CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

The foregoing chapters revealed the facts that though the Assamese and the Ötkaliya VaïÀ¸avism started almost at the same, i.e. from the later part of the 15th century to the last part of the 16th century and were the results of the prevailing social and religious conditions of the respective lands, expressions of protest against the dominance of Brahminism, were the breakaway groups of VaïÀ¸avism in prevalence yet remaining within the fold of it and attempted to cleanse the religion and the culture of their respective people from within yet every thing cannot be taken at face value regarding similarity in their nature and influence. No doubt, both exhibit ample similarities yet striking dissimilarities are also galore, each having some distinctive features of its own.

Distinctive Features. The first and the foremost is that though both the Assamese and the Ötkaliya VaïÀ¸avism are unanimous in holding the view that bhakti is the best mode of worship in Kaliyug because by and through this mode alone God can be easily pleased yet the Assam VaïÀ¸avas follow 'beganayee' or 'rasamanayee' or 'suprema' bhakti. They consider jµ¡na as secondary and bhakti primary. They take that bhakti induces one to concentrate his mind on the supreme God. It is bhakti that will help one get jµ¡na. They believe that knowledge comes, of course, in the process of devotion and no separate effort is necessary for it. Madhavadeva says that ìtma-bodha (self knowledge) comes through the grace of God. áa´karadeva too admits that knowledge of Vedas is inherent in bhakti. In course of bhakti knowledge is achieved. So, one should aspire bhakti, not jµ¡na. But the Ötkaliya VaïÀ¸avas consider jµ¡na as the essential element that helps one inculcate bhakti bhiva. For them, without jµ¡na bhakti cannot arise in one’s mind. Only through jµ¡na bhakti can be obtained. Knowledge is taken by them as the step for devotion. As their devotionalism is built upon Brahmacïda of Vedînâ, Sînkhya and Yoga, the importance of path of knowledge is here expressed. So, theirs is the jµ¡nami¿ra bhakti whereas it is pure bhakti in Assam VaïÀ¸avism. In the devotionalism of the Ötkaliya VaïÀ¸avism much importance is given to japa, ãapa, yoga, dhy¡na etc. To overcome Mîy¡ one has to take shelter near Brahma by following both the paths-knowledge and devotion. But in Assamese VaïÀ¸avism we do not find too much mention or practical application of yoga or jµ¡na.
The Assamese Vaishnavism does not aspire mukti in lieu of bhakti. For Assamese Vaishnavas, deliverance from the cycle of life is not of much importance as important is their aspiration towards bhakti. They fear that once they get freed from the life-cycle they will be deprived of the bliss of serving god. So, they are indifferent to mukti. They pray god to bless them to continue unceasingly their devotion in mind and body towards their god. Of four kinds of liberation, i.e. Sarupya, Samipya, Salokya and Sujjya, the Assamese Vaishnavism follows all except the Sujjya, though they prefer Sarupya. They consider Sruprema bhakti and Nishya bhakti as the real ways. For them a man cannot attain true perfection through mere individual realization of God but must be integrated with the divine immanent in him and also with his entire social environment comprising other selves, i.e. Universal liberation (Sarva Mukti). In respect of liberation the Oktaliya Vaishnavism is different from the Assamese Vaishnavism. Oktaliya Vaishnavs aim at Sujjya mukti. For them, moksa or mukti from the suffering of life, from the bondage of life is the be all and end all of aspirations. According to the Paucaskshals among four objects of human pursuit liberation is the main. Here one has to taste the joy of void by detaching him from the transitive and sorrowful earth and mingle with Param Brahman. They desire liberation through devotion with knowledge. They engross in devotion not for the sake of devotion but to attain liberation. With this in mind they pray their personal god. They strongly believe that if god wills through the strength of the devotion of a devotee then He will grant him mukti.

The presiding deity of the Assamese Vaishnavism is Kåśi, but not Rasikabheri Kåśi. He is the son of Devaki. In Oktaliya Vaishnavism it is Jagannath who is the embodiment of Râdhâ and Kåśi manifested as one soul, in single God. The Assamese Vaishnavism regards Kåśi as an avatar and all other gods are avatâras. For them, Kåśi, a is the supreme God and from him all other gods have emanated, as such Kåśi a has thousand names. But the Oktaliya Vaishnavs believe that Jagannath is the lord of the universe, He is the avatar whereas all other gods including Kåśi a are avatâras of Jagannath. For them, Kåśi a is the other name of Jagannath since the latter is the prime god and the former is only Dwâraka Kåśi a in the dwipar yug. It is because by the 15th century A.D. Jagannath was accepted as the state god and Jagannath cult had deeply entrenched in Odia mind.

Both the cults did not accept the Râdhâ cult, but with a little difference, âa´karadeva had visited
ārkaṭeṭra ētvēcē, once before Gāttāṇyā had propagated his Ridhi-bhiva and Ridhi-Kāṅğa, a cult there and second time after Gāttāṇy’s premari-ganarica bhakṭi made deep inroads in ārkaṭeṭra. āa-ʻkaradeva too had visiteḍd Vrindavan where he must have seen the popularity of Ridhi cult. Agaṇa, he must have been aware of the transgressive gender ideas about god where male devotees see themselves as lovers of God whom they view as male while they express their longing in feminine terms. But ʻkaradeva rejected all these. He was not swayed by the Ridhi cult as some apostles of the time were. To remain in the tradition of bhakti movement in India he accepted only the concept of gopis. So, he started r̄ṣa gīṭrā and dolgīṭrā in Assam. In r̄ṣa gīṭrā existence of the gopis is accepted but none of them is given prime importance or occupies centre stage, a position equal to Kāṅğa, a and in dolgīṭrā only Kāṅğa, a is remembered, there is no presence of Ridhi along with him. Assam Vaiṣṇavism never celebrates the Ridhi Kāṅğa, a jugalbandi. ʻkaradeva’s rejection of Ridhi cult has social causes. During his time sahāṭṭa and some other traditions where women were taken as objects of enjoyment were prevalent. So, ʻkaradeva knew that if Ridhi cult would be introduced by him then some unscrupulous people will take advantage of it and pollute the society. Oṅkāṭya Vaiṣṇavism never do not accept the presence of Ridhi from the heart of their hearts while worshipping Kāṅğa, a. But they have not rejected it outright. It is because by the time they bloomed Gāttāṇyā had already had his sway over some parts of Odisha and also over the mind of the King and some of the royal officials. By the first part of the 16th century Jayadeva’s Geetgoyinda had also greatly touched the imagination of the Odisha mind. Therefore, fearing first King’s retribution and then common man’s disapproval of their denial of Ridhi cult the Oṅkāṭya Vaiṣṇavism could not openly condemn this cult. However, in none of their writings they have celebrated it.

The Assamese Vaiṣṇavism takes Kāṅğa, a the possessor of sixteen celestial degrees whereas the Oṅkāṭya Vaiṣṇavism take Jagannath as the embodiment of sixteen degrees and consider Kāṅğa, a possessing only one sixteenth of celestial degrees.

In the religious consciousness of the Assamese Vaiṣṇavism we find the importance of feeling in comparison to thinking and willing whereas in Oṅkāṭya Vaiṣṇavism thinking is predominant over feeling and willing. In Oṅkāṭya Vaiṣṇavism intellect or reasoning gets the priority to get rid of worldly desires and worries whereas in Assamese Vaiṣṇavism it is pure devotion which leads one to get liberation.
Regarding devotion there are some differences also. While Assamese Vaishnavas follow nabadhãbhakti, Odarkiya Vaishnavas, along with nabadhãbhakti, follow Yantra, Mantra, Tantrã, Chhãya, Jyoti, Abãda, Nãta, Samãdhi and Rasaguru. The Paµcasakhãs did not accept bhakti as the only means for Hitisiddhi. They gave more importance to the worship of guru, tantrã, mantrã, japa, dhyãna, sanjãam and yoga. Thus what we see is that Odarkiya Vaishnavism, in addition to nine kinds of devotion followed by Assamese Vaishnavism, also adds other nine kinds of sãdhanãbhakti which are brought from tantra and yoga practices. But Assamese Vaishnavism outright rejects tantra practices and give little importance to yoga practices.

Another notable feature of Odarkiya Vaishnavism is that the preachers, even if unwillingly, had to accommodate some of the religious practices advocated by Caitanya under compelling circumstances though holding ground to their convictions. However, áa´karadeva did not encounter such problems.

In Odarkiya Vaishnavism yoga is adopted to control disease, decay and death. It also adopts Hatha yoga. But Assamese Vaishnavas do not give much importance to yoga. Here we find the mention of Bhirami yoga only.

We find elaborate descriptions of the Pinda Brahminãda theory in Paµcasakhã literature, but in Assam we find little mention of it except in Ândipitanã, that too very little. Paµcasakhãs viewed Brahma as void (ãunya) whereas we do not find any such mention in Assamese Vaishnavism.

There is the mention of Mahãmantra, of sixteen names and thirty two syllables as the mode of worship in Odarkiya Vaishnavism whereas in Assamese Vaishnavism it is only a ðruva, a and krãtana of God’s name and attributes. áa´karadeva has adopted krãtana while Achyutananda established Ribisa Krãtana which is a blend of both Ribisa and Krãtana and also a powerful medium for socio-cultural unification.

Regarding personal gods there lies differences. The Assamese Vaishnavism worships the skirãa form of Kãsa, whereas Paµcasakhãs take ðagamãthã as their personal God and take Him as sunya Brahma. However, both of them prefer performing household duties and obligations towards the society along with worship of one God only- Kãsa, ðagamãthã.

Assamese Vaishnavism refers áa´karadeva and Madhava as their Ìstaguru (Kãsa) at the time of initiatãon but Odarkiya Vaishnavas do not accept any of their saints as their Ìsta Guru.

In the cosmology of medieval Vaishnavism of both the states religion with its domination of faith
and acceptability against logicality comes to the forefront of philosophy. Both take God as the material and efficient cause of the universe. But there are some differences in both the views. Whereas ārya-karadeva’s theory of creation has leaning towards Sāṅkhyā doctrine of creation Pāñcasakhā theory of creation has three imaginations- Vedic, Bauddha and Tantric- where āt is believed that āt is void, or ‘āunya Brahma’ from which the creation begins. Pāñcasakhās believe that in the beginning there was no sun, moon, nothing except Pāram Brahma who is described as ‘āunyaabat’.

The void according to the pāñcasakhā philosophy is not nothingness. The spirit of Puraṇa, immanent in the void is conceived as the void personified. He is known as the Alekha puraṇa, i.e. the being who has no form and who cannot be described in words. As the absolute manifests him in the void, he is also known as āunya Puraṇa. The Alekha or āunya Puraṇa keeps him aloof from the created world and reveals his playfulness from the void. He has his abode on the void. He is worshipped with the aid of sixteen names and thirty-two letters (Achyutananda Das, SS VIII). Pāñcasakhās’ āunya Brahma is not inactive like Bauddha āunya Puraṇa and Vedic Nirguña, a Brahma, but āt is always active. The Pāñcasakhās ascribe āunya Brahma to Śaṅkara also. They repeatedly describe Śaṅkara as āunya Puraṇa. Balaram Das in the first chapter of “Brahmāṇḍa Bhūgola” beautifully describes the creation out of void. But in the Assamese Vaiṣṇavism we do not find any such mention of the theory of void.

Utkaliya Vaiṣṇavas adopt sānta-rasa as the only path which leads one towards aversion and finally liberation. The desireless state of mind is sānta-rati. It is characteristically indifferent to either positive or negative. The God oriented otherworldly sense is the basis of the sānta-rasa. It is expressed in the verses of the Pāñcasakhās relating to their indifference to the world. In Assamese Vaiṣṇavism we also find mention of sāntarasa. In both the sects we also find mention of bīṣalīya rasa.

In Utkaliya Vaiṣṇavism we find the ‘Manjari’ bhāva, according to which feelings devotees think about Kṛṣṇa, a taking themselves as gopis. But in Assamese Vaiṣṇavism we do not find any such feelings. They only feel themselves as servants of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Regarding the abode (Dhāma) of God āt is Vaikuntha for Assamese Vaiṣṇavism, but for the Utkaliya Vaiṣṇavism āt is ‘Nilāchala ksetra’.

Assam Vaiṣṇavism value the Xth canto of Bhagabata as the best whereas Utkaliya Vaiṣṇavism accept the XIth canto as the best.
No doubt, differences are there a lot between the two branches of Vaisnavism but we also cannot ignore the similarities found in them.

In both the sects Brahman is taken as the Supreme absolute reality. It is both transcendent and immanent. Both are of the view that the Supreme reality is Sacchidananda, Nirvikara and Nirguha. He is also eternal and indescribable.

Both the sects believe in sattva and nirguha aspects of God. Like ákaradváda both of them hold the opinion that Absolute or Brahman is in essence without any attribute or nirguha. Nothing can be predicted or ascribed to it. Worship of sattva leads to ultimate reality—the nirguha, a Brahman. ákaradeva preached the worship of the sattva, a Brahman for the layman because he thought their ordinary intellect cannot comprehend the nirguha, a aspect of it though he had not denied its nirguha, a aspect. Just like Assamese Vaisnavas, Utkal Vaisnavas also worship both sattva and nirguha, a form of God.

Jiva according to both of them is a part of Brahman. They are abhinna (not different) in as much as they are conscious and abhinna as their attributes are different. Both of them admit that the relation between īvara and jiva are one of difference because of the limitation due to Māya. The changeable matter is also not out of the range of the Supreme Being. Hence God is present in every being and non-being (Matter). Vaisnavism of both the states admit that the world of multiplicity is also born out of Brahman and dissipates into it at dissolution. Both of them admit that world (samsāra) is neither real nor illusory. It is both. Both the sects refuse to accept ákar adva’s view that the world is an illusion like the snake in the rope. As it is the partial manifestation of Brahman it seems as real from empirical point of view.

Both the branches accept Brahman as the ultimate cause. The individual beings and the world are not different from the Absolute Brahman, but appears as real to the Ignorant due to the concealment by Māyā which is the magical power of Brahman. According to the Bhagavata Māyā has two properties—concealment and projection. Due to its influence jiva forgets that he is a part of God and hence suffers. It generates ignorance in individual self and thus causes suffering. Though Māyā is indistinguishable from God yet it cannot affect God. The existence of Māyā is dependent on God and also wherever there is God’s presence the delusion of Māyā cannot be there. Hence, both the sects admit that only God can undo beings’ bondage caused by Māyā. It is the power of God which creates, sustains and persists
over the universe through Måyå. Hence both the sects sincerely and seriously endeavour to dispel the veil of ignorance from the mind of the jiva. Their main business is to help the jiva go beyond his sense organs and this world of divided consciousness after which jiva gets true knowledge and is liberated.

In the theory of Evolution also we find the ascending order. Both of them conceive it as a movement of the entire creation towards the ultimate goal of absorption in the Absolute. According to both of them the object of the world process is the achievement of such a state of perfection to which not only all individual sources are merged in God but also God is merged in Absolute.

In respect of monotheism the Assamese and the Òkktiyya sects arrive at the common concept of the formless by a subjective intuition. Both of them consider that the abode of God is within one’s own heart. There is no need of image worship or performing rituals. That is why the stress is on contemplation through subjective visualization. Pacasakdhis are of the opinion that one should see God within one’s soul (jiva jivi ka dekho). Hence introspection is necessary. “Only persons with introspection can know Kå آل, and according to their indwelling essence they are favored with salvation”.

Both the branches admit the acceptance of intuition as the highest level of consciousness. It is the only kind of absolute knowledge. Through this kind of knowledge a devotee arrives at the knowledge of Supreme reality which is a matter of realization.

When explaining the Law of Karmic theory, all of them agree that man’s past karma is responsible for the present condition of life. His present karma determines his future. They seem to support the conventional Law of Karma when they maintain that if our acts were irrelevant to our past then there would be no moral responsibility or scope of improvement. Here moral freedom does not mean freedom from action but freedom through the performance of selfless action. As sakina karma (actions passionately associated with fruit) creates attachment they stress on desireless action. As there is no difference between doing and non-doing for desireless persons they surrender every action to God.

In the Risal¢l of O·i¡ Bhågabata Jagannath Das names the favorite gopi as Brindabati. VaiÀ¸ava preachers of both the states pointed out that the love of the gopis for lord Kå آل, a was a symbol of the soul’s inclination towards the universal self.

Assamese and Òkktiyya VaiÀ¸ava do not have any systematic philosophy. Only from their
literary works one can gather their philosophical ideas. They did not break any new ground on philosophical line. Most of their philosophy is borrowed ones. It is because they were mainly social and religious reformers. However, there is faint influence of Buddhist philosophy on the philosophy of Ōkākiya Vaishnavism. But in Ākaradeva's philosophy there is no trace of it. Elements like pinda brahmanda, sunya etc. found in Ōkākiya Vaishnavism suggest that the Vaishnava preachers of this branch had thorough knowledge on both Hindu and Buddhist philosophy.

The medieval Vaishnavism movement in respective states had had great influence on respective societies. Both contributed immensely to the upliftment of the society cleansing the religious bigotry, ennobling the self and showing the mass paths for moral upliftment. However, in comparison to Ōkākiya branch the influence of Assamese Vaishnavism was astounding on the society. Assamese Vaishnavism left impact on all aspects of Assamese life like bringing numerous tribal groups to the fold of greater Assamese culture, radically narrowing the caste gaps, minimizing hold of priestly class on the society, giving fillip to the economic life, promoting performing art etc. But Ōkākiya Vaishnavism could not leave impact in large scale on the society. It remained confined to a limited area. It is because by the time it flourished in Odisha, a parallel Vaishnavism movement initiated by Caitanya and supported by elites and royal power had made inroads into Odisha life.