PREFACE

Assam and O·ish¡ share many common religious and cultural practices, as áa´karadeva of medieval Assam, the propagator of Assamese VaiÀ¸avism while orienting his religious and philosophical mind was much influenced by O·ia scholar áredhara Svamin’s Bhyprtha Deipik¿, a commentary on the Bhagavata puran. However, much of his social and moral philosophy took shape during the time of his two trips to árekÀetra, the abode of Lord Jagannath where an atmosphere of religious tolerance, social inclusiveness and cultural richness prevails. During áa´karadeva’s time in O·ish¡ too a bunch of VaiÀ¸ava preachers, who were later termed as Paµcasakh¿, appeared whose social and moral philosophy bear a close resemblance to Assamese VaiÀ¸avism. Though both these branches rely heavily on the áremad Bhagavad¿, Bh¿gavatpur¿, and áredhar Svamin’s commentary on the latter yet these two branches deviate a lot in their religious tenets and practices and philosophical thinking. So, each branch has much dissimilarity which though escapes an ordinary eye yet falls to the scrutiny of a discerning eye. Here lies the research problem because though outwardly it seems that both are the branches of VaiÀ¸avism and have same source and follow in letter and spirit the religious, philosophical and moral tenets enshrined in the VaiÀ¸ava literature in orienting their mind, are much influenced by the Jagannath philosophy, accept various incarnations of ViÀ¸u as godheads yet inwardly there flows a current of dissimilarities-how and why?-these need to be found out. This research problem necessitates a comparative study of both the sects. Only diachronic and synchronic
forms of study will help us to find out similarities and dissimilarities, if any, underlying both the forms of Vaiṣṇavism and what caused for these dissimilarities.

The medieval Vaiṣṇavism in Odisha is also given the nomenclature Utkaliya Vaiṣṇavism. It is so called because when ancient Odisha is named Kalinga, the historic civilization of the present day Odisha; the present name of the land is the politico-official while the medieval Odisha is known as Utkal-the socio-cultural identity of the land. In literature it is called Pañcasākhyā yuga which roughly lasts from 1500 A.D. to 1570 A.D. It is to be mentioned here that the name of the land was changed from ‘Orissa’ to ‘Odisha’ in 2011 by an Act of the Parliament.

The medieval Vaiṣṇavism in Assam and Odisha is also known as neo-Vaiṣṇavism as it was a reformed movement to purge the prevailing Vaiṣṇavism of many of its ills and corrupt practices while some prefer to call it Bhakti movement since Bhakti is the dominant feeling in this religion.

A comparative study of these two branches becomes necessary because in many academic forums and writings debate and arguments continue about the true nature of Vaiṣṇavism in respective states. When many offer the view that Assamese Vaiṣṇavism and its religious institutions owe its richness to Jagannath cult in Odisha many too dismiss the idea and deny Ākāra-deva’s indebtedness to it; instead they maintain that Utkaliya Vaiṣṇavism has borrowed many from the Assamese. Against this background a comparative study of both these branches will be rewarding and the study will discuss where the views diverge and where they converge. The study will also offer thoughts for further study on the line.
The objective of my study will be to (i) compare and contrast religious tenets and practices of respective branches, (ii) find out philosophical basis of these two branches, (iii) chalk out influences of these two branches on the life and culture of the people of respective states and (iv) find out distinctive features of Assamese and Utkaliya Vaishnavism.

During the period Caitanya from Banga preached Vaishnavism in Oishij. Scholars like Artaballava Mohanty have given it the nomenclature Gauya Vaishnavism. They have brought a difference between Gauya Vaishnavism and Utkaliya Vaishnavism. Since the present study does not deal Gauya Vaishnavism it confines its study to the Assamese and the Utkaliya Vaishnavism.

During the last one hundred years some pioneering works have been done on the nature and philosophy of Assamese Vaishnavism and also on the contribution of áacařadeva and Madhavadeva and other apostles towards the society.

Earliest in Assam to present áacařadeva and Madhavadeva in an objective and dispassionate manner is Lakshminath Bezbaruah (1864-1938) who by means of his philosophical and theological writings included in Tattva-kathā, äré-Kriyā-Kathā, Sri Bhīgavata-Kathā, the Religion of Love and Devotion and the biographies of áacařadeva and Madhavadeva and his various addresses at different literary and social organizations analysed the principles and ideals of the Vaishnav faith of áacařadeva. Along with this, he establishes the fact that an integral interrelationship exists between áacařadeva’s ideas and the rich Indian philosophical concepts. To say, he rendered a human touch to áacařadeva and Madhavadeva divesting them of godly qualities.
A pioneering work made by Maheswar Neog was published by Gauhati University in 1965 under the title *ākaraḍeḍva and His Times: Early History of the Vaśa Faith and Movement in Assam*. The work is a full account of *ākaraḍeḍva’s* background and an appraisal of his work. In it is depicted the religious life of *ākaraḍeḍva’s* era on the background of the economic and cultural life as well as the historical, literary and artistic aspects of Assamese Bhakti movement. In it he has given social implications of the movement and gives the permanent human qualities of his writings.

In 1966 another work *The Neo-Vaśa Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam* authored by S.N. Sarma came out from Gauhati University. In it the author presents a connected and systematic account of the neo-Vaśa movement of Assam with special reference to the origin and development of the Satra institution. The book deals with all the aspects of medieval Vaśa-vaśism in Assam including its institutional developments. Fundamental teachings, religious rites and practices, literary and cultural contributions of the renaissance movement and organizational aspects of the Satra institution have been clearly brought into focus.

HVS Murthy in his research work entitled *Vaśa-vaśism of ākaraḍeḍva and Ramanuja: A Comparative Study* tried to situate ākaraḍeḍva’s philosophy in the Viś-vaśa school of Ramanuja. He tried to prove that ākaraḍeḍva’s Vaśa-vaśism did not subscribe to ākaraḍaṭya’s Advaita since the former put more stress on bhakti, not on intellect.
In last some years some Śākara-devite scholars like K. N. Dev Goswami, Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami, Dambarudhara Nath, Bap Chandra Mahanta and others have done laudable work on the saint poet and his religion but, as far as my knowledge goes, no one has ventured to discuss his works seriously from philosophical point of view or tried to situate him and his professed religion in relation to medieval Vaiṣṇava movements in other parts of the country, particularly to Odisha. In 2008 two works were published, one edited by Nilima Sharma and the other by Girish Baruah, which included a number of articles on philosophical thinking of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva.

In Odisha too a systematic study of the Utkaliya Vaisnavism was made during late thirties of the twentieth century. Prabhat Mukherjee in his The History of Medieval Vaishnavism in Orissa (1935) dwelt upon medieval Vaisnavite movement in Odisha. But he put more emphasis on the influence of Caitanya, a Gaudīya vaisnava saint, on the social, religious and political life of Odisha. In his work we find inexhaustive mention of philosophy of five Utkaliya Vaisnava preachers—Balaram Das, Jagannath Das, Achyutananda Das, Yashobanta Das and Ananta Das, fondly called Pancasakhṣś—and their religious tenets and practices. In 1984, Achintya Kumar Deb published The Bhakti Movement in Orissa in which he too like Mukherjee put stress on the impact of Caitanya’s preachings in Odisha and devoted a small chapter to Utkaliya Vaiṣṇavaism. His work was mainly literature oriented. From early seventies of the last century many Oriya scholars like Ratnakar Chaini, Nagendranath Pradhan, Bansidhar Mohanty, Kedar Nath Mohapatra, Krishna Chandra Sahu et al, belonging to Oriya
department of academic life made serious attempts to discover the literary talents of Paµcasakh¡s. They retrieved many missing works of the Paµcasakh¡s. However, a bulk of their writing devoted to literary aspects of these preachers. As in Assam before 2008, in O·ish¡ too, no exhaustive and comparative in-depth study on the religious tenets and practices and philosophy of Utkaliya VaiÀ¸avism with other VaiÀ¸ava branches at pan Indian level has been made till now.

Though Assam and O·ish¡ share a lot of cultural similarities and Assamese Vaisnva preachers owe a lot to Jagannath cult to which Utkaliya Vaisnava preachers owe too, no systematic comparative study between these two branches has been made till the last part of the last century. Jyotsna Rout, Professor of Gauhati University, is a pioneer in this field who has for about last one decade published a number of valuable articles dwelling on comparative aspects of these two branches of Vaisnavism. Her works “Odia O Asamiya Sanskruti Aru Samannayar Keitiman Dish”(Guwahati:Bani Mandir, 2005) and “Odisha O Assamr Barnila Loka Sanskruti” (Bhubaneswar: Paschima Publication) and articles “ Samanwayar Pratik SriJagannath Īru Srimanta Sankaradeva” (Prajina, GU 2012-13), “Namghar ebam Bhagabataghara” (Puri Praklapa, 2008), “Mahapurusa Srimanta Sankaradeva ebam Satra tathā Namgharar Parampara” (Paschima, Bhubaneswar, 2008) etc. have thrown new light on the comparative aspects of two cultures. During last five years a number of seminars were organized to make a comparative study of Assamese and Utkaliya VaiÀ¸ava literature where religious tenets and philosophy of respective branches have appeared for serious discussion. However, till now, as far as my knowledge goes, no full length comparative study encompassing different aspects of these
two branches have been made. And hence, my thesis, I hope, would break new ground in the field and give interest to the general readers as well as provide materials to scholars who want to study further on the line.

There are six chapters in this thesis “Vaisnavism in Medieval Assam and Odisha: A Comparative Study”. The first chapter “Vaisnavism and its presence in pre-medieval Assam and Odisha” traces the etymological meaning of Vaisnavism, its origin and evolution in ancient India. The chapter too traces presence of the faith in Assam and Odisha prior to the fifteenth and the sixteenth century. The second chapter “Milieus in Assam and Odisha” discusses social, political and religious conditions prevailing during the advent of medieval Vaisnavism and its presence in respective states. The third chapter “Religious Tenets and Practices” deals exhaustively religious ideas held and modes practiced by respective Vaisnav preachers. The fourth chapter “Philosophy of the Religion” discusses philosophy lying behind respective branches and the fifth chapter “Influence of the Movement” traces the astounding influence of this movement on the religious, social, economic and political life of the respective lands. The sixth chapter which is also the concluding part enumerates distinctive characteristics of the Assamese and Utkaliya Vaisnavism and sums up the findings.

There are slight overlappings and repetitions of ideas and text references here and there. But I believe it is the context of the discussion that will justify them.