CHAPTER I

Vaiśāvism and its presence in pre-medieval Assam and Odisha

India is a multi-religious country. Various religious groups—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis etc. living here enjoy their religious life and mode of worship freely and independently. One of the most distinct sects among the Hindus is Vaiśāvism. It is the religion that revolves round the worship of Viśu, who is taken as the supreme personified God. Unflinching faith in personal God Viśu or his incarnations constitutes the essential feature of Vaiśāvism. "The religious path known as Vaiśāvism can be described as devotion to Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Viśu, or any of his divine incarnations. It is seen by its adherents as a type of monotheism in which worship of a personal God is the focus." (Rosen, Preface, i). Those who follow Vaiśāvism revere their faith on this supreme, personified God, and as the name of worshippers are called Vaiśāvas. It is considered a reform movement like Buddhism and Jainism with the difference that it is based on theistic principles. Buddhism and Jainism protested against the Vedic principles whereas Vaiśāvism aimed at modifying the external and the superficial tenets of the Vedas and Upaniṣads. Vaiśāvism is ekāntika dharma or the single-minded love or devotion to God.

1.1. Etymological meaning of Vaiśāvism

Vaiśāvism believes in "Viśu eva Vaiśava". That means the worship of Viśu is the root of Vaiśāvism. Viśu is known variously as Mīśa, Kṛṣṇa, Hari, Rāma, Vaiśuva-Kṛṣṇa, and Gopī-Kṛṣṇa. It is one of the oldest and the most popular faiths that can be traced to ancient India, the evidence of which can be had from Megasthenes’ Indica, written in the 4th century B.C. Worship of Viśu has been prevalent since the time of the Vedic period. In the Ṛg Veda we find ample number of hymns sung to gods like Indra, Varuṇa, brahma, Agni etc. At many places in other Vedas like Śim, Yajur and Atharva we too find that the glory of Viśu has been sung profusely. According to scholars, in the Ṛg Veda there occurs the mention of the name of Viśu one hundred and five times, in the Yajur Veda it occurs fifty-nine times, in the Śim Veda it is twenty-four times and in the Atharva Veda it is sixty-six times.
In the Vedic Viṣṇu has been described as one who is all pervading. He who is present everywhere is called Viṣṇu. In the Veda, a Purāṇ, it is mentioned that the word Viṣṇu has come from the Sanskrit word Viṣṇu which means to pervade or to enter. The etymological meaning of the word 'Viṣṇu' is determined as 'One who enters hereafter creation'. So, He who can enter everywhere is known as Viṣṇu. In the Rig Veda it is mentioned that Viṣṇu occupies and upholds three worlds - Ādī, prāthīvī and the space. It is also mentioned that Viṣṇu is the Lord of the universe and He is the preserver of all. In Taittirīya Ēravaka Upaniṣad Viṣṇu is described as the most excellent of all the gods. But with the rise of Brahminism, Viṣṇu was made synonymous with Yajña. Ātapataprabhāmāṇa identifies him with sacrifice. He is endowed with such names as Yajña, Yajñavāhana, Yajñavādana, Yajñaparāśa. According to the Aitareya Brahmana, Viṣṇu averts all the evil forces that appear during the yajña due to defects in the sacrifice and protects the sacrifice and the sacrificer. In it, it is said, "Viṣṇu, avabhavaṁ Viṣṇu, abe Yajñaśvaye veinām ēdvēhataraṁ svāna cchandasa sambarddhaṁ(1/34)″ (Viṣṇu is the image of Yajña. Those who perform yajña are true Viṣṇu, avas. Viṣṇu himself receives those who initiate themselves into Viṣṇu, avism). In this work we also find about the avatāras of Viṣṇu.

The grace of Viṣṇu has also undergone various interpretations through ages. In the beginning stages of the coding of the Vedic Viṣṇu was not mentioned as the chief god. At that stage Agni, Indra, Sun god, and Varuṇu were getting preference. But in later period with the consolidation of Viṣṇu as the chief god importance of all other gods diminished and Viṣṇu came to the forefront. In the Veda, Sun god and Viṣṇu are made synonymous and they meant all pervading and shielding the universe. Sun and rays of the Sun have pervaded the entire world, so the other name of Sun is Viṣṇu. So, Viṣṇu is a Vedic deity. He is represented in the mantras as one of the solar deities and as such is associated with life and light. Viṣṇu in the Veda is conceived as the personification of the activity of the Sun, whose passage through the three divisions of the Universe is referred to in his three steps which he took for the benefit of mankind. His benevolence in the post-Vedic mythology must have developed into the doctrine of Avatāras (descent to earth), which he assumed for the good of humanity. "This establishes an inseparable connection between Viṣṇu and the Sun god and makes the former one of the solar deities" (Choudhury 409). At that period Sun god’s position was much above the other gods. He was considered the source of creation, the protector of the
created world.

Indra was also given primary importance in early writing of the Vedas. But in course of time his influence dwindled and Viṣṇu was given prominent place. Niriyanna says, "He (Viṣṇu, a) is an old Vedic god and appears in the Ṛgveda as a minor deity or at best only on a footing equality with the others. He is there intimately associated with Indra and is even in later mythology known as ‘the younger brother of Indra’ (Indravaraja). In the Brahmaṇas, his position is more exalted, and he is repeatedly identified with the sacrifice. ... He gradually supersedes the other gods and becomes supreme (p.98).’ In the Vedas Indra is mentioned as Śrībhīṣṭa (god of property and wealth). Later the word Śrībhīṣṭa was also used for Viṣṇu, a. In this way, in course of time, prominence of Viṣṇu, a was recognized and all other gods were relegated to secondary place. To quote Satyendra Patnaik, ‘... during the age of Brahmans, believed to be the products of the first encounters with the non-Vedic and non-Aryan culture, that Viṣṇu, a was brought to the limelight despite his minor position in the Veda’ (p.68).

During the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata period Viṣṇu, a consolidated his position as the supreme god. In the Rāmāyaṇa, a Rama considered an incarnation of Viṣṇu, a has been mentioned as nīrguṇa, saṁsātana and protector of all pervading. In the epic Śiśu is adored like Lakṣmīṇā (Vīmukti Rāmāyaṇa, Yuddha Kīndam, 6/11/29). In the Mahābhārata too, importance of the Viṣṇu, a has been accepted. It is mentioned here that blessings of the Viṣṇu, a will accrue more merits than listening to eighteen purāṇas (Aṣṭadasha purāṇa, am Śrīraja, a, yatphalam laveś. Taṭhiphalam samaparnotvatvatvavo natra samsayab [Mahābhārata, 18/6/97] to purāṇa, a, the glory and grace of Viṣṇu, a is mentioned. According to Viṣṇu, a Purāṇa, a, "He is Viṣṇu, a who is present in all elements and in whom all elements are present” (Śrī Viṣṇu, a purāṇa, a-3/1/45). In the later stage of Viṣṇu, a worship, worship of Nirṛti, a took prominence. Though there is no direct mention of the name Nirṛti, a in any of the vedas, the Ṛg Veda contains indirect praise of Nirṛti, a. Here he is described as Parameśwar, omnipresent and capable of taking universal form, viśvarūpā. Here he is identified as male which can be compared to Brahmā in the Upaniṣads. In Taittirīya Era, gāka and gātāpatha Brahmān this Being is described as omnipresent and omniscient. In purāṇas like Viṣṇu, a, Harivaśa, Viṣṇupurāṇa, a and Śrīmad Bhāgavat we find how grace and glory of Nirṛti, a has been praised.

During the Mahābhārata time Viṣṇu, a was identified with Nirṛti, a. Nirṛti, a was described as the
"older than the oldest," "soul of the universe," having his abode in the primeval water. The Nîrîga-yoga section of the Mahabharat identifies Arjuna with Nara and Visvdeva with Nîrîga and regards them as one and the same.

Elevation of Viṣṇu to the highest point came when he came to be identified with Visvdeva-Káśi. This identification of Viṣṇu and Visvdeva-Káśi seems to have been completed by the second century B.C. as evident from the Besnagar Garuda pillar inscription of Heliodorus, in which the Greek ambassador Heliodorus is referred to as a devotee of Visvdeva. R.G. Bhandarkar opines that "some of the ideas originated from the Upanishads turned to Jain and Buddhist dharma in east India while at the same time it took the form of Bhagavat dharma-Káśi-Viṣṇu worship to west India" (pp.12-13). He too observes that "in the puranic times three streams of religious thought, one from the Vedic God Viṣṇu, another from Nîrîga, the cosmic and philosophic God and the third from Visvdeva, the historical God mingled together decisively and thus formed the later Vatāvyuddhivaisnavism" (p.35). It is presumed that there was some process of religious syncretism before the composition of the Besnagar pillar inscription, which records the identification of Visvdeva, Nîrîga and Viṣṇu. Prabhat Mukherjee maintains that "in the 5th AD, during the Gupta era, Vaisnavism spread and flourished in India and since then Visvdeva and Saṅkarṣaṇa have been worshipped as Jagannātha and Balabhadra" (p.7). However, in the beginning of the Christian era one new element, the concept of Gopāl-Káśi, identified with Viṣṇu, entered into the faith of Vatāvyuddhinism (Bhandarkar, p.100). The background of the later Vatāvyuddhinism is founded by the Bhagavad-Gītā which is known as the divine words of Visvdeva-Káśi.

Another sub-sect Pañcarātra was most popular in the pre-Christian and the early centuries of the Christian era. Its chief god is Visvdeva. In the Brhadaranyaka of Śanāt Kumar śaṅkhu (10/53) it is mentioned that god Visvdeva incarnated on earth to purge the world of sins and evils and to restore dharma. He asked people to follow pañcarātra dharma which is also known as Bhagavat dharma, Vatāvyuddhinism etc. In this dharma Viṣṇu and Visvdeva are shown as one and the same. It speaks of the five-fold manifestations of God representing His Parā (transcendent), Vyuha (emanatory), Vibhava (incarnatory), Antaryāmin (immanent) and Arca (worshipable in images) aspects. With the incorporation of the idea of incarnation into the system, Śaṅkhu-Visvdeva or Káśi a cult and Viṣṇu a cult became identified with and under the name of
Vaiśāvism. In course of time Viṣṇu of the Vedic period, Nṛṣimha of the Purāṇas, Vasudeva-Kṛṣṇa of the Abhras and Gopāla of the Mahābhārata came to be worshipped under the unified name of Viṣṇu, in and through his different manifestations (Choudhury, p.409). The Vedic God Viṣṇu was later named the cosmic god Nṛṣimha by elevating the former to a higher rank by the Brahmana literature. The Brahma Sūtras refers to the followers of Viṣṇu as Vaiśāvins and Ṛgveda. In the Nṛṣimha section of the ānti canto of the Mahābhārata we find a lot about how the king Vasu once performed a yajña without sacrificing any animal. Instead he put more emphasis on unflinching devotion. It is mentioned here that God revealed to five rishis five secrets which are dharma, artha, kīma, mokṣa and bhakti. Here God revealed in five nights five knowledge-Ultimate Reality, Devotion, Liberation, Yoga and Bhāgya-to these five rishis.

After the Upaniṣadic, Brahman and Ēra yaka periods, black art (tāntra) entered into the Vedic dharma, though earlier this dharma was dominated by karma, yajña and bhakti. It was because the indigenous people of India were worshippers of ākāti. They were practitioners of black magic and sorcery, worshippers of female deities while Ṛṣya society was patriarch and its gods were all male gods. After long conflicts between the Ṛṣyas and non-Ṛṣyas a compromise was reached from when the Ṛṣyas resorted to the practice of black art, worship of ākāti and indulged in contemplative devotion to appease the non-Ṛṣyas. This influenced the Vedic dharma no less because religious attitudes in the tāntras are fundamentally the same as in the Vedic ritual. This syncretism welcomed to its ranks women, sudras and the aborigines. It also recognized the prevailing social and feudal hierarchies opened during the Guptā period.

1.2 Evolution of Vaiśāvism in ancient India

Vaiśāvism becoming a major faith during the Guptā era, kings and feudal lords professing this faith indulged in lavish yajña, sacrifice, rites and rituals dictated under the Brahmi ic tenets. A section of the priestly class who were deprived of enjoying the benefits of these rituals and the resultant royal favour began to disapprove the cumbersome religious practices that included sacrifice, offerings etc. They turned to ērved Bhagavad Gītā where it is mentioned that God is not indifferent to the world, He is interested in the well-being of his devotees and He is sensitive to the devotion of his worshippers. They found in it "Sarbadharmaṁ paritṛṣṇya mīmekam saranam brahma" which is total surrender to God and is better than
any other modes of worship. In the Gita they also discovered the ways and means of how to unite people belonging to different castes and classes by removing caste rigidity and propagating caste and class unity. Gita also professes performance of one's own dharma, i.e., the duties enjoined for one without desiring any result. With this advice for niskäma karma Gita also advocated for Bhakti which means to immerse one into the thoughts of God by deviating the mind from all the worldly desires.

During the Gupta era Vaishnavism traveled to South India. A vast Aryian civilization raised its head here on the model of the system of Gupta era. Indigenous kings becoming Artyfied were patrons of this culture. The Brahmins were the lobbyists who provided all the facilities for the growth of this religion. And the Sudras were the base of this culture. In this system Käatriyas or the Balïyas had no role. Agonised caste system was the bedrock of this system. Candilas and outcasts who were newly inducted into the fold of Hinduism were much neglected, ignored and were the suffering lot. As a result, a new spiritual compensation was required for them which found expression in the Bhakti cult as spiritual litany had found expression among the Negroes in America to sublimate their protest, desperation, agony during the prevalence of slavery system. The oppressed lot in the South suffering from the caste rigidity in Hindu system poured their distressed, grieving and bruised mind through the medium of bhakti songs so as to lessen the pangs of their sufferings.

1.3 Growth of Devotionalism (Bhaktivälôa)

The upsurge of devotion first found expression in the works of the Alwirs. The word Alwir means "one who has deep intuitive knowledge of God and one who is immersed in contemplation of Him" (Dasgupta, p.68). The earliest Alwirs were some Brahmin messengers from the north to the South India who owe their origin to the Bhagavata sect of the north India. The contribution of the ancient Alwirs of southern India to Vaishnavism is greater in the sense that they preached Käśi, a bhakti by composing songs in local language which immediately appealed to the heart of the downtrodden people. Vishnu with all his avatâras, particularly Käśi, a avatar was the object of their worship. According to them "Vishnu is the only God who can protect and liberate a devotee by giving him shelter when so prayed for" (Sircar, p. 108). The earlier Alwirs flourished about the time of the revival of Brahmanism and Hinduism in the North, which extended up to the Marathi country and must have extended still further to the South. However, all the Alwirs were
not Brahmins. They were from different castes and layers of the society. The intensity of feeling and emotion are the chief characteristics of their beautiful songs in which they prayed to Viṣṇu, asking for the favour of his divine grace. These alwirs while singing the song in praise of Viṣṇu-Gopī-Kṛṣṇa, a also raised the Bhagavad-Gītā to high pedestal because for them this is believed to have come from the mouth of Kṛṣṇa as heard by Arjuna, one of the greatest devotees of Kṛṣṇa.

The Vaiṣṇava Alwirs began to sing the grace and glory of Viṣṇu, because they were disenchanted with the highly ritualistic and priest-ridden rites of Viṣṇu worship followed under the Brahmīnic influence. They sang God’s immanence, His Catholicism, piety and His love for the devotees. They visualized Him as an image of love, saviour and grace. For them God is not to be feared but to be loved. These Alwirs along with Āsvīte Nayanmars emphasized upon the possibility of obtaining the grace of God by chanting His name only, instead of practicing cumbersome rituals enjoined by the Brahmīnic cult. The Vedic Aryans tried to please Viṣṇu and other gods by means of sacrifice, but the alwirs endeavored to please Viṣṇu by bhakti (devotion of the faithful to God) and oblations. They preached that every body irrespective of caste, social standing or knowledge in the Vedas or in the scriptures can qualify for God’s grace by adopting the path of bhakti, that is total surrender to God. God himself is interested in saving beings. Every being is the manifestation of the Supreme soul. God is the lord of all. One who is free from illusions about the world and devotes himself to the service of God can realize Him. Again, service to God is not different from service to devotees. Love towards God expresses itself as love towards His devotees. Thus they represented the devotional and emotional side of the Vaiṣṇava faith.

The rise of the Vaiṣṇava Alwirs, “their triumphant disputations and successful peregrinations and the establishment of mutts and organizations in important centres of Vaisnava persuasions, made Vaisnavism a popular religion” (Murthy, p.15). The alwirs moved from place to place singing the infinite grace and kindness of God. They were not illiterates; they were learned lot in whose compositions we find deep philosophical meaning and humanism. They were well conversant with the quintessence of the Vedas, Upaniṣads and Gītā. Out of any three paths—jñāna, karma and bhakti—found in the Gītā as means to attain deliverance from the sufferings of the world, the Alwirs preferred the bhakti marga. They were staunch supporters of the sāgū, a aspect of God. They sang the praise of God, whom they believed that a lay man can
visualize. They followed in their personal life what they preached. Their life was reflection of high ideals. Though the Alwirs belonged to different castes and strata of the society yet they looked upon everybody equally. They as devotees tried to establish communion with God in various ways.

Though the Alwirs preached bhakti at different points of time yet they were found to entertain some common views regarding certain religious concepts. Bhakti, Prayer, chanting the name of God, initiation, the greatness of Guru, satsang and detachment are the common points to which they converged. They made the path of devotion easy and simple which, the common people later found, can be followed easily. Instead of the path of knowledge and action, now the path of devotion seemed easy for the common people. Nammalvar sings, "He who is bliss imparts the illuminating bhakti to the mumukṣu, Bhakti is more than intellectual love of God and includes philosophical knowledge and religious feelings." The Alwirs, to quote Bezbaroa, "represented the devotional and emotional side of the Vañca faith, unlike the Brahmin Ācāryas who came after them representing the intellectual and philosophical side" (3018).

It will be rewarding to mention here about the importance of the Bhagavatapurāṇa, a collective work of various Alwirs, which is the "ample and magnificent exposition" of bhakti (Neog 36). J.N. Farquhar says the puran contains some passages that convinces one that "they are expressions of a living religious experience" (229). About the period of the composition of this puraṇa, Bijayānanda Kar says, "The date for the famous Srimad bhagavata Puraṇa has been fixed by the scholars around sixth century A.D" (557). However, Sitakanta Mahapatra opines that "there seems to be general agreement that it was composed a little before the sixth century A.D." (13). It is in this work that through anecdotes and legends, involving gods, demons, rishis, kings and common men, importance of bhakti is stressed upon. This Puraṇa, has given a new incentive to the Vañca bhakti dharma. All the established Vañca communities hold this scripture in high esteem. It is what Bezbaroa calls akhila-sruti-sara. This work enjoins nine ways of bhakti.

Had a section of Brahmin erudite scholars not composed Sanskrit texts taking quintessence of the Tamil compositions of Alwirs and praising their contributions to the popularization of Vañca, role of the latter in the growth of bhakti cult and their songs and prayers, ideas behind it would have remained confined only to the south India. Nīthamunir set the songs of Nammalvar, one of the most talented Alwirs, to music. After him the scholars, also called Ācāryas, collected and recorded all the compositions of the Alwirs.
and interpreted it in the light of the Vedas, Upaniṣads and the Gītā and offered commentaries on it. They gave Prabandham of the alwārs equal status with the Veda and accepted the importance of Tamil language, a language not of the devas but of ordinary people. Moreover, these scholars propagated something hitherto unknown, i.e. a layman's dependence on a preceptor or guru. Thus they initiated the guru-vidyā, i.e. need of an ordinary man to take the help of a teacher to know the Reality. These Europeans brought harmony between devotional but emotional outbursts of the alwārs and their intellectualized realization of God in the Brahmanic tradition. They enriched Sanskrit language by translating the devotional songs of alwārs and popularized elements of bhakti in different parts of India. On the other hand, they restrained and pacified the rebellious spirit and revolutionary strain flowing in the compositions of the alwārs. In this way the bhakti elements set its foot in the newly appearing feudal structure of the Indian society. Apart from it, introduction of guru-vidyā and institutionalization of the system of initiation by them channelised and shaped the bhakti-vidyā.

Thus we see two streams of bhakti-vidyā that flowed in India at different times, one flowed in north India through the works like the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Āraṇyaka and Brahman culminating in the Gītā and the other flowed in south India through the songs and devotional poems of the Alwārs and the Bhāgavata purāṇa and culminated in the works of and commentaries of four Ācāryas.

The bhakti-vidyāins believe in Saivism. Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Mādhva and Vallabha were all Vaśāvīs whose primary objective was to strengthen the tradition of Viśāva, a worship. They were concerned most with the task of constructing Vaśāva theology by explaining Viśāva as saiva, a Brahmaṇ. They differed from Āaṅkāra in the sense that the latter aimed at subsuming all personal deities in his concept of the Nirguṇa, a Brahmaṇ.

Common insistence by the four medieval Vaśāva Ācāryas on the saiva, a (personal) nature of God stood in direct contrast with Āaṅkāra’s concept of the Nirguṇa, a (attributeless) Brahmaṇ. Āaṅkāra’s interpretations of the Vedānta are based on the intellectual approach to religion but interpretation of the Vedānta by the medieval Ācāryas is regarded as an emotional approach that affirms Bhakti religion. The systems of Vedānta evolved by the latter were in fact Vaśāva systems of Vedānta while that of the former is that of the Advaita Vedānta. However, these Ācāryas did not altogether efface the path of jñāna from
their doctrine of how to attain liberation. In this way, they followed áa´kar¡c¡rya faintly, though they advocated bhakti mirga for a lay man. No doubt, áa´kar¡c¡rya saved Hinduism from falling into the trap of debased form of Budhism and T¡ntricism. For him, God is Nirgu¸a, He is attributeless, He is the Highest Reality and Jñana is the path to know Him. However, for a lay man enveloped by m¡y¡, it is not possible to comprehend the Nirgu¸a, a Brahman, to realize the Highest Reality is beyond his cognitive power. So Adaitav¡d doctrine of áa´kar¡c¡rya failed in its mass appeal. This gap between mass expectation and áa´kar¡c¡rya’s doctrine of Absolute Reality was filled by the medieval VaiÀ¸ava ¡c¡ryas who showed a lay man an alternative path for attaining God’s proximity, which is bhakti. For these ¡c¡ryas, God is qualified, He is infinitely beautiful, He is all merciful, full of grace and embodiment of love and kindness. He is Sagu¸a and has attributes. Bhakti is the last step towards dedication for getting the infinite bliss of God. God’s grace is possible only when one surrenders absolutely to Him.

1.4 Role of Īc¡ryas in popularizing BhaktiVida

The Vi¿iÀt¡dvaita of R¡m¡nuja, the Dvait¡dvaita of Nimbarka, the Dvaita of M¡dhva and the Suddh¡dvaita of Vallabhac¡rya-all advocate bhakti for Sagu¸a Brahman. When they speak of Brahman in their expositions on bhakti, they underline the equation of ViÀ¸u with Brahman. Vallabha, however, is an exception in this regard. He operates with two categories in his thought system, i.e., of AkÀara Brahman (as nirgu¸a, a) and PuruÀottama (as sagu¸a, a). Vallabha’s bhakti is for the PuruÀottama which he relates to K¤À¸a, hence he advocates for K¤À¸a-bhakti. However, all the four ¡c¡ryas had practiced and preached ViÀ¸u, a-worship/K¤À¸a, a worship. Despite their differences in philosophical explanations of bhakti at the level of actual religious practice their devotionalism was directly related to ViÀ¸u, abbakti/K¤À¸a, abbakti.

R¡m¡nuja propounded the Sagu¸a aspect of the Absolute Reality and the concept of personal God, whom he styled as ViÀ¸u, a-Nírêya, a. In Bezbaroa’s words,

___he (Ramanuja) took up the question whether the Supreme Deity is to be styled Visnu or Siva, or to be identified with the other Gods known to the Upanishads and concluded that Visnu or Nírêya, a is alone and the only one, who can be so named and so identified (3020).

However, R¡m¡nuja differs from the Advait¡dvítís to whom one Personal God is as another due to the phenomenal nature of each one. R¡m¡nuja’s scheme of s¡dhan¡ is inspired by his knowledge of UpaniÀad and
his faith in Vaishnavism. Inspired by the former, he lays stress on the contemplative factors like dhyana, jñana, and yoga, and inspired by the latter he gives full recognition to the ritualistic modes of idol worship. According to Ramanuja, a laity can attain jñana through dhyana and yoga. He says that it is also sufficient for a laity to take the path of complete surrender, devoid of dhyana and yoga. But, on the whole, he identifies the path of contemplation with bhakti and differentiates it from the path of total surrender based on simple faith alone.

Ramanuja does not discard altogether any one of the two mārgas. Depending on the type of aspirants he recommends the modes. He recommends bhakti, the ingredients of which are meditation, knowledge and spiritual experience for the upper castes and prapatti (surrender) for the śūdras. So Ramanuja’s bhakti is not the path of simple surrender as opposed to that of jñana, rather it is a particular kind of knowledge that leads to the extinction of all other interests and desires. Ramanuja does not explain bhakti (devotion) as a "doctrine" or "theology" but as an experience which is the result of devout meditation accompanied by love, which is also a kind of knowledge. He maintains that the act of constant bhakti or dhyana culminates in an immediate intuitive perception for its act of constant memory. Those who are attached to this state attain liberation on account of their intense love for the object of their memory. Thus Ramanuja’s bhakti can be interpreted as the spiritual knowledge derived from personal knowledge.

Nimbārka, another Vaishnav ācārya also toes the line of Ramanuja when he says the ultimate end of bhakti is the intuitive perception of the Brahman or Brahma-śikṣākāra. According to him the end of spiritual endeavour is to attain the feeling of oneness with God which can be achieved only through bhakti. He maintains that Brahman does not reveal itself without the aid of both thought and devotion and continuous devotion for Him makes one a constituent of Him.

Bhakti is the emotive part of sādhana. It is a sweet and tender feeling. For Nimbārka bhakti and knowledge are interdependent. According to him, mokṣa is possible by attaining knowledge which is brought about by God’s grace (prasād), which is itself due to bhakti. He further maintains that individual efforts of a devotee moves God to grant His grace to him. Similarly, the spirit of surrender or prapatti is a means of salvation. Prapatti has value only in so far as it arouses bhakti and finally leads to the intuitive perception of the Brahman.
Another Vaiśṇava Śruta Śrīva Mādhva also does not exclude knowledge as a means to attain liberation. According to him, bhakti is a state of loving attachment born out of knowledge and regard for the object of devotion. Only the jñāna of the Brahmā can produce the feeling of love for and absolute dependence on Him. The final and the highest stage of bhakti is reached only when the true relationship between Jīva and Brahmā is realized, the grace of God comes to the devotees after this.

VallabhaŚrīva operates with two categories of bhakti. These two categories are MaryādBhakti and Puḷ ŚŚrīva bhakti, the former for the Akāra Brahma (God in the sense of an impersonal and Immutable Reality) and the latter as bhakti for the PuruŚottama (God in the sense of supreme Personality) and these have direct correspondence with Nirguṇa, a and Sagūṇa, a forms of bhakti.

According to Vallabha, only the godly souls, not demonic, are always capable of bhakti which is of two kinds; one who follow the path of maryādBhakti and the other who follow the path of puḷŚŚrīva bhakti. Those who follow the former through karma, jñāna and upāsanā attain liberation through individual effort and those who follow the latter must depend entirely on God’s grace in their bhakti. Ends of both the miryas are the same. However, VallabhaŚrīva personally advocates for the puḷŚŚrīva mirya. He regards Kṛṣṇa as the supreme deity, an incarnation of Brahma, PuruŚottama or Paramānanda and the only way to attain salvation is love and devotion to Kṛṣṇa. He explains the bhakti of his puḷŚŚrīva strictly in terms of Kṛṣṇa’s worship. Vallabha regards prema as the seed of bhakti and his followers generally interpret bhakti as a combination of prema, and sevā (service) and this sevā can exist for the name (nāma-sevā) as well as for the form (rupa-sevā). Bhakti as sevā “In these forms is obviously conceived in relation to the personal deity Kṛṣṇa, his idols and temples.” (Krisha Sarma 159). Thus Vallabha laid a clear and definite emphasis on “a personal god, complete reliance on emotion and God’s grace and hope for salvation without taking recourse to jñāna” (159), though he did not limit the meaning of the term bhakti. He favoured the emotional form of Kṛṣṇa’s bhakti and at the same time took full cognizance of bhakti for the nirguṇa a Brahmā. VallabhaŚrīva introduced the Rādhā cult. He worshipped Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and the basis of his religious teaching is that.

The sportive Kṛṣṇa with his Radha is transferred to a heaven, which is in a region, higher than the ordinary vaikuntha of Nīrīya, a or Visnu and is called Goloka. The highest aim of man’s life is to
get to this place and join in the sports (Bhandarkar, p.82).

From the above observations of the philosophy of these four sects, we find that “though all the sects worshipped God in diverse forms and followed the path of devotion yet all of them were fundamentally monotheistic in character” (A.M.Mukherjee, p. 6). The list of Ācāryas who have influenced medieval Vaishnavism in Assam and Odisha will be incomplete if we do not include Caitanya who has greatly influenced Orkatiya Vaishnavism.

Caitanya was the chief exponent of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, a cult. For him, sincere and passionate love for God is the only way to salvation. His doctrine of love is reaching the realm of God (Krṣṇa). Faith in a personal god (Krṣṇa) forms the very essence of what he meant by bhakti. When bhakti is raised to the level of mysticism, it is accompanied by the idea that all is Krṣṇa. It is described as an act of realization of Krṣṇa, residing within oneself, which culminates in one’s own self assuming the form of Krṣṇa. For Caitanya the Lord Krṣṇa, a with his loving consort Rādhā is the twin-idol (yugala-mūrti) of worship. Worship means chanting of the names and glories of Krṣṇa with love and devotion.

Vaishnavism as preached by Caitanya is based on prembhakti. It is devotion which gets matured into a sentiment of love. It appears sufficiently after the bhiva or emotion gets solidified into a sentiment of love (prema). It is the highest good or puruṣārtha. It culminates in complete self-surrender. Self-surrender is of two types: svakīya and parakīya. The former relates to virginity and marriage of gopīs. It is described by all the Vaishnava poets as the greatest way of realization of God. It teaches the Vaishnavas to love God as his or her own husband. But parakīya bhāva is opposite to svakīya bhāva. It is only a form of sacrifice in the cause of the realization of God. It means love for a person other than the husband or the wife. Whenever a devotee surrenders himself/herself completely and totally and thinks himself/herself as a wife to God (Krṣṇa) she reaches the realm of God. This type of bhakti is also called Īrāvibhakti. Caitanya's premabhakti is corroborated by Rādhābhiva, the consort mode of devotion. “He wanted to emotionalise and idealise the love between Srikrisna and Sriradha, that had no relation with carnal desire” (Panigrahi, p. 245). Krṣṇa has three powers-cīta, miśra and jñāva. The cīta gives rise to the power of delight, the essence of which is Rādhā. However, Caitanya never compromised the personal aspect of the deity Krṣṇa.

There was an upsurge of the bhaktīvad during the 15th and 16th centuries in most parts of India. The
bhakti movement during the period was not confined to Vaiṣṇava dharma only, it also included devotion to ēva in certain places. However, Nammalvar in south India, Rāmānanda, Krishna and Tukirin in Maharashīra, Nābhadrī, Dharmadīs, Rōmhanda, Kābh, Rāmān in north India, Gātan in Bengal and Odisha, ākaradeva in Assam, Jagannātha Dīs, Bālārām Dīs, Aghāfīnanda, Yashovantā and Śīchu Amañtha who together are called Pāpacakshīs in Odisha propagated, spread and popularized this bhakti movement. Ėt is also called neo-Vaiṣṇava movement by some scholars. These preachers made Vaiṣṇava religion a mass religion.

1.5 Vaiṣṇavism in Assam and Odisha before Fifteenth century

It appears that much before ākaradeva Vaiṣṇavaism was prevalent in Assam. Epigraphic evidence, purhī, textual source, archaeological remains and literary sources testify that worship of both Viṣṇu and his incarnations were prevalent to the land from early times.

Epigraphic evidences are galore about the worship of Viṣṇu and his incarnations in Assam before the 15th century A.D. The inscriptions of Vanamīl, Balávaranam, Raṅgapīla, Indrapīla and Dharmapīla mention the Boar-incarnation in which Viṣṇu “lifted up the earth from the depths of the lower region”. Viṣṇu in his Boar-incarnation begetted Naraka and established him in Kamarupa as the king. Viṣṇu in his incarnation of Jamadagnya Rāma or Paraśurāma “washed his blood-stained axe in the water of the Lauhitya”. (Gauhatī grant, v.13 in middle part of 11th A.D.). Gauhatī grant v.9 and Kamaullī grant, v.4 mention Narasiṅha and Rāma, “who crossing the ocean killed Rāvana”. Guṅkuchi grant, v.24 and Tezpūr grant, v.13 mention about Bālakrṣṇa or Gopāla who was brought up by Yosoddh and was the delight of the Gopīs. The Kamaullī Grant begins with an invocation of Hari in the form of Varāha. Hayagrīva Mādhava temple at Hajo, built in pre-medieval age suggests Viṣṇu’s Hayagrīva (Viṣṇu with horsehead) incarnation. Kṛṣṇa’s avatāra of Viṣṇu is the most popular avatāra in the later Vaiṣṇavism of Assam. The Kṛṣṇa legend seems to have formed an essential element of Vaiṣṇavism in Kamarupa as early as 7th century A.D.

Inscriptions of the period also suggest about the prevalence of Vaiṣṇavism in early period of Assam. The earliest recorded reference to the worship of Viṣṇu in Kamarupa occurs in the Badaganga Rock inscription (554 A.D.). Badaganga epigraph of Bhūtabharman gives the earliest reference to Viṣṇu’s worship. The Umācāl Rock Inscription of Surendravarman records the establishment of a cave-temple dedicated to Lord Balabhadra. In the Dubi plates (1st part of 7th century A.D.) we find references to Devakī and Kṛṣṇa (v.53).
to Lokesa and Viṣṇu (v.59), to goddess Lakshmi and Viṣṇu together (v.60) and to Balā, i.e. Balarāma and Acyuta, i.e., Kāśi, a together (vv.68 and 69). The Nītihpurī granite (1-34), Gaubīti granite, (v.9) Bargain granite (L46), Puspabhadra granite (v.1), Tezpur granite (vv.3-4-5), Nawangong granite (v.3), Gaūkūti granite etc. suggest that from early times there is an association of this faith with Viṣṇu and his incarnations. Dīnoddarpur inscription of Badhagupta mentions a deity named Kokamukhasvamin, whose seat is the place where Naraka was born, which is believed to be Viṣṇu in his Varāha form. The Tezpur granite of Vanamala (v.5) belonging to the 9th century A.D. confirms that Bhagadatta had a special devotion to Viṣṇu. The Subhankarapataka grant alludes to the quarrel between Kamalā and Bhairavi, a story so common in Hindu folk tradition (B.K. Barua, p. 175).

Purāṇic sources also suggest presence of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam in earlier times. The kings of Kamarupa trace their lineage to Viṣṇu. In the Brahma purāṇa (29.115) it is recounted that Viṣṇu established Naraka in the city of Prayagotisha. In the Kliśka purāṇa (38-39ff) too, it is mentioned that he was Viṣṇu who was responsible for establishing Naraka as the monarch of Kamarupa. K.L. Barua quoting legend says that “Naraka who was well-versed in the Vedas and devoted to the duties of the twice-born was the son of Viṣṇu who begot him through his consort Prithivi” (18-20). The Varāha purāṇa mentions that in the Himalayas there was a temple of Kokamukhasvamin where Viṣṇu was residing. The purāṇa describes in detail the worship of Viṣṇu-Vaiśudeva with rituals (chs. 78-80, 88) and mentions as many as five incarnations of the deity as being worshipped in different places of Assam (Choudhury, p. 409). It also mentions the manifestations of Viṣṇu as the First Incarnation and is worshipped as Mādhava in the form of a Bhatrāva named Pīdamithā in the Mātātya mountain, east of Mautkara and as Vaiśudeva-Viṣṇu in the Dikkaravāsini region (B.K. Barua, p. 175). Harsha Cārttē describes Bhāskaravarma as a progeny of the Vaiṣṇava family. The Rājāt Rasāṅa describes the mode of worship of Viṣṇu in a number of Viṣṇu-pitha-kundas, including that of Pīdamithā-Viṣṇu. Lauhrīgīde Viśvāt maṇtra pīdamitham prapatayet (11/6). The Kliśka purāṇa abounds in indications of the prevalence of the Vaiṣṇava faith in Assam. It begins with the invocation to the lotus feet of Nārā. In the second verse the goddess is described only as the miṣī (saktī) of the same Absolute power. The third verse sings the praise of Viṣṇu who has been referred as Puruṣottam. The Purāṇa mentions the places of worship by the people of Vaiṣṇava faith. Despite
general belief that Kālikī Purī, a is a ākāta Upapurī, a, it contains numerous references to Viśnu, a as faith.

In the opinion of R.C.Hazra "ākāta-Vaiśāva avas of Kāmarupa who looked upon Viśnu, a as Brahma or Puruṣa and Debi as his ākāti (or Māyā or Prakṛti) wrote the present Kālikī-Puri, a with a view to convincing the people that Kāmikhyā is none but Viśnu, a's Yoga-māyā embodied, that Viśnu is superior to Śiva, and that every one must be a Vaiśāva, a before he sets himself to Debi-worship." (qtd by M.M.Sharma in Barpujari 331)

Excavations made from time to time in Assam and the archaeological remains prove that Vaiśāva dharma has been prevalent here since early times. Discovery of the ruins of temples dedicated to Viśnu, a, his incarnations and his iconographic representations show that Viśnu, a worship has been prevalent in Assam at least from the 5th and the 6th centuries. K.N.Dikshtī discovered an inscribed Viśnu, a image of the 9th century A.D. which refers to bhikṣu viroma, a (ṣyā) sāttī prakṛti bhaktāntam (bhaktānam) (B.K.Barua 176). Another ruined Viśnu, a temple has been discovered in the neighborhood of Sivasigar town that dates approximately from the 10th or 11th century A.D. (ibidem,176).

Again, literary sources strongly point to the fact that Vaiśāva dharma was there in Assam before the 15th century A.D. There appeared a significant number of literature from the later part of the 13th century A.D. whose writers were great Vaiśāva thinkers. They made valuable contributions to the development of the Vaiśāva sect in the state.

Harivara Bipra (13th century A.D.) wrote 'Babrubhinār Yuddha' where he has declared the glory of Kṛṣṇa, a. In his Laha Kisor Yuddha he sings the glory of Rima. Nilimbarīcīrya (13th century A.D.) wrote a commentary on the Viśnu, a purī, a by the name 'Amgsa Prakṣikā' where he glorifies Viśnu, a and Vaiśāva dharma on the basis of logic and philosophy. In his "Kalīkaumudī" he has described the mode of Viśnu, a worship. śrīdhara Bhatta (14th century A.D.), the writer of 'Vaiśā Pradip' began his work vowing to Viśnu, a, describing characteristics of Viśnu, a devotees, mode of Viśnu, a worship and merits in chanting hari-nīma etc. Hem Sarasvati, Kaviratna Sarasvati and Rudra Kandali in their works like 'Prahlad Garti', 'Jayadratha Baddh', 'Satyaki Pravesh' etc.gloried Viśnu, a worship. śrīdhara Kandali and some other poets like Durgībar, Pitimbar in the 14th century A.D. proved themselves as strong supporters of Vaiśāva dharma in their writings. Śrīmadva Mishra (early 15th century A.D.) in the invocation of his commentary on the 'āṅkīśaṅkā' saluted "paramātma, the Akṣara Brahma as the ultimate controller of both purusa and prakṛti" (Sastri 24).
In the later part of the 1st millennium A.D., adoption of Viṣṇu's name and its synonyms as a personal name became common and like to-day's custom, in early days also personal names were given to the name of common deities of popular worship. Synonyms of Viṣṇu were given as personal names as we find in the Nidhīnpur grant the names like Mādhava, Govardhana, Gopīla, Saḍāvarṇa, Keśava, Jambūrdana etc. Again in various grants we find the mention of Agata, Nṛṣya, Puruṣottama, Hārī, Upendra, Visvadeva, Kṛṣṇa et al. Some writers hold the view that even the personal names of persons such as Vanamalla and those of the Brahmanas like Mādhava, Keśava, et al. indicate people's faith in Viṣṇu.

However, the nature of early Vaiṣṇavism in Assam corresponded to the Bhīgavatism of the Gupta period, which brought into harmony various cults of Viṣṇu like that of the Vedic Brihmatism, Nṛṣya, of the Pañcarātras, Kṛṣṇa, Visvadeva of the Saivaśītas and Gopīla of the Abhira tribe.

The origin of Vaiṣṇavism in Odisha lies in the Vedic religion. It is closely associated with the Jagannath cult. Jagannatha has been mentioned in the Īg Veda. He is Viṣṇu, avatāra god. Ākārca described him as identical with the great Brihmatī God, Puruṣottama of the Gītā. In the Vana-parva of the Mahābārata, there is the mention of Indradjugama who is believed to have installed the caturdham idol at Puruṣottama kāṭetra. “Before it”, Mahatab says, “Viṣṇu was worshipped at Puri in the form of Nilamādhava” (515). Besides it, Brahmapurī, a and Bihārīradhyapura, reveal that “the worship of Viṣṇu in the form of Puruṣottama at Puruṣottama Kāṭetra was in practice during the Puranic ages” (Saraladasa-Mahābārata Madhyaparva, p. 339). During the Gupta period Vaiṣṇavism spread far and wide. So also the cult entered Odisha. The Mitharas, feudal kings owing allegiance to the Gupta emperors were responsible for rearing the Vaiṣṇava faiths in their kingdom during the 5th-6th century A.D. The names of the kings, donees and others found in the plates indicate that Vaiṣṇavism had a deep root in Odishan soil in the early period.

In the Koroshondī plates of Viṣṇikbivarman, the king declared himself as “Paramadīvata” and one donee possesses a Vaiṣṇava name Viṣṇuṣaman. Similar epithet has been used by Ṣūlīvarman in his Biranga plate. King Pravanjanamaivaraṇa in a plate declared himself as “Bhīgavata Svēnt Nṛṣya, apidmadhyatīh. This grant records donation of some land to the Brahmanas on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Kṛṣṇa. In the 6th-7th century A.D, Prasamamitra of Sarabhapura
Dynasty in north-west Odisha issued some gold coins bearing the figure of Garu•a, flanked by a cakra on the right and a conch on the left. A plate discovered from Padagadha village of Koraput begins with an invocation to Hari (Vi•u) where it is recorded that the king Skandavarmana belonging to Nala ruling house had built a shrine for Vi•u, after he had recovered his lost fortune. The Patatakella plate of ativarj•a bear Va•at• avs names of the donees. The Mitalapore plate of Somadatta dated back to 629 or 639 A.D. refers to the Boar incarnation of Vi•u. During the rule of Satidhavas, Trivara•va, the king declared himself a “Paramavat•a•ava” in his Bonda Rajim and the Balada plates. The R•jim plates contain the royal seal with the emblem of Garu•a, a cakra, a conch and a flower. Trivara•va’s son Namari•ja also claimed himself a “Paramavat•a•ava” in his Andhabhara plates. The Sirpur plate refers to the elder brother of Mahisavagupta comparing him with the mighty Balurima. During the rule of Bhaumakara dynasty Va•at• avs•a thrived in Odisha. In her Dhenk•n•l plate Tribhavana Mahidevi declared herself as a “Paramavat•a•avi”, the devout worshipper of Vi•u. In her Baad plates she has been styled as “Paramabh•ttarka Mah•r•idhrija Paramesvar•i” and Paramavat•a•avi. In other plates issued by her successors she has been described as a devout worshipper of Hari. Tribhavana’s grandson Gayada is said to have possessed the glory similar to Vaikuntha, as mentioned in the T•cher plate issued by Savakaradeva. In the Hindol plate it is hoped that Subhakaradeva would continue his reign as long as Laks•mi with lotus in her hand sits in the heart of the enemy of Madhu. Even the employees who have engraved or heated plates bear Visnu•ite names. From the plates of Bhaumakara period we find names like Hara•v•dana, Rabhasavardhana and Ramavardhana, Niriya, akara, Balabhada•a.

During the Somava•sts who were avowed Siktas, Brihmanical religious faiths also had its popularity. In the Narasimhapap plates of king Yay•ti the king is described as the representative of Madhusudana, Vi•u, and in the plates preserved in the Patna museum he is referred to as born like Vi•u. The Sonepur plate of Janmejaya records the gift of a village to the temple of Edu•ya or Ke•ava.

Va•at• avs•a seems to have reached its zenith during the Ganga period. The Narasimhapap plate refers to the king Hastivar•a’s grant of a village to god Niriya, who lives in the seven seas and who is the lord of seven worlds. The Korup plates dated saka year 1034 (1112 A.D.) mentions that Anantavar•ma Choda•n•gadeva adopted a title like “Paramamahesvar•a, Paramavat•a•ava and Paramabhrm•anga” while
in his Vishakapatnam plate in the saka year 1040 he used the epithet “ParamavaiÀ¸ava”. The Dasgoba copper plate of R¡j¡ R¡j¡deva II records the construction of the Jagannatha temple in the vicinity of the sea by Chodagangadeva.

Epigraphs and inscriptions found from time to time also give evidence of the prevalence of VaiÀ¸avism in early Odisha. Some sculptural representations of the Sailoddbhavas period trace the existence and popularity of VaiÀ¸avism among some sections of the society. Two stone images of áaÄkarÀa, a and K¤À¸a V¡sudeva, now kept on the bank of the Bindus¡gara at Bhubaneswar, are dated back to the seventh century A.D. Another stone image of K¤À¸a, a in his feat of Kilkadadamana, now kept in the Odisha State Museum, and a few images recovered from the Pr¡chi valley give evidence of the presence of VaiÀ¸avism in the 7th century A.D. Odisha. The Sirpur stone inscription tells about the construction of the LakÀmana temple in Sirpur in the 8th century A.D. It has been mentioned in the stone plate, “Om namahye PuruÀottama (ViÀ¸u)”. This inscription describes different incarnations of ViÀ¸u including his N¤siÄha avat¡ra. In it the queen has invoked N¤siÄha avat¡ra of ViÀ¸u for the protection of the king. A stone sculpture of about 8th-9th century A.D. now preserved in Odisha State Museum depicting the scene of three images placed on a bullock cart being dragged by the people may be taken as the images of K¤À¸a, Balar¡ma and Subhadr¡. Two huge rock-cut images of ViÀ¸u Ananta¿ayana belonging to the 9th-10th century A.D. have been recovered from Siranga and Bhimakonda that prove about the popularity of VaiÀ¸avism in Odisha during the period. Mathur stone inscription from Madhya Pradesh records the journey of a Brahmin boy to the PuruÀottama kÀetra in OÈra country. During the Ganga rule a number of stone and temple inscriptions were made that mentioned about the popularity of VaiÀ¸avism in Odisha during the period. Madhakeswar temple inscription also mentions the name of a VaiÀ¸ava priest.

Popularity of VaiÀ¸avism in Odisha can be gauged from the numerous personal names corresponding with names and synonyms of ViÀ¸u, K¤À ¸a and N¡r¡ya¸a as taken by kings and common men before the 15th century A.D.

Literary sources also testify to the presence of VaiÀ¸avism in early Odisha. S.K. Patel mentions such pur¡nas like “Purusottam Mahatmya, Nil¡dri Mahoday¡, Pr¡chi M¡h¡tma, Mukti Cint¡mani, Kapila SaÄhit¡, Ek¡mra Pur¡na, Svarnadri Mahoday¡, Ek¡mra Chandrika, ArkakÀhetra M¡h¡tmya etc. that deal with
Vaiṣṇava theme (521). These purāṇas eulogize the sacredness of Puruṣottamakṣetra at Puri, Ekamra, Mahendragiri, Konarka etc. and speak high of the glory of ardha Jagannāth. Among the dramas dealing with the Vaiṣṇava theme the most important are Bentsambha Nītaka by Bhaṭṭā Nīrīṭa (7th century), Anarāgaragātha Nītaka by Murīḍi Mishra (11th century), Prabodhacandravijaya Nītaka by Kṛṣṇa Mishra (11th cent.), Parārīma Viṣṇa Nītaka by Gajapati Kapilendra īdeva (15th century). These dramas have culled their subject matter from the epics like Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata and also from different purāṇas. Again, popularity of Sīrāla Nīla's Odīa Mahābhārata composed in the 15th century A.D. tells much about the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism before the 15th century A.D. However, considering the popularity of Gītāgovinda composed by Jayadeva in the 12th century A.D. that celebrates the amorous dalliance of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, we can safely say that Vaiṣṇavism was popular in the early and pre-medieval Odisha.

Different sources pointed above help to reach the conclusion that the worship of Viṣṇu and His incarnations were there in Assam and Odisha from early times. Āśā Karadēva and Mādhavadeva in Assam and the Patacasakhīs in Odisha only popularized it in a reformed form. The cult has its origin in the solar cult of the Alpine-Iranians and Magians and was gradually developed into the worship of Viṣṇu and His incarnations under the Brāhmaṇical influence that was responsible for the Bhagavatism of the Gupta period (Ray Chaudhuri 104).

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