Introduction.
INTRODUCTION

The area of research project contained in the present dissertation is by no means an untrodden field of investigations and the literary works involved in this study are well known to those who are conversant with the history of Bengali literature. I was therefore warned again and again by my supervisor to proceed cautiously with a subject which has been touched by the reputed scholars, and the literary works by the three Bengali poets, namely, Badu Caudidas, Vidyapati and sadavali Caudidas have been studied by the well-known critics and other authors.

I must confess that I had some weakness to and fascination for the subject and as a result I wanted to stick to it. Knowing fully well that sectarian literature based on a well-knit doctrine of philosophy involves certain risk and responsibility. As a student of literature I prepared a scheme of work which would not entail me exclusively to a philosophical approach to Vaishnav
Literature. In fact the Radha-Krisna songs and the poetical works associated with these two names written in the pre-Caitanya period do not strictly come under the purview of the Vaisnava literature of Bengal, because Vaishnavism in Bengal and for that matter the vast literature associated with it follow the emergence of the Caitanyite movement in Bengali. Therefore the literary works which appear to be in tune with the Vaisnava literature of the Caitanya and the past-Caitanya periods, in content and expression cannot be, from the historical point of view, considered as Vaisnava literature of Bengal in the strict sense of the term. There are no dependable evidences to show that these earlier poets were professedly Vaishnavas in faith and in fact there are rather reasons to believe that Badu Caudidas and Vidyapati were indeed not.

The chosen field of investigation therefore leave aside the theological discussion and the philosophical approach to the cult of Bhakti, though suitable references have to be made from time to time as and when necessary. The study is based on the literary works in
Bengali of the pre-Caitanya era, therefore it has been considered desirable to dwell on the theme from the sociological and literary standpoint rather than from the devotional standpoint. Sri Caitanya tasted the flavour of devotional love sentiment in the verses of Vidyapati and Caudidas, and that was indeed in keeping with his inner spirit of Bhakti, and as a result the romantic, the poetical and the pragmatic aspects of the literary works have often been either overlooked or underestimated. The padavali Caudidas whose actual identity is yet to be established was probably a religious-minded person following the path of Bhakti, but his approach was not along traditional design or in a conventional doctrine. Whatever may be the creed of these earlier poets and whatever may be the colour of their works, Badu Caudidas appears to be nearer to the earth at the beginning, while the padavali Caudidas appears to be nearer to the Heaven, while Vidyapati hovers from the one end to the other. Finally it seems, approaching from the worldly strings of life as Badu did and approaching the poetic glamour of
romance and beauty as Vidyapati did, they ultimately go beyond, and strike a note which has an universal appeal. It is in this sense, these poets prepared a soft and fertile soil congenial for the growth of love-sentiments attuned to the music of Heaven.

The concept of Radha which we find in the "personified" pranks and sentiments of Sri Caitanya did not come to Bengal exclusively from the age-old Aryan doctrine of Bhakti or as an expression of any form of religious philosophy whatsoever. In fact even before the sweeping change in the cultural aspect of Bengal during the Sena dynasty, "Radha" was a typical name known in Bengal who symbolised a heroine in love or a heroine to be loved. Apart from the Gitagovinda by the court poet of Sri Laksman Sen, there were stray verses written in Sanskrit and Prakrit even in earlier days. Human sentiment of love and frivolous designs towards "female" is also not unknown in old Bengali literature, though the name 'Radha' has not always
been used there. The emergence of "Radha" and the "Gopi"s from the philosophical view point has been at long the dwelt by authorities, particularly by Dr S.B. Dasgupta. An attempt has been made here to dwell on the socio-literary traditions.

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Though the present dissertation seeks to develop the theme of investigation, with reference to the pre-Caitanya literature (on Radha-Krisna songs) the socio-religious atmosphere prior to the advent of Sri Caitanya has been given consideration. This has been done to as to get a perspective of the early Radha-Krisna songs and related works in the context of the Caitanya period. A peep into the historical background was felt desirable so as to emphasise that the social atmosphere prior to the advent of Sri Caitanya as well as the emergence of Vaisnavism in Bengal was not surcharged with a deeper and penetrating feelings towards spiritual goal.
The non-Aryan and the lower stratum of the Aryan society were in disarray and there was none to educate the people to lead them to a life of refinement and to guide them to rise above the mundane pleasures of life. Under the Pathans, many of them accepted Islam sometimes under impelling circumstance and sometimes actuated by some practical motives. The high caste Aryans kept themselves in isolation with a feeling of conscious conservatism and with an instinctive adherence to their traditional style of life and mode of living as well as with a complex of superiority in the social and religious domains. Sri Caitanya came to knit together the diverging forces and the disjointed fabric of the society. This picture reveals that the socio-cultural atmosphere was not conducive to the growth of a higher concept—concept of the sentiment of love leading to a cult of Bhakti. Yet there were a few poets, viz. Maladhar Basu, Badu Caudidas and others who struck a note of spiritual attainment paving thereby a way for higher mental approach. Pre-Caitanya "Radha-ism" is not Vaisnavism of the later period and pre-Caitanya Krisna-consciousness (as in the Krisna-Vijaya)
is not the symbolic Love (Madhurya-lila) of the Gaudiya philosophy. Though the humanisation of Love, Badu and Vidyapati sang the Love of Humanity.

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In preparing the thesis under the guidance of Prof. Dr. S. Biswas M.A., Ph.D., DLITT Retired Professor, G.U. the scholar admits certain limitations. The suggestions and guidelines advanced profusely by the guide could not sometimes be given due considerations due to want of materials not available to me. The difficulty in taking up research project on the earlier socio-cultural as well as the literary works of Bengal, particularly when one is away from the resourceful Centres of study reminds the scholar of the words of caution by the supervisor at the beginning. With all limitations whatsoever, the work has been accomplished with utmost care and sincerity.

I must acknowledge my indebtedness and deep sense of gratitude to my supervisor who helped me with his person books, gave me necessary directions all through and
spared no pains to go through my prepared notes whenever I approached him time and again. Lastly thanks are also due to the authority of the Gauhati University who permitted me to prepare and submit the thesis for the degree of Ph.D.

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