND OF THE VAISHNAVITE LYRICS OF BENGAL

To make an elaborate discussion about the Vaishnavite lyrics of Bengal, it is necessary to discuss at length, the history of Bengal Vaishnavism or the Gaudiya Vaishnavism, as it is the base of the Vaishnavite lyrics. It is essential to discuss under what circumstances and how the Gaudiya Vaishnavism flourished, what is its background and what are basic tenets of the faith.

A little more than five hundred years ago, a great saint Sri Caitanya by name, (or Visvambhara as his real name was before his renunciation of domestic-life), was born (1486 A.D.) at Navadvipa in West Bengal. He was a great scholar and talented person. He renounced the world and led a devoted life. He distributed among the people— high and low, young and old— the nectaral name of Hari— the Supreme personality of Godhead. He taught them the way to purify the minds by repeated chanting of the name of Hari and approach Him through devotional service. The disciples considered Sri Caitanya as Lord Krsna incarnate and called him Mahaprabhu— the great master.

On the eve of the birth of this great prophet, the socio-religious as well as politico-religious life in Bengal was in a deteriorated condition. Bengal was then under the influence of the distorted practices of Tantricism. At that time the orthodoxy and rigidities of the Brahmanas also prelominated. Again the practices of the degraded Bhikus and Bhiksunis of the Vajravana and Sahajayana order of Buddhism, also mixed up with current Hinduism. So also, the religious thoughts and ideas of that time were badly affected by the evil effect of Tantricism of the Vamacari school as well as the mystic and the semi-mystic cults like the Sahajayana and Nathapanth of Buddhism. Besides, some
minor local customs and practices such as—Manasa, Daksina Raya, Dharma Thakura and others that were prevalent at that time also caused such deterioration. But it was the Muslim rule in Bengal at that time, that led the country, to a caotic condition. There were religious oppressions and suppressions over the subjugated Hindus by the Muslims, which compelled the Hindus to become convert to Islam. The 'iconoclast' Muslim hated the idolatry of the Hindus. Thus, the politico-religious life of Bengal was most insecured and unsafe during the Muslim rule at that time. To add to this, the Brahman, who were most conservative and at the same time autocratic, oppresed the so-called low-caste Hindus. "The foreign domination and the resultant fear for contamination of the people by their indulging in the 'mlecchacāras' compelled the Śmārta law-givers of the Hindu society to lay strict and hidebound rules of conduct to be followed by the general people as a safeguard against the likely aberrations. For the aforesaid reasons, the Brahman law-givers, the Śmārtas, had no other alternative than to ensure the stability of the Hindu society by tightening the age-old caste-system with rigid and water-tight religious taboos or injunctions." Therefore, there was a great need for reformation in the religious life of Bengal. At this critical juncture, Caitanyadeva was born and he brought about a change in the religious and spiritual life of Bengal and thus re-vitalised the society with spiritual vigour and love. His doctrine of love and devotion swept over far and wide particularly the whole of Bengal and washed away hatred, malice and sectarianism from the hearts of the people. It was the love for the fellow beings, which was the main principle of the religion preached by Caitanya. There was no question of caste and creed in his religion. The ritualism of the priests had also no place there. Thus the lofty spiritual fervour, the broad idea of liberalism and tolerance of Caitanya

school, attracted the attention of the masses. Further, the personality and love of Caitanya added to it. And the gospel, which prevailed in Bengal Vaisnavism laid down the foundation of the Vaisnavite lyrics of Bengal.

Thus we see Caitanyadeva, who was one of the greatest religious and social reformers of the medieval times initiated Bengal Vaisnavism in the early years of the sixteenth century, which became an unrival religion of Bengal and could win the core of the hearts of the people. The wonderful religious personality of this great master called forth such a powerful and lasting impression in the minds of the people of Bengal, that Bengal Vaisnavism became identical with the sacred name of Caitanya or Gaudāṅga. However, Caitanya cannot be called as the real founder of the school. He was not directly devoted himself to expound a system. In this connection the opinion of Melville T Kennedy is worth-mentioning. He remarks, 'it is a mistake to think of Caitanya as in any sense the originator of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal.' According to Dr. S.K. De, and Dr. J.N. Sarkar also, Caitanya can hardly be called as the 'founder of a sect or a church' (in Bengal).

Really speaking Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavism is a small stream flowing from the vast main current of Indian Vaiṣṇavism. It is well-known that the Vaiṣṇavism in India, including that of Bengal, originated long before Caitanyadeva appeared. There are instances that the idea of Vaiṣṇavism had been current many centuries before the advent of Caitanya. The teachings of Vaiṣṇava scripture like the Śrimad-bhāgavata infused a good deal of inspiration to the people of India. The eminent early poets such as Jayadeva, Candīdāsa, Vidyāpati and Mālādhara Vasu threw lights on Vaiṣṇavism, through their lyrics. The lyrics of these poets are Vaiṣṇavite in nature. Their works on love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa brought an awe and devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa with great earnestness.

Thus it is apparent that the Vaiṣṇava ideas and works existed in Bengal long

before the days of Caitanyadeva. But it was Śrī Caitanyadeva who by his religious reformation gave it a firm footing and saved it from the foreign subjugation, social oppression, Tantricism etc. The people of Bengal who were misled by Tantric ritualism in all its evils, longed for a religion, that would make emotional appeal to their religious instinct and thus give solace to their hearts. And it was the great prophet Caitanyadeva, who could do this.

Although by his miraculous touch Caitanya added new light to the old ideas and thoughts of Vaishnavism and thus brought about renaissance in the Vaishnavism in Bengal, it cannot be denied that there were some influences of the old tradition of Vaishnavism over that preached by him.

The theology and philosophy prior to Caitanyadeva:

Prior to Caitanyism, several schools of Vaisnava thought established in India, particularly in the Deccan. During the period from twelfth century to fifteenth century A.D., the Vaisnava theologists, namely— Rāmānuja (1027-1117 A.D.), Nimbārka (XI century—born c 1060 A.D.), Madhva (1197-1276 A.D.) and Vallabha (1479-1531 A.D.) refuted the theory of Śaṅkarācārya, by their individualistic theories. Thus different theories such as— Qualified Non-duality (Visistadvaita-vāda— Rāmānuja), Dualistic Non-duality (Dvaitadwaitavāda— Nimbārka), Duality (Dvaita-vāda— Madhva), Pure Non-duality (Śuddhadvaita-vāda— Vallabha), came into being. These schools of thought threw light on the theology and philosophy of Bengal Vaishnavism as well as on the other schools of Vaishnavism.

The theology and philosophy of Bengal (Gaudīya) Vaishnavism— Acintya-bhedabheda-vāda (Incomprehensible Dualistic Monism):

So it is apparent that, prior to Caitanyadeva, a philosophical foundation of Vaishnavism, regarding the nature of God as well as the relation
between God and the individual self (jīva) was laid in India, including Bengal. The above mentioned theories helped much in the building up of the systems of theology and philosophy of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. The philosophical dogmatism of the Bengal school, that were propounded by the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana (ṣad gosāmīnāḥ)⁴ were based on the divinity of Caitanya's life and personality and Caitanya's doctrine is known as Acintya-bhedābheda-vāda (incomprehensible dualistic monism). Like the other doctrines of the former Vaiṣṇava theologists, this doctrine had also been founded, based on the relation between Īśvara (God) and jīva (the individual self).

The meaning of the doctrine of Acintya-bhedābheda is that, the relation of sameness and difference exists between Īśvara and jīva. There are the distinction and also non-distinction between the relation. These two opposite relations are beyond the reach of human thoughts and reasons and as such incomprehensible (acintya). According to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism jīva is really the servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa but owing to illusion (māyā), it has forgotten itself. Jīva being subject to illusion (māyādhīna) is different from Īśvara— the Master of illusion (māyādhiṣa). On the other hand God is Saccidananda (eternal, conscious and blissful), non-phenomenal being. Jīva falls under the category of Kṛṣṇa's divine incidental energy (tātastha or jīva-sakti). So, jīva is a part of Īśvara— it is non-different from Him. But jīva is never be equal with Īśvara, the relation between God and the individual self is but of the master and that of servant.

The Bengal Vaiṣṇavism and its philosophical aspects are said to be based on the following verse from the Bhāgavata.

4. The six pious and learned disciples of Caitanyadeva. They were— Rupa, Sanātana, Jiva, Raghunātha-dāsa, Raghunātha Bhatta and Gopāla Bhatta. Amongst them, Rūpa, Sanātana and Jīva Goswāmī were the three authoritative Gosvāmīs of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. They composed treatises on Vaiṣṇava theology, philosophy and Rasa-sāstra. It was the scholarly and authoritative works of three Gosvāmīs, which systematised the theology and philosophy of the Bengal school and came to determine the doctrinal trend of Caitanya's creed.
That means— The knowledge of the Absolute Being has been termed by the theolo-
gists as the ultimate truth. The knowledge has been conceived as \textit{Brahman}, 
\textit{Paramatman} and as \textit{Bhagavan} in different context. To speak in simple language, 
for the wise He is \textit{Brahman} or the \textit{Great One}, for the \textit{yogi} He is the \textit{Highest Self} and for the devotee He presents Himself as \textit{Bhagavan}.

Caitanya\textit{deva} did not accept \textit{Śaṅkarācārya}'s doctrine of \textit{maya} and his 
view regarding non-difference between \textit{Brahman} and \textit{Jīva}. Caitanya\textit{deva}, believed 
that the term \textit{Brahman} indicates the \textit{Great One} or \textit{Bhagavan}. He (\textit{Brahman}) is the 
Possessor of that power which is inscrutable. Being unchangeable, He manifests 
Himself as the world. The unconscious \textit{prakṛti} cannot be the cause of the world.
As God manifests Himself as the world, so the world cannot be the unreal; 
Of course the world is transitory. As already mentioned \textit{Jīva} is subject to \textit{maya}, 
but the term \textit{maya} indicates the self consciousness in the body. God is neither 
\textit{nirgūṇa} (quality-less) nor \textit{nirvisēṣa} (indeterminate). He is \textit{saguna}, having 
qualities and determinate (\textit{sva-visēṣa}).

According to the Bengal Vaisnavism Brahman (Krṣṇa) is powerful having 
form and six-fold powers (\textit{sad aśīvarya}).\textsuperscript{6} So, He is Bhagavan. God possesses 
three-fold natural energies, namely— the \textit{sandhini sakti}, the \textit{sarpvit sakti} and 
the \textit{hlādini sakti}. These three-fold energies unitedly constitute His intrinsic 
energy (\textit{antarāṅgā sakti}). Besides these three-fold energies, He is attributed 
with other two divine energies, namely— \textit{sakti as tatastha} (incidental) and 
\textit{sakti as bahirāṅgā} (extrinsic). These two are also natural energies but these 
are not His intrinsic energies. These two aspects of His divine energy are

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Bhāg.-p. I.2.11.}
\textsuperscript{6} The six-fold powers are: \textit{aśīvarya} (power), \textit{vīrya} (potency), \textit{yajas} (fame), 
\textit{āśī} (prosperity), \textit{jñāna} (knowledge) and \textit{vairāgya} (non-attachment).
successively called—the svarūpa-sakti, jīva-sakti and māyā-sakti. The doctrine of Acintya-bhedā-bhedā of Bengal Vaisnavism as well as the ērema-bhakti (‘bhakti ripened into a sentiment of love’) which is the most desired highest goal (parama-puruṣārtha) of the Vaisnava society of Bengal are based on these three divisions of divine energy.

In all the Indian Hindu scriptures, Brahman or God has been described as pure existence (sat), pure consciousness (cit) and pure bliss (ānanda). Because of possessing these three-fold qualities, Brahman is sagūpa. These threefold attributes successively correspond to the threefold intrinsic energies of His own, namely—sandhinī, sārvīti and hladinī. By means of these three divine energies, God (Kṛṣṇa) displays His sportive activities. The sandhinī sakti constitutes the virtue of pure existence (cit) and it implies the existence of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the places of His divine sports, namely—Vṛndāvana, Mathurā and Dvārakā and His parents, residence etc. The sārvīti sakti is His energy of knowledge by means of which He knows Himself and helps others in possessing knowledge. And the hladinī sakti is His energy of pure and infinite bliss, by means of which He gets Himself blissed and also causes in His devotees pure bliss. The gopīs of Vṛndāvana as well as Rādhā—the main gopī are the essence of the hladinī sakti. In Gaudīya Vaisnavism, top priority has been given to this hladinī sakti, as the sentiment of erotic sweetness (madhura), which has been recognised as the highest and best sentiment in Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, is an aspect of this highest bliss of energy. This very energy constitutes the highest attributes of God and also it involves His other attributes: existence and knowledge. And as such hladinī sakti is the highest manifestation of the svarūpa sakti of God and this is a peculiar characteristic of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. By means of this very intrinsic energy, the divine sports
of Lord Kṛṣṇa who is the adorable deity of Vaisnavism, have been phenomenally
displayed in Vṛndāvana and non-phenomenally in Vaikuṇṭha.

In this way Śrī Caitanyadeva sowed golden seeds of new philosophical
ideas on the wide field of devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Gaudīya Vaisnavism which
is full with emotions and sentiments, has grown on the basis of the doctrines
preached by Rāmānuja and other Vaiṣṇava acāryas. The doctrine of Caitanyadeva
or Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism, is however mainly based on the doctrine of Madhva and
the Upanisad. While discussing the Vaiṣṇavite lyrics of Bengal at length, it
will be necessary to discuss the basic tenets and practices of the Bengal
school. Because, all Vaiṣṇavite lyrics are centered round the theology and philo-
sophy of the faith. Of course, the dry theme of this philosophy has been turned
into beautiful poetical works by the powerful pens of the Vaiṣṇava poets.

Devotion and love are the principal features of Caitanyaism. Accor-
ding to Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism Lord Kṛṣṇa is the God Himself. He is the Absolute
Being (parama-purusa), the ultimate truth (parama-tattva).

It is said that, God creates this world for the dalliance. But this
creation is not possible alone. Therefore, the Lord in His eternal activities
(līlā) created a second to Him i.e. Rādhā. Thus, Lord Kṛṣṇa becomes divided
into two for erotic sweetness. Paramāprakṛti Rādhikā is His own consort—the
delighting power (hlādinī sakti), with whom Parama-purusa enjoys eternal
pleasure (ramana). And that sublime (Mahābhāvasvarūpini) Rādhikā always eager
for the union with Kṛṣṇa.

In Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism, emphasis has been given upon the divine abode
of Kṛṣṇa (Golaka) and the divine sports of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. All the objects of
nature are the great wealth of Brahman (Absolute Being i.e. Kṛṣṇa). Jīva (the
individual self) is the molecule of Brahman. Hence this trifling being (ksūra
satvā) is willing to unite with the Supreme Being (Brhat-satvā). The ultimate
aim of jīva is to enjoy the taste of Brahman as well as the pleasure of union with Him. In order to attain Brahman one should have a strong desire of love with Him. One cannot attain Him through devotion in the ways as laid down in religious scriptures. In order to get Him, one should forsake all sorts of social customs and worldly bashfulness, self-respect and become mad in love with Him. The sports or dalliance of Kṛṣṇa with the gopīs, particularly with Radhā reveals the eternal sports of Brahman. Brahman is divided into two—Upabhogya (i.e. to be enjoyed) and Upabhokta (one who enjoys). Upabhokta Brahman is Kṛṣṇa and Upabhogya Brahman is Rādhikā. So, the highest ambition of jīva is to attain the state of Rādhā (Rādhātva-pratāpa).

Rādhikā is the power of Kṛṣṇa—His love power. Jīva is nothing but unconscious (jada). But Rādhikā is the cit-sakti (divine-energy of consciousness) or svarūpa-sakti (intrinsic energy) of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Śrī Rādhikā is the delighting divine-energy (hladini sakti) and Parama Brahman is the delight (āhādāsvarūpa) Himself. He is delighted (hladita) Himself by union with the delighting power Rādhikā.

"Rādhikā is the perversion of Kṛṣṇa's love,
The svarūpa sakti and hladini—
Whose names are."

Parama Brahman Kṛṣṇa is the embodiment of bliss (ānanda svarūpa)—the embodiment of sentiments (rasa svarūpa). Rādhā, the Parama-prakṛti gives Him the pleasure. Their love is deeper and stronger than worldly love. Rādhikā is the lover herself. She is so much absorbed in love of Kṛṣṇa and besides herself that she forgets her inner and outer existence. Consequently, she sees nothing but Kṛṣṇa everywhere in the world, it is the desire of jīva to reach

7. Caritāmṛta, Adilīlā, Sec. IV, p. 35.
such state of Rādhā (Radhatva). Jīva attains this stage only when it abandons the insignificant worldly love and get the taste of the divine love.

According to Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism, Rādhikā is none but the devotee because it is she, who only worships the Absolute Being (Para Puruṣa). Being absorbed in the sentiment of love, the devotees get the nearness of God Kṛṣṇa. In Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism such kind of love is known as rāgānugā-bhakti. According to the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavas, a true devotee (parikār) of Lord Kṛṣṇa is one who pays rāgānugā bhakti to Him. It has enlivened most of the Vaiṣṇavite lyrics of the Bengal school with the poetic possibilities of its mystical erotic impulse. In the love of the gopīs, there is little touch of sensuous desire. To the gopīs, love for Kṛṣṇa is the be all and end all. This love for Kṛṣṇa gets its fulfilment only by adoring Him. In worshipping Kṛṣṇa as do the gopīs, there does not exist any reverence mixed with awe and submission as well as any difference between God and the devotees. To him, who worships Kṛṣṇa considering himself to be a gopī, even sāyujya mukti (identification with Brahma) is of no value and is never desired by him.

As already mentioned, Kṛṣṇa, the worshipping deity of the Vaiṣṇavas, is Para Brahman Bhagavān. All the incarnations are His parts. He is the source of the universe (brahmanda). He (God), Who is the base of all sentiments and wealth, sports in Vṛndāvana. God, Who is the embodiment of all the beauties of the world, Who is also the perfect idol of pleasure, lives as the soul in the hearts of the jīva.

The individual self (jīva) is only a part of the Highest self (Para-mātman). That is why, unknowingly there lies an attraction for the Supreme Being, in the heart of each jīva. Jīva forgets his self, when he comes in touch with the worldly chains of illusion and then it faces many troubles and

8. See supra, (chapt. 1).
sufferings. As soon as jīva comes to know its self by the grace of God, then jīva abandons to God. Love for Kṛṣṇa cannot be obtained by practices. When jīva eagerly surrender at the feet of God, the latter being graciously pleased, gives jīva divine love. Jīva can approach Him through divine love. The principles of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism are based on such theology.

According to the teachings of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, there are five kinds of devotional feelings: śānta (quietude), dāsya (servitude), vātsalya (parental), sakhyā (friendliness) and madhurya (erotic sweetness). The votaries may reach the ultimate truth through the help of these five aspects of devotion. However, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism lays emphasis on the madhurya aspect of devotion. Though the aspect of erotic sweetness, outwardly appears to be sensual, but in fact it is entirely free from all desires and attachments. It is supersensuous and motive-less (niskāma) worship. Such a love is only possible between Kṛṣṇa and the gōṇīs particularly Rādhā only.

Here it may be discussed, about the philosophy of paraśūrya prerana (the forbidden love of a lady-love who is married to somebody else) of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. As already mentioned above, in order to approach Brahman (God), jīva has to totally forsake all the worldly affairs— it has to sacrifice all sorts of cravings and desires also. The milk-wives of Vṛndāvana have no deep love for their own husbands. But they adore Kṛṣṇa as their paramour. Particularly, Rādhā, who represents among the gōṇīs the highest degree of the supreme love, sacrifices everything like— her domestic-happiness, family-circles, lineage and character, bashfulness, selfrespect etc. only to meet Kṛṣṇa. The scriptures however give importance to the adoration for husband, but in the devotion for Kṛṣṇa as a paramour, the love of the milk-wives is pure as well as divine love. In the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavite lyrics, the family deserted Rādhā has been picturised in a novel way.
The love of Kṛṣṇa with the gopīs is perpetual. Gopīs are the playmates of Śrīkṛṣṇa in his daily dalliance at Yṛṣaj-ḍāme. Amongst the gopīs, Rādhikā is the gopī par excellence—she is the embodiment of supreme love and devotion. This love as already mentioned, is supersensuous, the significance of it consists in offering to the pleasure of its divine object. Therefore, although outwardly sensual, it turns into a pure and divine love.

Some modern scholars consider Kṛṣṇa's eternal erotic sports with Rādhā as mere symbol or divine allegory. According to them, relation between Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā is simply the relation of that of the Highest self (Paramātman) and the individual self (jīvātman). Paramātman in the guise of Śyāma always attracts jīvātman in the form of Rādhā. At His call, all the worldly chains become free. Rādhā or jīvātman becomes mad to have a look at Him. However, the theologists and devout poets of the schools do not think the fervent quasi-amorous attitude of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as an allegory.

One is not able to get such a love of the gopī or Rādhā till he is attached to the worldly affairs. Only the votary who renounces the world may be able to attain this.

The preference for the joint-worship (yugala-upāsanā) of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa to the single-devotion to Kṛṣṇa is a remarkable feature of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. The doctrine of Caitanyaism has given an exalted position to Rādhā.

Another striking feature of the Bengal school lies in Caitanya-tattva i.e. the theology of considering Caitanya as the incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa. According to the theology of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa though outwardly separate, actually there is no difference between them. For enjoying love Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa took different forms in the age of jvanpra. These two forms united together into one and took the form of Śrī Caitanya-dvāra in the Kali age. It has been said that in order to relish the nature of the
devotional feeling touched with madhura sentiment of Radha as well as to propagate the ideal of Radha’s love in the world, Lord Krsna appeared again as Caitanya with the feelings and beauty of Radha.

That means— How is the glory of the love of Radha, how is the charming romance of Mine that is enjoyed by Radha, how is that happiness, which Radha gets by thinking about Me— being strongly desirous of experiencing personally these things, Hari, with the feelings of Radha was manifested Himself, from the sea-womb of Saci.

Now, a point may be discussed as to how Gaudiya Vaishnavism helps in enriching the Vaishnavaite lyrics of Bengal. It has been seen that, in various religious practices the japa (the silent and repeated recitation of God’s names) is considered as a preliminary steps in the ladder for spiritual advancement. Chanting the name of God repeatedly, is enjoined by the religious leaders of Bhakti cult, for attaining the spiritual goal. Thus in Bhakti cult of India, kirtana (community song) came into being. Kirtana is congregational choral singing of the sacred name and the glory of the Lord. Like other religious leaders, Caitanyadeva also laid much importance to the chanting the names of Lord (Krsna, Hari, Madhava and so on). Probably, Caitanya, in order to make the chanting of Lord’s names popular and an effective medium for preaching his doctrine, introduced kirtana, as a part of the ritualism and devotional practices of Bengal Vaishnavism. And this system of worshipping God, helped much in enriching the Vaishnavaite lyrics of Bengal.

Caitanya himself did not leave any writings. But his death was followed by a brilliant efflorescence of Vaisnava literature. His learned disciples wrote kāvyās (notes), the devotional lyrics and also biographies of the Great Master.

Śrī Caitanyadeva in his own life, put into practice in full, the love of the gopīs, which is found in the Śrīmad-bhāgavata Purāṇa. As Rādhā was absorbed with brusting thrill and maddening excitement in love with Kṛṣṇa, so also Śrī Caitanya did. This love for God revealed so much in that lean and thin body, shattered with penance and clad with yellow robe, that the people were looking after him, wistfully to have a taste of that heavenly nectar of love. The love for God as enjoined by Śrī Caitanya have inspired the devout poets to compose numerous devotional lyrics. Thus, there was the efflorescence of a great number of Vaisnavite lyrics in the wake of neo-Vaisnava movement of Bengal.