CHAPTER V

Influence of the Movement

Any socio-religio-cultural movement of great dimension leaves a far-reaching effect on the land and the people. Reformation movement in the 15th century Europe started to cleanse the ills that had crept into the Christian religious practices and it gave rise to the Protestant movement which swept across many parts of the Christian world that ashered in the age of Reason and was instrumental for the birth of capitalism, economic progress and individual’s freedom. Bhakti movement in Maharashtra awakened the Dalits who under the impact of it discovered themselves, made attempt to find their inner worth and craved for equal space in the society. The reformation movement started by Nanak purged the society of many evils and ills like castesimn, polytheism, complicated rites and complex rituals etc. and oriented the mind of his followers to strive for a life of truth, honesty and hard-work. The Vaishnav movements in medieval Assam and Odisha too have had great impact on the society and culture of respective lands since both these movements have large contributions to shape the way of life of the people. The impact left by this movement on the religious life of Assam is far greater. There is no aspect of life in Assam or any section of it that did not come under the influence of this movement. To say, religious, social and cultural life of Assam underwent tremendous transformation under the impact of this Eka áara¸a Harin¡ma Dharma. The following will show how the movements in Assam and Odisha touched emphatically various shades of life-religious, social, economical, literary, cultural and political—of the people of the respective lands.

5.1 Religious Life

The greatest contriibution of áa´karadeva-led bhakt movement was to the religious and the social life of Assam. “áa´karadeva and Midhavadeva were no visionaries or revolutionaries. Their aim was to purify Hinduism from within” (Bezbaruah as qtd. in Maheswar Neog, p.360). They did not preach any new religion, but were revolutionaries in interpreting their own religion, purging it of some demeaning practices and preventing it from turning into a debased form of religion. They prevailed upon the masses to follow a simpler way of worshipping and praying God. When áa´karadeva urged people to go for simpler ways like singing God’s infinite grace and chanting His name without resorting to cumberbome Br¡hminical practices
or sacrifices it touched the religious sentiment of common people belonging both to the Aryans and the non-Aryans, aboriginals, tribes and non-tribes, satvas and saktas.

waćkaradeva’s disciples were enjoined by him not to practice blood sacrifice to appease any personal god or goddess. His appeal was so strong that his disciple Damodaradeva was even prepared to sacrifice his own life instead of sacrificing the dumb animals before the altar of goddess. Once Mādhavadeva though visited the Kīnkīkha hill yet he never visited the temple to pay obeisance to the deity because it would violate his eka ḍāraṇa, a nine dharma. Under the influence of this movement popularity of śaktism and ātavism declined. Even kings like Nārāyanīya, a devote śākta was prepared to embrace this religion. And also his son Nīrāyanīya, a, the king of Kimarupa desisted from sacrificing goats at the altar of goddess Durgā under the influence of Vaīśnavism. To quote Jyotindra Rout, “Influence of tantric culture and animal sacrifice dwindled because of the awareness that was created due to neo-Vaīśnavism movement spearheaded by ṛṣi karadeva in Assam,” (Uttarpurva Purba Bharatiya Sanst, p.16). By discouraging the mass to follow Brahmintal rites dictated by the priestly class and asking them to go for simpler ways in all their religious life except on birth, marriage and death, ṛṣi karadeva brought silent revolution in the religious life of the land. His rejection of highly ritualistic and priestly-ridden religious rites and rituals, for he believed it unsuitable for the majority of people who belonged to the non-Aryan ethnic groups with little or no knowledge of Sanskrit language in which Brahmintal rites and rituals are conducted, attracted unsophisticated masses to this faith. This section abandoned polytheism, fetishesm, antītsam, blood sacrifice and all sorts of absurd practices in the name of religion. The number of people belonging to heterogeneous faiths and creeds gradually disappeared and a common and simple religion based on strict monotheism and ethico-devotional codes of conduct came up. This helped to form a greater Assamese nation in future as these non-Aryan groups embraced Hindu religion and culture.

Religious life in Odisha too underwent change under the influence of neo-Vaīśnavism. Propagation by the Paucaskhais about the need to follow simple rites and rituals attracted many. These laity immersed themselves mainly in kārtana and Ārāṇa, a. They minimized priestly-ridden ceremonies though they could not altogether discard brahmintal practices. In many cases, Paucaskhais exposed the hypocrites of this class and their adherence to fundamentalist principles. They translated religious scriptures into vernacular
languages so that common people were able to understand basics of Hindu religion. In this way, under the influence of the Paµcasakh¡s dominance of the priestly class and of the Br¡hmins slackened.

Medieval period is one of the most critical periods in Odisha history of religion. Buddhist tanÌric practices had still its hold on the society and the people followed it to gain pelf and power. Many had followed sahaj¡ path of bodily gratification leaving a bad taste on the society. Occult practices, performance of magical rites, sorcery were common during the time. Apart from it, frequent invasions from the north had threatened the people’s very belief on the omnipotence of their personal god ár¢ Jagann¡th. Muslims’ reaching at the ár¢ KÀetra and keeping it under seize for some time made common people doubt about the protective nature of Hindu gods. At the same time Muslim clerics accompanying the invading army tried to convert people belonging to the lower class into Islam religion. Appeal of Islam’s formless, attributeless supreme power worked upon people’s mind and they got attracted to its idea of a casteless, egalitarian society. Jagann¡th cult could not much help in this time of crisis as the champions of this cult, the Br¡hmins, had put the things in a mess. They had not been able to reach out to the common people to spread the high ideals and catholicity present in the Jagann¡th cult. Instead of simplifying the mode of worship, they tried to make it more complex and complicated so that common people would heavily depend on them for performance of rites and rituals. During the time, influence of áaktism was strong on the society, following which people practiced animal sacrifices on the altar of goddess.

Contribution of the Paµcasakh¡s lies in the fact that they minimized the influence of Buddhism and Buddhist practices in the society. By including S£yang¡ theory, pt, du Brahm¡, drtatv¡ etc. in their philosophy and propagating for a casteless society they minimized the hold of Buddhism on people’s mind. They too took Buddha as an avat¡ra of Jagann¡th, thereby they made the Buddhists a part of Jagann¡th religion. The Paµcasakh¡s too minimized the influence of áikt¡ practices on the society. They were strong believers of non-violence. They asked their followers not to practice animal sacrifice. They preached that God resides in everybody. Therefore it is sin to kill even an insect. Thus áikt¡ mode of worship declined in religious life of Odisha.

Paµcasakh¡s loudly and strongly asserted the glory of Jagann¡th dharma, preached about the formless, attributeless nature of Brahm¡ which is a kin to Allah of the Muslims. By preaching for a
casteless society they attracted low caste Hindus to their fold thereby stymieing their temptation to embrace Islam. Paµcasakh¡s did not accept KœÀ¸ as the sole god, the only god for worship. They too did not accept the RœÁ¸hœ cult. In this way they differed from Caitanya whose prem¡nur¡ga bh¡va had attracted the higher and the powerful section of the society. They termed KœÀ¸ as an avat¡ra of Jagann¡th. In this way they asserted the position of Lord Jagann¡th as the only God to be worshipped, the only God on whom people must keep their unflinching faith.

The Paµcasakh¡s freed the Odis from the sense of regional religioutism. By including basic tenets of some of the major religions of the world they enhanced its appeal at all world level. “Hindu bole Alekh Ïurak Alef ge/ewu Alef beji Hindu Alekh hin bhaje. (aunya SaÄhit¡, 7th Chap.,3)

The influence of the Assamese VaiÀ¸avism on religious life of the people is astounding and still now holds its ground. It is because when áa´karadeva spearheaded the movement the religious life of the land was in a degenerated condition, people practicing all sorts of debased form of religious practices. Moreover, the number of tribal people was comparatively large who were practitioners of animism, fetishism etc. So when now vatœ avism spread in the land they accepted it wholeheartedly for the appealing nature of its eka¿ara, Ïamadharma. But in Odisha, Papcasakh¡s accepted the godhead of Jagann¡th, the Lord who had already sat in the heart of the people. The religious liberalism and catholicity in Odisha was already there by the time Paµcasakh¡s appeared. It was polluted a little. Moreover, Caitanya’s appearance on the scene influenced the mind of the people a lot. All these factors factors affected the intensity of influence of Utkaliya VaiÀ¸avism on the religious life of Odisha. However, as in Assam in Odisha too the papcasakh¡s minimized intensity of caste factor and influence of the priestly class.

5.2 Social Milieus.

5.2 (a) Social Life

áa´karadeva’s portal of new faith was kept wide open to all communities and no discrimination whatever was made on the basis of caste and status while conferring initiation or ordination. By the 17th century the movement which had encompassed a broad social outlook based on the principle of human equality had made rapid strides and gave a welcome fillip to the growth of a community feeling among the people. When áa´karadeva welcomed to the fold of his faith G¡ros, Miris, Nag¡s, Yavanas, Kir¡tas, C¡nd ¡las,
Kalbairtas etc. the marginalized people of the land developed a sense of oneness with the mainstream and came forward to build a greater Assamese nation. Common religious rites and practices, common scriptures, common set of saints and a common personal god created a new sense of cultural unity and people living in the easternmost part of the Brahmaputra valley could now feel a sort of comradeship with those living in its westernmost part. It broke many a tribal barrier in the north-eastern India and became the sole ideological force strengthening the foundations of a developing egalitarian society. To quote Dilip Baruah, “The propagation of the bhakti religion growing in Assam land cleared the ground for the birth of Assamese nationalism, and removing the obstacles created by castetism and four Varna divisions laid the foundation of a modern society” (Prakish, May 2013, p.11). Thus, the movement laid the foundation of a modern Assam, a greater Assam, an Assam where everyone would feel a sense of oneness. The religion too facilitated for the growth of a less strained relation between landlords and tenants, as a result both the ruler and the ruled worked for nation building. However, it cannot be agreed that the Bhaktidharma created a feudal society by demolishing tribal society. No doubt, the movement gave birth to a new sense of community identity which effectively united different tribal elements with those of the Aryans or the Hindus.

Under the influence of this religion the people belonging to tribes discarded many of their respective tribal identities in matters of rites and rituals. They acquired new identities as adherents to their respective Gosains and Satras and adopted some form of Assamese as lingua franca among themselves. Thus it reduced the number of inter-tribe conflicts and social barriers then existing among different tribes. “It gave birth to a rich fabric of culture out of diverse ethnic elements in this community of people” (S.L.Baruah, p.254).

The greatest contribution of the bhakti movement to tribal life was that under its influence tribal people gave up many ill practices and social evils prevalent in their society. It changed their way of life and life’s vision. Following the social customs and practices enjoined by the Mahipuraliky dharma they gave up drinking, smoking, eating meat, practice of polygamy, quarreling etc. Jatin Nipun writes, “I had heard in 1965 when I was in class six that my father and another ten family heads of our village had been initiated into bhaktidharma under the aegis of áreemanta áa´kara Sa´gha. Since then these ten families along with my father gave up drinking home-made liquor and taking intoxicating substances. As a result, the
environment at our home completely changed unknowingly. My father who used to beat my mother under the
influence of nausea stopped beating and instead we saw our once weeping mother engaged in sweet talks
with my father who seemed level headed, calm and quiet… As a result, we were benefitted unknowingly in
financial matters, education, health etc. (Manikandan, Nov. 2004). About the contribution of the bhakti
movement to the people belonging to the tribes Indhar Deuri says: “The most notable influence of the
Mahapurusha religion is impart of education. To recite only the Kirtana dasam and namaghosd many
(tribal people) tried to learn how to read” (p.83).

About the impact of neo-Vaishnavism on tribal society, Milan Neog writes. “Identities of small
tribes found a way into a greater Indian identity through Hindu fold. Through songs, dances, plays and
paintings, translation of great classical Indian narratives like the Vedas and puranas into Assamese that
gave scriptural ideal a cultural environment and a simplied and economical mode of worship and devotion,
absence of the use of liquor, meat and blood sacrifice grew among the tribal society. The neo-Vaishnavism
 gave a more spectacular push to the tribal social chain and its way of life in comparison to Brahmin
religion” (p.200). Nabendra Paul also says, “àarkaradeva by propagating Vaishnavism among the
tribes tried to bring religious harmony among them” (p.63). The same impact was also there on the life of
“low-caste” people. Dhrubajyoti Bora in his award winning novel Katri Ratnakara, which is based on his
field study, has shown how the Kaibarttas of Jahlath area in Golaghat district in post-independent period
led a crime-free life and life free from intoxication under the influence of Mahapurusha dharma.

The ekatra, a dharma removed to a great extent the severity of caste taboos. Under itsenign influence unreachabiliy to its extreme form is not known in Assam which is a bane in other parts of
India. In this religion, “Brahmins, ñadras, and Parthas have all equal liberty in matters of worship, devotion
and chanting the name of the Lord… àarkaradeva recognized only a social signifiacne in the caste
system and has nothing to say against Varahshram duties. People of each social order would follow their own
traditional duties, but in religious gatherings, all are equal” (Rajkhowa, p.268). The process of social
assimilation of the people of the northeastern region began by the principles of equality and fraternity,
love and brotherhood as preached by àarkaradeva. All sections of people irrespective of caste, creed or
status- Govinda, a Garo, Rima, a Kacari, Nirlija, a, a Miri, Boloi, a mikir, ár Rima, a Kathorta, Damodara, a
Bhāṭṭa, Chandsai, a Muslim- were brought to the fold of a single creed. His doctrine of ‘universal social brotherhood’ created conditions for harmonious living of people belonging to diverse castes, communities and creeds. Gopladeva appointed sadra pontiffs in half of his satras. In some satras like Cimariya in the district of Kamarupa, a custom still exists in which the Hindus and the Muslims of the village meet together in the village namghar once a year to pray for common welfare, and all the participants take their share of prasad with their own hands from a common pot. There are also instances of inviting Muslims to Hindu villages to carry tazia or to come to temples and satras to play musical instruments, and of making joint pilgrimages to the shrines of the Hindus and the Muslims. To quote S.K.Bhuyan, “In other parts of India, the humiliation to which those unfortunates were subjected, drove them to the bosom of other religions, in Assam the liberal policy of the Kila Sambati satras endowed them with a sense of self respect and individual value. These satras made a great appeal to the unsophisticated Assamese people and thus they commanded unprecedented popularity” (qtd. in S.L.Barua, p.451).

āa karadeva and the medieval saints raised the status of women. They were not misogynists as many would like to project them by calling their general observation on women from the writings of these saints. Considering the general social environment like prevalent practices of Bhog¢, Rütkhowi, sahajiy¡ path of Bhuddhists etc. which prompted men folk to take women as objects of enjoyment, these saints termed women as temptresses, instruments of man’s fall etc., only to dissuade the men from following such heinous practices. This was only a clever tactics of the neo-VaiÀ¸ava preachers. By warning the men against the temptation of women, they saved the womenfolk from being turned into objects of sex. āa karadeva has never debarred womenfolk from attending religious life or entering into namghars. He did not entertain Rādh¡ cult in Assam VaiÀ¸avism since he knew its possible effect on the men folk of the land. Subsequent events show that āa karadeva’s dharma had not put bar on women to participate in religious matters rather it is liberal towards them and how women were allowed to act as religious heads in satras. Neo-VaiÀ¸avism in another way acted as a liberator of women. Ankiy¡ nas, bh¡ons etc., where masks, costumes of various designs are used engaged village women to make it and thus eke out a living. Moreover, the naamprasanga organized in namghars put in demand for g¡mos which were made by women. So, neo-VaiÀ¸avism helped the women for their economic upliftment.
The movement too enriched the culture of the people. ānā ṛākaradeva and other neo-Vaiṣāvās laid a great stress on outward cleanliness. Under the influence of Saṅhura culture Assamese people keep their body and house clean and surroundings neat. They do not keep unclean animals like pigs and fowls. Following neo-Vaiṣāvās’ advice to neophytes to efface ego and exhibit good behavior the people of Assam lead a life of humility, show polite behavior to all and maintain hospitable nature. It is a taboo for a neo-Vaiṣāva to quarrel or talk ill of others or to take intoxicants. The Mahāparāśara dharma of ānā ṛākaradeva has its impact on the general nature of the people of Assam. It made people non-violent, docile and asked them to cultivate qualities like humility and meekness. It also raised the level of religious tolerance of the people. It has made Assamese people hospitable, friendly and in most cases teetotaler. And this culture still prevails in the society.

Love and co-operation which are the hall-marks of Assamese society and culture are gifts of neo-Vaiṣāvism. In Saṅhura culture bhaktas are required to support each other in their needs and to exchange pleasantries when first met on the day and also to offer something when somebody visits one’s place. And this culture is still now in the society.

Earlier most of the naming was ordinarily connected with things of common use or the days of the week and months of the year or people were taking titles depending on their status and position in the society. But since the movement came names are changed to Vaiṣāvite ones. Moreover, the Vaiṣāvite institutions created various posts to run these with the responsibility to hold various posts under it. Persons holding such posts were given titles that do not essentially reflect the caste to which he is born.

The movement influenced the folk-life a lot. Under its influence the people of Assam in their interaction with others chant frequently the names of Hari, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma. There is a large crop of hymns called naam, like gosai-naam, bhājī naam etc. that bear Vaiṣāvite influence. The basarit that is sung by troupe during folk festival like Bihu also underwent change under Vaiṣāvite influence. Under it extreme forms of humility and chanting of Hari-Hari, Kṛṣṇa-Kṛṣṇa, a-Kṛṣṇa, a crept into this song. The practice of the troupe falling prostrate while seeking the blessings of the house-holder is due to the influence of neo-vaiṣāvism. The movement gave rise to some festivals like rāsa-gītī, dol-gītī etc. It helped people to participate in festivities and thus to forget the troubles and toils of daily life, besides giving rise
to community sense.

The movement inspired some Muslim fakirs to compose devotional songs. In its literary and musical mould Muslim devotional songs like Zikirs and Jars were composed. These songs with local theme, philosophical meaning and folk tune serve as instruments of harmony and integrity that bind the society cohesively.

Odisha society in the time of the Paµcasakh¡s was caste-ridden. Acute caste consciousness and discrimination perpetrated upon the lower caste stood on the way of theirs to move up in the social scale. Paµcasakh¡s were essentially social reformers. Their bhaktiv¡da was basically a reaction against the strong Br¡hminical influence on the society. Each of the paµcasakh¡s except Jagann¡th Das was either a non-Br¡hmin sudra or a rebel against the hegemony of the Br¡hmin as a caste and class. And each of them was either badly treated by the Br¡hmins or was jeered at for his attempt to rise in his individual effort to interpreting scriptures or translating religious texts from Sanskrit to vernacular language. Insults and humiliations heaped on them made them rebel against casteism. They vehemently denounced the vicious nature of this heinous social practice. They proclaimed loudly that everybody has the right to worship his personal god. They too said that everybody is capable of establishing communion with the Brahman and also attaining salvation. In this way they instilled democratic sentiment to people’s mind.

As the first step the Paµcasakh¡s experimented with the casteless identity on them. They shed their titles to efface their caste identity and took a common title “Das” which signifies one who is servant to God. Their reaction against Br¡hminism resulted in the creation of a new religious sect known as VaiÀ¸ava, who believed in the religious structure of the society in a socialistic way (Chaini, p.11). They did not recognize any caste barrier in the society. A VaiÀ¸ava does not belong to any caste or sub-caste, he is only a servant to God and all other VaiÀ¸avas are his brethren, so, equal in the eyes of God. This egalitarian concept considered all as one. As a result, even people belonging to Islam religion ventured to embrace VaiÀ¸avism, thus arresting the spread of this religion in the society. One Muslim from Yoosohar district now in Bangladesh, became Haridas and lived at Puri till his death. Many Muslim bards during the time and after like Salabega expressed their closeness to VaiÀ¸avism by composing and singing devotional lyrics in the name of Jagannath.
Papcasakhis always viewed the society beyond the narrow looks of castesm. Achyautananda converted people to his sect irrespective of caste and creed. Under the influence of Papcasakh religion hypocrisy in religious matters dwindled in the society. These Papcasakhis never created that breed of disciples who were only in the garb of Vaikut avas or who wore false chains of beads, painting their foreheads and body with sandal paste, only to dupe the gullible people. As a result, the number of fake sadhus and sanyasis declined and a clean religious environment gradually emerged in the state.

Achyutananda composed many works in praise of the lower class people of the society. His “Gopil Ogila” raised the suppressed self of the milkman community. The work taught the neglected milkman community how to feel proud of the glory of their ancestry. It gave them self-respect, courage and emboldened them. His Ribisa was a powerful medium for socio-cultural renovation and it has influenced the contemporary Odishi public life exuberantly. His “Katharta Goti” sang the glory of the down-trodden community of fishermen. Like áakaradeva, Gopildeva and Antruddhadeva of Assam Achyautananda became the guru of the communities like milkman and fisherman, the downtrodden section of the society.

Achyutananda composed a number of treatises on medicine, cow treatment that helped not only the milkman, fisherman and others but also the higher caste people. Papcasakhis were religious preachers as well as social reformers. They were sincere in their hearts to cleanse the tainted religious social practices. They composed translated versions of a number of religious scriptures from Sanskrit to Odia, making those available to common people, thus demolishing the monopoly of the Brhmans in reciting, studying and interpreting the scriptures and dictating the society to follow their interpretations. In another way, they stimulated the intellectual activity and critical faculty of the ordinary people.

Papcasakhis strengthened the nationalistic spirit of the Odishans which had begun in the 15th century A.D. from the time of Gajapati Kapilendra. However, this spirit lost its vibe and vigour with the series of defeats borne by Praapradra from foreign powers. The papcasakhis revived the national glory not in the field of political or military power of the Odias but in cultural field. They began cultural renaissance in Odisha soil. They upheld the pride and self-respect of the Odias when defying Caitanya’s pre-eminence given to Kola as personal god they upheld the supremacy of Jagannath as the supreme god, i.e. the avatar. They rejected Caitanya’s riginagi bhakti and put emphasis on a harmonious and balanced
relationship among jnana, bhakti and yoga, thus maintaining a distinct place for Odhikya Vañā, avism.

A series of ignoble defeats suffered by King Pratapdradha in the hands of neighbouring powers no doubt demoralized the Odus for some time. But Khyas and poems of the pañcasakhis rejuvenated the spirit of the Odus. Achyutananda’s Baranacharita Gita, Kaltkabanti and many Muktis gave much importance to the glorified life of Odusins. The pañcasakhis in their writings described Jagannñthdham of Puri as the Marttavaikuntha, thus making it superior to all pilgrim centres. Jagannñth Das by composing Bhagabatpuran in Odia language and popularizing it among the common, ordinary people minimized the influence of Caitanya, enriched the Jagannñth dharma and Jagannñth culture. When he questioned, “How is it that motherly Kriññi could establish physical relation with her own nephew?”’, it touched the imagination of the Odus who then rejected Caitanya’s Kriññi cult. (KC Panigrahi, p.633). To quote Bana Bihari Shukla, “They (the pañcasakhis) rejected Gaudiya cult of Vañā, avism. He (Jagannñth Das) produced the Odia Bhagabata, the torch-bearer of the Jagannñth dharma and culture. Odia Bhagabata’s mass appealing qualities rejuvenated Odia spirit” (p.35).

By trying to abolish caste barriers, unifying people on the bond of humanism and providing a common platform in the Bhagabatghar to air their grievances, to share the weal and woes of each other, to arouse the fellow feeling in every one’s heart, the pañcasakhis awakened the spirit of nationalism in the heart of every Odus that had remained dormant for quite some time. To quote Sarndra Kr. Maharana, “Pañcasakhis were patriots, they were nationalists. In their works they have expressed their spirit of nationalism and also tried to arouse patriotism in common man’s mind” (p.112-iv).

5.2 (b) Rise of Institutions.

Medieval Vañā, ava movement gave rise to certain religious and social institutions that contributed to the spiritual upliftment of the people, apart from making the society cohesive. These institutions are nimgharas or village prayer halls and Satras or monasteries. The satras though not founded by áa’ karadeva himself get when this institution rose under the efforts of later apostles it established itself as a powerful tool to engineer various social changes and change in the life of the common people. Of course, village nimghars founded by áa’ karadeva are instrumental in bringing changes at micro level.
(i) Ninghar: This single institution ninghar brought significant changes in the village life. It serves the spiritual and the community purpose of the villagers. It is the place where the villagers after day’s toil congregate to listen to the stories from the Bhigabatpuri, that provide them solace and show them a way how to live a life of righteousness. It is here that people from all strata of society gather forgetting their social status and position. It is the symbol of unity and democracy and the centres of satsang. These ninghars play crucial roles in the nation building process of the Assamese by accommodating here people from different walks of life on a common platform.

Ninghars are centres where villagers meet their religious aspirations. By worshipping here the Bhigabatpuri, engaging themselves in kirtan and Arava, of god’s sports the devotees receive some kind of mental peace. It serves as the centre of the religious life of the village which besides meeting the emotional requirement of the people also promotes the intellectual and cultural activities. Here the religious texts are recited and explained, community prayers are sung and religious discourses are made. To quote Jyotna Rout “By placing the Bhigabata in place of image of gods in the naamghars of Assam, a revolutionary change was effected in the society, literature and culture of Assam (p.17)

The ninghars serve as educational centres for illiterate villagers. Here literary works and scriptures are read and discussed. Moral elements enshrined in it are transmitted to them. When education was confined only to a few, especially to people belonging to high caste and class, who could afford it, who could follow the Sanskrit language, ninghars played a crucial role in disseminating knowledge even to the lowest rung in the society.

The role of ninghars in dispersing justice cannot be minimized. Once all cases small in nature were settled here. Only heinous cases were referred to the satrîdhikir or to the government machinery. Mira Dutta says about the role of ninghar in Majuli, “In Majuli the sattra institution with the ninghar as its offshoot in villages has contributed towards the maintenance of peace, concord and orderliness by providing an adequate forum for the villagers” (p.311). Moreover, complicated problems faced in life are discussed here and common wisdom of the village people suggests ways how to wriggle out of it. In this way it gives a sense of oneness to all the villagers. About the utility of the ninghar, Nîlima Sharma says:

...these were established with various purposes like spreading hits (âa´karadeva’s)
faith, including ethico-social ideals, imparting knowledge through different media solving knotty social problems with the motive of establishing the three great values, viz., freedom, equality and fraternity (p.222).

The namghars also serve as centres of art and culture. Bhaonas, satritya dances performed here, songs recited here, traditional fine arts like music, song, mask-making, portrait painting, drawing etc. taught here carry on the legacy of indigenous art and culture of the Assamese society.

These namghars not only serve educational and cultural life of the village people, it also articulates the voice of protest. One will see how in one of such namghars at Phulaguri in Nagaon district imposition of unjust tax on village people by the British power was opposed and here the people coming from many villages vowed to rise against the imperial power. Namghars under the Miglimari satra became rallying points to protest against the tyranny of Ahom monarchy. Thus namghars sometimes play crucial roles in arousing people’s combined power with a view to setting up a society free from exploitation and injustice.

(ii) Satras. Another institution that grew under the aegis of neo-Vaisnavism of Assam is the satra institution that was founded to serve as “centres of new consciousness” (Hiren Gohain, p.93). These were established to provide a shelter to the disciples where they can live a life of perfect peace and happiness, where the allures of the worldly pleasures would not taint the inmates, where egalitarian spirit would prevail, and which will serve as an emulative point for other people in the society. In the satras there is no caste system, no private property, and no show of power, no caste or class division. It is such an ideal place where “the Kaivartas, the Kaltas, the Kocs, the Brahmans, that is, the people of all castes, take meals together…” where the monks “usually wear rags and live by begging. They have no property except a gourd shell and they sleep on broken bedsteads” (Rimarat, qtd. in Sivanath Barman, p.186). The basic aims in founding satras were to establish an ideal place where egalitarian sense would prevail, where people would feel divine peace, where a sense of asceticism would be instilled so as to help its inmates live a life free from greed, anger, pride etc.

These satras in course of time became centres of social revolution. Under the aegis of the satras conversion of people belonging to different walks of life to Vaisnavism continued. In these satras religious teachings were imparted, people were taught how to live good and pious life. These satras also promoted
Assamese language by giving \( \text{¿ara}_\text{a} \) to the laity and composing works of both religious and secular nature in vernacular language. A large number of people belonging to different tribes embraced Va\( \text{ti}_\text{a} \), avism through different satras. As a result, those who did not use Assamese language were felt attracted towards the works of neo-Va\( \text{ti}_\text{a} \), avism and got interested to learn this language. In this way satras made the Assamese language acceptable as a lingua franca and began to do some remarkable works in serving as a liaison organization to strengthen the integration between the systems.

The satra institution made performing art to flourish in Assam. The life of all the inmates of the satra is steeped on matters artistic. The performing arts of the neo-Va\( \text{ti}_\text{a} \), avites of satr\( \text{i}_\text{ya} \) affiliation- a r\( \text{i}_{\text{ga}} \)-linked system of music associated with a class of devotional songs called bargeet, a highly refined form of dance called satr\( \text{i}_\text{ya} \) dance, as well as a rich dramatic performance centering round an exclusive genre of plays called an\( \text{ki}_{\text{y}_\text{a}} \) n\( \text{i}_\text{t} \) and a related performance model called bh\( \text{i}_{\text{o}} \)n\( \text{i}_\text{t} \) have constituted rich heritage of Assam. At different points of time at different situations these have determined the course of religious, social and political history of Assam.

The Satr\( \text{i}_\text{ya} \) architectural design influenced the later architectural design of the state. Like the community prayer halls in Satras, the Ahom kings built their audience hall. The Satr\( \text{i}_\text{ya} \) school of painting which is practiced as a religious art illustrating the various books of the Bh\( \text{igaba} \)\( \text{ip} \), influenced the Ananda Lahari of Ananta Acarya Dvija in the first part of the eighteenth century. The Satr\( \text{i}_\text{ya} \) dance too shadowed the popularity of the devad\( \text{i}_\text{s} \) system. The rigorous training given to youths to perform this dance form makes them hardy and flexible.

In course of time some of these satras under the royal patronage possessed land and collected \( \text{tax} \) from disciples and indulged in trade pursuits. It induced the later satr\( \text{ih} \)\( \text{ik} \)\( \text{irs} \) to lead a life of pomp and glory. They deviated from high ideals with which these were established. They too at the instigation of the royal power engaged in sabotaging other satras. As a result, those who felt aggrieved rose against the royal power.

These institutions in an indirect way contributed to the economic growth of the land. Weaving and handloom got a boost due to the influence of neo-Va\( \text{ti}_\text{a} \), avism. The tradition of and the artistry in making g\( \text{moc} \)h\( \text{is} \), chadder, wrapper etc. handed through generations make the clothes of this region most attractive.
to their outside world. Moreover, demand for g¡moch¡s and chadderas induced people to go for cultivating pit, endt, meqi etc. The pontiffs of the satras and the n¡mghars encouraged cottage industry. Woodcraft, pottery, cane and bamboo works, wood works like simh¡sana, palanquin or khatol to carry KæÀ¸, a during dolgærì, tarmull oira, bar piri, designing of the manikut or pit made of ivory etc. flourished from the time when these institutions grew up.

The bh¡on¡s, the ankia-n¡ts performed by profession als provided people livelihood, employment and income. It also brought to limelight hidden talents in villages. Dramatic performance staged at n¡mghars requires assorted items including a number of musical instruments like drums and varieties of cymbals for which potters and cobbler are engaged, and thus brass industry got a fillip. Apart from it, dramatic performance during medieval period required illuminations and fireworks in order to ensure realistic and attractive staging of bh¡on¡s and ank¡y¡ n¡tas. As such, firework industry grew. Moreover, paintings used in dramas used locally available natural colour like hengul, haital etc. which were used in later years in the make-ups of the actors. While writing on sinchp¡t, áa´karadeva and others used ink made from earthworm. This manufacturing of ink got a boost from áa´karadeva’s time and made writing easier and effective.

With the practice of n¡ma-k¢rtan in n¡mghars accompanied by distribution of eatable offerings like gram, banana etc. people began to grow these items in their field. Thus there was economic growth and agricultural boost. By extensively using “curd, milk, ghee, cream and other milk products at most of the religious gatherings and also otherwise áa´karadeva promoted dairy industry as well” (Rajkhowa, 285), a tradition that continues even now.

Synchronizing with the rise of bhak¡t dharma in Odisha some institutions grew here which brought far-reaching effects in the social, cultural and religious life of the people. One such institution was the Bh¡gabataghara.

Since early 16th century A.D. with the rendering of the Bh¡gabatpur¡¸ into Odia language by Jagann¡th Das Bh¡gabataghars were established in every village of Odisha. Though initially these cottages were established to enable people listen to the recitation of the pur¡¸, later these served manifold purposes for moral, cultural and social rejuvenation of the people.

(iii) Bh¡gabataghara. The Bh¡gabataghara was one of the most important village institutions in
medieval Odisha and it continued to be so till the first part of the 20th century. When one talks of the Bhigabataghara the scene of a thatched hut being lit by a small lantern having a heap of manuscripts written on palm leaf placed at one side and an old priest reciting the text from an old book placed on a wooden cradle, some elderly persons listening to him, immediately comes before our eyes.

Since the time when Jagannatha Das composed the Bhigabatapuri, in Odia at least one hut was built in every Odisha village to house this sacred work and be recited at evening before the gathering. Sometimes it was attached to a monastery or a temple. In the beginning it was recited in the precincts of the Great Temple and then it spread to every village.

In course of time the significance of the bhigabataghara transgressed the religious denotation and embraced social and cultural implications. During its heydays, the villagers used to gather in the Bhigabataghara at evening after their day’s hard toil to listen to the recitations from the Bhigabatapuri, composed in Odia. Here class distinctions and caste barriers dwindled. Sitting arrangements were made for all sections of the community, thus enabling everybody in a village to listen to the moral and philosophical discourses contained in the scripture. In this way, it promoted democratic sentiment among the village people. “Thus the institution not only imparted religious teachings but also moral teaching to the village people” (Islam, p.144). It promoted social harmony as the people present there would forget their enmity for each other and by the way develop the sense of oneness in the village that in turn help instill nationalistic spirit.

For more than four hundred years this institution served as the centre of village life. It served as a guide for village people how to live a cultured and lead a civilized life amidst joys and sorrows. People reposed their faith in this institution so strongly that during the time of the outbreak of epidemics or natural calamity they used to gather at its precinct to listen to the continuous recitation of the puri, with a belief that the name of God when recited would drive out evil forces from their village. The people used to believe that when a person dies while listening to the Bhigabatapuri, his soul would rest in heaven.

The institution served the role of moral police. If any conflict arose among the village inhabitants the village elders sit together and decide the matter to the satisfaction of all. In conflicts between two individuals or two families when versions of each turn out to be beyond any independent verification, each
party was being asked to swear by putting his/hand on the puran or swear in the precincts of the Bhigabataaghar. Since the people of the time were more God fearing and believed that Bhigabataaghar was the place of Godly activities they generally desisted from telling lies. It helped to maintain discipline in social and community life and also streamline social relation and individual behavior.

Bhigabataaghar also served as judicial institution. Any small offence committed by any village people was tried here by the village panchayats. Offenders were punished with the imposition of fines which was used for public good. In relatively serious offences offenders were debarred from interacting with other village people. They were being socially boycotted, prevented from using village well, tank, road and their children were prohibited from attending village schools. They were rather kept isolated. This worked as a deterrent to discipline errant villagers.

Around Bhigabataagharas there arose the sense of public service. At evenings when village elders were gathering here they discussed issues concerning public life. Here they often decided how to build village roads, reclaim village tanks, appoint teachers in village schools etc. Here decisions were being taken how to collect fund or how to mobilize labour to undertake social welfare measures. Even during the outbreak of epidemics village Baidyas or medicine men from other places provided medicine free of cost to the affected people. In that case expenditure was borne by the community fund. It too maintained its institutional services to the orphans, foundling, the destitute etc. providing them free education, free food and lodging etc.

Bhigabataagharas too played the role of educational institutions in medieval times. It was the centre of learning since it provided elementary education to village children. In some villages, children belonging to outcasts were also allowed to avail education on the premises of the Bhigabataagharas, though in separate enclosures. People used to learn moral precepts while listening continuously to moral teachings recited by the priest from the Bhigabataapuri. It too served the role of village public library as manuscripts written on palm leaf of various scriptures like Harivaśa, Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa etc. were kept in these huts.

During the period when inns or sheltering houses were not available for distant travelers Bhigabataagharas served as inns for them. Pilgrims who used to come from far off places to ārkaśatra or
some other pilgrim centres in Odisha were using attached rooms of the Bhigabatagharas as night halting place. It was a belief during those days that if the strangers and guests are satisfied by the services rendered by the villagers, the Almighty will bestow mercy on the village people and that no harm will be done to them.

Bhigabatagharas too served as centres of transmission of culture. Here village people used to learn how to learn village art, how to recite and perform *diskritiki, patriarchi* etc. They used to rehearse it on the premises of this institution. During festivals these performing arts were held here which served as a source of entertainment to the village people. When holy books were recited in Bhigabataghara, “people got attracted towards its easy, simple, mellifluous language. When these works became easily available people got interested in these works and tried to learn mother language so that they can recite these works. As a result, literacy rate increased” (Maharana, p.112).

Thus, during the medieval period Bhigabataghara helped to promote social harmony, social unity, maintain social and sectarian tolerance, distinguish between good and evil as enjoined by religious scriptures, teach social etiquette to village young, educate village illiterates, take life in a matter-fact-fact manner, acted as centres of entertainment, provided a sense of social and economic security to the needy, served as a promoter of village art and artifacts, interpreted issues confronting life and what not? To say, most of the issues concerning village life once revolved round this institution.

(iv) Mathas: Another institution that attracts our attention for its influence on Odishan people is mathas or monasteries. According to Puri Gazetteer, 1929 “Matha are monastic houses originally founded with the object of giving religious instructions to chelas or disciples and generally of encouraging a religious life”. The institution of Matha in Odisha in medieval times originated since the time when sadhus and saints belonging to different parts of the country used to come to Puri, the seat of Lord Jagannath, to have a darshan of the Lord and also to enter into philosophical and religious discourse and argument with learned people of other parts of the country so as to drive home their own point of view and belief. They were provided land by the king or other wealthy people to open their mathas, and recruit their disciples. Its primary function was to render service to the Great Temple through participation in various rituals and supply materials like sandal paste, costumes etc. necessary for worshipping deities. These mathas were too
centres of education, patrons of music, art, dance and literature. For intellectual development they used to organize philosophical and religious discourses to which they invited learned men from places far and wide. These mathas were also celebrating annual festivals which were attended by people irrespective of class, caste and community that served as a source of entertainment.

The mathas had also the duties to feed the poor and the hungry not only during the outbreak of famines but also throughout the year. They were liberal in donating rice and paddy to the king when the latter needed to meet emergency situations like famine, drought etc. They too used to accommodated pilgrims visiting the holy places especially during Rath yatras and other festivals.

One of the main functions of these mathas was to train young people on the line of philosophical and religious beliefs of the founding seer. Here these young people who are called chhells or disciples were put in and provided learning on different epics, scriptures and religious books. The institution later allowed the growth of a militant branch called Akharas supported and financed by the rulers inside these mathas with the sole aim to give able-bodied disciples training in martial arts. It was done so to defend the institution and the pilgrims during the time of outside attack.

Some such mathas which flourished in pre-paucasakh period were Kincipeeth established by aakaracarya in the 9th century A.D., Emr matha by Ramanuja in the 12th century A.D. aakaradeva of Assam too established such an institution during his second visit to Puri in the 16th century A.D.

Following the tradition, the Paucaskhils too established their mathas in and around Puri. Jagannath Das established the Sita Lahari matha on the shore of the ocean. He lived there till 1550 A.D. and then, according to legend left his mortal body for his heavenly abode. He had also established another matha called Bada Odiyamatha in the heart of Puri town. This matha used to perform many important functions in the Jagannath temple. In these mathas customs followed strictly according to Oda traditions. One of the special privileges granted by the King to the Bada Odiya matha was to supply sari and other types of costumes to the royal house for the use during the time of coronation ceremony.

Achyutananda Das too established his matha at Nemal. Here he composed a number of works which embody his philosophical thoughts and religious tenets. The paucaskhils declared this matha as padmabana (forest of lotus) from the spiritual point of view.
Mathas established by pāñcāsakhīs played important roles in the life of Odia people. These mathas encouraged promotion of vernacular literature. From the precincts of these mathas Balaram Das, Achyutamanda Das and others penned many philosophical, religious and moral treatises which provided knowledge to people in different aspects of life and also offered them solace in the time of crisis. These mathas too acted like centres of cultural activities where performing arts rooted in Odia life were promoted.

Apart from serving religious functions, mathas also engaged themselves in philanthropic works. They used to take care of the assembled sādhus and scholars, feeding them and providing them accommodation for their stay during festivals or religious congregations. The mathas which were located away from Puri performed certain festivals similar to those that are performed at Jagannath temple. Thus, these mathas helped to bind the Odishan people living in far off place to unity to strengthen their emotional link with Lord Jagannath. In this way it stirred their religious fervor as well as nationalistic spirit.

When one compares the role of religious institutions set up by respective Vaiṣṇava movements one will see that in Assam the role of nādhghar and satra institution is still relevant in social life. Nādhghars still now play pivotal role in social life discharging its functions like a centre of cultural activities in the village, meeting religious needs of the individual, playing the role of judiciary, promoting performing art, instilling moral values in individuals. Satras have great hold on the mass as people still now seek the ways for their moral upliftment from the satradhikṣas. In comparison to the great hold on the Assamese society by these institutions the Bhagabataagharas and mathas in Odisha have lost its relevance. Due to the onslaught of modernism bhagabataagharas have now become defunct and mathas are now only in name.

5.2 (c) Literary Life.

Bhakti movement in Assam contributed a lot towards the popularity of vernacular literature and placed it on Indian scenario. It let the people of Assam know the Indian great literature and helped them come in touch with Indian culture. The movement burgeon a remarkable social and cultural resurgence in Assam that in turn brought a full scale transformation that encompassed an amazing range of human thought and activity from spiritual to the aesthetic. It too made the fullest use of diverse types of creative
and artistic media like literature, music, dance, drama, painting, sculpture, architecture and so on.

Vernacular literature in its various genres flourished in Assam by the work of neo-Vaiṣṇava preachers. They translated great Indian classical epics and purāṇas into Assamese, adapted episodes from the epics and purāṇas into the form of independent kīvya and devotional works explaining the tenets, types and modes of devotion, devotional lyrics and dramas, biographies of chief apostles, prose renderings of the Gītā, Bhīgabatpurāṇa, Rāmāyaṇa and a few others as medium to propagate their religion. Ācarākadeva created a new literary genre called ankiynta. Mādhavadeva wrote almost similar plays called /hamar/that influenced later writers to experiment with dramatic writings. The Rangkhangita buranjī mentions that at the invitation of King Kamaleswar Sinha the Mahantas of Bāregar Satra presented the one-act play Rukmiṇi, /Nara, in 1816 and the Namāt Dihing satra enacted Ankuragama that fostered friendship among the conflicting parties. These plays when enacted not only gave entertainment to the laity but also instilled in to the hearts of the audience the message of bhakti. The plays or the poetry of neo-Vaiṣṇava preachers are imbued with morality, deep humanism and when performed or recited help maintain peace and unity in the society and give mental peace to the individuals. One-Act plays of the Bhakti period played significant role in the integration of the society. In Buranjī we find how a bhūona performance performed in honour of the Mamturī and Kaciōt kings in the court of Gaurinath Sinha cemented the bond between these three kingdoms. An efflorescence of poetry was found in the form of bargit, devotional songs and other forms during medieval period composed by Vaiṣṇava saints. The respect, the awe, the love that these songs command and their message of truth and non-violence, their ennobling power to provide solace at the time of distress have now turned some of it into the position of religious scriptures and given them sacra mental status. Moreover, by propagating its religion in three kingdoms-Assam or Ahom kingdom, Kamarupa, Kochbehar—through a common language, i.e. Assamese, the bhakti movement made this language a common medium of a greater but varied populace and was thus able to bring harmony to the society. About the influence of medieval saint literateurs Barpujari says, “A host of other poets, writers and scholars like Ananta Kandali, Rāmasarasvati, Vaikunthanatha, Bhagavata Bhattacharya, Ārdhara Kandali, Gopāladeva of Bhavanipur, Rinchnan Thakur, Gopila Charan Dvija etc. floated under the banner of the bhakti faith and formed into a vigorous literary movement. It was the age of one ideal, bhakti of one god, Vīṣṇu, a-κा-λ, a and
The neo-Vaiśāvite movement later gave rise to rich prose biographical literature with excellent details of the life of the masters hitherto unknown in Assamese literature. Dattat Thakur’s Mahapurāṇa āsā ārā āa sankarađevas aro Mīdhavadevas aśīvan Carita, Bhusan Dvija’s āsā ārā āa sankarađevas, Ramananda Dvija’s āsā Guru Carita etc., written in the middle part of the seventeenth century are well documented and reveal individual talents of the biographers in their approach to events and incidents happening to the life of the saints. For example, in Bhusan Dvija’s work the technique of narration, presentation of events in the life of āa sankarađeva and imaginative power of the biographer is more attractive than others. In the biography, not found in other biographies, we find how in the beginning through dialogue between sankarađeva and his disciple Nityā aśa Thakur, the biographer has presented the events happened to āa sankarađeva’s early life. These Caritas or hagiographical accounts of the lives and works of the neo-Vaiśāvite saints and their apostles supply a mine of information on the cultural and artistic milieu of a period spanning over several decades. Moreover, the plays of āa sankarađeva and Mīdhavadeva gave Bhattadeva scope to give prose literature a distinct shape, later historical chroniclers to follow prose style of āa sankarađeva.

āa sankarađeva’s use of the Brajabuli language to make people understand the matter and spirit of his writings paved the way for the writers of the later period to use vernacular language as medium of expression. The bulk of literature in Assam before him was in Sanskrit. āa sankarađeva showed the path that original works could also be produced and made popular by using a language, other than Sanskrit, very close to colloquial language. As a writer in Assamese, āa sankarađeva was master of a new diction. He created the Brajabuli prose which he used in dialogues of his plays. For example, ‘Hey Rīja, don’t get worried. Now I shall bring Kṣatriya here. You will remain in happiness.’ In this dialogue and there are many in āa sankarađeva’s plays the use of words like ‘ekatīla’, ‘sukhe raha’, and the way of delivering dialogues with very intimate touch of colloquialism provide the plays a very special dimension. It inspired later playwrights to use more colloquial expressions for immediate effect. With admixture of tadsama and tadbhava words in their works, use of compound words and relative pronouns āa sankarađeva and neo-Vaiśāvite
litterateurs enriched the vocabulary of Assamese language. To quote Bakanta Kakati, “of the varied groups of words the bhils constitute the most preponderating elements in Assamese. This is mostly due to the fact the foundations of Assamese literature was laid by the Vaiàµva reformers whose chief aim was to appeal to the masses and who composed their works as much as possible to the language of the people” (Assamese: Its Formation and Development, Sec.41).

Odì language and literature received a fillip during the Pãpãcasakhi period. Prior to Pãpãcasakhi days Odì literary world was dominated by Sanskrit texts and Sanskrit language. Since this language was unattainable and inaccessible to the common men for acquiring knowledge, performing any rites and rituals in daily life either for spiritual upliftment or for purification of body, they had to depend heavily on the priestly class who only were privy to this language. Moreover, great Indian classical narratives like the Rãma, the Mahãbhãrata, Pãurã, and other scriptures, source of all knowledge and perennial entertainment were in Sanskrit language. These texts were the monopoly of the Brãhminical class, and they did not allow people other than their caste to cultivate this language. As a result, common men were largely exploited and were denied the benefit of knowing the great treasure hidden inside these texts. However, the Pãpãcasakhís by translating these texts into Odì language and composing these scriptures in the tone and style keeping to the local environment and tradition disseminated the quintessence of these texts among the common people. The influence of Jagannãtha Dãsa’s Bhãgabata was so intense that people began to think the translated work as replica of God Jagannãtha and worshipped the work in place of the deity. The work too replaced the Sanskrit text in the Great Temple of Puri and recitation of it was made daily in the precinct of the temple. Thus the Pãpãcasakhís diminished the supremacy of Sanskrit language, standardized Odì as an independent modern language. Pãpãcasakhi literature teaches the people to be optimistic, not to lose faith on life. By talking about impending calamities and catastrophes in Malikãs (literature on impending events) they prepared people mentally to face it heroically and surrender to the will of God.

Jagannãtha Dãs and Bãlarãm Dãs were in-born litterateurs. They were first poets and then they became bhakta. Their source of inspiration was Lord Jagannãtha. He was for them the source of all religions, fountain of all strengths. They composed powerful lyrics keeping this in their mind. These lyrics and songs created the sincere interest in everyone and served as an easy way to preach the divine ideas to common
people. Balaram Das’s *Laxmi Purī* is considered the first manifesto of Women’s Liberation or feminism in Odisha. When Balaram Das made Lord Jagannath to admit the importance of Laxmi, representative of women class, in domestic life he aroused the consciousness of common people about the plight of women in the society. Here Laxmi may all women got a declaration of social equality and even lower castes got recognition from higher castes about their contribution to the society since women were considered lower to men.

The Pācaskās gave Odia language a new elasticity. Jagannath Das through his Bīgabata helped Odia language reach a new height. He forged newness into it by a magnificent blending of *tādbhava* and *tatsam* words in ample measure. He thus created new poetic language which was balanced, effective and creative. Later poets took this ideal of blending Sanskrit words with colloquial words in right proportion as an objective of poetic craft. Jagannath Das in his Bīgabata brought into use a new line-scheme called navikārati brūṭa (the nine letter rhyme). Prior to this the Dīdi brūṭa based on irregular number of letters and words in the lines, was the ruling pattern. The navikārati brūṭa enjoyed immediate and immense popularity for it could combine flexibility of recitation with the facility of easily remembering the rhymed lines and singing them in variable patterns and methods.

Achyutananda’s *Gopī Ogla* is a skilful jotting of philosophical poetic exchanges between two groups people, one group questions in the song and the other answers. While singing, people also continue dancing which is made to the accompaniment of some musical instruments like *simgha* (made of buffaloes’ horn), *mōda ga* and cymbals. It was encouraging for the milkmen and also a medium for propagation between lower caste people which was interesting and easy to memorise.

Achyutananda also established a new trend of Rāhṣa kīrttāna which is neither Rāṣa nor kīrttāna, it is a blend of both and a novel way of combining the two into an organic whole. In these Rāhṣas the relevance of Rāṣā, Kṛṣṇa and Gopīs is symbolic. Pinda Brahmā, da taṭṭva is enshrined in his Rāhṣas. For them as the Gopīs are the main participants of the Rāṣa Nīl, not the Gopīs, so to become qualified to participate in the Rāhṣa one has to become a Gopī in body, mind and soul. Being inspired by the ideology, the Gopī community in many areas in Odisha has become prosperous and cultured like the higher caste people. More of Achyutananda Rāhṣas are more dramatic than melodious. The Rāhṣas dilated on the religious gains that one achieves by hearing and reflecting on it in course of his movements while performing it in group like the
Balaram Das and Achyutananda Das too in their *Jagamohan Ramya* and *Harivanta* respectively rewrote the respective epics almost as original works in a language which was soaked in the local idiom with a free mix of Sanskrit vocabulary. In later period Upendra Bhanja, Abhimanyu Samantasthbar and others used Sanskrit language and the local prakrit to great success. The navikavita brata of Jagannath Das too attracted and inspired many contemporary and later writers. Madhava Das and Dwarika Das composed the 12th and the 13th skandhas of the Bhājabata to the same rhyme scheme. Bhupati Pandit of the 17th century in his *Prema Rasamrit* and Danai Das of the 18th century in his *Gopibhasa* showed the influence of poetic style and craft as adopted in Jagannath Das’s Bhājabata. In the 18th century A.D. Dinakrisna Das’s *Rasakallol*, Abhimanyu Samantasthbar’s *Bidagdha Cintamani*, Bhakti Charan Das’s *Madhara Mangala*, Brajanath Badjena’s *Shyama-Rasodasa* followed closely, in language and theme, Jagannath Das’s Bhājabata. Balkadev Rath, Bhitra Bhoi, authors in the 19th century A.D. were too influenced by the emotional contents of the Bhājabata. Even in the works like *Mahl Yatri*, *Gomhota* the authors like Ridh Rath Ray, harbinger of modernity in Odia poetry, and Gopabandhu Das one can discern the distinct influence of Jagannath Das’s Bhājabata. Speaking of the religious literature of paµcasakh¡ period, Manmohan Chakravarty observed, “They showed that the Odia language could be made fit for expressing complex thoughts and abstract feelings and by their own imperfect effort made it capable of being utilized in various kinds of versification. They prepared in fact the way for the later Odia poets Dinakrisna Das, Upendra Bhanja and Abhimanyu Samantasthbar. Any sketch, therefore, of the progress of the Odia intellect would be materially incomplete if it fails to give some accounts of these old religious poems” (qtd. in *Odia Samaj O Sanskritire Bhitra Bhoi Prabhar* p.69). Even many modern poets like Sitakanta Mahapatra have gone back to the paµcasakh¡ period searching for certain philosophic and symbolic contexts to express a new mood and new awareness of modernity. Certain archetypes which describe man’s destiny and human situations are drawn from the paµcasakh¡ works to discover parallels in modern times, and these modern writers describe it in symbolic terms.

5.2 (d) Art and Architecture

The heritage of performing art in Assam is rich. It has become richer by the contribution of
Assamese Vaishnavism, with the integration and synthesis provided by it in the form of hymn singing. The institution of satra established by the neo-Vaishnav order was turned into centres for the cultivation and dissemination of all kinds of art. Highly refined forms of music, dance and drama as well as art and crafts are integral to the satra way of life that are encouraged by Assamese neo-Vaishnavism.

The Satria architectural design influenced the later architectural design of Assam. Like the community prayer halls in sattras, the Ahom kings constructed their audience hall. The satria school of painting which is practiced as a religious art illustration the various books of the Bhagavatapurana influenced the Ananda Lohar of Ananta Acarya Dvija of the first part of the eighteenth century. The portraits in the aorta Cartia, following the satria idiom are larger and the faces are as usual in the profile. Miniatures produced in the style of the satria school have certain features like the human forms.

The Paucashakhas in Odisha too contributed immensely to the art and culture of Odisha. Architectural design of mathas encouraged people to construct their cottages in its model. This low cost dwelling unit gave boost to housing in the state. Bhajanras and kirtanas performed in the mathas gave rise to writing of more devotional songs. Achyutananda in his Gopil Ogil composed Ogil songs with which the people danced with colourful bamboo sticks in their hands to the tune of mellifluous voice. His Rihlsa are more dramatic than melodious. It gave rise to a kind of folk art.

However, when we compare the contributions made by respective branches to the art and architecture of the respective lands we find that Assamese Vaishnavism has greater contribution than Utkal Vaishnavism. It is because by the time Odisha came under the influence of the paucashakhas the state was already rich in its art and architecture. Odisha by the fifteenth century had developed Odishi dance form and its temple designs were of great merit. Since the land was the confluence of many cultural streams so it was rich in art even before the advent of the paucashakhas. Hence the movement could not influence much on this aspect.

5.3 Economic and Political Life

5.3 (a) Economic Life. The contribution of Assamese neo-Vaishnavism to the economic development of Assam cannot be minimized. It directly as well as indirectly contributed to the economic welfare of the people.
Apart from the economic contributions made through the institutions like naamghar and satra institution, the Assamese neo-Vaishnavism encouraged cottage industry in various ways. Woodcraft, pottery, cane and bamboo works etc. flourished during and after áa´karadeva’s time. The patronage given by the Vaishnavs to these works encouraged cane and bamboo industry, costume designing and making, jewellery making, architecture etc.

áa´karadeva’s contribution in saving environment is also immense. By popularizing wet cultivation food items, he in an indirect way encouraged his tribal disciples to give up shifting cultivation. The disciples had to present in plenty, mainly in time of their initiation to the faith, gifts consisting mainly of food items like rice, fruits, vegetables, pulses, mustard oil and seeds, spices like ginger, turmeric and black pepper etc. This has given encouragement to laity to produce rice, sugarcane etc. thus giving a boost to agricultural economy.

Satradhikars had established a number of satras which were granted liberally huge acres of cultivable land. These lands were used for growing crops, mainly rice, vegetables, fruits, bamboos, tree plantation etc. The disciples and their family members were also allowed to cultivate hard soil donated to the satra by the king. Thus agricultural economy received a boost. áa´karadeva and other apostles had patronized sericulture which has made now the land famous.

In comparison to Assam Vaishnavism, Utkal Vaishnavism could never make such tremendous economic influence on the land. Only some mathas which were donated land could cultivate it and store the surplus produce which at times of famine could be used. By the time pucaskahis appeared on the scene Odisha was already a maritime power and its economic condition was better than Assam. By fifteenth century Odisha had already abandoned primitive method of cultivation and its rural economic was better.

5.3 (b) Political Life

The medieval Vaishnavite movement in Assam has also the political course of the land. Under the influence of neo-Vaishnavism the Ahoms became more and more hinduised and discarded some of their own religious and social practices and customs. By the second half of the sixteenth century the neo-Vaishnavism turned into a mass religion with tribals, low caste Hindus, even some Musalmans and others embracing it. The satras flourished under the mass support, both in matters of finance and physical labour and sometimes on royal
patronage, became states within states. The Ahom kings had to accept the satra institution as fait accompli. When satras became powerful many subjects of Ahom kingdom took refuge in it just to escape the paik system since there was an understanding that celibate disciples would be exempted from paying personal labour to the state. As a result of this, state economy was affected and more and more people preferred monastic life in satras causing a decline of population. So, when the state power tried to curb the satra power by way of intimidating them, pillaging their wealth and creating division among them by banning the non-Brahmin Mahantas initiating Brahmans and using state power to enforce its order, the satras revolted. One such rebellion known as Moiniria rebellion by Kila Samhāti group of Satras brought the downfall of the Ahom reign.

In Odisha medieval Vaiṣṇavism played some negative role on the political life of the land. Under its influence the people of Odisha once known as a martial race lost their temper. They tilted more and more towards spirituality. They engaged themselves in religious discourse and showed their disinclination towards war and treaties. As a result, after a brief period of the fall of the Gajapati Empire the external powers from the north and the south invaded the land and occupied it. During this time Caitanya, the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava preacher also influenced the course of political events. Under his spell King Prataprudradeva was to change two of his decisions like appointing a Prime Minister and condoning the punishment of an errant governor in the north that cost the state heavily. Moreover, many of his able generals left royal service to embrace Vaiṣṇavaism causing huge military loss to the state. However, we do not agree with some that King Prataprudra neglected state affairs by following Caitanya’s prema-bhāva. So, the influence of Vaiṣṇava movement in Odisha was immediate on its political life while it was slow and gradual in Assam.

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