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EDITOR
DR. JAGAT CHANDRA KALITA



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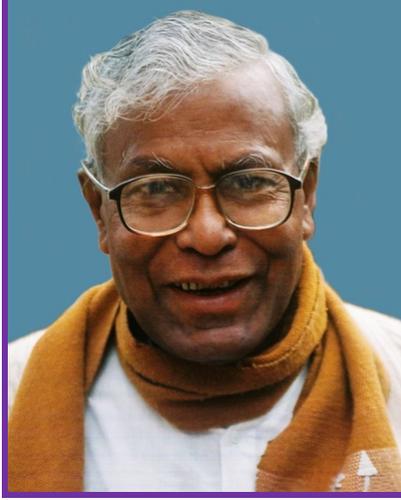
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Dr. Dharmeswar Chutiya

We deeply mourn the untimely death of Dr. Dharmeswar Chutiya, the First Editor of this Journal and Editor of many other publications of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha on 23/12/2013 and pray to God for the eternal peace of the departed soul-

Namo namo Nārāyaṇa prasanna huyoka Hari
 Kariyoka māyāka niryyāna/
 Āponāra mahimāka āpuni bekata kari
 Jivaka kariyo paritrāṇa//

On behalf of the Editorial Board

Jagat Ch. Kalita

(Dr. Jagat Chandra Kalita)

EDITORIAL

The society of the 16th century NE India, where all sorts of evil practices, growing from Śaktism, Tāntricism and decadent Buddhism were raging, gave birth to a Mahāpuruṣa, who in turn gave the society the greatest of social reformation, a scientific religion and above all, an incomparable culture full of all the best human excellence like vast number of classic literature, classical music, classical dance etc and also a group of scholars and artists to take forward his mission. He is our great Guru Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. The speciality of the reformation movement initiated by this genius is that it is good for all and ever. Even after 447 years of his departure from this world his teachings are equally effective and relevant for this society. Question may arise- what are the key features of his ideals that keep it ever relevant for human society? The answer may be traced from the following memorable excerpts-

"The special feature of the new tenet (of Śaṅkara) was its uncompromising hostility to the worship of minor gods and goddesses and the animal sacrifices. It was explained, on the basis of the Upaniṣads, that God was the only eternal, changeless spirit, the individual soul or Atman was a part of it, but all the rest was matter and, therefore, subject to change and decay. People, who worshipped matter, being oblivious of the everlasting spirit, were fools. Śaṅkaradeva was so particular in this respect that he spurned his own faithful follower Byāskalāi as soon as he came to know that the latter in order to save his son from the clutches of small-pox had offered pūjā to the goddess, Śītalā." Kanaklal Barua.

"The eka-Śaraṇa of the Gītā super imposed upon the idealism of dāśya-bhakti with sat-saṅga or companionship with bhaktas of the Śrīmadbhāgavata and the Hanumantī Kāṣṭhā, i.e., the unwavering and firm devotion and allegiance to one and the only one God as of Hanuman to Rāmachandra, is the main plank of Śaṅkara's creed. Self-surrender to the supreme God Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is the creator supporter and destroyer, and who is the lord and master of Kāla (Time) and Māyā (manifestations) and to Him alone-and not to any other minor god and goddess; the chanting of the names of that great God, and the meditating of Him are the instructions of which Śaṅkara's Vaiṣṇavism stands." Laksmīnath Bezbarua.

The Eka Śaraṇa system is not a religion of bargain and barter between God and men or of a sacrifice and easy recompense; it is one with exclusive emphasis on slow spiritual regeneration, on growth of a new spiritual outlook by laying flesh and spirit in the hand of the Lord. Life once surrendered, given over to the Lord, can no longer be lived according to the desires and impulses inherited from old Adam.
Banikanta Kakati

“This religion knew no caste, creed or colour, and a universal spirit is the main principle of this faith. ... His teachings embrace the lowliest of the lowly. In Kīrttanaghoṣa he says ‘In Bakti there is no distinction of castes, everybody has equal right to chant the Hari-Nāma.’ He simplified religion to such an extent that even the most ignorant and the humblest of all could join religious worship.” H.V. Srinivasan Murthy

“We wish to build a society free from caste and class, from exploitation of every kind- social and economic, racial and religious.” Dr. S. Radhakrishnan.

“All old social customs which divide our people into high and low on the basis of caste must be wiped out.” Jawaharlal Nehru.

Shouldering the great duty of preaching that very special religion i.e. Eka Śaraṇa Nāma Dharma in its pure form Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha has completed 83 glorious years with the support of all sections of people belong to NE India and abroad. I, on behalf of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, would like to express deep sense of gratitude to all the Bhaktas and supporters and pray to God for their peaceful life.

I would like to express here my gratitude to the scholars who have obliged us by sending their valuable articles for Volume XIV of Mahāpuruṣajyoti. I am sincerely thankful to honourable Padadhikar, Upapadadhikar, Pradhan Sampadak and all other executive members of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, along with the honourable President and members of sahitya sakha samiti and sahitya gaveshana parishad, for their kind advice in editing of this Volume. My special thanks are due to Bhaba Prasad Chaliha, Professor (Retd) Dept. of Assamese, G.U, Dr. Suresh Chandra Bora, Associate Professor, Cotton College, Dr. Indira Saikia Bora, Associate Professor, Pragjyotish College, Mr. Biswajit Kalita, Associate Professor, Suren Das College, Hajo and Mrs. Jyotishmita Bora, Project Associate, AHSEC, Assam for their noble help in all the processes of publication of this issue. The Proprietor and workers of Ellora Printers, Abhayapuri deserve our appreciation for printing the journal very sincerely.

Due to some inconveniences it has not been possible to publish some of the articles sent for this issue for which I am very sorry. I request all the scholars to extend cooperation in the future publications of this Journal by sending their valuable Research articles, suggestions and critical comments on the published issues of the same.

Despite my sincere efforts there may be some omissions or commissions in the publication of this volume of the Journal for which I beg unconditional apology from all the concerns. With regards-

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Jagat Ch. Kalita

Jagat Chandra Kalita
2nd February/2014

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THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THE ARTICLES ARE THOSE OF THE
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ŚRĪMANTA ŚAṅKARADEVA SAṄGHA IN GENERAL

HISTORY OF VAIṢṆAVISM IN INDIA

Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbarua

Lakshminath Bezbarua, the Sahityarathi of Assam was the most prominent among those who tried their best to find out the best in the Vaiṣṇavism of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and preached the creed in the modern Society for its betterment. He wrote two biographies of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva along with his ardent disciple Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva and numerous scholarly articles on different aspects of Vaiṣṇavism. His dedicated study on the Vaiṣṇavism in India made him so famous in those days that he was invited to Baroda by the Mahārājā to deliver a lecture on Vaiṣṇavism. Bezbarua delivered two great lectures there in presence of a galaxy of prominent scholars of India included great philosopher Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, great Scientist Chandrasekhar Venkataraman, Kabiguru Rabindra Nath Tagore etc. and received high admiration from them. Those two great lectures are still very relevant for the Assamese society and therefore, one of them is reprinted here. The text is adopted from Bezbarua Granthavali Volume III, edited by Jatindra Nath Goswami and published by Sahitya Prakash. The transliteration of the text is, however, done according to the tradition of this journal. Editor

The three great commentators of the vedāntic school of thought in India are Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya and Madhvācārya. All of them acknowledged the infallibility of the Upaniṣads, but differed in the interpretation of the same. Gauḍapāda preceded Śaṅkara, and there were earlier teachers too of the Advaitic School who preceded Gauḍapāda. But it is supposed that did not give prominence to Māyāvāda as Śaṅkara did. Rāmānuja came after Śaṅkara. His school of through called Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda can also be traced to remote antiquity, commencing from Bodhāyana, not removed far from the days of Vyāsa, the author of the Vedānta Sūtras. It owed its origin from even some centuries before the Christian era. Pāñcarātra Tantra by Nārada, and Bhagavadgītā are the foundation of the Bhāgavata school.

The seed of Vaiṣṇavism in South India was sown by the Ālwārs, who were the earliest Brāhmiṇ Messengers to the South. They gave prominence to the emotional side of Vaiṣṇavism and used the language of the people in their songs and hymns. From the 9th century down to the end of the 15th century an unbroken line of Vaiṣṇavite reformers existed in Southern India. This cult flourished there from the early years of the Christian era under the impetus given by the Ālwārs, who preached Bhakti and devotion to Kṛṣṇa in the local Tāmil, and songs composed in that language were very well understood by the mass. Viṣṇu with all his Avatāras, and particularly the Kṛṣṇa Avatāra, was the object of their deep veneration. They used to adore idols of Viṣṇu of different forms, although the mode of worship was mainly confined to recitation of his names and contemplation of his forms. Śatagopa among the later Ālwārs was very famous, and Andal, daughter of a Pariah devotee, was also included in the list of Ālwārs. The Ālwārs did not denounce Brāhmiṇs or the caste system. Their denunciations of the Buddhists and the Jains clearly show that their fight was with them, and they were their contemporaries. It is evident that the earlier Ālwārs owed their origin to Northern Vaiṣṇavites or Bhāgavata sects. Their teachings were based on the Bhagavadgītā and Bhāgavata. They represented the devotional and emotional side of the vaiṣṇava faith, unlike the Brāhmiṇ Ācāryas who came after them representing the intellectual and philosophical side.

Nāthamuni, the great Vaiṣṇava sage, was born in the first quarter of the ninth century. He was native of vīranārāyaṇapura, the modern Mannargudi of the Chidambaram Taluka, in the dominion of the Chola rulers of the day. He was probably a scion of some early Vaiṣṇava immigrant from northern India, who carried the Bhāgavata or the Pāñcarātra cult to the South in the early years of the Christian era. He was well-versed in the Sanskrit literature of the day and is said to have been an adept in Yoga. He composed many works on the Yoga philosophy, of which one called Nyāyatattva is an elaborate treatise covering the whole field of philosophy that was incorporated later on by the Rāmānujan school of thought. He was a great Tāmil scholar also. His provision for the recitation of the Tāmil Vedas, as the works were collectively called, during the festivals of the God Viṣṇu in temples, gave birth to a school of combined Sanskrit and Tāmil scholarship. Nāthamuni is traditionally considered to be the founder of the Rāmānujan school of thought, though his grandson Yamunācārya really laid the foundation for all the doctrines that are now ascribed to

Rāmānujan. They are practically based on the Pāñcarātra Tantra and are said to have been accepted by the Ālwār saint Śatagopa himself and by Nāthamuni after him. The Tāmil songs of Śatagopa are sung in various Vaiṣṇavite temples of this day, and Nāthamuni is said to have set them to music soon after his discovery of the work. Nāthamuni made an extensive tour in Western India, visiting Mathurā, Vṛndāvana and Dvārakā, the scenes of Kṛṣṇa-līlā, and went even to Badrīnātha on the north and Jagannāthakṣetra on the east.

So we clearly see that the Viśiṣṭādvaita school, which was consolidated and founded on a solid basis Rāmānuja, had many teachers of great repute who preceded him, such as Śatagopa, the author of the Thousand Tāmil Songs, and then Nāthamuni. Nāthamuni had eight pupils, of whom Puṇḍarīkākṣa was much celebrated. Puṇḍarīka was of an inferior caste.

Yamunācārya was the grandson of Nāthamuni. In order of succession he was the third from Nāthamuni. Kumārīlabhatta with his predecessor had held the field in philosophical speculations during the century immediately preceding Śaṅkara. Their tirade was against the philosophical Buddhism and its atheistic tendencies, and their stand was the sacrifice-ridden Pūrva Mīmāṃsā school. So both the Advaita and the Viśiṣṭādvaita schools were the simultaneous expression of reaction and protest against this school, of which Kumārila was a powerful exponent. The Vaiṣṇava school did not try to start a new philosophy, but based its teachings on Nārādīya Pāñcarātra and Bhāgavata and laid stress on a life of purity, high morality, worship and devotion to only one God who is above all the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. Although the Monism of Śaṅkara was greatly appreciated by the intellectual class, the masses people who were beyond the influence of Brāhmiṇs, hailed Vaiṣṇavism in delight, and came increasingly within its fold. Vaiṣṇavism checked the elaborate rituals, ceremonials, Vratas, fasts and feasts prescribed by Smṛtis and Purāṇas for the daily life of Hindu, and also the worship of various deities like the sun, the moon, the grahas or planets, etc., enjoined by the priestly Brāhmiṇ class for the sake of emoluments and gain. It enjoined the worship of no other deities except God Nārāyaṇa of Upaniṣad, who is the primal cause of sṛṣṭi (creation), sthiti (existence) and pralaya (destruction). It differs from the Advaitavādas, to whom one personal God is good as another, as both are simply of phenomenal nature. In the Rāmānuja school of thought there was practically nothing sectarian. Devotion to one deity was the teaching of this school, and the object was to enthrone Hinduism once

more on its old pedestal, restore it to the ancient purity of the Upaniṣad days and free it from the non-Aryān influences that had given it from the tāntric and worship of many Gods. It has brought the lower classes into the fold of practical Hinduism and extended to them the right and privilege of knowing God and attaining mukti (salvation).

Yamunācārya was born in the city of vīranārāyaṇapura, the modern Mannargudi in the South Arcot district, a few years after the beginning of the tenth century. Even in his boyhood his intelligence and retentive memory attracted the attention of his teachers, and easily topped the list of his school-mates. While he was a student he gained the favour of the chola king by defeating his court paṇḍit in Vedāntic disputation. The king granted him lands and emoluments, and he lived a life of luxury for some time. During this period he married and had four sons. He forgot the higher spiritual life lived by his grandfather, Nāthamuni. At last thought the intervention of Rāma Mīśra, the pupil of Puṇḍarīkākṣa, the awakening came, and discarding the life of a householder Yamunā became sanyāsī and devoted himself entirely to spiritual life. The Upaniṣads, the Gītā and Vedānta sūtra attracted his attention and like Śāṅkara he devoted himself to the task of their textual interpretation. He was deeply learned in the lore of philosophy and wrote several books dealing with the niceties of the faith he upheld. In his time the oral interpretations were mainly proceeded with. The formal embodiment of those interpretations was not reduced to written until the of Rāmānuja later on.

Rāmānujācārya the practical founder of the Viśiṣṭādvaita school, on whom the mantle of Yamunācārya fell, was born about the year 1017 A.D. Under Yamunācārya the Viśiṣṭādvaita had greatly developed and took a strong footing in Śrīraṅgapatnam and other places. But Rāmānuja, by composing philosophical works and committing to writing the special views that were being developed orally by Yamunācārya and his predecessors, gave the system solid foundation and made it more prominent. He attacked the interpretations of Śāṅkara of the very first famous passage of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad namely, tat tvam asi, "That thou art" the corner-stone of the Advaitavādis and also attacked the Māyāvāda of Śāṅkara as well as the Bhedābheda doctrines of the Bhāskara and the Madhvā schools of thought. After this he took up the question whether the Supreme deity is styled Viṣṇu or Śiva, or to be identified with the other Gods know to the Upaniṣads and concluded that Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa is

alone and the only one who can be so named and so identified. After this he wrote the Śrī-bhāṣya on the Vedānta Sutra, the great work on which the great school of the Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda stands. There various incidents in his life and some of them quite thrilling, which the space at my disposal to-day forbids me mention.

Rāmānuja was remarkable for his broad-mindedness burning sympathy for mankind in general, unselfishness, resourcefulness and absolute devotion to God. In recognizing merit in people, inferior in caste, he went farther than any other religious teacher of his time. His writings bear testimony to the fact of his having a keen intellect no harsh word even for his opponent in controversy and was always noted for his moderation. He is rightly held to be the founder of the Viśiṣṭādvaita school, which is a qualified non-dualism. According to him, God alone exists. All else that is seen are his manifestations, attributes of Śakti. The Advaitism also maintains that God alone exists, and all else is his manifestations. But Advaitism regards the manifestations as unreal and as results of Avidyā or Māyā. So practically ekamevādviṭya Brahman is reduced to a Being without any attributes. Rāmānuja regards the attributes as real and permanent, but they are subject to the control of the One Supreme Brahman in their modifications. According to his school of thought, the Oneness of God is compatible with the existence of His attributes.

I do not propose to go into the details of the niceties of discussions on thoughts of these two schools of philosophy to-day, as is not possible within the limited compass of speech, and as it will tire your patience. In short I would point out that the Viśiṣṭādvaita school would call Brahman sat and the rest asat, which undergoes change in its essence unlike Brahman. It can however, be safely concluded that Rāmānuja's philosophical conceptions, if studied carefully, would lead one to think that it entitled to high place among the world's philosophical thought and his system is a sound one, not attributes and the nature of the supreme Brahman.

It is to be regretted, however, that after Rāmānuja's death and within the course of a century or two, sectarianism and exclusiveness become the characteristic of the class. As Sir R.G. Bhandrakar says, the tendency of his system seemed to give an exclusive Brāhmaṇic form to the traditional method of Bhakti or devotion to God. This may account for the greater predominance of the Brāhmaṇic element in the sect. Dogmas and one-sidedness got the better of the

true religiousness and moral progress of the community as a whole; and the divergence of views created a divergence of sub-sects among the followings, although the doctrinal differences between them are trivial. Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda of Rāmānuja has also in course of time shared the fate of the other few practical religions in not being able to preserve itself unsullied by unseemly disputes and schisms that overtake the pristine purity of the teachings and mode of life enjoined to be led under the aegis and inspiration of the original founder.

I now come to Northern India and try to give a brief account of Vaiṣṇavism current there. It cannot be correct to state that all the Vaiṣṇavism found in Northern India was imported from the South, and that they were the legacy of Rāmānuja and his predecessors and successors. The birth place of Kṛṣṇa and his cult were by no means lying dormant all along since the early centuries of the Christian era, that sent forth votaries and preachers such as those early Ālwārs to the South to preach the cult. But it cannot be denied that Vaiṣṇavism in the North received a fresh impetus from the South from the great Ācārya Rāmānuja and his successor's teachings and powerful propaganda.

In Northern India Rāmānanda, vallabhācārya, Nimbāditya, Śrī-Śaṅkaradeva and Śrī-Caitanyadeva were the Vaiṣṇava reformers of great repute. Rāmānanda is said to have been the fifth in apostolic succession from Rāmānuja, and he lived towards the end of the fourteenth century A.D. It is generally said that there are four main sampradāyas or sects of Vaiṣṇavism, viz., Rāmānuja, Viṣṇuswāmī, Madhvācārya and Nimbāditya. All other current minor sects are said to have been included in these four main sampradāyas. It is also said Lakṣmī acknowledged Rāmānuja; Brahmā Madhvācārya; Rudra Viṣṇuswāmī and Sanaka, Sananda, Sanātana and Sanatkumāra Nimbāditya respectively. Rāmānanda had twelve disciples from various lower classes. Ruidās was a cobbler; Pipā a Rājput; Dhannā a Jāth; Kabīr a Mahomedan; and Sen a barber. Some of these disciples founded separate sects of great celebrity; and as regards the mode of religious worship divergence of views with the main system of Rāmānanda is very marked. Rāmānanda worshipped Rāma and asserted the supreme efficacy of the chanting and meditating of Rāmanāma, and practically discarded social distinctions. The Bhaktamālā, a book written by Nābhājī, a pupil of Rāmānanda or one of his successors, is practically the scripture of the Rāmānandīs. Nābhājī belonged to the Dom caste. The famous Tulsīdās who was seventh in descent from Rāmānanda wrote the Hindi Rāmāyaṇa, which is a book

looked upon with great veneration by and the only textbook on religion for millions of people in upper India. Rāmānuja wrote his books in Sanskrit, and Brāhmiṇs as a rule got the upper hand in expounding his cult; whereas Rāmānanda and his followers wrote their books in the current language of the people and these books, therefore, became accessible to everyone, a fact that made easy for even the people on other castes to aspire for the status of a guru.

Jayadeva, the renowned author of the Gītagobinda flourished in the 12th century. Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa were his objects of worship. His Gītagovinda gave a great impetus to Caitanya during his life and cult in the beginning of the 16th century, about which I will speak briefly later on. Kabīr made spiritual projects against the current Hinduism and Mohomedanism, and wanted to reconcile both the religions like Nānaka, the founder of Sikhism in the Punjab, later on. Kabīrapanthīs do not give much importance to following the forms and modes of current Hinduism. The chanting of religious hymns is their method of Upāsana or worship of god.

Minor sub-sects like khāki, Molukdāsī, Dādupanthī, also owed their origin to Rāmānandīs. They worshipped Rāma and Sītā, and the method is to contemplate and chant Rāma-nāma. There are many sub-sect belonging to Dādupanthīs, and the Nāgas are one of them. Nāgas fight soldiers also when they are employed on remuneration. Sometime past the Mahārājā of Jaipur had about 10,000 Nāga soldiers.

Ruidās, one of the 12 disciple of Rāmānanda, had also founded a separate sect. From Sen, the barber disciple Rāmānanda, another sect came into existence.

In 1776 Sambat a man called Rāmsaran founded a sect. of Vaiṣṇavas called Rāmsnehī after his name.

I have mentioned before the four main sampradāyas of Vaiṣṇavism. Brahma-sampradāya is the second. Madhvācārya was the founder of this sect and the sampradāyas is called Mādhvī after his name. This sect is of a later date than the Śrī Sampradāys of Rāmānuja. Madhvācārya was born in 1121 Śakābda in Tulab in Deccan. Except Sanyāsīs and Brāhmiṇs no other people have any right to become a dikṣā-guru in this sampradāya. Dikṣā-gurus even do not give Dikṣā to the people of the lowest class. Every guru inherits his Śiṣyas or disciples as if they were paternal property, and can sell or mortgage the right of guruship if he so desires. Madhvācārīs are dvaitavādīs. They acknowledge the separate entities

of jīva and Brahma. They, therefore, differ from the philosophical conceptions of both Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja.

The third main sampradāya is the Rodra-sampradāya, of which Vallabhācārya was the founder. He was born about 1749 A.D. in Telaṅgana and settled at Muttra Bālagopāla or the child Kṛṣṇa is the object of worship for the devotees of his sect. The practical indulgence in the rhapsodies of the Bhāgavata and the Gītāgovinda of Jayadeva tended to increase luxury in the high priests of this sect and its followers to such an extent that a case that went up to the Supreme Court of Bombay in 1862 brought out to the public notice certain practices of this sect that do not do credit to them.

The sampradāya of Vallabhācārya traces its origin from Viṣṇuswāmī, the commentator of veda. Viṣṇuswāmī made disciples from Sanyāsāśramīs and Brāhmiṇs only. It is said that Vallabhācārya, stepping into the shoes of the successors of Viṣṇuswāmī, devoted himself to the expounding of his cult. Bārtā is the name of the chief grantha or scripture of the Vallabhācāryas. Expositions in the Bārtā go to establish a kind of oneness of jīva and Brahman. Vallabhācārya's teachings contain certain unique doctrines quite unusual in the Hindu religion. He says, in God's Upāsānā no fasting, no tiresome methods, no tapasyā are necessary. Without discarding delicacies of food, luxuries of the world such as riches and raiments and other amenities of life, worship of God is possible. This led the Vaiṣṇavas of this sect to extreme luxury and hankering after worldly pleasures. The Goswāmīs or spiritual head of this sect are married men. The devotees or their disciples pamper them with various kinds of rich food and clothing, and offer their gurus their tan, man and dhana , i.e. body, soul and wealth. It is evident, therefore, that the gurus wield a vast influence over their disciples. Like the disciples, the gurus also go on doing business in trade and commerce. Gopāla Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā and images of his different incarnations are worshipped in their temples. The commentary which Vallabha wrote on the Bhāgavata is their chief book for the conduct of life and faith. He wrote several other books also in Sanskrit, and also one or two in the current language of the people.

In several parts of India, particularly in Gujarāt and Mālwā great many rich and very well-to-do people are followers on the Vallabhācārya Vaiṣṇavism. In Muttra and Ajmere they have got several maṭhs or temples.

A small sect of Vaiṣṇavism originated with Mīrā Bāi. She was married to the Rāṇā of Udaipur, but as she was a staunch Vaiṣṇava, she could not agree with her husband and his relations, who were Śāktas, and had to leave their protection. After roaming over many places she passed the rest of her life, meditating and chanting name of her Iṣṭa Devata, Ranchhod an image of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa.

The founder of the fourth main sampradāya was Nimbāditya. He lived near Vṛndāvana. His original name was Bhāskarācārya. He was called Nimbāditya later on, and people belonging to his sect is called Nimāt. Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā is their God of worship, and the Śrīmat Bhāgavta is their main scripture. Nimbāditya had two distinguished disciples, named Keśava Bhatta and Harivyāsa. Two separate sub-sects own their origin from these two. There are many Nimāts in western India and particularly, in places near Muttra.

In Mahārāṣṭra there is a sect called Vithalbhaktas. In Gujarāt, Karṇāt and Central India also disciples of this sect are to be seen. Their another name is Vaiṣṇava-vīr. Their God of worship is Pāṇḍuraṅgā, Vithal or Vithobā. They consider him as the ninth incarnation of Viṣṇu i.e. Buddhadeva. They have got a celebrated temple on the northern bank of the Bhima river in Deccan. They have got a large mass of sectarian literature, such as *Bhaktavijaya*, *Pāṇḍuraṅg-māhātmya*, *Hari-vijaya*, etc. A saint, called Puṇḍalik, is said to have been the founder of this sect. Probably he flourished in the fourteenth century of the Christian era.

This sect gives prominence to the love between the upāsya and the upāsaka, i.e. the object of worship and the worshipper. Although they do not place much stress on leading a life of seclusion or giving up the worldly life yet there are many devotees of this sect who renounce worldly life and pleasure. According to them Pandharpur is the chief place for pilgrimage. While the Gosvāmīs or gurus of other sects exercise sole and strict authority over their disciples, the gurus of this sect do not do that. They do not regard the Vedas and Brāhmiṇs as much supreme as the followers of other sects do. They not place great stress on the caste distinctions and on festive occasions take meals from the hand of everyone. There is much similarity to be seen between the Jagannāthakṣetra temple and the Pāṇḍuraṅg temple with regard to mahāprasāda or anna offered to the deity and taken by the devotees afterwards. This sect may be taken as an attempt at reconciliation between Buddhism and Hindu Vaiṣṇavism.

I will say something now briefly about the Caitanya sampradāya in Bengal. Caitanya is generally regarded as the founder of the sampradāya. He was born in 1486 A.D. in the city of Nadia or Navadvīpa on the bank of the Ganges. His father was Jagannātha Mīśra, and his mother's name was Śacī, Caitanya, whose real name was Viśvambhara, renounced the world and turned out a Sannyāsi and preacher at the age 24. He died or disappeared in about 1533 A.D. at Purī or Jagannātha-kṣetra. Advaitacārya and Nityānanda were his chief helpers in propagating his creed. His followers not only regard him as the founder of the faith but also as an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa and the main object of worship. There had been a bitter controversy between the Brāhmiṇ paṇḍits of Bengal and his followers as to his being an incarnation. They quoted Vedas, Smṛtis and Purāṇas to refute the claim sought to be established by his followers, depending mainly on the śloka said to be from Ananta-Saṁhitā. Caitanya or, more properly, Viśvambhara's early life was frolicsome, mischievous and annoying to his parents. At his ninth year he was invested with this sacred thread and after that attended the ṭol of a pundit and studied grammar. After that he studied Nyāya under sārvaśāstra Bhattācārya. He married twice- the second one, named Viṣṇupriyā, after the demise of his first wife Lakṣmī. At about the age of twenty he was initiated into the Vaiṣṇava faith by Īśvarapurī a disciple of Mādhavendrapurī, whose descent as a spiritual guru is traced from the great Mādhavācārya. After his return from Gayā where to he had undertaken a trip, he became subject to trances and visions and indulging in talking of and thinking of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and his Vṛndāvana līlā with the gopīs. He imagined himself to be Rādhā and acted her part to perfection. When he was overpowered by the extreme āveśa or the idea of Kṛṣṇa he used to do strange things such as taking Kṛṣṇa's seat on the āsana or dais reserved for the idol and imagine himself as the object of worship and proclaim likewise. Advaitacārya, an elderly Vaiṣṇava paṇḍit and scholar, who became Viśvambhara's follower afterwards, had doubted Viśvambhara's claim. He was one day literally beaten by Viśvambhara and forced to accept the truth of his divine nature. After this Viśvambhara renounced his worldly life and took to sanyāsa having been initiated under the name of Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya by one Keśava Bhāratī, who lived in a village about 18 miles distant from Nuddea. Hunter in his *Orissa* says, "The adoration of Caitanya has become a sort of family worship throughout Orissa. In Purī there is a temple

specially dedicated to his name and many little shrines are scattered over the country.”

After taking sanyāsa at his 24th year, caitanya roamed over different places in India, such as Muttra, purī, etc., and preached the doctrines of Kṛṣṇa worship. The latter part of his life, i.e., for 18 years he lived in purī and devoted to the worship of Jagannāthadeva, and preached prema-bhakti. The span of his life was altogether 48 years. The people of his sampradāya regard Advaita and Nityānanda also as aṁsa-Avatāra, i.e., part-incarnation of Viṣṇu.

Although the Caitanya sampradāya traces its origin to Madhvācārya, the sect of vallabhācārya has great affinity with this sect. Both Caitanya adopted the worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and there can be little doubt that Jayadeva's Gītagovinda and the Maithili poet Vidyāpati's songs played an important part in moulding his thoughts. The attitude of the soul to God was represented in his cult by the attitude of the beloved towards her lover. The love towards the gallant was considered the highest kind that the soul could entertain towards god. The ardent longing of the gopīs for Kṛṣṇa was considered typical of the soul's longing for the God. In the case of the devoted, who are morally strong, this mode of madhura rasa worship could not lead them to abuse. But human nature is human all the same. Those who are not strong in nature that way could hardly restrain themselves from being led to pitfalls, and that was the main reason why after Caitanya's death the sampradāya gave birth to numerous sub-sects, that fell into reprehensible practices and moral degradation.

Caitanya had a few converts from among Mahomedans amongst his followers. He did not preach any Mahomedan doctrine, nor like Kabīr or guru Nānaka did try to bring a rapprochement between these two religion essentially so different. It appears that within the pale of Hindu religion he recognized no caste distinctions when the devotee becomes a Vaiṣṇava or a worshipper of Kṛṣṇa. But the cult of bhakti giving prominence to madhura rasa soon after him degenerated into such a path that the excesses and objectionable practices committed by the lower orders among his followers under its aegis naturally evoked criticism and condemnation that cannot be called unjust. As in Orissa and Vṛndāvana, in his native district in Nuddea and other neighbouring places, maṭhs or temples have since been established, where Caitanya's image came to be actually worshipped as the image of God. Even before his death and so on after, it became the vogue to install his image in temples for worshipping him as a

divinity, and the incidents in his life were magnified and given a shape so as to establish him as being of divine nature. The deification of great saints and bhaktas is inherent in human nature and particularly in Hinduism and the latest instance is the humble saint Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahansa of Bengal.

I now come to Śaṅkaradeva of Assam, my province which has fallen from its ancient greatness and is not very well known nowadays to the people of other parts of India. In ancient times it was called Prāgjyotiṣapura. About one thousand years before the Christian era the greater part of lower Bengal was probably under the sea, while a considerable portion of Northern Bengal was included in Prāgjyotiṣa, which was then a powerful kingdom and was often mentioned in the great epics, the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. The Aryān wave extended to Kāmarūpa – the name by which Prāgjyotiṣa came to be known afterwards- directly from Videha and Magadha long before the lower Bengal became habitable. Mr. Pargiter in his book named ‘Ancient Countries in Eastern India’ writes that the kingdom known as Prāgjyotiṣa included, at the time of the Mahābhārata was, a greater part of modern Assam together with the Bengal districts of Jalpāiguri, Cooch-Bihār, Raṅpur, Bogrā, Maymensing, Dhacca, Tippera, part of Pabna and probably a part of East Nepāl. In the Rāmāyaṇa it is mentioned that Amṛtarāja was the son of Kuśa and grandfather of the famous ṛṣi Viśvāmitra. Viśvāmitra performed his austerities on the banks of the Kausika, the modern Kosi river. To go into the details about the Prāgjyotiṣa kingdom that came to be known as Kāmarūpa during the paurāṇic period would be out of place in to-day’s lecture. In any case it is clear that Prāgjyotiṣa or the ancient kingdom of Kāmarūpa-the central portion of which is now called Assam-was a much larger kingdom than most of the other kingdoms mentioned in the Mahābhārata : and it was larger than most of the other sixteen Mahājanapadas existing during the time of Gautama, the Buddha. The poet Kālidāsa, who, according to Vincent Smith, flourished in the first part of the fifth century, also mentions Kāmarūpa and Prāgjyotiṣa as names of the same kingdom. Prāgjyotiṣa was the seat of learning in Astrology or Astronomy in ancient India. It is generally recognized that the cult of the yoni and liṅgam is of pre-Aryān origin. The shrine of Kāmākhyā in modern Gauhati in Assam, which represents yoni, is associated with the pre-Aryān king, Naraka, who is reputed to have been the guardian of the shrine. In the seventh century the great Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chang during his travels over various places of India, visited Kāmarūpa also. He did not find

Buddhism to have take root there. Some centuries after his visit Kāmākhyā became the reputed centre of the Vajrayāna system to Buddhism known as the Sahajīā cult, along with the Udayana, Śrīhatta and Pūrṇagiri. The debased practices enjoyed by this system of tāntric Buddhism earned for Kāmarūpa-Kāmākhyā the reputation of its being a land of magic sorcery, or as the original center of tāntric Hinduism. It was to extirpate this system of debased religion the great Vaiṣṇava religious reformer of Assam, Mahāpuruṣa Śrī-Śaṅkaradeva began his preaching towards the end of the 15th century. During the next century he and his disciple and associate, Mādhavadeva, a Kāyastha, and Dāmodaradeva, a Brāhmiṇ succeeded in suppressing the “Buddha” rites, and spreading the new Vaiṣṇava tenet far and wide.

Śaṅkaradeva was born in 1449 A.D. He was the descendant of the Śiromaṇi Bhuṇa Caṇḍīvara, a kāyastha by caste whom DurlabhaNārāyaṇa, the king of Kamatā settled in kāmarūpa about the middle of the 14th century. Kusumavara, the great-grandson of Caṇḍīvara and father of Śaṅkaradeva migrated to Bardoā within the Ahom kingdom, when Viśvasimha , the king and founder of Cooch-Bihar kingdom, in order to establish his undisputed supremacy in Kāmarūpa was engaged in suppressing the powerful Bhuṇa chiefs. Kusumavara was a devotee of Śiva, and he named his son Śaṅkara, as the gift of his Iṣṭa Devatā. Śaṅkara’s mother died three days after his birth, and he was brought up by his paternal grandmother. Sometime after this, Śaṅkara’s father also breathed his last. Being endowed with natural gifts, Śaṅkara soon developed a strong physique and quick brain. He outclassed all the Brāhmiṇ and Kāyastha boys of his age in study as well as in sports. On attaining manhood Śaṅkara married and settled down to domestic life. A daughter was born to him, and he gave her in marriage to a Kāyastha youth when she attained the proper age. Śaṅkara’s wife died after this.

After the death of his wife Śaṅkara set out on a pilgrimage to the holy places of India. During his long pilgrimage of twelve years he visited different parts of India such as Purī, Muttra, Vṛndāvana, Badarikāśrama and met Kabīr, with whom he contracted friendship. At the end of his travels he returned home and re-married, having been convinced that in order to elevate oneself spiritually and to be of service to humanity at the same time, one need not renounce the world. He then began to preach his tenets of Neo- Vaiṣṇavism with full vigour far and wide.

Writers ignorant of historical facts have often represented that Śāṅkaradeva's school of NeoVaiṣṇavism in Assam is an off-shoot of the Caitanya movement in Bengal. This is misconstruction and misrepresentation of real historical facts. Śāṅkaradeva was born in 1449 A.D. whereas Caitanya was born in 1486 A.D. Caitanya was not born when Śāṅkara set out on his pilgrimage. When Caitanya turned an ascetic in 1510 A.D. Śāṅkara's Vaiṣṇavism was in its full swing. Śāṅkara could not have met Caitanya during his first pilgrimage. But during his second pilgrimage from Barpetā he met Caitanya about 1530 A.D. at Purī. There was no conversation between them as Caitanya was then observing silence, and therefore by pouring water from his kamaṇḍalu Caitanya indicated that devotion to God is continuous and directed to one channel only like the flow of running water, was his creed. Śāṅkara did not long survive after his return from the second pilgrimage. He died in Cooch-Bihar in the year 1568 A.D. after having attained a very long life of 119 years.

The idolisation of the female element which formed the marked feature of Northern Vaiṣṇavism and of the Caitanya movement in Bengal, is conspicuous only by its total absence from Śāṅkara's Vaiṣṇavism. Caitanya's conceptions of madhura rasa or love relations between the lover and the beloved as the mode of worship of God by His devotee, to which he gave prominence, does not find favour in Śāṅkaradeva's school of thought. There is neither the combined worship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa of Caitanya, nor of Gopī- Kṛṣṇa of Vallabhācārya, nor of Rukmiṇī-Kṛṣṇa of Nāmadeva, nor of the Sītā-Rāma of Rāmānanda. The eka-Śaraṇa of the Gītā super imposed upon the idealism of dāśya-bhakti with sat-saṅga or companionship with bhaktas of the Śrīmadbhāgavata and the Hanumantī Kāṣṭhā, i.e., the unwavering and firm devotion and allegiance to one and the only one God as of Hanuman to Rāmachandra, is the main plank of Śāṅkara's creed. Self-surrender to the supreme God Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is the creator supporter and destroyer, and who is the lord and master of Kāla (Time) and Māyā (manifestations) and to Him alone and not to any other minor god and goddess; the chanting of the names of that great God, and the meditating of Him are the instructions of which Śāṅkara's Vaiṣṇavism stands. Though essentially based upon the Śrīmadbhāgavata, it has nothing of doctrinaire about it. It gives prominence to the chanting of Rāma's and Kṛṣṇa's names as well as the other thousand names of the Creator and recognises in so many names only so many symbols of that one state of supreme

bliss of the liberated soul. That is why the Vaiṣṇavism preached by Śaṅkaradeva is called eka-śaraṇa nāma-dharmma- the religion of supreme devotional surrender to one, i.e., Kṛṣṇa, whose name is Rāma, Hari, Vāsudeva, Janārdana and a thousand more. The conception of relationship between God and his devotee is like that between an all powerful and all merciful master and his servant whose humility and self-surrender to his master is extreme. Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva is uncompromising in its attitude against the worship of other gods and goddesses. Bhakti or devotion of a devotee to the One becomes vyabhicārī, i.e., vitiated, even by going to the place of worship of other gods or goddesses, or bowing his head with reverence before them, or by eating the prasāda or offerings there. The Upaniṣad says, *ekam eva advitīyam*, 'He is the One without a second.' *taṁ īśvarānāṁ paramaṁ maheśvaram, taṁ devātānaṁ paramaṅca daivatam, paṭiṁ paiināṁ paramaṁ parastāt, vidāma devaṁ bhuvaneśam idyam (?)* 'One who is the Lord of the lords, One who is God of the gods, One who is the Protector of the protectors I only know Him the greatest of all, the resplendent, worshipful and the Master of the Universe.' It seems as if the ancient voice of the Upaniṣads with its stem gaze at the One, broke into an ejaculation in the teachings of this great religious reformer of ancient Kāmarūpa-Assam, where Śākta worship with all the admixtures of tāntric Buddhism and tribal ceremonial customs prevailed.

Śaṅkara's ancestors were all Śāktas. Mādhavadeva, his renowned disciple, a man of almost unmatched scholarship, was a Śākta before his conversion into the new creed of Śaṅkara's Vaiṣṇavism. Śaṅkara's Kṛṣṇa is the One God above all gods without a complimentary second. K.L. Barua, Deputy Commissioner, Assam (retired), President, Kāmarūpa Anusandhān Samiti, writes in his book *Early History of Kāmarūpa* (Published lately), "The special feature of the new tenet (of Śaṅkara) was its uncompromising hostility to the worship of minor gods and goddesses and the animal sacrifices. It was explained, on the basis of the Upaniṣads, that God was the only eternal, changeless spirit, the individual soul or Atman was a part of it, but all the rest was matter and, therefore, subject to change and decay. People, who worshipped matter, being oblivious of the everlasting spirit, were fools. Śaṅkaradeva was so particular in this respect that he spurned his own faithful follower Byāskalāi as soon as he came to know that the latter in order to save his son from the clutches of small-pox had offered pūjā to the goddess, Śītālā. On the other hand, Caitanya, it

appears, did not ban worship of the numerous deities and is said to have himself worshipped Śiva though he was a Vaiṣṇava.’

The political situation of the country at the time was not very favourable for Śaṅkaradeva freely to preach the doctrines of his creed. Several rival powers professing divergent religious views were creating ferment in the country, and Śaṅkaradeva had to proceed carefully in his mission, even at the risk of his life. Although he did not set much value on the caste system, he did not throw society into confusion by entirely demolishing it. He declared spiritual equality for all men and loudly proclaimed that even a Caṇḍāla is superior to a Brāhmiṇ if that Caṇḍāla becomes Hari-bhakti-parāyana, i.e., if he becomes devoted to Hari. He rejected caste superiority as a ground of respect among men, otherwise equally venerable, as lovers of God. Although the giddy levelling of caste orders was not discernible in him he had among his disciples people from the Mahommedan community, from aboriginal races of Assam, as well as from high class learned Brāhmiṇs. The most pious amongst them held the forefront position in his system irrespective of his caste, and founded religious orders of their own.

In Assam as in other parts of India the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkara met with strong opposition from the Brāhmiṇ priesthood, as it was a crusade against the excesses of the priest craft.

The Bhāgavata cult of Śaṅkara by cutting at the very root of the false Brāhmiṇical ceremonials roused their anger. They managed to gain the ears of the Ahom king of Assam, who were but newcomers and did not understand much of real Hindu traditions. They prosecuted Śaṅkara at the instigation of the Brāhmiṇs as tampering with the popular Hindu faith and a trial in the court was arranged. Śaṅkara however got off free, with credit, from the trial. Although the Brāhmiṇs were foiled in their attempt at the time, further hostility did not cease. After this Śaṅkara had to undergo a lot of troubles, which culminated in the beheading of his son-in-law at the order of the Ahom king. In great disgust Śaṅkara left the jurisdiction of the Ahom kings, and sought refuge in the lower Assam which was then within the boundary of the Koch king of Cooch-Bihar. Although he took his shelter in the kingdom of Naranārāyaṇa, the great king of Cooch-Bihar who was a Hindu, the hostilities of the Brāhmiṇs followed him up there too, and he had to face a big trial in the court once again, out of which also he came out victorious in resplendent glory. The king was greatly impressed with his piety and learning, and expressed a desire to become his disciple. But

Śaṅkara refused, as it would not be possible for kings to observe strictly in its entirety the eka-śaraṇa dharmma, i.e., the religion of love with its undeviating devotion to the One, and also the absolute prohibition of animal sacrifices. He tried his utmost to dissuade the king from his expressed desire, as by virtue of his position, a king would have to worship other gods and goddesses. To keep his creed in its pristine purity, no deviation could be allowed. But the king persisted, and Śaṅkara was in a dilemma. Being helpless, he asked the king to observe fasting and in prayer next day to perform the initiatory rites. Next morning when the King's messengers came to take Śaṅkara to the king for performing the initiation, they only found Śaṅkara washing his hands and feet, then putting on new clothings, then sitting in a devotional mood under a peepul tree and chanting beautiful hymns composed by himself, and finally surrendering himself to the Supreme Being of his love and devotion by yogic communion, and thus passing away. Śaṅkara's eldest son was with him at the time; but Śaṅkara left the world nominating Mādhavadeva, his favourite disciple, to succeed him to his apostolic seat.

As I have already mentioned, Śaṅkara built his system upon the ethics of the Gītā and the Bhāgavata. He evolved a creed to wipe off the prevailing social and other evils that were current in the name of religion, and at the same time to be an expression of the deepest philosophy. Kṛṣṇa was the all-supreme God of adoration for him; and he rejected the feminine element of the Rādhā cult. He composed many books in his country's vernacular for the propagation of his creed; the Kīrtana-ghoṣā was the chief amongst them. In the Kīrtana-ghoṣā he lays down :

śāstras say that Dhyāna or supreme communion by concentration was for the Satya-yuga, that worship by yajña or rituals was for Tretā, that various forms of worship were for Dvāpara but that for Kali-yuga devout recitation of the name of Hari is the only religion.

Hari-nāma is sufficient to destroy a hundred sins, and in fact a sinner cannot commit enough sins for a single utterance of Hari-nāma to destroy.

But the name of Hari should be taken not like a parrot, but by the application of kāya, manas and vākya, body, heart and soul and voice all put together. Another condition is that the name of Hari should be taken while steering clear often kinds of the nāmāparādha, i.e., offences to Hari's name, such as those of

(1) One speaking ill of Hari-bhaktas; (2) one who neglects Hari-nāma and speaks ill of the Vedas, knowing them fully well; (3) one who in order to slight the glory of Harināma gives different interpretations to it; (4) one who deliberately commits sins thinking that by dint of the power of Hari-nāma he will be purged of those sins; (5) one who places Hari-nāma on the same level with yajña, homa, vrata, dāna and pilgrimage to tīrthas or sacred places; (6) one who does not listen or play attention to Hari-nāma when others chant it; (7) one who offers Hari-nāma to another no regard for it; (8) one who does not love Hari-nāma, although its mahimā or glory is dinned into his ears everyday; etc.

In Śaṅkara's system Vedic rituals such as homas, yajñas and animal sacrifices find no place. In his renderings of the Śrīmadbhāgavata Śaṅkara quotes the sayings of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa to Uddhava as under:

People interpret the Vedas according to their own whims. Their interpretations are coloured by the dominant attributes of their mind. I not accessible through knowledge, neither through penance, nor through renunciation, nor through gifts. I am not accessible to Yoga, not to knowledge. I am tied down by Bhakti alone.

Śaṅkara's renowned disciple, Mādhavadeva's Nāma-ghoṣā, which gives the profoundest philosophical exposition to the entire creed of his Master, contains the following:

The indwelling Hari moves far away from him who places faith in rituals. But one who makes it his religion to hear and recite Hari's name attains Kṛṣṇa even if he is not free from the ego.

Although Śaṅkara's system of Vaiṣṇavism does not encourage karma or the vedic rites, provision has been left for karma mainly for cittaśuddhi, in the early stages of a devotee. The Nāma-ghoṣā says, "For a bhakta not fully detached from the world, it would be a fault to transcend Vedic rites. But for one undeviatingly attached to Kṛṣṇa and totally indifferent to wordly matters, there is no prescription." The real bhakta does not seek mukti or salvation, although it is within his grasp. He wants to remain in a state of eternal enjoyment of the bliss of bhakti, even when he attains mukti or salvation. This is the summum bonum that a bhakta of the Śaṅkara school of thought would fain seek.

In his Kīrtana-ghoṣā, the first of the four books regarded as the text of his creed, he gives the process how a devotee can attain to bhakti : The first thing he should do is to be an associate of a Vaiṣṇava and to serve him sincerely as his

guide and worship god Kṛṣṇa under his instructions. The second step is to do pious acts and offer the consequences of those acts to Kṛṣṇa. His mind will be steady and purified by the continuous hearing of the name of Kṛṣṇa and his doing (līlā), and he himself should also recite Kṛṣṇa's name and mediate Kṛṣṇa in his heart, and see Kṛṣṇa in every living being of the world. He must, therefore, show his regard of each and everyone not excluding even the lower orders of creation such as dogs, jackals and asses, because Kṛṣṇa resides in the hearts of every one. This will lead the devotee to love and regard Kṛṣṇa with deep veneration. Then the great Kṛṣṇa who is supreme in the universe is sure to dwell in his heart permanently. To offer bhakti to the Supreme a man need not be a deva, or a dvija (Brāhmiṇ) or a ṛṣi. It is not necessary that he should be learned in the lore of many sāstras. Tapa, japa, yajña, dāna are not essential for him in order to get Kṛṣṇa; they are rather obstacles on the way. Kṛṣṇa is pleased and is attainable simply through bhakti. Śaṅkara enjoins the bhakta to see God Viṣṇu in every being in the universe and says that teachings of any other religion are only an illusion and shame. A bhakta should view an enemy or a friend with an equal eye, serve humanity specially, as mankind is superior to all other orders of life being a special manifestation of Viṣṇu. The bhakta must surrender his body, mind and soul to Kṛṣṇa and ever recite his name. The society of such bhaktas has been placed higher in point of sanctity by Śaṅkara than the worship of idols and pilgrimages. He says that these might acquire the power of purification after a long and laborious process, whereas the bhakta purifies people by his very sight. In the society of bhaktas, regard and love for Kṛṣṇa is poured in through the eyes, ear, and mind, and then the sole attachment to the name of Kṛṣṇa is a natural process.

No idol was ever worshipped in any sattrā, that is, place for religious worship established by Śaṅkara, particularly during the life-time of Śaṅkaradeva, and his great successor Mādhavadeva, who has the following in his famous book, Nāma-ghoṣā, to show the futility of idol worship:

Unmanifested is the Supreme Deity. Hari. How could you then worship Him? How could you make visarjana or dismiss Him after worship who is all pervading? How could you meditate on Him who is formless? So purge your mind by the reciting of the name of Rāma.

Śaṅkara in his Kīrtana-ghoṣā says,

He who seeks spiritual purgation in holy waters, believes in divinity as dwelling in idols, but never entertains the same ideas in regard to Vaiṣṇavas, is worse than a cow,- so says Kṛṣṇa.

But for the purpose of concentration the construction of the mental image is advised by Śaṅkara. He says:

Recite the name of Rāma on your lips and contemplate his image in your heart to get mukti.

Śrīmadbhāgavata enjoins nine kinds of bhakti for a Vaiṣṇava devotee, viz., śravaṇa, kīrtana, smaraṇa, arcana, pada-sevana, dāsyā, sakhitva, vandana and deha-samarpana. For the Kali-yuga śravaṇa, i.e., the hearing of Rāma Kṛṣṇa's nāma and kīrtana, i.e., the chanting of it is prescribed as the only dharma; and in Śaṅkara's system of Vaiṣṇavism these two kinds of bhakti are mainly enjoined. Śaṅkara preached the dasya-bhakti as the relation between Śrī-Kṛṣṇa and his devotee. The devotee must conceive of God as a servant does of his master. The madhura conception may be lofty as a personal ideal; but Śaṅkara discarded it, as he clearly saw that it could not be worked out practically in this world, particularly when it would fall into less enlightened minds. It is bound to get degraded, and corrupt and immortal practices are bound to creep in course of time when the mastermind of the founder is removed. The extreme humility and self-surrender of a devotee giving vent to his dāsyā bhakti in Śaṅkara's system is :

Thou guidest me, O Lord! outwardly and in inner workings of my heart. In thee I am possessed of a Lord. Remove my delusion. I take up a straw between my teeth and bow unto Thee. Show me how I may remain in Thy service. Buy me, O Lord! as Thy slave. The price I want is not any filthy lucre, but only the supreme treasure of Thy nāma. I am the last in the list of the sinners in this world. There is none who purge sins like Thee, O Lord! Do unto me as thou thinkest best. This is my humblest supplication at Thy feet.

Such is the prayer in Śaṅkara's system of Vaiṣṇavism.

Śaṅkara did not start with any Vedāntic thesis on the nature of Godhead as the basis of his teachings. The deity of the Gītā and Bhāgavata was sufficient for him. God is supreme intelligence, without limitation, all pervading, without form, without attributes. He expresses Himself, taking recourse to Māyā, to favour His bhaktas. He is the beginning, the middle and the end of the Universe. He is the controller of Puruṣa and Prakṛti. No other gods or goddesses can give

salvation or mukti; He only can. To the bhakta He reveals Himself. Such are Śaṅkaradeva's teachings. He adores Mādhava as adorable even to Lakṣmī, Brahmā an Mahādeva, He chants Rāma's and Kṛṣṇa's names as both are incarnations of Mādhava, the Parama Brahman, and are indistinguishable from each other His practical application of the śāstric saying caṇḍālo' pi dvija-śreṣṭhaḥ Hari-bhaktiparāyanaḥ, was visible when he received disciple from all classes and castes of people, not excluding Mahomedans, and the tribes such as the Gāro, Miri, Nagā, etc, He recognised only a social signification in the caste system, and had nothing to say against varṇāśrama-dharma, where people would follow their own traditional duties. But in religious congregation all are equal. Śaṅkara's Neo- Vaiṣṇavism threw open the doors of the temple of god to all classes of people. People flocked in thousands under banner of his new faith.

I give below the rendering of a hymn from Nāma-ghoṣā.

I do not belong to the four castes, nor do I belong to the four āśramas. I have no business in offering gifts, observing vratas, and going on pilgrimages. But I aspire to be a slave of the slave of the slaves of Him, whose lotus feet shine in the ocean of full bliss and who is the Lord of the gopīs.

Śaṅkaradeva was a prolific writer of Assamese verses and a poet of very high order. In order to popularize his tenets he and his great disciple Mādhavadeva turned out a vast religious literature in the current language of the people. Śaṅkara also wrote a Sanskrit work named Bhakti-Ratnākara. Śaṅkara translated the Bhāgavata, and composed a unique book called Kīrttana-ghoṣā to be read and chanted by the devotees of all classes. The Kīrttana-ghoṣā contains the quintessence of his creed. He composed popular religious songs upon the life and doings of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa. He introduced a new feature in his movement by composing dramas inculcating the cult and depicting life-story of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, to attract people by dramatic performances, and thus popularise his teachings. No Vaiṣṇavite reformers of his time seemed to have done this. The entire life-story of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa was rendered into music, poetry and drama by him, and Mādhavadeva contributed his share to all these literary performances.

Immediately after Śaṅkaradeva's death, there was a cleavage between his apostolic successor, Mādhavadeva, and Dāmodaradeva, a Brāhmiṇ follower and associate of Śaṅkaradeva. Since then the sect has been divided into two : one came to be known as Mahāpuruṣīyā and the other Dāmodarīyā. The followers of Mādhavadeva are called Mahāpuruṣīyā and of Dāmodaradeva Dāmodarīyās.

In coming to the end of my speech, I trust it may safely be concluded that there cannot be any doubt as to Vaiṣṇavism remaining always a living religion. It may lose its nomenclature in course of time here and there, and become indistinguishable in its separate entity having been merged in this or that great religion of the world. But the ground on which I stands and its all-pervading vitality will remain all the same : because it is based on eternal truth, such as love, ahimsa, humility, and at the same time unbending rigidity in principles, devotion to one and the only God who is sat, cit and ānanda. To what the ancient seers of the Upaniṣads had evolved after ceaseless contemplation as an abstract conception of God. Vaiṣṇavism gave a concrete form to be easily understood and be accessible to all and sundry, so that even the humblest of the humble could come to Him, irrespective of caste and creed. The fountain-heads of Vaiṣṇavism, the Gītā and the Bhāgavata, simply worked out the abstract propositions of Vedānta-Sūtra and gave them a concrete shape and made them accessible to all. Winnow the chaff and dirt that have crept into the different systems of Vaiṣṇavism prevailing in India, and you are sure to find the real solid grain that is the solace and sustenance of life. Our duty is to break the artificial barriers of the different sampradāyas and sects, and blow away the froth and foam of hair-splitting controversy, and dive into, and gather the pearls from, the bottom. That will give everlasting peace and happiness to all, and it will then be found that there is no room for untouchability, or higher caste or lower caste which is purely intended for the maintenance of the social fabric and not for generating class hatred. This is the true significance of Vaiṣṇavism. Vaiṣṇavism has opened wide the portals of the temple of God for everyone from the highest to lowest, and binds them with the sacred tie of brotherhood.

The Nāma-ghoṣā of Mādhavadeva says :

In other prevailing forms of religion, different people are entitled only to rites variously prescribed for different castes; but in reciting the name of Hari all are equal. Therefore, this is the best of all religions.

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Early Vaiṣṇavism and the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Bhakti Movement in Assam

Bhaba Prasad Chaliha

Vaiṣṇavism is one of the oldest religions of India where Viṣṇu, also called Hari, Nārāyaṇa, Kṛṣṇa, etc., is worshipped as the Supreme God. Viṣṇu is a Ṛg-Vedic Deity who attained great prominence in the later Vedic period and came to be referred to as the great God or the sole God. In the Bhagavadgītā and the Bhāgavatapurāṇa Vaiṣṇavism finds its best exposition through the person of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the perfect incarnation of Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa. This aspect of Viṣṇu's assuming different forms or incarnations (avatāra) from time to time is an important feature of the Viṣṇu-cult.

Although it is not easy to determine the origin of the Vaiṣṇavism in Assam, evidences do not want to show that the worship of Viṣṇu and His incarnations was prevalent in the land even before the advent of Śrī Śaṅkaradeva who preached and propagated Vaiṣṇavism in Assam in the last part of the fifteenth century and made it a popular cult. Epigraphic and archaeological finds, folklores and traditions; writings of poets who flourished prior to Śaṅkaradeva in Assam testify the existence of Vaiṣṇavism as a living faith and cult. In the Śānti Parvan of the Mahābhārata, Viṣṇu is called 'Prāgjyotiṣā Jyesthā'. Bāṇa in his *Harṣacarita* describes Bhāskaravarmana (606-647 A.D.), the great king of Kāmarūpa, as belonging to a Vaiṣṇava family. The Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsang also describes that Bhāskaravarmana was descended from Nārāyaṇadeva. In the beginning of the 13th century Vaiṣṇavism came into prominence under the fostering care of the ruling monarchs of the time. The period of Dharmapāla definitely points to the predominance of the Vaiṣṇava cult in Kāmarūpa. The Puṣhyabhadra grant of Dharmapāla begins with an invocation of the Boar incarnation. Kālikā Purāṇa also records that Viṣṇu as Boar Incarnation was worshipped in the Citravāhu Mountain east of Pandu. Rama worship was not very popular in Assam although a reference occurs to Him in one of the copper plates of Indrapāla. The most celebrated and popular avatāra of Viṣṇu is Kṛṣṇa whose accounts became the theme of the early Assamese literature. Viṣṇu's other names

such as Nārāyaṇa, Hari, Vāsudeva, Puruṣottama are to be found in some of the grants.

The worships of Hayagrīva as one of the incarnations of Viṣṇu possibly existed in Assam from very early period. There is a temple, even today, of Hayagrīva Mādhava at Hajo, about 20km north-west of Guwahati. There is a reference in the 10th century Kālikā Purāṇa according to which Viṣṇu in the form of Hayagrīva killed the fever-demon (Jvarāsura) in the Maṇikuṭa hill and lived there for the benefit of men, gods and asuras. Images of Vāsudeva and his manifestations found in different parts of Assam also points to the fact that Vāsudevaism was the earlier form of Vaiṣṇavism practiced in Assam. Tantric elements are also associated with Vaiṣṇavism of this type.

Literary evidences of the existence of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam are also not wanting. The Assamese translation of the Rāmāyaṇa by Mādhava Kandali and popular translations of several episodes of the Mahābhārata by Haribara Vipra, Kaviratna Sarasvati and Rudra Kandali, all belonging to the pre-Śaṅkaradeva period, establish that Vaiṣṇavism, as found in the two epics, was not unknown to a section of the people.

But Vaiṣṇavism prior to the Śrī Śaṅkaradeva was confined to a limited number of persons and was also of syncretic nature. Śākta religion was the most common and predominant one in Assam. Śaivism was another very popular cult in Assam along with Śaktism. Esoteric Buddhism in the form of Vajrayāna began to gain ground secretly from the 9th century onwards. Thus Tantrism, both Hindu and Buddhist types, was widely prevalent and the worship of various gods and goddesses with elaborate ceremonies, both esoteric and exoteric, was also very popular. Monotheism and the bhakti-cult of Vaiṣṇavism did not thrive for the want of proper atmosphere and a leader, although the belief in one Supreme God was not altogether alien to the learned section of the people.

To bring all these people under systematized religions codes and conducts of life, to do away with the extreme tantric observances which encouraged sensuality in the name of religion, and to supply the mass with a mode of worship which would be simple and at the same time accessible to all, were the pressing needs of the time. At this hour of need Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva came forward with his Neo-Vaiṣṇavite creed and ideals. Śaṅkaradeva purified Vaiṣṇavism in Assam from the contaminations and influences of non-Vaiṣṇavite practices and re-established it on a purer and broader basis which attracted all sections of the people. Śaṅkaradeva was

born in the year 1449 A.D. in the district of Nowgong in a Śākta Kāyastha family and his father was the ruler of a small territory. Śaṅkaradeva was a versatile genius who combined in himself many wonderful qualities rarely to be found in a single individual. Within a short span of time he mastered the various branches of learning i.e., the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas, the Epics, grammar, philosophy and the tantras and was acknowledged as an accomplished scholar. Born and brought up in a Śākta family he noticed the hollowness of the prevailing elaborate ritualism connected with religious observances, including animal sacrifices for propitiation of Gods.

With an all-embracing religion of love, he carved out a new way for religious and social upheaval in Assam. He initiated a great progressive and democratic movement which laid emphasis on the unity of Godhead, stood against excessive ritualism, preached a faith based on the liberal doctrine of Bhakti fought against caste prejudices and stressed on the equality and brotherhood of man. Few saints in the world have so comprehensively molded and shaped the spiritual, social and cultural destiny of a race as Śaṅkaradeva did for the people of Assam. He unified Assamese society and brought forth a glorious renaissance in the fields of literature, music, art and drama and gave to the people of Assam a distinct cultural identity. Within a short period of time his message of love and devotion, of ethics and humanism, spread like fire and vibrated the whole of North-Eastern India.

At the time of Śaṅkaradeva, there was already a great Vaiṣṇava revival throughout India. The Neo-Vaiṣṇava movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva in Assam may, therefore, be called a part of the all-India Vaiṣṇavite movement of the Middle Ages, and although it had its own distinct features in the principles and tenets of the faith best suited to the genius of the people. Śaṅkaradeva's new doctrine came to be known as the Eka-śaraṇa-dharma i.e., the religion of supreme surrender to one God viz. Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa. He drew his inspiration for his new faith from the Vedas, the Upaniṣads and the Purāṇas and particularly from the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* which has been described as the sun among the Purāṇas, comprising the quintessence of Vedānta philosophy served as the inexhaustible source for Śaṅkaradeva.

The Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva is also known as Nāma-dharma as the means of worshipping God is the chanting of the name of God with undeviating devotion. The advantage of chanting the name of God is that everybody can do it irrespective of age, sex, caste, time or place. Another important feature of

Śāṅkaradeva's religion is the complete absence of idol worship, even that of Kṛṣṇa, in any form.

A great contribution of Assam Vaiṣṇavism was the social recognition of man irrespective of caste, creed or status. No importance was attached to the caste system in the religious order. Thus, for the first time the lower caste people were given due recognition in the society. Besides a host of high-caste devotees, persons from all sections of the people including the aboriginal tribes of hills and plains embraced the new religion. This utter disregard for the age-old tradition of caste in the initiation of bhaktas greatly helped to atone the rigour of casteism and untouchability in the society. Because of the liberal outlook the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism in Assam became very popular and people from all parts of Assam and even beyond rushed to seek shelter under the banner of this new faith.

The Neo-Vaiṣṇavism initiated by Mahāpuruṣa Śāṅkaradeva was supported and strengthened by a band of scholar-devotees like Mādhavadeva, Dāmodaradeva, Rāmasarasvatī, Ananta Kaṇḍali, Bhaṭṭadeva, Rām Charan Thakur and many others. For the propagation of the new faith they took the media of literature, music, dance and drama and built up a very rich literacy tradition by composing thousands of verses, original and translation, kāvyas, songs, dramas, prose works and biographies, and thus raised the Assamese language and literature to a high level of excellence. The Sattrā and Nāmghar institution of Assam is another very important aspect of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. There are several hundred Sattras and more than thirty thousand Nāmghar s in Assam. In the modern period also a large number of Vaiṣṇavite institutions and organizations have been established within and outside Assam for the study and spread of Assam Vaiṣṇavism on a world-wide basis. The contributions of these institutions towards the religious, social and cultural life of the people are very great.

Thus the importance of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam does not lie in its religious aspect alone. It also contributed much to the social and cultural development of the Assamese people. It gave a rich literature, introduced a new type of music, dance and drama, encouraged handicrafts and introduced the art of manuscript painting, loosened the caste rigorousness, elevated the socially backward people, spread learning through Assamese versions of Sanskrit scriptures, popularized the ethical values of kindness, non-violence, obedience, etc. and above all fostered a spirit of fellow feeling and friendly relation among all persons of the country.

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NIṢKĀMAVĀDA IS THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE GĪTĀ

Dr. Girish Baruah

Most of the commentators, both modern and ancient, Western and Indian, hold that Karmavāda is the philosophy of the Gītā. In my opinion it is not true. Not Karmavāda but Niṣkāmavāda is the philosophy of the Gītā. Why so I am assigning below my arguments.

The Gītā emphasizes all the three paths to liberation e.g. karma, bhakti and jñāna. It has laid equal status on all of them. So it is impossible for the Gītā to lay emphasis specifically on any one of them. Therefore if somebody asks as to what the philosophy of the Gītā is the prompt reply would be Niṣkāmavāda. Karmavāda is a philosophy mainly advocated by the Brāhmaṇa part of the Veda and by the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā philosophy as advocated by Jaimini. Bhaktivāda is a philosophy which is mainly advocated by the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and by the Vaiṣṇavisms following this Purāṇa.

The Gītā is of the opinion that man has every right to follow any one of the above paths. However which path would be followed by a person depends on his/her psychical attitude. Our mind has generally three functions: thinking, feeling and willing. All minds have these three functions. But all these functions are not equally dominant in a person. In some men thinking may be dominant, in some feeling may be dominant and in some willing may be dominant. A man in whom thinking is predominant may be attracted to jñāna i.e. knowledge or wisdom; a man in whom feeling is predominant may be attracted to devotion i.e. bhakti; a man in whom willing is predominant may be attracted to karma i.e. action. This is a very natural process in man.

The philosophy of the Gītā is not psychological, but ethico-metaphysical or metaphysico-ethical. It emphasizes the ethical behavior of man. That man has to work is a natural tendency in him, because he is endowed with the karmic element viz. Prakṛti. As prakṛti, the material principle, is there in us we are bound to work. So it is not necessary to teach us action. What is to be taught is how to do action. This is a moral teaching, not a psychological one. Every man is bound

to work, but every man is not bound to do an ethical action i.e. to do action in a right manner. In the teaching of the Gītā, to do an action in a good manner means to do it without any desire (kāma). It is very difficult to do an action without any desire. Almost all people do work with desire, especially with the desire for the result. That is why the Gītā insists on doing work without desire.

By karma the Gītā means varṇāśrama karma i.e. varṇāśrama dharma. Gītā uses the word dharma mostly in the sense of dutiful work. Man is bound to work according to his guṇa. Guṇa means three guṇas viz. sattva, rajas and tamas. A man possesses all the three guṇas; of them any one may be predominant in him. His character is determined by this predominance.

Let me explain very briefly what varṇāśrama dharma is. Varṇa means the four varṇas viz. Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śudra, and āśrama means the four āśramas viz. brahmacarya, gārhasthya, vānaprastha and sannyāsa. A man's action is determined by his varṇa. It means if he is a Brāhmiṇ he is to do Brāhmaṇic works and so on. (It is to be remembered that at Gītā's time varṇa was not determined by birth, but by guṇa and karma. Only later on varṇa has been transformed into jāti meaning birth.) Similarly man's action is determined by āśrama i.e. the station of his life. A man belonging to the brahmacarya āśrama, for example, is to study. When he gets married he becomes a gṛhastha i.e. house-holder, and then he is to do house-hold work. In the vānaprastha āśrama he is to go to the forest and must live a retired life being away from his worldly duties. At last he should be a sannyāsī i.e. an ascetic.

This is varṇāśrama karma or varṇāśrama dharma, and the Gītā sticks to it. It is said that a man is born with the predominance with a certain guṇa and he is to do things accordingly. He cannot forego his varṇāśrama dharma. It is mandatory on him. But that these karmas are to be done without desire is not mandatory but voluntary. So such an action is called voluntary action. The Gītā engages its whole effort to teach man how this voluntary action can be transformed to an ethical action.

Although we are to do action without fail, yet action is not advocated by the Gītā. The philosophy of the Gītā is spiritualism and therefore it emphasizes the self. The self is all in all in the human sphere, and the self does not work, it simply knows; because consciousness or knowledge is the principal quality of it. Nay it is not only the quality, but its very being consists in consciousness (caitanya). So in the ultimate analysis karma has to bid good-bye, as its function

is temporary, not eternal. What is eternal is simply knowledge or jñāna, as the self or soul is also eternal. Karma being a temporary phenomenon, so it cannot be a vital point in the Gītā and therefore the philosophy of the Gītā cannot be regarded as karmavāda. It advocates simply niškāmvāda without question.

Karma does not mean simply Vedic karma or ritualistic action. (However the Gītā is not against Vedic karma if it is performed without desire.) As we know from the episode of the Gītā in which Arjuna stands as the person to whom Kṛṣṇa advises on moral grounds. Arjuna is a kṣatriya, and as a kṣatriya he is bound to do the works stipulated for a kṣatriya. His main work is to fight and therefore he cannot forego it. So he is bound to fight. When Arjuna wishes to desist from fighting he is going away from the kṣatriya duties. He is prevented from doing so and he is reminded that as being a kṣatriya through guṇa and karma he cannot abandon fighting. Kṛṣṇa understands that Arjuna wants to desist from fighting as he is influenced by desire which consists in the emotional feelings for his kinsmen. When he can renounce such desires he would never mind to fight. So the Gītā advocates not the renunciation of work, but renunciation of desire in work. So long one is in bondage one is under the subjugation of prakṛti, and so he cannot renounce action.

Man cannot avoid the three ways: karma, bhakti and jñāna. One of them may be more prevalent, but all of them are there in man. So the Gītā advises to do work with bhakti and jñāna. He is to do work with bhakti because through the devotion to God he may renounce his ahaṁkāra i.e. arrogance which arises from desire. According to the Gītā man does not really work; God works through him. When man can understand this he will not be arrogant. ¶

The Gītā does not recommend that there are stipulated time and place for devotion to God. At every moment one should remember God. No time should be there without thinking of God. So even one is karmī he cannot avoid bhakti. Bhakti is cognate with karma. But to be devoted is not necessary for man. He can go without bhakti. So to practice bhakti is not a psychological phenomenon, but an ethical phenomenon. To offer bhakti to God is a voluntary action, and when one engages in devotion without desire i.e. without asking anything from Him he practices niškāma bhakti.

Similarly the Gītā advises us to do work with jñāna. It places jñāna in the highest position. It is higher than even bhakti. It is said in the 4th Chapter of the Gītā, “Na hi jñānena sadṛśam pavitramiha vidyate” i.e. “There is nothing on earth

equal in purity to wisdom.” (RādhāKṛṣṇan) At the empirical level we have simply perceptual and intellectual knowledge. At liberation only the intuitive knowledge in the sense of aparokṣa anubhuti is possible.

Let me explain the hierarchical statuses of karma, bhakti and jñāna. Karma is at the lowest level and jñāna at the highest. Bhakti comes in between the two. As karma is at the lowest level we believe in many gods when we are at this level. This position is known philosophically polytheism. When we come to the level of bhakti, we come to the belief in one God. This is known as monotheism. And when we come to the level of knowledge, we believe in the Absolute (Brahman in the Vedāntic sense). This is known as monism or non-dualism (advaitavāda).

The above discussion convinces us that the role of karma is very insignificant in the Gītā. Its whole attempt is to eulogize niškāma. The Gītā has no inhibition against practicing karma, bhakti or jñāna. Anybody can follow any of these paths. But he is the ethically successful man who can synthesize these three paths and can practice them without any desire. Then only he will be able to follow the eternal law i.e. the sanātana dharma.

I wish to say something on bhakti as the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Asomiyā Vaiṣṇavism emphasize the concept of bhakti. We know that Śāṅkaradeva’s religion is known as Bhaktivāda. Why so? It is not a fact that Śāṅkaradeva’s religion is called Bhaktivāda, because he lays emphasis on bhakti i.e. devotion. Devotion is a universal phenomenon. It is there in all religions. It is there in Śākta Dharma also, which is an arch enemy of Vaiṣṇavism. Then why do we call Śāṅkaradeva’s religion Bhaktivāda? It is not without reason. Though devotion is there in all religions, desireless devotion (niškāma bhakti) is not there in all of them. Only the Vaiṣṇavism based on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa can claim so.

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Bhakti Ratnākara: Chapter III

The Greatness of the Company of the Pure Devotees of Hari

Bina Gupta
Arunava Gupta

Śaṅkaradeva and others of his school interpreted the Bhāgavata in the local language and gave it out as the supreme message of Vedānta (vedāntaro parama tattva).¹ In the Bhakti Ratnākara he relies upon the authority of this purāṇa. The śloka citations are systematically arranged in order of subject-matter and also commented upon. Later on, this book was rendered into Assamese verse by Rāmacarana Thākura. The following is a translation² of the third chapter of that text- sādhu-saṅga mähātmya.

Pada (Quatrains)

The chapter on greatness of human body I have finished;
now let me tell the significance of the company (saṅga) of the Pure Devotees of Hari³ (sādhu).

The company of Sādhus is the primary cause of devotion;
listen to it, Good People, with great elation. [57]

In the First Book's eighteenth adhyāya,
Śaunaka and other ṛṣis say to Sūta,

“Listen, O Sūta, to these words of ours,
an extremely small amount of time spent in the company of Mahantas⁴- [58]

¹ *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Assam: Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*, Maheswar Neog, Motilal Banarsidass, 1980, pp. 208.

² The edition brought out by Dattabarua and Co. has been utilized in this translation.

³ The term *sādhu* may be variously translated as ‘holy man’ etc. But in the current context, this appellation is used to mean only the pure (Eka-Śaraṇite) devotees of Hari. See *Santa Bhaktara Lakṣaṇa* (Chapter 4) for a discussion on the characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of a *sādhu*.

⁴ Madhavadeva's definition of ‘Mahanta’ in the *Nāma-ghoṣa*:

The one on whose lips is ever present
the supremely beneficial Name of Hari
that alone is the Mahanta and only for him
all *dharmmas* have come to fruition [216]

heaven, salvation do not measure up to it⁵ [what to speak of all earth's enjoyments];

we tell this certainly to you.”

In the words of Śaunaka and others, I have told you the power of the Sādhus.

Listen again to what is said by Vidura. [59]

He utters these words praising Maitreya:

“The Mahantas are, in truth, the path to obtaining Kṛṣṇa.

‘God of gods, O Janārdhana⁶ Hari’,

they who make great effort to sing ceaselessly- [60]

a little of their sevā, of these most excellent ascetics (tapasvīs), is rare and supremely difficult to obtain, know, O Best Among Sages!

Therefore [meeting you] surely I have obtained that privilege, rarest of the rare.”

I keep the words of Vidura here. [61]

It is in the Third Skandha, seventh adhyāya.

I have told it to you; please look it up and verify it afterwards, O saintly people.

The saṅga of Bhaktas is the very limb (aṅga) of Bhakti,

Kapila says this before mother Devāhuti. [62]

It is given in the twenty-fifth adhyāya of the Third Skandha;

listen to it, holy men, attentively.

He says, “Listen, O mother, carefully.

In the association (prasaṅga) of My single-minded (ekānta) devotees, [63]

all facts (kathā) pertaining to Me are brought up

which reveal all My glories and

hearing which the mind and ears are greatly elated.

He who serves only the Lotus-Feet of Kṛṣṇa forsaking all desires (*kāmanā*) and [in this way] does not ever transgress upon the code of conduct of the Vedas

who feels in mind at all times the great joy obtaining from that service of the Feet of Kṛṣṇa know it for sure that such an individual is termed as ‘*Mahanta*’. [595]

⁵ From the original in Sanskrit (*Bhakti Ratnākara*, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha edition):

तुलयाम लवेनापि न स्वर्गं नापुनर्भवम्।

भगवत्संगिसंगस्य मर्त्यानां किमुताशिषः॥१॥

भगवत्संगिनो विष्णुभक्ताः तेषां संगस्य लवेन अल्पमात्र कालेन स्वर्गमपवर्गञ्च न तुलयामः तुल्यं

न पक्ष्यामः। मर्त्यानामाशिषो भोगाद्या न तुलयाम् इति किं वक्तव्यम्॥१॥

⁶ On the epithet *Janārdhana*, Mādhavadeva says in the *Nāma-ghoṣa* [164] that by ‘*jana*’ is meant *māyā*. As the Lord destroys (*marddana*) the *māyā* of the Bhaktas, therefore He has come to be known as Janārdhana.

Whoever listens in their company in rapt attention, [64]
 at first, respect (śraddhā⁷) for Me, Hari, the path to release from māyā,
 is very quickly generated.
 Immediately after this, one develops fond attachment (rati), then devotion
 (bhakti) in Me.
 These three come in a chain, I have told thee.” [65]
 Here I keep the quote of Kapila.
 Listen to Dhruva’s words in the Fourth Skandha.
 It is in the ninth adhyāya, know certainly;
 before Bhagavanta, he supplicates respectfully, [66]
 “O Lord Ananta! Acyuta! Bhagavanta!
 Extremely pure all the single-minded Mahantas
 who do always Thy Bhakti singularly-
 let me have their prasaṅga regularly. [67]
 If you say, ‘Why would you not ask for the boon of mukti?’
 listen, O Lord, that is not necessary⁸.
 Staying always in the company of Thy Bhaktas,
 all moments I will drink the nectar of Thy tale (kathā). [68]
 Drinking nectarine kathā, I will become greatly intoxicated and
 happily attain to the other shore, crossing world-ocean.”
 I have told the power (mahimā) of the holy in the words of Dhruva;
 now listen to this power in the words of Rudra. [69]
 To Kṛṣṇa, he says, “O Lord! In Thy Feet Śaraṇa
 whosoever takes Śaraṇa in body, mind and speech⁹-
 that one parts with fear of saṁsāra;
 that one obtains exceeding profit. [70]
 When the company of Bhaktas is regularly obtained,
 only that is termed as mahā-lābha, the supreme and best profit
 [because] all ends of human life (puruṣārthas) that there are including mokṣa;
 satsaṅga, the Bhaktas’ company, exults, dancing on the heads of them all. [71]
 The company of the Mahantas even for half a second (ardha-kṣaṇa);

⁷ May also be translated as *faith*.

⁸ There is no need to ask for Mukti separately. Mukti comes as a by-product of the process of devotion in the company of single-minded Bhaktas.

⁹ रुद्रगीतायामेवं रुद्रेण कथितम् ॥६॥

that is not equaled by heaven's seat and salvation
 and the enjoyments of humans- king-rank etc.-
 what to speak of them, they do not stand any comparison. [72]
 Therefore supreme gain is the company of Bhaktas.”
 At this much only, I keep Maheśa's words.
 Now listen to the words of King Rahugaṇa.
 It is the matter of the Fifth Skandha, extremely beautiful. [73]
 At the conclusion of the description of the world-forest,
 Rahugaṇa makes this remark before Jaḍa Bharata.
 He says, “The particles of dust of the Lotus Feet of Thee
 the one who worships always with reverence- [74]
 all sins of that person are killed entirely
 and discriminating (unadulterated) devotion (avyabhicariṇī bhakti) he develops
 in Kṛṣṇa.
 To me, this effect is nothing strange
 since the overwhelming proof of this I myself have obtained. [75]
 I, a man extremely wicked and greatly indiscriminating,
 whose mind remained ensnared in many bad deeds.
 But, conversing with Thee for merely two daṇḍas,
 all my ignorance is removed. [76]
 By Thy grace, understanding (bodha) has dawned in me.
 Oh! What will I say! The unbounded power of the Mahanta!”
 Here we keep this utterance of Rahugaṇa.
 Now, O holy people! Listen to the word of Bhagavanta.
 Before Akrura He says, in the Daśama Skandha, [77]
 “All tīrthas and devas that there be- wrought of water, stone, clay, etc.
 Know that, although they are considered to be tīrthas and devas,
 yet it is only the Sādhus who are exceedingly superior¹⁰. [78]
 [Because] The tīrtha and deva take a long time to purify a person
 but the Sādhus- they purify merely through sight (darśana)¹¹.”

¹⁰ न ह्यम्मयाणि तीर्थानि न देवा मृच्छिलामयाः।

ते पुनन्त्युरुकालेन दर्शनादेव तु साधवः॥९॥

¹¹ Moreover, the *devas* are स्वार्थसाधनपराः while the Sādhus are परानुग्रहकातराः

देवाः स्वार्थसाधनपराः साधवस्तु परानुग्रहकातराः। परमार्थतश्च साधव एव देवाः त एव तीर्थानि च

I have quoted the word of Kṛṣṇa from the Daśama.
 Listen again, in the Eleventh, the word of Mādhava. [79]
 To Uddhava, Mādhava utters the following:
 “The one for whom the sun-like saint (santa-surya) has risen;
 several ‘eyes’ like that of knowledge open up in him.
 He then knows Bhakti differenced by saṅga and nirṅa. [80]
 It is as if the sun itself has risen in such a person[‘s mind].
 The single pair of eyes - wrought of flesh - out of that a person only sees [but
 does not perceive].
 Only knowledge of name and form is born.
 They cannot purify the mind of the person. [81]
 Therefore, it is only the Saint who is god, it is the Saint who is friend¹²
 the Saint only, the Self (ātmā) and Saint only, Me, Īsvara Mādhava¹³ [the
 dispeller of māyā].
 Listen Uddhava, what more will I say.
 As food which is life for all creatures; [82]
 as Me, the only shelter (Śaraṇa) for the distressed;
 as dharmma which is the only wealth for the other world;
 so is, for the one who has become fearful of saṁsāra,
 sole-refuge (Śaraṇa) in the pure devotees (santas)¹⁴.” [83]
 Again, in that Ekādaśa, the twelfth adhyāya,
 listen to what is being said by the King of Yadus.
 Before Uddhava, Bhagavanta, Lord Hari
 reveals the most secret doctrine (rahasya kathā) [the real way to God] most
 carefully, [84]
 “Listen Uddhava, I tell you asserting fiercely-

॥१०॥

¹² सन्तो दिशन्ति चक्षूषि वहिरर्कसमुत्थितः।

देवता बान्धवाः सन्तः सन्त आत्माहमेव च॥१२॥

¹³ To illustrate the point that *sat-saṅga* is superior to *deva* and *tīrtha*, it is further said:

विभावसुमग्निं सेवमानस्य यथा शीतं भयं तमश्चाप्येति तथागमिसंसारभयं कर्मजाड्यं

तन्मूलमज्ञानञ्च नक्षयतीत्यर्थः॥११॥

¹⁴ Therefore, in Śaṅkaradeva’s Eka-Śaraṇa system, sole-refuge or Śaraṇa in Bhakta is made an essential component of Śaraṇa.

there is no dharmma other than sat-saṅga.

The paths of yoga, sāmkhya, dharmma, renunciation (tyāga), austerities (tapa), bathing in tīrthas,

rules and restrictions and control of the senses (niyama samyama), holding fasts (vrata), muttering esoteric mantras (japa), yajña and charity (dāna), [85]

performing agnihotra and all other dharmas [apart from these] that may exist, do not, in reality, make Me subservient (vaśya) [to the aspirant] in the manner that

the company of Sādhus makes Me vaśya¹⁵.

¹⁵ न रोधयति मां योगो न सांख्यं धर्म एव वा।

न स्वाध्यायो तपस्त्यागो नेष्टापूर्तं न दक्षिणा॥१४॥

व्रतानि यज्ञाक्षच्छन्दांसि तीर्थानि नियमा यमाः।

यथावरुन्धे सत्सङ्गः सर्वसङ्गापहो हि माम्॥१५॥

तत्र द्वादशाध्याये भगवानुद्धवाय परमतत्त्वं सुगोप्यं कथयति। सांख्ययोगादीनि

साधनान्तरसापेक्षाणि सव्यभिचारीणि। सत्संगस्तु स्वतः समर्थफलोअव्यभिचारी च इति

वर्णयितुमंगीकृत्याह द्वाभ्याम्। एतैर्द्वादशोपायैर्मां न वशीकरोति। योगोअष्टाङ्गः आसनादिः

सांख्यं तत्त्वविवेकः धर्मोअहिंसादिः स्वाध्यायः वेदपाठः तपः कृच्छ्रादि त्यागो दानं सन्यास

इत्यर्थः इष्टमग्निहोत्रादि पूर्तं कुपादिकर्म दक्षिण दानम्॥१४॥

व्रतान्येकादक्ष्युपवासादीनि यज्ञो देवतापूजा छन्दांसि रहस्यमन्त्राः तीर्थानि सतीर्थाः शौचाद्या द्वादश

यमाः अहिंसाद्या द्वादश एतैः न तथा यथा सत्संगः अवरुन्धे वशीकरोति॥१५॥

Śaṅkaradeva makes a clear summary of this along with the gist of the other ślokas in the *Kṛṣṇa*

Uddhava Saṁvāda section of his rendering of the Eleventh Book (*Ekādaśa*) of the Bhāgavata:

Mādhava said, “Beloved Mate, listen to this verdict of Mine.

Let one read all the śāstras and study all four Vedas

Yet, one would not have the capacity to do Bhakti to Me

As long as one does not take the Santas’ company.” [173]

Kṛṣṇa then whispers this secret into the ear [of Uddhava],

“O *sakhi!* Friend, closest and dearest! there is no other way (*upāya*) than good company (*su-saṅga*)

Furthermore, I am not obtained by the ritualist (*karmī*) or the intellectualist (*jñānī*);

It is only *sādhu-saṅga* which certainly makes me subservient. [174]

I am not obtained through sacrifice, through *yoga* or through charity

Nor through the incanting of great *mantras* or bathing in a crore of *tīrthas*

Nor can one get Me by holding fasts (*upavāsa*) on days like *Ekādaśī*, etc.

Nor can supreme renunciation (*sanyāsa*) make me subservient [175]

In vain do people mortify themselves doing these various *karmmas*

For it is only the company of *Bhaktas* which knows Me correctly.

O Uddhava, I have, in this manner, told you the most confidential secret of all

Lo! I have told you the supreme mystery (rahasya). [86]
 By listening to and even seeing the Vaiṣṇavas,
 great sinners become pure.
 If one respectfully enters into conversation with the Mahanta,
 then what can one say about the luck of such a person! [87]
 The Sādhus, giving sage advice (upadeśa) [relating to supreme truth
 (paramārtha)]
 cut asunder all doubts and hesitations (saṁśaya) of the mind, completely.
 Therefore, casting aside evil company, the intelligent men
 will always take solely the company of the Sādhus.” [88]
 [O people!] You all have heard these words of Kṛṣṇa.

Since you are My [highest] devotee and supreme friend [176]
 Know, O mate, that even greater than salvation is the congregation of Sādhus
 Even a particle of which cannot be equaled by the pleasures of heaven
 Through *sādhū-saṅga*, many have attained to My abode
 I will now go through their list, O mate, please listen to it currently [177]
 The ghosts (*yakṣas*) and monsters (*rakṣas*), the trees (*vṛkṣas*), the birds (*pakṣīs*) and herds and
 herds of beasts (*paśus*),
 The women (*strīs*) and the *śudras*, the outcastes and the untouchables (*caṇḍālas*)
 And many other rascally individuals even worse than these!
 By associating with Bhaktas obtained my state [178]
 Brave Vibhīṣaṇa, Vṛṣaparba, Bali and Bāṇa
 Jāmbavanta, Jaṭāyu, Sugrīva, Hanumāna
 The garland-maker (*mālākāra*), hunchback (Kubjī), Dharmma Vyādha and the *tulādhara*,
 the wives of the *dvijas*, residents of Vraja and the Gopīs of devious conduct [179]
 They did not do even an iota of *tapas*, *vratas*, *śauca*; they did not study the Vedas
 They do not know what is *jñāna*, having no knowledge at all of the *śāstras* and also of the
 difference between the *tattvas*
 Solely through the company of Sādhū they attained to Me happily
 Apart from *satsaṅga* there is no other path presently [180]
 Greater even than the gods (*devas*) and the pilgrimage-spots (*tīrthas*) are the Bhaktas
 When one does *bhajana* to the Bhaktas, one’s state of work-torpidity (*karma-jaḍa*) is removed
 and
 only then one does Bhakti to Me, regarding Me as Lord
 O *sakhi*! I tell this word of truth before thee [181]
 There is no difference between My Bhakta and Me
 The company of Santas is the same as My company
 Therefore, do take the company of the Sādhus at all times without break
 Listen, now, *sakhi*, to what is the distinguishing characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) of a Sādhū [182]
 Knowing fully well that only the Bhakta is eligible for [receiving] all merits (*puṇyas*),
 the one who, forsaking own-dharmma [injunctions of the Vedas], does *bhajana* only to Me and
 who has resolved unshakeably on Me solely,
 that one, doubtless, is the greatest Sādhū only.” [183]

Knowing this, always make effort to obtain the company of Sādhus.
The topic of sat-saṅga here I conclude.

Afraid of making the verses excessively lengthy, I (Rāmacaraṇa) will not say further. [89]

Omitting some verses here and there, I have composed these padas.
O Sādhus! Please do not find fault with me for this.

I salute, I salute Thee Kṛṣṇa! Purifier of the Fallen (patita pāvana)!
In Thy Feet I have taken Śaraṇa. [90]

O Favorable One! Do this favor unto this orphaned one-
let Thy Devotees' company always be mine;

I pray this much at Thy Feet only.

Utter 'Rāma! Rāma!' O men in the assembly! [91]

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The Unique Features of Eka-Śaraṇa-Harināmadharma of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Characteristics of his writings

Dr. Indira Saikia Bora

The fifteenth century A.D. witnessed the birth of new ideas leading to the rise of new religion, founded on the liberal doctrine of Bhakti, often of a revolutionary character such as India has witnessed in the sixth century BC. It was an era of great spiritual upsurge throughout India. It saw the rise of a great progressive and democratic movement which laid emphasis on the unity of Godhead, stood against excessive ritualism, preached a faith based on constant devotion, fought against caste prejudices and stressed on the equality of man.¹ There appeared on the scene of religious history of various provinces a galaxy of spiritual leaders to carry the gospel of the new faith to the masses and to infuse in them a sense of unity and purpose. In Assam, it was marked by the birth of the 'many gifted' Śaṅkaradeva, an illustrious and noble son of Assam.

Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva, the fountain head of the Bhakti movement in Assam, has left a deep impress on Assamese culture and literature on Assamese religion and way of life. He was a great genius prophet and seer, in whom the whole of Assamese culture may be said to be epitomized. With his encyclopedic knowledge, magnetic personality and brilliant power of exposition, he summed up in his long life of 119 years all that was good in the known past. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva preached the eka-Śaraṇa-Harināmadharma. It was a unique religious system, different from other systems prevalent in the country. The saint formulated his ideology in such a logical manner that it also laid the foundation for a new branch of spiritual philosophy. The concept of Eka-Śaraṇa preached by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva meant that a devotee had to submit him/herself to only one God, Lord Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva derived it from Śrīmadbhagavadgītā². He did not permit his followers to worship any entity other than Lord Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu. Even Lakṣmī, the consort of Lord Viṣṇu cannot be

worshipped by the followers of eka-Śaraṇa. Of course, Lakṣhmī has been described by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva as the consort of the Lord. Also she is considered as the personification of the attributes of the Lord. Thus she is necessarily embedded in him. But that does not mean she is to be worshipped. Rather it is strictly prohibited in eka-Śaraṇanāmadharma.

The concept of eka-Śaraṇa implies the acceptance of only one worshipable entity. The worship of that entity, Lord Kṛṣṇa ensures the possible entities as he is the ultimate entity over and above all. Here Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was more logical than Ādiśaṅkarācārya, who sang Glory of Lakṣhmī in his 'Kanakadhara Stavam'. The latter eulogized the 'Devī' in his 'Saundarya Laharī' too. Ādi-Śaṅkarācārya preached devotion to the Devī in his work.³

The eka-Śaraṇa preached by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is not seen in any other Vaiṣṇavite system or for that matter in any other religious system within Hinduism, though it had been prescribed in Śrīmadbhagavadgītā. It was unique for the system evolved by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. All other Vaiṣṇavite cults in India worshipped a female entity as either consort or attributes of the Lord. Mādhavācārya, Rāmānanda and Rāmānuja worshipped Lakṣhmī or other forms. Rāmānuja composed three verses known as 'Gadyatraya' to eulogize Goddess Lakṣhmī. Yamunācārya also sang her glory in his Kāntastotram. Vallabhācārya, Nimbārka and Caitanya on the other hand worshipped Rādhā. Again the deity Varāhi was worshipped by the southern Vaiṣṇavites along with Lord Varāha.

Before Śaṅkaradeva's time, the religious life of Assam was far from satisfactory. It was an age of Tantricism which is characterized by the worship of Divine Energy in the female form called by many names such as Kālī, Durgā etc. It combined many elements of ancient superstitions as well as ingenious magic. Śaṅkaradeva was not at all happy to find the general mentality of the people as hopelessly degraded, being selfish, eager for royal favor and averse to religion or culture. To put it differently, the atmosphere of Kāmarūpa was surcharged with worldliness. Thus the emendation of the prevalent religious and social abuses became Śaṅkaradeva's first concern and consideration. Śaṅkaradeva was a monotheist and he preached a religion of supreme surrender to the one and therefore, his creed is known as Eka-śaraṇa-nāma-dharmma. According to Śaṅkaradeva, the supreme God is Vāsudeva or Kṛṣṇa and He is the savior of all. Thus Kṛṣṇa says in Bhakti-pradīpa⁴ —

Jagatare ātmā brahmādiro mai deva
Jāni ekacitte mātra moke karā seval

Śaṅkaradeva views that if Kṛṣṇa is worshipped, all other Gods are worshipped, so says “All the branches, leaves and foliage of a tree are nourished by pouring water only at the root of the tree as limbs of the body are nourished by pouring food only in the stomach, so all Gods and Goddess are propitiated only by the worship of Kṛṣṇa.”

yathātarormūlaniṣecanena
tṛpyanti tatskandha bhūjopaśākhāḥ |
prāṇopahārācca yathendriyānām
tathaiva sarvārhanamacyutejyā ||⁵

Śaṅkaradeva upheld the philosophy of oneness in all. He comprehended one God Kṛṣṇa, one service, the service of Kṛṣṇa, the Brahman.

This religion knew no caste, creed or colour and a universal spirit of the main principle of this faith. In ‘Kīrtana-Ghoṣā’ he says—

nāhi bhakatita jāti ajāti vicār |

Kṛṣṇa bhaktita samastare adhikār||⁶

“In Bhakti there is no distinction of castes, everybody has equal right to chant the Harināma.” He simplified religion to such an extent that even the most ignorant and the humblest of all could join religious worship, “Mahāpuruṣīya dharmma’ is another name for this faith, because Śaṅkaradeva’s object of worship, the all pervasive, Paramabrahma, to whom devotee is to take shelter, is so described in the Bhāgavata. It had universal appeal and therefore, people of all castes could embrace it.

It is as a social reformer that Śaṅkaradeva stands out more prominently. In this respect, the message of Śaṅkaradeva recalls to our mind some of the concepts of the modern Community Development, Adult Education and the Pañcāyatirāj.

This naturally leads us to closer examination of some of these concepts.

A deep and dispassionate study of Śaṅkaradeva’s teachings reflects more or less the same ideals described above. It may be noted here that as every institution of society grows out of its own peculiar soil and nurtured by its own unique climate and environment, the ideal of the development of society as envisaged by Śaṅkaradeva has its own distinctive characteristics. Śaṅkaradeva

attached great importance to dignity of labour and respect for individual. There are many anecdotes which amply testify to our statement.

Even the chanting of the name of God had the same desire. Even to this day, one can see in the Nāmagharas the Prasaṅgas where people belonging to different castes join without any distinction of caste and creed. This was intended mainly to establish harmony in society and to promote fellow feelings.

Attending the Nāma-Kīrtana (Prasaṅgas) at the appointed time and chanting the name of God to the accompaniment of musical instruments were intended to discipline the mind of the individual. Discipline is the great criterion which actually nurses determination and resolution which are in turn necessary to develop one's own potentialities, thereby enriching society.

Śaṅkaradeva knew that the development of society depended upon the education of the people and their active participation in matters affecting them most. His main concern was to mould the character and life of the people. This, he achieved by drawing the attention of the multitudes to religious as well as ethical literature. He translated the Bhāgavata and other Sanskrit texts into the Assamese language so that the common man might read and understand them. He also introduced Ankīyā plays based on religious themes to educate the common people. In his first drama 'Cihnayātrā', he himself painted on long canvas scenes of Vaikuṅṭha to infuse into minds of the people a sense of religious consciousness, on the one hand, and a sense of devoted service for the progress of humanity on the other. Thus, he used paintings as a popular means of communication that could be understood by the illiterate and even children.

Śaṅkaradeva established the institution of Nāmaghar as central religious institution in the village, which, as B.K. Barua observes 'combined the functions of a village parliament, a village court, a village school and a village Church. These institutions served as sheets anchors of Assamese society in the midst of continually shifting political circumstances.'⁷

The Nāmaghars worked to a large extent towards spread of intellectual and cultural activities in the village and in the course of time being nerve centers of the village come to co-ordinate all aspects of social, economical and political life of Assamese people.

Characteristics of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's writings:

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was a prolific writer. His writings included plays, epic, stories, hymns, songs, philosophical treatise etc. These placed the Assamese

literature in a strong footing and ensured a distinguished position for the Assamese literature in the entire Indian literature. Some of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's writings followed in the foot-step of Caryā-pada, the earliest example of the Assamese literature. It may be noted that the famous verses of Caryā-pada had been composed by several Assamese authors like Luipa, Minanāth etc. during eight century to twelfth century for propagation of Buddhism. The language of the Bargeets composed by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva had great resemblance with the language of the Caryā-pada or verse.

The Brajāvalī language used by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva had resemblance with the language of Caryā-pada. He created a wide circle of readers spreading all over North and East India with the help of it. The Brajāvalī language used by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was in fact an important stage of development of Assamese language and an indispensable part of it. The Brajāvalī language was not an artificial language, but a language used by the scholars of ancient Assam, for conversation, and an ancient heritage of the region. There are ample evidences that the Brajāvalī had been used as a respectable language in the Assam during thirteenth century and fourteenth century. It was used in a stone plaque of 1232 AD excavated at Āmbārī, Guwahati. The Gachtal plate of 1362 A.D also used the Brajāvalī language. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva elevated this regional language to all India level. His Bargeet and Ankīyā plays were the most appropriate tools for that task.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva used the language of the mass people in his writings i.e., writings other than Bargeet and Ankīyā plays. He brought the wealth of the scholars to amidst the masses through his writings like Harichandra Upākhyāna, Kīrtana-Ghoṣā and the Bhāgavata transcreation. Use of ethnic words and depiction of local life style in these writings helped the masses to feel united with these writings. Similarly, the secular elements like ethics, description of nature etc. made these writings acceptable to all people. The writings of Śaṅkaradeva helped the process of nation building also as these has become a common asset for all ethnic groups. The saint gifted not only a common culture, but also a common literature to the people of Assam.

Kīrtana-Ghoṣā is the most popular book of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. He composed the verses of this book for use as prayer song by the devotees. Singing of names and attributes of God was of prime importance in the Eka-Śaraṇa-nāmadharma founded by him. Śaṅkaradeva presented the theories of his religion

in these verses in a simple form, so that even the lay men could understand them. Some of the important theories put forward in this book were the identity of Brahma and Īswara. Moreover, the suitability of the devotional path for taking human beings of different temperament to the final beatitude was highlighted here by the examples of diverse characters like Prahlāda, Ajāmila etc. There are many verses in his writings, which speak about non-discrimination in the path of devotion between different castes, through devotion to God.

Another important element in Śaṅkaradeva's writings is the elements of ethics. He was not only propagating a religion but also developing a cultured and ethical nation. Whoever listened to his songs or hymns, got to learn ethical education and the means to lead an ideal life style. These were not confined to religious sermons only. So we can term the entire literature of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva as an exercise in adult education. He appealed to the people to give up demonic nature.⁸ He also exhorted the society to educate the women, low castes, and the Śūdras.⁹ The innumerable advices in his writings prove the presence of this educationist. That is why Śaṅkaradeva used the style of spoken language in his writings in order to take them to the masses. Śaṅkaradeva wrote all his books other than Bhakti Ratnākara in languages spoken by the people. He used rural phrases in his literature.¹⁰ Moreover, he mixed the Sanskrit Tatsama words with ethnic words.¹¹

Another exceptional quality of Śaṅkaradeva's writings is its lyrical and musical nature. The saint composed his verses in many beautiful meters like Dulari, Lechari, Jhunā, Jhumurā, Payār, Kusummālā, Pañcali etc. So his writings became musical and these entered into the hearts of the listeners easily. These meters helped in arranging the verses in different tunes. Several meters used by Śaṅkaradeva were his own creations. Jhunā, Jhumurā, Kusummālā etc. were such meters. These were derived from Sanskrit meters Trisṭuv, Madhumatī, Toṭaka etc. respectively. He had used silent Mātrā in his first ever verse.

'Karatala Kamala Kamaladalanayanal'-Popularly known as 'Komal Gīt' (Short song) Śaṅkaradeva's verses are the best example of how verse can lead to growth of prose.¹² He was the first prose writer in the entire world with his Ankīyā plays.

But Śaṅkaradeva did not forget to present his religious philosophy in his writings in spite of his concern for literary and aesthetic qualities. We have

named this philosophy as Vivartanabāda since there is a planned attempt to elevate the human beings from the primary level to the ultimate non-dual state in this philosophy.¹³ The universal self and the Īśvara is the same in Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy. The devotee considers the universe as the body of the God.

yata jīva jaṅgama kīṭa pataṅgama
aga naga jaga teri kāyā l¹⁴

But ultimately he/she rises to the non-dual state by realizing the unity of God and the creations just like the unity of gold and gold-earring.¹⁵

The concept of evolution is distinctly seen in the description of ten incarnations, mentioned at the very outset of 'Caturvīmśāti avatāra', the first Chapter of Kīrttana-Ghoṣā. It is significant that Ramcharan Thakur, the compiler of Kīrttana-Ghoṣā put this chapter at the very beginning of this important scripture. The mention of the fish incarnation in the first place is also scientific, because the Jelly fishes were the first creatures of the universe even according to modern Science. So, the philosophy embedded in Śaṅkaradeva's writings is completely scientific. This is one of the reasons why these writings have remained popular even in this era of science and technology. The logical writings always transcend time. Śaṅkaradeva's writings have also transcended time.

Śaṅkaradeva's writings were derived from Sanskrit sources. So many critics opine that he was a translator only. But that is not a fair judgement of the great author. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva showed originality in his translation of Bhāgavata. He dropped many verses of the original sources and did not maintain chronological order even in those which he translated. He mixed verses of different chapters whenever he found it relevant. Sometimes he elaborated the verses to peach the glory of devotion to God. He incorporated names of ethnic groups of Assam in his Bhāgavata.

kirāta kachāri khāci gāro miri
yavana kanka gowala l
asama muluka dhovā ye turuka
kuvāca mleccha caṇḍāla ll¹⁶

Mention of local costumes and picturization of local life style also characterize his works. He created many verses in the chapter 'Gopī-Uddhava-Saṁvāda' in the description of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and in the description of water-sport

by the Gopīs. Even when he kept to the original, he made a summary of it, not a literal translation. So he can be termed an author of new scriptures, based on original Sanskrit scriptures.

We would have been able to find more characteristics in Śaṅkaradeva's writings but a large part of his writings were lost for posterity for lack of preservation. For instance, he had written the entire twelve cantos of Bhāgavata. But several cantos are not now available to us. Similarly most of his Bargītas were lost for posterity, when the manuscripts containing these songs were destroyed in a fire. The saint has to keep roaming from one place to another due to ethnic conflicts and royal persecution. Many of his writings were destroyed in this process. But even the remaining assets have given a strong foundation to the Assamese literature. The Assamese nation is indebted to Śaṅkaradeva for that.

Footnotes:

1. Aspect of early Assamese literature, p.65
2. Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā 18/66
3. The Saundarya Laharī, W. Norman Brown, Harvard University Press, 1958 AD, pp. Intro, 6-7
4. Bhakti Pradīpa-29
5. Bhāgavata Purāṇa, 4/31/14
6. Nīminava Siddha Saṁvāda-333
7. Śaṅkaradeva Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam, B.K. Barua, Pg-104.
8. Kīrtana-Ghoṣā-359
9. Nīminava Siddha Saṁvāda-333
10. Kīrtana Puthir Rasavicār- Dr. Hiren Gohain, 2nd Edn., Guwahati, 1987 AD, p.2
11. Ibid, P-4, for example, Śaṅkaradeva combines the ethnic word 'phutil' with the Sanskrit word 'katak', in a beautiful manner in the chapter 'Prahāda Carita'.
12. Kīrtana-Ghoṣā-998, 1896
13. The Unique philosophy of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, Dr. Sanjib Kr. Borkakoti, in Mahāpuruṣa Jyoti, edited by Dr. Suresh Ch. Bora, Vol. IV, 2002 AD.
14. Bargīta-4, Pg-26.
15. Kīrtana-Ghoṣā-520

16. Bhāgavata-2/53
17. 'Kathā Gurucarita' Cakrapāṇi Vairāgī, ed. By Upendra Ch. Lekharu, Fifteenth Edition, Guwahati, 1987 AD, pp. 35-36

Books:

1. Śrīmad Bhāgavata: Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, 2nd Ed., 2004
2. Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmṛta, 1st Ed., 1998
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4. A Creative Vision Essays on Śaṅkaradeva and Neo-Vaiṣṇava Movement in Assam, Śrīmanta Śaṅkara Kṛṣṭi Bikaś Samiti, 1st Ed., 2004
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6. Śaṅkaradeva- Studies in Culture, Ed. By Bhavaprasad Chaliha, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, 2nd Ed., 1998

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Role Of Female Characters In Śaṅkaradeva's Plays

Dr. Pranati Sarma Goswami

Of the main divisions of dramatic interests, character stands first for consideration. It is an indispensable part of a drama. The existence of character is essential to show the subject-matter of drama distinctly through actions and visual representation. Other aspects of literature can give merely an idea to the mind of the people. Though it seems that the common people are very much attracted to the incidents, the interest which keeps them alive is the men and women in them. The various activities of characters give a clear vision of the subject-matter to the audience and the development of a drama depends upon making those characters lively and active.

In a drama, character is not an author's raw material. It is his product. It emerges from the play, and is not put into it. Without character plot has nothing to be acted. By the term 'character' we mean the dominant sentiments and beliefs of an individual at any time, whereby his attitudes to himself and his environment is determined. Critics have different opinions regarding the position of characters in a drama. According to Aristotle, the plot of a drama occupies the first position and its characters claims the second. William Henry Hudson, on the other hand, regards characters to be the fundamental and lasting element of the drama. Drama reaches its greatness and immortality by the type of its characters. This is seen in all Shakespearean dramas. His dramas are great because of their characters and not because of their plots or anything else. The central theme of his dramas is to analyze the human characters. Hundreds and thousands men and women characters and activities are depicted in the Shakespearean dramas. In modern dramas also, the dramatists, while seeking for reality, substitute the art of story-telling by creation of characters. The chief emphasis upon characterization is the prime feature of the modern drama and the characters have been brilliantly represented by the dramatists through dialogue or conversation. The writers of modern period are the first to examine the mind of the characters. Thus all the modern playwrights pay more attention to the characters than to the plot or the subject-matter. Plot and characters, however, cannot be determined separately.

One cannot exist without the other. They are interrelated like the two sides of a coin. In all great dramas, characters control the plot and they lead the plot to the end.

Dialogue is an important characteristic in a dramatic character. The utterances of any person in a play furnish a continual running commentary upon his or her character. Sometimes, it becomes more necessary to know the man himself than to the physical or social activities of that particular character. The dramatist then takes help of soliloquy and aside. The purpose of the dramatist in using soliloquy or aside is to make us known the hidden recesses of a person's nature for which ordinary dialogue provides him with no adequate opportunity to disclose. The modern realistic drama, however, is not in favour of soliloquy which is said to be unnatural. The use of it is accepted only in very unusual circumstances such as the portrayal of madness or in a highly experimental drama.

Different dramatists create different types of characters according to their own ideas about men and women and their experiences of life. We can learn a good deal about an author or about the times in which he lived from his treatment of characters. As the social and political thoughts sometimes control the social and private life of mankind, it also sometimes changes the world of the drama. Therefore, through the nature and behaviour of the dramatic character, it is possible to study the contemporary social life.

The Aṅkīyā nāṭas were composed in a religious environment. At a time when the whole of India was swept by the Neo-Vaiṣṇvaite movement, Śaṅkaradeva and his disciples attempted to promote the cause of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. They wrote plays and enacted them as a means for popularizing the cult. The main purpose behind these plays was to propagate Neo-Vaiṣṇavism among the masses. So they were quite idealistic in nature. The playwright did not write plays with the intention of creating characters. As the old dramas were descriptive in nature the plot occupied the highest position in it. The characters of Aṅkīyā nāṭas had to be depicted in limited area and as such the dramatist had little opportunity to develop or to depict character on many aspects. Yet they were well aware of the fact that mere incidents and narrations without the essential feature of a drama— the characterization do not constitute a real drama. Though the playwrights were constrained by limitations, they had to make the most of them if they were to succeed and with the fewest master strokes they

created their characters and flashed them before the audience like figures on the screen. To make these characters nearer to the common people some rules of old dramaturgy had to be followed. Moreover, Añkīyā nāṭas were written after the rules of Sanskrit drama and as in the Sanskrit drama characterization was not a major factor in Assamese Vaiṣṇava drama. There are reasons for it. In Sanskrit drama the primary emphasis was on the rasa (sentiment) element that emanated from the play and in Assamese drama the emphasis was on religious absorption and spiritualized accent. When in a drama the emphasis is thus oriented or shifted, there is little scope for characterization. Yet this must be noted that although characters were required to conform to fixed types, characterization, despite limited nature of the Vaiṣṇava canvas, did not suffer. It should, however, be noted that in the composition of the Añkīyā nāṭas the Assamese playwrights did not strictly follow all the rules of Sanskrit drama and certain things prohibited in the performance of Sanskrit drama were adopted by them. On the other hand like the western drama characters of these plays were not created with conflict as an important element in them but to rouse bhakti (devotion) in the mind of the audience. Conflict and characters were created auxiliarily in the very need of the plot. In order to show the might and power of the Lord Kṛṣṇa characters were needed and for this purpose they were created. And to represent their actions and reactions, sometimes, some external conflict was used, without which it was difficult to present the play to the full satisfaction of the people. As the playwrights did not pay any attention to create conflict, in none of the Añkīyā nāṭas external conflict is seen and for the same reason characters are also not reflected distinctly. External conflict has been introduced in some of the dramas like Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa, Rāma-Vijaya and Pārijāta-Haraṇa of Śaṅkaradeva, but it is not the principal communicator in those dramas. In his other plays and in Mādhavadeva's Jhumurās, there is no conflict in the true sense of the term. The use of songs and descriptive lyrical prose created an emotional atmosphere in the Añkīyā nāṭas instead of dramatic environment and naturally the characters could just come out ordinarily.

The dramatists wanted to depict the story as it was in the original mythology and so they paid attention to create characters in their own way. None of the playwrights tried to develop or change the characters from the original mythology. Almost all the characters including the hero and heroine came into

existence in the shadow of human being, but they were not the representatives of mankind; they were deity or Asura.

The characters in these plays are not numerous; they are confined to a limited few. In portraying the characters, much emphasis was laid on the principal hero and heroine. Other minor characters were drawn in bare outline. Kṛṣṇa appears to be the principal hero in five of Śaṅkaradeva's plays and in the sixth Rāma plays the role of the hero and his life is depicted in the plays of Śaṅkaradeva as a young man. It should be remembered that Śaṅkaradeva was a married person and of strong personality. So, he could excel in portraying the exploits of Kṛṣṇa or Rāma. The hero of Śaṅkaradeva is, therefore, divine (divya) and endowed with all good and great qualities, some of which are even supernatural. He has the beauty that charms all women, and prowess that vanquishes all men. He is usually noble but sometimes gay as in the Keli-Gopāla given to amorous dalliances with women. The antagonists of the hero like Śiśupāla in Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa, Paraśurāma in Rāma-Vijaya are generally haughty, self-assertive and boastful and vain and jealous.

The interesting Viduṣaka character of Sanskrit drama is replaced by some characters in Aṅkīyā nāṭas—like Vedanidhi in Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa, Nārada in Pārijāta-Haraṇa and the sage Viśvāmitra in Rāma-Vijaya. Vedanidhi, the messenger of Rukmiṇī to Kṛṣṇa is boastful and ludicrous at points and sometimes speaks incoherently. Nārada reveals himself in inciting quarrels between the two co-wives, Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā; Viśvāmitra is painted by the dramatist with the sage's proverbial anger and his movements and appearances have also been described as odious.

The society at Śaṅkaradeva's time was easy-going and without any complexities and it was reflected through the contemporary literature. Although the heroes and the heroines of the Aṅkīyā nāṭas were gods and goddesses, their behaviour was quite like human beings. Moreover, because of the parallelism and contrast among them, the leading characters become more prominent. It is more applicable to women characters. But just like the heroine of the modern drama, one woman character (sometimes more than one) was depicted against Kṛṣṇa. With the association of these women characters, the story was developed towards the end. Śaṅkaradeva realized that without the help of women characters the highest success of bhakti could not be reached. Therefore, he painted the women characters in his dramas with some attractive and excellent feminine qualities in

them. They are the mother, wife, beloved and at the same time great devotees of God. In his *Patnī Prasāda* it was shown that the path of bhakti is very easy. The sweet hearted Brāhmaṇīs (the wives of the Brāhmaṇas) paid homage (bhakti) to Lord Kṛṣṇa and his cowherd companions by giving them various sweets while pinched by hunger, they asked for food from the Brāhmaṇas who refused as they could not understand Kṛṣṇa as an incarnate of God. The well-educated Brāhmaṇas at first resisted their wives' activities, but ultimately got converted to the religious aspiration of their womenfolk. In the words of Hem Barua "...this conversation is significant; this is conversion from blind faith in ritual and sacrifice to Kṛṣṇa cult as initiated by the Vaiṣṇavas." This drama focuses the conflicts between the two trends of thoughts, ritualistic Brāhmaṇism and simple faith of Vaiṣṇavas to whom Kṛṣṇa is supreme, the one God. Nowhere, the idea that characterization was of minor interest to Śaṅkaradeva finds better expression than in his drama; the action lacks vitality of exposition and characterization is no more than fragmentary. The Brāhmaṇ women favoured for their love of Kṛṣṇa in preference to their husbands, who despite the ceremonies and rituals had no love for Kṛṣṇa (God) in their hearts. This drama is based on the sentiment of Madhura-bhakti (marvelous).

The status of women in the society; their duty to the house, the contemporary social life, educational system, all these real pictures were depicted through this drama. To receive the blessings of God the duty of a human being should be neither to disregard nor to give punishment to the body with strict rules and customs and fasting. The path of bhakti cannot be achieved with the help of riches and social status. But the mind should be pure and clear. All these characteristics of Vaiṣṇava religion are distinct in *Patnī-Prasāda*.

The scene of the Brāhmaṇīs while giving food to Kṛṣṇa is described in a song and they are described as Satī (chaste lady) twice in the play. The wives of the Brāhmaṇas enchanted at the sight of Kṛṣṇa, offered food to Him. They did not want any physical relation with Kṛṣṇa rather they worshipped Him from the bottom of their heart. The Bhakti movement propagated by Śaṅkaradeva had remarkable influences on the Assamese social life. The womenfolk and the people who were neglected for long year's discovered a new purport of life. Through this play Śaṅkaradeva not only unveiled the anti-human deeds, but also started the women-movement for giving them their rightful status in the society.

Kāliya-Damana (Taming of the Kāli Nāga) is based on the dominant sentiments bhayānaka (terrible) followed by karuṇā (pathetic) and adbhuta (marvelous). With the intention to give punishment to the serpent named Kāliya, Kṛṣṇa started dancing over the hood of the snake, as the snake was the cause of death of his companions. The cowherd boys pinched with thirst, drank the water from that pond and died, because the water of the pond was contaminated by the snake's venom. The serpent unable to bear the weight of Kṛṣṇa was on the point of perishing. Kāliya's wives then appeared in the scene and prayed to God to forgive all their husband's misdeeds and to spare him of his life. Here also the dramatist depicted the wives of the Kāliya in a symbolic way and they were the submissive power of egoism of certain inclination. The dramatist wanted to show that the main way to rescue and to save oneself from this painful world is to worship God. The food offered by the Brāhmaṇīs to Kṛṣṇa and the worship to Lord Kṛṣṇa by the wives of the Kāliya were the same kind of thing. Śaṅkaradeva thus created his women characters to rescue the human beings from the social evils. From this point of view, it can be said that social consciousness is more prominent than spiritualization in this drama.

An important characteristic seen in the women characters of Śaṅkaradeva's dramas is the intensity of love. There is no trace of selfishness in this kind of love. Moreover, it cannot be regarded as the emotions of blind love too. In the words of Dr. Harishchandra Bhattacharya. "The heroine comes into prominence with the elements of love story in Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa and Rāma-Vijaya. They are the maidens with superb qualities in the beginning of the play, struck with pangs of love on the hero's qualities and passes sometimes in anxiety and even despair for the attainment of their purpose; but after vicissitudes, which confront the hero, is happily united to him at the close." The prevailing sentiment is erotic and heroic (Śṛṅgāra and Vīra) in both dramas. While depicting these characters Śaṅkaradeva could not ignore the local fervour. They are developed with natural succession of beauty and merit but no desire for amorous feelings depicted therein. Both Rukmiṇī and Sītā are noble and kind-hearted women found in purely Assamese society. Rukmiṇī was the lovely daughter of King Bhīṣmaka of Kuṇḍila. Both Rukmiṇī and Kṛṣṇa fell in love with each other, while they came to know each other's accomplishments through the narration of the two bhāṭas, Surabhi and Haridāsa. Thus the attachment between the two became deep and they choose each other as their life partner. Her parents also gave their consent

and arranged for their marriage. But Rukmiṇī's brother Rukma stood as an obstacle here. He did not want his sister's marriage to be settled with Kṛṣṇa and wanted to marry her off to Śiśupāla instead. In this conflicting condition she was not out of patience, rather she called the most trusted and reliable royal priest without any delay-though she was restless in her mind, since her heart was with Kṛṣṇa. In depicting the women characters the playwright did not draw them as simple, uneducated and illiterate village women and in one of his plays he even made Rukmiṇī write a letter to Kṛṣṇa. Like the young lovers of the youthful time. Rukmiṇī was also distracted. But like the common girls, she did not offer her love to Kṛṣṇa with her activities and gestures and postures. In Śaṅkaradeva's dramas girls might be weak, but they are not foolish. And generally women never disclose their love to men first Rukmiṇī is different here, who sent message to Kṛṣṇa writing a secret letter to him through the reliable royal priest Vedanidhi. Rukmiṇī's letter in Assamese prose mixed with Brajāvali to Kṛṣṇa is worthnoting— "To Kṛṣṇa.. O Lord, having heard of your qualities and beauties. I have dedicated myself to you in body, mind and word. But the vile Śiśupāla comes to marry me as a jackal can desire a lioness as his wife (yaise Siṁhaka bhāryā nite śṛgāla āsaya thika). So do come and take away your slave in me. If you neglect, I will give up my life laying the blame at your door." But she would not like to touch even the shadow of Śiśupāla. This is a rare instance of sincerity, determination and promise of women's life and this letter can claim as the first love letter in the history of Assamese literature. Women can save themselves with the love and purity of their heart. Rukmiṇī wrote letter to Kṛṣṇa describing the coming danger of her life and suggested the way to elope her from the temple of Bhabānī on the day previous to her wedding day. The secret of that letter was centred round love and emotions of Rukmiṇī to Kṛṣṇa. This letter is significant in narrating the dramatic plot. In depicting the characters of the hero and the heroine and their love to each other. Though Śaṅkaradeva depicted her as intelligent, honest, calm and quiet, she was not sitting idly thinking about her fate but could show her presence of mind instead. In the medieval age women were in a lower rank of the society. They were not allowed to touch the religious books and were debarred from the object of worshipping and the like. So, to make them free from these superstitions Śaṅkaradeva took the pen in hand. He made Rukmiṇī write a letter to Kṛṣṇa engaged her in the battle-field as Kṛṣṇa's charioteer (coachman) while he had to fight with Rukma, the brother of Rukmiṇī

and with other princes. But she was not devoid of feminine love and softness. On the entreaty of Rukmiṇī to spare her brother's life, Rukma was granted pardon.

The character of Rukmiṇī is of impeccable rectitude in a restrained way. She symbolizes a woman's love which is her whole existence. Although the natural amorous attachment of two young souls are projected into the canvas, the playwright is not oblivious of Kṛṣṇa divinity or Rukmiṇī's despite her deep physical and emotional urge. Deep in love, dignified in demeanor, wise in counsel and action, Rukmiṇī is the central focus of the drama. The mental conflict of Rukmiṇī in Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa has taken the shape of modern outlook in the medieval background, which is the most important aspect of the drama.

Sītā in Rāma-Vijaya is also painted in the same order on the basis of parallelism with Rukmiṇī. Her deep love for Rāma and anxiety until she got him, her fear, hesitation and doubt—all these have been beautifully reflected in a small canvas. Like Rukmiṇī, she also has come into the picture with her love to Rāma, who is remembering her own condition in her former life where she wished to get Rāma as her husband in the next birth. Accordingly, there was a divine prophecy that Sītā would be united with Rāma in this life— “se Śrī Rāma Swāmīka caraṇa ohi janamata bheṭa nāhi pāwalo.” But she was not the worshipper of Rāma's physical beauty. Moreover, like Rukmiṇī, she was not tossing in pain in the separation of her first birth. The young mind of a woman at the spring of her life is seen in the character of Sītā like a natural human being. When Rāma stood up to bend the Haradhanu which was lodged with pawn that whoever present in the svayambara (a form of marriage in which the husband is selected by the bride) of Sītā succeeded in bending the bow and fixing an arrow in it Sītā would be entitled to his hand, she became restless thinking about Rāma's young age, as if he would not be able to bend it. While it came true, the bow having been lifted and broken, Sītā came forward and garlanded her paramour, Rāma. The character of Rāma was the main focus of the drama and as we know to the Vaiṣṇava Saint poets— “the mark of perfection of any literary work rested on its capacity to stir the deeper waters of the soul rather than agitate the senses, that is to paint the ideal so that it might appeal to the soul.” That is why, the dramatist was not able to draw Sītā with anything new in her character.

In both these dramas Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa and Rāma-Vijaya the beauty of the two heroines is suggested through two exquisite bhatimās. Even Brahmā and Viśvāmītra were enchanted by their beauty and were eager to get them who were

rebuked by their two maids Līlābatī and Madana-Manjurī in Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa and Madana-Mantharā and Kanakāvātī in Rāma-Vijaya.

Śaṅkaradeva's Pārijāta-Haraṇa was composed with an eye to social reform. His intention was not only to educate the common people in religio-ethical field, but also to reform the society. From this point of view, Śaṅkaradeva can be regarded as the first social reformer of Assam. This play is noted for the writer's power of observation and characterization. Satyabhāmā, who has been drawn with the natural jealousies of women, is the example of it. On hearing Kṛṣṇa's dedication of the Pārijāta flower to Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā was extremely agitated with anger and envy. Ultimately Kṛṣṇa had to promise to fetch a flower for her from heaven. She not only made him promise, but accompanied him for fetching the Pārijāta flower, so that Kṛṣṇa's other wives could not influence him anymore. She knew that she had many enemies and, therefore, she would not leave his company so that he could not give the same to his other wives. Satyabhāmā is the heroine in this play, and it is for her that Kṛṣṇa had to fight with Indra to get the Pārijāta tree. As painted by the dramatist she was so quarrelsome that even in the heaven she could not control herself. While Indra stood on the principle that no heavenly flower could be spared for an earthly woman, she accused Indra of sexual transgression with the herlots of Amarāvātī and also with Gautama's wife Ahalyā with impersonation. Śacī, Indra's wife also did not remain silent. She also shouted and accused Kṛṣṇa of sexual complicity with the womenfolk of Gokula. Satyabhāmā and Śacī have been depicted on the basis of parallelism. Being surprised at Satyabhāmā's abusive speech Indra was also compelled to say that she was the most trusted and eloquent among all the wives of Kṛṣṇa. She was not free from egoism, who wanted to establish herself over the other women. So, after bringing the flower from heaven, she compelled Kṛṣṇa to transplant the same near her palace and she wished to roam about in front of the other wives, putting the flower in her wig.

On the other hand, in their mental attitude and conduct, the two women characters Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā, strike a contrast; the former is dignified of men and demeanor, the latter is flippant of conduct and approach. Rukmiṇī is a little speaking and soft-hearted woman, very keen and dutiful to her husband. On the other hand, Satyabhāmā is too much talkative, sentimental and proud, who just wants to get her husband solely as her own. Both Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā are the two main devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa— Rukmiṇī's love is noble and

generous— whereas Satyabhāmā’s love is narrow and self-centred. Love is blind and it also causes jealousy. So, she cannot tolerate the idea of his love for other wives at the cost of negligence and disregards to herself. But Rukmiṇī is a bit different. On hearing the beauty and usefulness of the Pārijāta flower, she humbly prayed to Kṛṣṇa to have the same and did not demand it. Such humbleness is nowhere found in Satyabhāmā’s character—who used to think of her own happiness and prosperity. To be brief, in her capacity for abusive language and vitriolic outbursts, Satyabhāmā has no peer. This diseased psychology has added an edge to her character, natural fragilities a woman is instinctively “heir to”. Rukmiṇī is of quiet nature and if her words betray anything it is the nobility of her character and they are deep in thought and spiritual realisation. Another noteworthy thing is that since Satyabhāmā was not a princess whenever she had to address Rukmiṇī, she addressed her as a princess, but in return Rukmiṇī replied to her addressing her as a sister.

Pārijāta-Haraṇa expresses moods and temper that are nearer to life. The dramatist notices both the dark and bright sides of the womenfolk. Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā represent bright and dark sides respectively. The dramatist has shown exceptional ability in depicting the characters through local perspective and colour.

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Cosmogonical revelation of the Śrīmadbhāgavata of Śaṅkaradeva

Rashmi Rekha Goswami

The problem of the origin of the universe naturally fascinated “the brooding mind of India” in different ages as a result of which widely different ideas centering round the cosmogonical problem came into existence. But certain similar basic principles run through all cosmogonical ideas. According to Hindu Mythology, creation happened gradually. The Universe in primitive form was made up of Īśvara tattva . The Īśvara tattva primarily spreads homogenously throughout the Universe. In Hinduism, nature and all of god’s creation are manifestations of Him. He is within and without his creation, pervading the entire Universe and also observing it externally. Actually all this is nothing but a general assumption of Hindu mythology. While minutely observed, it is found that cosmogonical or cosmological ideas are the basis of cultural thoughts of all religions.

Śaṅkaradeva’s approach towards cosmogony or the theory of creation of the Universe as reflected in the Śrīmadbhāgavata also follows the same line and direction. Śaṅkaradeva’s Śrīmadbhāgavata is an outstanding and unique creation which is regarded as a masterpiece by all Hindus. This authentic work containing twelve skandhas (chapters) is nothing but the glorification of Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa, who is the root and the essence of the whole Universe. Śaṅkaradeva’s endeavour of delivering the concept of only one supreme reality i.e. Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa (eka deva eka seva eka bine nāi keva) is portrayed in the Śrīmadbhāgavata very beautifully.

Kṛṣṇa, according to Śaṅkaradeva, is the One-Eternal-Absolute who is the guardian of not only this Universe but also of countless Universes. From the philosophical angle, He is the supreme spirit (Param Brahma). Śaṅkaradeva’s teaching or philosophy is based on the fundamental principles of the Vedānta schools of Indian philosophy. But he is not the follower of any of the specific Vedāntic school. Actually, gathering the fragrance of Vedāntic dogmas he

innovates a different philosophy of his own. If there could be any question of mutation or affiliation, it could have been with the Gītā and the Bhāgavata purāṇa, which Śaṅkaradeva read and interpreted in his own way, at once original and new. The purport of Śaṅkaradeva's teaching is that bhakti to Kṛṣṇa is the realization of the nirguṇa (formless, non-dual) Parama Brahma through the guṇas of Lord Kṛṣṇa. His concept of godhead, which forms the bed-rock of his religious philosophy is that of one who is ever living and loving and the force with which the world is connected with god is both centripetal and centrifugal.

Śaṅkaradeva's interpretation of God, world and its creation :

According to Śaṅkaradeva the one and the only Ultimate Reality is Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa.¹ Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is out and out a believer in god being both immanent and transcendent (yena jala vāyu/pṛthivī ākāśa vyāpi āche carācara/sehimote mayo mana buddhi prāṇa/vyāpi ācho samastara). When Kṛṣṇa, the Absolute Reality is connected with this world, he assumes the name of Bhagavanta, Paramātmā etc. Similarly on the psychological plane, he is the presiding deity of the conscience (citta) following whom the jīvas secure the highest good. Based on different angles of vision, the same Reality Kṛṣṇa takes on different names. According to Vedānta philosophy, the highest Reality is Brahman and there is none beyond it.² But Śaṅkaradeva boldly asserts that Puruṣottama Kṛṣṇa is superior to even Brahman (kṣara pade ito dehāk bolaya/akṣara śabade Brahma, duiṭo kari Hari uttama nimitte/prakhyāt Puruṣottama). According to Śaṅkaradeva, the Supreme Reality or the Supreme Being is Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa who is infinite in nature. He is omniscient, omnipotent, creator, preserver and destroyer of the world.³ He is the root cause of the Universe.⁴ He is pure, attributeless, blissful and conscious self of the Universe who is also the cause of the jīvas.⁵ In Him, the world of creation exists and yet, he is beyond the world. He neither performs any work nor creates the world purposefully, being without any possessions, devoid of any movement, desire or attachment and activity. The act of creation, preservation and destruction is only his līlā.⁶ He creates, sustains and destroys the universe only for the sake of jīvas.⁷ Having created the world, Kṛṣṇa, the only Unchangeable Reality resides and pervades in it in a very detached manner.⁸ That Highest Reality (Nārāyaṇa) is formless, all pervading, eternal, undistorted faultless, full of natural delight and truth, composite of eternal knowledge and without having any size or shape or form.⁹ He is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the

Universe¹⁰ but he does all these in a detached manner. Nārāyaṇa who is the nature of sat, cit and ānanda is the only Reality underlying various objects and beings of the world.¹¹ He assumes different forms for different purposes but not for his own sake. Thus Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva etc. devas are nothing but his reflections.¹² But Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa is above all the devas¹³ and so he is the object of worship for these devas also.¹⁴ Īśvara creates the world through the instrumentality of māyā , but he is never attached to it. He supervises the whole process of creation, preservation and destruction only as a sākṣī because everything spreads from him and ultimately resides within him and so he is ever luminous.¹⁵ He is enriched with immense knowledge¹⁶ and so he is above avidyā or māyā. Śaṅkaradeva again and again emphasizes on the point that Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa incarnates in different forms only for the smooth running of the world process.¹⁷

The process of creation :

Śaṅkaradeva has both extensively and immaculately describes the concept of cosmogony in the Śrīmadbhāgavata. Śaṅkaradeva's anādi pātana gives an account of cosmogony in a very beautiful manner. It tells us how in the arc of descent life has come down from Brahma through prakṛti with the enveloping medium of his body and the physical world and how māyā acts in the whole process which alone is responsible for this conception of the so-called universe.¹⁸ Śaṅkaradeva says that the whole cosmogonical process is the effect of māyā.¹⁹ Sṛṣṭi in a specific terminology can be expounded as projection. At the end of a cycle, everything becomes finer and finer and is resolved back into the primal state from which it sprang and there it remains for a time, quiescent, ready to spring forth again. That is Sṛṣṭi, projection. And if it is asked that what is that radical point or that primal state, then Śaṅkaradeva answers that it is Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa. Thus in the philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva, the concept of cyclic universe is found.

During dissolution, everything including prakṛti, fourteen bhūvanas, jīvas, jaḍas etc. merge in the supreme soul Kṛṣṇa and remain in him.²⁰ Then again when his urge to create evolves he starts the process of creation as a mere sport with the help of prakṛti through the instrumentality of māyā²¹. He involves in the entire scheme of evolution and he himself enters in it for the smooth completion of the whole process. With the duty entrusted on prakṛti by the Supreme Soul to enjoin with the process of creation, prakṛti starts her work.²² In the

Śrīmadbhāgavata it is clearly mentioned that at the very sight of Īśvara , prakṛti becomes pregnant and mahat, the first tattva (compared to her son) evolves from her. From mahat, three ahaṁkāras (sāttvika, rājasika and tāmasika) spring forth. Again, from sāttvika ahaṁkāra, ten types of devatās (Vāyu, Vahni, Viṣṇu, Indra, Dīśa, Prajāpati, Aśvinī Kumāra, Mitra, Āditya and Varuṇa) come into existence. From tāmasika ahaṁkāra, the bhūtas evolve. The five tanmātras (fine elements) and the five bhūtas (gross elements) come within the sphere of tāmasika ahaṁkāra . That means at first from Śabdatanmātra, ākāśa bhūta evolves, from ākāśa through sparśa, vāyu evolves, from vāyu through rūpa tanmātra, tejas evolves, from tejas, jala come into being through rasa, and at last pṛthivī evolves with the essence of gandha from jala. From rājasika ahaṁkāra ten indriyas (vāk, pāṇi, pāda, pāyu, upastha, cakṣu, jihvā, nāsikā, carmma, karṇa)²³

Śaṅkaradeva again mentions that though in the process of creation ten devas come into existence yet nobody is illegible to create the brahmāṇḍa.²⁴ When Īśvara notices that the twenty four tattvas can't be assimilated by themselves or by other force to form the universe then with his māyā , he himself enters into creation and immediately the tattvas start to act and brahmāṇḍa come into being. The concept of brahmāṇḍa as depicted in the Śrīmadbhāgavata is more or less similar to that of the Vedic passages.²⁵ After the brahmāṇḍa coloured as golden (known as golden egg) being beneath the water for a long period of time, Īśvara in the form of Nārāyaṇa enters it, and then dissipate it into many divisions. From these divisions, along with different parts or sense organs of the body of Īśvara , three lokas, (svarga, pṛthivī and ākāśa) are also evolved.²⁶ The tattvas as depicted in the creation process of Śrīmadbhāgavata is more or less similar to that of the Sāṁkhya philosophy where the number of tattvas is twenty five i.e. prakṛti, puruṣa, mahat, ahaṁkāra (3 types) eleven indriyas, five tanmātras, five mahābhūtas. In the Śrīmadbhāgavata it is said that Kṛṣṇa himself assuming the form of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra creates, preserves and destroys the universe respectively. According to Śaṅkaradeva the process of creation and recreation never stops. It is a continuous process. Therefore, after one dissolution, Īśvara's urge for creation again fascinates and thus recreation starts once again. And thus creation and recreation goes on in a cyclic order. It is said in the Śrīmadbhāgavata that during the daytime of Prajāpati, creation goes on and during his night it stops.²⁷ A very lucid interpretation of the ten types of svarga

which includes from mahatattva to devagaṇas is found in the third skandha of the Śrīmadbhāgavata.

It is again and again stated in the Śrīmadbhāgavata that Nārāyaṇa himself enters into the creation which starts with the agitation in the guṇas (sattva, rajas, tamas) which are the constituents of prakṛti. And this agitation, made by Nārāyaṇa himself,²⁰ leads to the evolution of tattvas which ultimately results in the formation of brahmāṇḍa.³⁰ In the course of dissolution all the tattvas merge in prakṛti and prakṛti merge in Nārāyaṇa. While describing the structure of the universe it is said that fourteen bhūvanas constitute the universe.³¹ Thus Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa, the sole Reality of the Universe creates, governs, guides and supervises the whole process of cosmogony. So according to Śaṅkaradeva Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa should be glorified and worshiped from our inner heart and soul.

Conclusion :

After a careful study of Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy about the universe it can be said that this Universe is only a manifestation of māyā . Further, Īśvara or Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa is the controller of that māyā through his power of consciousness and jīva is ever mortified under the pressure of māyā. There is no final creation or dissolution, as dissolution or annihilation or cessation only means that life along with everything of the universe has only merged in the Universal Soul. And this Universal Soul (Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa) is eternal, because it is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent.

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2. etat param Brahma veda, nātaḥ param astīti, PU, VI. 7
3. harira adhīna huyā nāhike apara, BG, II. 4.89
4. jaya Jagannātha jagatara ādimula ..., Ibid, Anādi Pātana, III. 1.1
5. sadānanda sanātana deva nārāyaṇa / samaste jīvara jito parama kāraṇa...., Ibid, III. 13.618
6. Ibid, Anādi Pātana, III. 1. 5, 14
7. prapañcara bhitarā ... bhaktara nimitte kṛṣṇe karichā nirmāna, Ibid, II. 4.

8. samaste lokaka dekhichā satate antarjyāmi rūpa dhari / tathāpito tānka keho nedekhaya yāto aviṣaya hari ..., Ibid, VIII. II. 48
9. Ibid, VIII. 2. 53
10. jagatara sṛṣṭi sthiti layara kāraṇa / jito ādya deva bhagavanta nārāyaṇa, III. 21. 985
11. śānta cidānandarūpe bhagavanta vyāpi āche bhāvebhāva, VIII. 2. 46
12. Ibid, II. 6. 96 – 98
13. koti koti brahmā rudrara opare tomāra cale vikrama, Ibid, VIII. 2. 61
14. brahmā maheśvaro jāka sadā karai seva ... pariyā praṇāma, Ibid, Anādi Pātana, III. 1.2
15. Ibid, VIII. 6. 138 – 139
16. Ibid, VIII. 2. 54, VIII. 6. 152
17. Ibid, VIII. 9. 274
18. Ibid, II. 4. 77, 80
19. jāhāra māyāta hove sṛṣṭi, sthiti laya, Ibid, Anādi Pātana, III. 1.4
20. Ibid, Anādi Pātana, III. 1. 41 – 42
21. Ibid, Anādi Pātana, III. 1. 43 – 45
22. satvare kariyo māyā jagata prakāśa / āmiyo karibo tāte vinoda vilāsa / hena śuni prakṛti karilā praṇipāta / sṛṣṭira kāryaka yata lāgila tomāta// Ibid, Anādi Pātana, III. 1.51
23. Ibid, Anādi Pātana, III. 1. 52 – 59; III. 6. 409 – 413
24. ...simate janmiyā āchaya devacaya / brahmāṇḍa sraṇive keho samartha nahay // Ibid, III. 6.4
25. ṚG, X. 129, 3, X. 121.1; SB, VI. 1.1, II. 1.6
26. BG, III. 6. 435 – 442
27. Ibid, III. 12. 601
28. ādya sarga mahatattva dvitīya ahamkāra ... brahmā kahilo sāksāta // Ibid. III. 10. 575 – 579
29. īśvarara icchāta kṣobhita guṇachaya / tāta hante brahmāṇḍara bhaileka udaya // Ibid, Anādi Pātana, III. 1. 317
30. jagatara kāraṇa cauviś mahatattva ... brahmāṇḍaka karilā nirmāṇa ... Ibid, Anādi Pātana, III. 1. 77- 78
31. urdhe sāta loka tāta ... sāto parama bahala, Ibid, II. 4. 78

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A Glimpse Of Śaṅkaradeva's Philosophical Ideas

Kabita Doloi

Śaṅkaradeva the 'Mahāpuruṣa' created a new renaissance in all aspects of religion, society, art, language, literature, music etc. and gave Assamese society a new identity. It is rare to find out such excellent personality who may be described as 'All in one'. Śaṅkaradeva was the genius having the qualities of a poet, saint, religious teacher, musical master and expounder. He enriched Assamese society through his innumerable excellent contributions. His contributions towards Assamese society is so deeply rooted that it is unthinkable to imagine the socio-cultural aspects of Assam without him. He rebuilt the poetry of Assamese language in its classical perfection. Śaṅkaradeva was considered as the master of music, drama and musical instruments because of his creations like 'Aṅkīyā Nāt'. Along with this, it may be mentioned that Śaṅkaradeva was popular among the common people. He could bring divine Kṛṣṇa to the ordinary people. About Śaṅkaradeva Vasudev S. Agarwal has given the view, 'Śaṅkaradeva was like the glorious sun under whose warmth of mind Assam blossomed like a lotus of thousand petals.'¹⁶

Generally, Śaṅkaradeva was neither a philosopher nor he propounded a new philosophy; but being familiar with the systems of philosophy, he presented lots of admirable expressions in terms of art. 'The philosophical basis of his religion', says Birinchi Kumar Barua, 'is the culmination of the Bhakti movement of Northern India augmented by Rāmānanda, and of Southern India.'¹⁷ According to Śaṅkaradeva God is the central Reality of the soul and matter; both of them cannot have existence without Him. The soul and the matter are inseparable from Him. Hence in 'Kīrtana-Ghoṣā' Śaṅkaradeva mentions about their relation as :

Tumi Paramātmā jagatara Īśā eka/

¹⁶ . A Creative Vision, p-60 .

¹⁷ . Śaṅkaradeva : Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam, p-87 .

Eko bastu nāhike tomāta byatireka//

It means Supreme Self is the Lord of the Universe and there is nothing in the world except Him.

From metaphysical point of view Śāṅkaradeva presented a non-dualistic standpoint which was different from the Vaiṣṇava counter-parts in the rest of India. Further, Maheswar Neog mentioned, 'The philosophical aspect of Śāṅkaradeva's poetry and religion corresponds rather greatly to the Advaitic views of the great Ācārya Śāṅkara'.¹⁸ Śāṅkaradeva accepted three kinds of substance: matter (acit), soul (cit) and God (Īśvara). He maintained that from Paramātmā the subtle jīvas and the subtle material powers of the universe emanate and both conscious and unconscious bodies of the universe also originate from Him. He described the noumenal Self as Ātmā which is immutable and immortal that does not have birth and death. Only the non-eternal body has birth and death. The Ātmā is associated with this body but distinct from it as the fire from the fuel it burns. After the destruction of the body the embodied Ātmā merges itself with unlimited Brahman. For Śāṅkaradeva Manas or the Mind determines the quality and the activity of the body and is a product of Māyā. Due to the ignorance created by the Māyā the embodied Ātmā or the Soul associates itself with the activities of the body. A lamp illuminates so long it is connected with the wick, oil and fire; in the same way the noumenal self goes by the name Jīva and suffers pain and miseries of the world so long as it is associated with the body, mind and the senses. Further, according to Śāṅkaradeva though the Jīvātmā originates from Paramātmā, yet both are not identical and co-extensive. He again maintained that though they have their own independent existence yet Jīvātmā and Paramātmā are interrelated. He considered Nirguṇa Brahman to be the ultimate Reality and Jīva to be one with Brahman. For him Brahman is indeterminate (nirvisēṣa), changeless (avikārī) and eternal (nitya). With these monistic views Śāṅkaradeva tried to combine the theistic or religious idea of a determinate personal God, which is the central point of his creed. He taught that Bhakti or sole devotion to the personal and transcendent God can lead human being to the knowledge of Self (Ātma-jñāna) the result of which is liberation.

¹⁸ . Sankaradeva and His Times, p- 243.

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The Doctrines of Advaitavāda of Śaṅkarācārya in Śaṅkaradeva's work

Madan Haloi

Introduction :

The Neo-Vaiṣṇava movement of Assam is mainly associated with the personality of Śaṅkaradeva. After having returned from pilgrimage, he propagated his new cult of vaiṣṇavism in Assam. The official name of his vaiṣṇavism is “ekaśaraṇa-nāmadharma” i.e. the religion of supreme surrender to only one God and that one is Kṛṣṇa or Hari. The Vaiṣṇavite movement of Śaṅkaradeva contributed a lions share in the cultural and literary progress of Assamese society. He formed the centre as well as the ideal of all the literary activities of the age, so much so that the period is best described as the age of Śaṅkaradeva. He used his literary works as the vehicles for expounding his creed. Popularly the writings of Śaṅkaradeva are classified into three groups on the basis of the nature of their composition – compilation, translation and original. A deep study of his literary works shows that he bears resemblance in many points with the philosophy of Śaṅkarācārya i.e. Advaitavāda.

Methodology : The present paper has been written in descriptive method. Here, the data have been collected from primary and secondary sources.

Aim and objective : The views of Advaitavāda of Śaṅkarācārya are also found in the works of Śaṅkaradeva. The main aim and objective of this paper is to highlight the similarities between Advaitavāda and Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy.

Discussion :

Although, Śaṅkaradeva was primarily a religious preacher his writings clearly transmit his philosophical views also. In translating the Bhāgavata, he has closely followed the commentary of Śrīdharasvāmī who was a follower of the

Advaitavāda school of Śaṅkarācārya. There is every likelihood of him being influenced by the views of the said commentator while establishing his creed.

According to the Advaitavāda, God or Brahman is the only reality, it is infinite consciousness and Absolute bliss. He abides everywhere. According to Śaṅkaradeva also, God is the only reality whom he names as Brahma or Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa or Hari. He says in Kīrtana-ghoṣā thus –“tumi satya brahma

Nothing is real in the world except the God. Śaṅkaradeva says thus –

“tumise kevale satya michā save āna,
jāni jñānīgaṇe kare hṛdayata dhyāna//”.²

According to Śaṅkaradeva, Kṛṣṇa or Hari abides in every living beings ---

“samasta bhutare tumi āchā hṛdayata/
tatva nāpāi tomāka vicāre bāhirata//”³

Śaṅkarācārya, in his school of Vedānta philosophy accepts the unreality of the world. According to him, only God is real, not the world – “brahmasatyaṃ jagat mithyā”.

In the words of Śaṅkaradeva also, we find same view of Śaṅkarācārya regarding the world. According to him, the world has no reality –

“tumi satya brahma michā jagat śrajana//”⁴

(O Brahman, you are the real and the creation of the world is unreal.)

Again, in the Kīrtana-ghoṣā, he says – “asāra saṃsāra nāhi ihāta viśvāsa i.e. there is no reliance on this unreal world.

Śaṅkaradeva does not believe in the modification or change of the Brahman. According to him, Brahman is like the actor on a stage or the rope appearing as a snake. In his Anādi Pātana, he mentions thus –

“kachile nātaka yena bhinna rūpa dekhi/
manara kalpanā iṭo samasta saṃsāra//”⁵

(It is like an actor appearing as a different man when he wears robes. The world is the product of the imagination of the mind.)

Again, he says thus,

Brahma vyātireke yata dekhā michā āna/
jarita upaji yena āche sarpa jñāna//. ⁶

(Except the Brahman; whatever you see is unreal. As if the cognition of a snake has arisen in a piece of rope.)

Thus, Śaṅkaradeva believes that the Brahman, the cause of the universe does not undergo any real change during the creation. In this point he bears resemblance with the view of Advaitavāda, the school of Śaṅkarācārya.

From the practical standpoint i.e. vyāvahārikadr̥ṣṭi of Advaitavāda, the Brahman can be regarded as the cause, the Creator, the Sustainer and the Destroyer of the world as well as the Omnipotent and Omniscient Being. This view of Advaitavāda is also found in the works of Śaṅkaradeva. From the practical stand point, Śaṅkaradeva also considers the Brahman as the cause, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Destroyer, the Omnipotent and Omniscient Being. In his Kīrtana-ghoṣā, he mentions thus, --

“namo nārāyaṇa jagata kāraṇa/
khaṇḍiyo saṁsāra bhaya//” . 7

(O Nārāyaṇa, the cause of the world I bow to you. Remove my fear for the world)

In Nīminavasiddhasaṁvāda, he says thus –

“bibhaṅjiyā āpunāka prabhu Nārāyaṇa/
srajlīlā indriya yata prāṇa buddhi mana//” 8

(Dividing Himself, Lord Nārāyaṇa created the senses, the creatures, the lives and the mind)

In the following śloka of the Nīminavasiddhasaṁvāda, Śaṅkaradeva describes Kṛṣṇa as the destroyer of the world –

Kālarūpī Kṛṣṇa jito jagata ādhāra/
Karanta līlāye pāche saṁhāra sṛṣṭika//. 9

(Kṛṣṇa, the container of the world, sportingly destroys the creation in the form of time)

The māyāvāda is the chief feature of Śaṅkarācārya’s Advaita School of philosophy. He accepts māyā only to explain the origin and nature of the world as vivarta, an illusory appearance of Brahman like the wrong sight of the rope as snake.

Likewise Śaṅkarācārya, Śaṅkaradeva also believes the world as vivarta of Brahman. Because of monistic position, he leans on the side of vivartavāda. According to Śaṅkaradeva, Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa creates, sustains and destroys the universe through māyā. His true nature is not known due to ignorance caused by māyā, which is an all pervading nature. He is the only truth, the rests are delusions.

According to Śaṅkaradeva, māyā is that power of God which conceals vastu (object) and exposes avastu (non-object) in its place. Māyā conceals God and holds the objects of attachment i.e. asāra viṣaya unto the individual self “avastuka dekhāwaya vastuka āvari, sehise mohora māyā jānā niṣṭa kari”. 10

This is done by māyā through its two powers namely Āvaraṇa and Vikṣepa. God pervades all the universe, but is not affected by merits and demerits of māyā.

Śaṅkarācārya is of the opinion that there is no difference between God and individual soul “jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ” Śaṅkaradeva also supports this view of Śaṅkarācārya. According to him, the individual souls are the parts of God – “Kṛṣṇarese amśa save jagata niścaya, viṣṇu – amśa Jīva”. 11

Again, in a Bargīta, he says thus - “hāmu yata Jīva śiva teri amśa kāhe ohi mohabandha”

The Advaitavādins believe that Jīva is composed of the illusory body and the soul, which is the Brahman. Śaṅkaradeva also believes this view of Advaitabādins. He says thus –

“mayi paramātmā āta nāhike sandeha/
dehatese ācho mai noho ito deha//” 12

(There is no doubt about it that I am the Brahman. Though I am in this body, I am not this body.)

To the relation between God and the world are applied the analogies of gold and

gold ornaments (Kīrttana-ghoṣā, 520, Bha – II, 648), of clay and clay made vessels, (Bhaktiratnākara, 5) of fire and sparks (Niminasiddhasamvāda, 181), of yarn and cloth (Bhaktiratnākara, 34). But, gold ornament’s, clay vessels and sparks are not. Not reals, seen from the view point of absolute reality i.e. paramārtha vicāra, these empirical objects are in reality gold, clay and fire. In the same way, the Jīvas and the world, which have been called parts of Brahman are not real transformations of Brahman but are apparent names and forms “mukuṭa kuṇḍala yena suvarṇara bhinna nuhi, michā mātra nāmarūpa yata” 13. The position becomes clear when Śaṅkaradeva calls in the Advaitic analogies of rope and snake (bhaga, XII, 171), of shell and silver (Bhaktiratnākara, 34), (Bhāvārthadīpika, XI.19.17:mithyā dṛṣyatvacchukti rajatādi vad ityādi)

To describe the relation of the world with the God or its reality, Śaṅkarācārya mentions the appropriate example of snake and rope.

Likewise the Advaitavāda, Śaṅkaradeva also believes that Brahman is free from all distinctions – Sajātīya, Vijātīya and Svāgata. But, due to māyā, various distinctions of Brahman are seen. In Kīrttana-ghoṣā, he says –

Māyātese dekhaya bibidha pariccheda/

Svarūpata tomāra nāhika kichu bheda//. 14

(It is because of māyā that various distinction are seen in you, In truth, you have no distinction at all) Again, he states thus –

Nitya niranjana svaprakāśa ātmā eka/

māyā upādhira pade dekhiya aneka//. 15

(There is one eternal, spotless and self evident Atman i.e. Brahman. It is seen as many due to māyā.)

According to Śaṅkarācārya Brahman is always nirguṇa, but when he comes in relation with māyā, then he is called saguṇa. This saguṇa Brahman is the creator, protector and destroyer of the world. Śaṅkaradeva also supports this view of Śaṅkarācārya. According to him, Brahman is beyond time and space and is infinite. In the very first verse of Kīrttana-ghoṣā, he salutes this formless nirguṇa Brahman as Nārāyaṇa, the cause of all incarnation –

“Prathame pranāmo brahmarūpī sanātana/

Sarva avatāra kāraṇa Nārāyaṇa//.” 16

This nirguṇa Brahman with the help of māyā, creates, protects and destroys the universe. Actually, the Sākāra Brahman or Saguṇa Brahman is only the creation of the faith in the heart of the bhaktas what Śaṅkaradeva did was only the attribution of qualities to Nirguṇa Kṛṣṇa. So, Mādhavadeva in his Nāmagoṣā states –

“Nirguṇa Kṛṣṇara guṇaka prakāśa Karilā Śrī Śaṅkare//” 17

According to the Advaitavāda, the liberation is the disappearance of the illusory distinction between the soul and the Brahman and is attainable during one’s lifetime. Śaṅkaradeva also believes in the disappearance of distinction between the Soul and the Brahman even in one’s lifetime and not only after death. In the Bhāgavata 12th book, he mentions thus –

“ahaṅkāra guchile brahmāka Jīva dekhe/

māyā eri āpuni buddhira gucai brahma//

nirmala hṛdaye Jīva dekhe parabrahmā/

ji kālate jñāna astra chede ahaṅkāra//

chinde karmabandha jīve tebe āponāra/

hṛdayate paramānanda howe yata//
 paripūrṇa ātmā howai manata sākṣāta/
 dehako nedekhe jīve huyā brahmamaya//". 18

Again in Niminavasiddhasaṁvāda, he states –

“śravana kīrttana kare jito aka kariyā dṛḍha biśvāsa/
 ehi janamate guci manamoha hovaya brahma āpuni//”. 19

(He who hears and sings this with a firm belief, being relieved of his mental illusion, becomes himself the Brahman even in his birth).

Śaṅkaradeva follows the fourfold preparations and the threefold steps as prescribed in the Advaitavāda school for a liberation seeker. The fourfold preparations are nityānityavastuviveka ihāmutrārthaphalabhogavirāga. Samādisatkasampatti, and mumukṣtva. The three steps are śravaṇa, manana and nididhyāsana.

Śaṅkaradeva gives the liberation seeker the knowledge of nityānityavastuviveka by explaining that Brahman is real and the world is not –

“tumi satya brahma michā jagata śrajana.” 20

Again, he imparts ihāmutrartha phalabhogabirāga by deprecating desires for enjoyment either in this world or in the next life –

henajāni viṣayata huyoka bimukha/
 paśu śarīrato pāya biṣayara sukh.// 21

Again, he teaches sama, dama etc in this way –

yijane jānilā mai parama bāndhava/
 tāra nāma sama ave jānibā bāndhava// 22

(O uddhava, know it, someone’s knowledge that I am his great friend is called the sama.

mora rūpa cintante manata karai śrama/
 jānā prāṇa sakhi ave take buli dama//.” 23

(o friend dear as my life, the effort to bring my image before the mind is called the dama.)

Śaṅkaradeva has tried to grow an earnest desire for liberation by glorifying it. In the Bhāgavata 12th book, he says –

“hṛdayata parama ānanda howe jāta/
 paripūrṇa ātmā howai manata sākṣāta//
 dehako nedekhe jīve huya”.24

Conclusion : Thus, the above discussion, makes us able to know that there are many similarities between Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy and Advaita school of Vedānta philosophy. He upheld the philosophy of oneness. According to him, there is only one reality in the world and he is Hari or Kṛṣṇa. The world and worldly things have not reality. These are seen to be real due to māyā or ignorance. Due to ignorance, one identifies his soul with the body and then he gets bondage. There is no difference between the individual soul and the Brahman. Due to māyā they appear to be different from each other. But, when this illusory distinction disappears, then one gets liberation in his life time.

Foot Notes –

1. kurukṣetra. V. 488
2. Kīrttana-ghoṣā. 8.522
3. Kīrttana-ghoṣā. 8.521
4. kurukṣetra. 488
5. Anādi Pātanaa, 65-66
6. Bhāgavata, 12th Book, 171
7. kīrtana, v. 64
8. NiminavasiddhaSaṁvāda, 110
9. Ibid, 114
10. Bhāgavata, II, 649
11. Ibid, 651
12. Bhāgavata, 12th Book, 209
13. Kīrttana-ghoṣā, 370
14. Kīrttana-ghoṣā, uresabarnan, 8. 83.
15. Kurukṣetra. 511
16. Kīrttana-ghoṣā. 1
17. Nāmaghoṣā, 357
18. Bhāgavata, 12th Book, 177-79
19. NiminavasiddhaSaṁvāda, 424.
20. kuruksetra, 488
21. kīrtana, 36
22. Bhāgavata 11th Book, v. 213
23. Bhāgavata 11th Book, v. 214

24. Bhāgavata, 12th Book, 178-79

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First Assamese Biographical Literature: *Carit Puthi*

Minati Hazarika

The simple definition of biography is the record of a life and biographical literature is that branch of literature which deals with person's lives. "One of the oldest forms of literary expressing, biographical literature seeks to re-create in words of the life of a human being, that of the writer himself or of another person, drawing upon the resource, memory and all available evidence- written, oral, pictorial." (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 1 Ed, page 1006).

Biographical literature focuses upon a human being deals with the particulars of his life. Man wants to be immortal. The root of biography started in man's search for immortality. It begins in praise.

In Assam, the first biographical literature originated in praise of the *Vaiṣṇava* poet, saint and reformer Śrī Śaṅkaradeva, during *Vaiṣṇava* period. *Carit Puthis*, the lives of saints, were the first Assamese biographical literature in both prose and poetry. "...very important type of literature that developed as an offshoot of the resurgence of the *Sattrā* institutions was the *Carit Puthis*, the biographies of Śaṅkaradeva. Later, this tradition continued in the biographies of many other *Vaiṣṇavite* saints. Recitations from the biographies of saints as a source of religious inspiration to devotees are made congregational prayers to this day." (*List of Assamese Literature*, Dr. B.K. Barua, page 63).

Carit Puthis are not biographies in modern sense. These are hagiographies. According to the "Century Dictionary" the meaning of hagiographies is sacred writing or literature, a collection of lives of saints." (page 2680). *Carit Puthis* are actually the hagiographies of *Vaiṣṇava* Saints, a new addition to the Assamese literature.

Hagiographies accepted the possibility of miracles in the lives of the Saints. Their aim was to glorify the saints and edify the common people. "It was not uncommon to transfer miracles and episodes from the life of one saint to that of another to achieve his end." (*Encyclopedia Americana*, Vol. 3, 1978, page 679).

Carit Puthis are still valuable and have a secured place as the first literary treatment of the lives of *Vaiṣṇava* saints of Assam. ‘*Guru Carit*’ by Rāma Caraṇa Thākura is the most voluminous biography in verse about Śrī Śaṅkaradeva. According to ‘*Kathā Guru Carit*’ (a biography in prose) Mādhavadeva was the first biographer to undertake a daily recitation of his *Guru Śaṅkaradeva*’s biography as a source of religious inspiration to devotees, who congregated for prayers and religious discussions. After Mādhavadeva, this practice continued and many other biographies of *Vaiṣṇava* saints took their own place in Assamese biographical literature.

Carit Puthis are really new addition to Assamese literature. “So far culture has been monopolized by the gods and goddesses, but now for the first time it took living human beings for its subject both in Buranjīs as well as in the *Carit Puthis*” (*Contemporary Indian Culture*, Article from Assamese Literature, B.K Barua, 1959, page 2). As *Carit Puthis* are hagiographies, the aim of *Carit Puthis* were to arouse faith and respect to the saints. So the hagiographies gave emphasis to glorify their master’s personality by adding miraculous episodes to their lives. “Naturally hagiographers accepted the possibility of miracles, and told as true stories no present day biographers would dare to record.” (*The Nature of Biography*, John A. Garraty, 1957, page 56).

From ‘*Guru Carit*’ and other *Carit Puthis* we came to know that during Śaṅkaradeva’s lifetime, Śaṅkaradeva used to celebrate the glory of *Lord Rāma* and *Lord Kṛṣṇa* in songs and narrated their life stories according to the wish of his disciples. Here lies the root of biographical literature. But the practice was not in an ordeal form. After Śaṅkaradeva, when Mādhavadeva took charge as the head of the *Vaiṣṇavas*, he organised the ceremonials and he himself told his disciples, the glory of their master.” ...In the days of the Mādhavadeva, telling of the story of the *Guru* and listening to it became a part of the daily religious duty of the minutest details of the lives of the Śaṅkaradeva and his disciples. (*Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*, Maheswar Neog, 1966, First Ed., page 2)

The biographical literature that is *Carit Puthis* has an important place in Assamese literature not for the lives of saints and activities of *Vaiṣṇava* order, but for providing us more and more information about the social, political, economic conditions of the state and the background of *Vaiṣṇava* movement in Assam.

Biographers, whose biographical works concentrate the activities of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, consider their master as the incarnation of *Viṣṇu*, but they never forget to realize that they were born in the form of man.

“The *Carit Puthis* aimed at generating a sense of reverence and devotion in the minds of the ordinary men towards the saints by recitals of incidents from their lives.the subject matter of the *Carit Puthis* was directly the lives of the eminent *Vaiṣṇavite* saints.” (*Aspects of Early Assamese Literature*, Edited by Bani Kanta Kakoti, 1953, page 136). The language of the *Carit Puthis* is simple, emotional, more homely and informal, so that the ordinary people can follow the language and content of the *Carit Puthis*.

The writers of *Carit Puthis* were themselves the devotee of their masters with all their deep feelings and regards. They described their masters' lives and believed that others might have the same feelings and regard towards their masters. The biographers described the subject-matter as the daily diaries of their masters activities very attractively. As the biographers believed their masters were incarnations of *Viṣṇu*, and the same feelings should touch their readers and listeners, so that they might feel the similar inspiration to follow the *Vaiṣṇava* ideals and teachings.

In these *Carit Puthis*, the general mass, for the first time, came into more intimate contact with their masters and felt their happiness and sorrows, and calumny with deep feelings. “In this respect *Carit Puthis* may be taken to be human documents of irresistible charm, absorbing interest and wide appeal.” (*Aspects of Early Assamese Literature*, Edited by Bani Kanta Kakoti, 1953, page 139).

Remarkable *Carit Puthis* are—(printed books) (i) Rāma Carāṇa Thākura : *Guru Carit*

(ii) Rāmānanda Dvija : *Śrī Guru Carit*

(iii) Bhusan Dvija : *Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva*

(iv) Collection of five Carits : *Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Śrī Gopāladeva Carita*

(v) Nilakanta Das : *Śrī Śrī Banamālīdeva Carit*

(vi) Ramā Kanta Dvija : *Śrī Śrī Gopāldeva Kathā Carit*

(vii) Ed. Rameswar Gosain : *Śrī Śrī Baṅśīgopāldeva Carit*

(viii) Rāmananda Dvija : *Śrī Śrī Baṅśīgopāldeva Carit*

(ix) Daityari Thakur : *Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva Mādhavadeva Carit*

(x) Ed. Maheswar Neog : *Guru Carit Kathā*

(xi) Ravi Ramrai Das : *Guru Līlā*

(xii) Bangaya Giri : *Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Harideva*

In these *Carit Puthis*, we find a very homely atmosphere. The subject of the *Carit Puthis* is something different from dry religious truths and only activities of the saints, lives, but these are human documents full of inspiration for devotees. So in present day also, *Carit Puthis* have their own place as a source of medieval Assam's history of *Vaiṣṇava* movements.

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IN SEARCH OF PANACEA

DR. PARIMAL KUMAR DATTA

Introduction :

Rabindra Nath Tagore, Vishwakavi and Seer, sang in his famous poem “Bharatatirtha’-

Keha nahi jane kar ahvane kata manusher dhara
Durbar srote ela kotha hate, samudre hala hara,
Hethay Arya, hetha Anarya, hethay Drabir Cin-
Shak-Hoon-dal Pathan-Mughal ek dehe halo lin//

This view of Kaviguru is truly applicable to Assam. Assam, the Queen of Beauty and Wealth, has been attracting the people of the other parts of the country and neighbouring states since time immemorial. People came, settled here and formed a great nation. So the population pattern of the medieval times in Assam was something like garlic, reflecting oneness in the midst of disunity and diversity, as if a sea of humanity tied by an unseen bond of unity.

Formation of Assamese Society :

Chronicles, genealogies and inscriptions show the true picture of the formation of Assamese society during the medieval period when Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva appeared.

Those sources speak of the following castes, sub-castes, professional castes and tribes.

Castes, sub-castes and professional castes :

Brāhmiṇs, Daivajñas or Gaṇakas, Kāyasthas, Kalitās, Kochas or Rājavaṅśīs, Āhoms, Cutiyās, Keots, Sālois, Kumāras, Nāpitas, Surīs (brewers), Camāras, Dhobās, Yugīs, Hāris, Caṇḍālas, Jolas (Weavers), Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, Natas, Bhātas, Telis, Thathāris (brass-workers), Sonāris, Kaṅsarīs, Kamāras, Shankhārīs (workers in conch-shell), Baṇiyās, Sūtāras (carpenters), Mucīs (cobblers), Śilākutīs (stone-cutters), Mālis (gardeners, garland-makers), Rajakas (dyers), Śilpakāras (artisans), Cunerīs (workers in lime), Sālais (sweet-meat dealers), Tokars, Hāḍīs, Dobas (Doms) etc.

Tribes, sub-tribes :

Bodo- Kacārīs, Gāros, Khāsis, Kārbis, Lālungs, Tiwās, Jayantīās, Misings, Dimāchās, Khāmtis, Doaneāhs, Tāi-phākes, Turungs, Āitanīās, Narās, Cākmās, Meshas, Pāwis, Akās, Ādis, Tangdas, Miris, Wāncus, Nāgās, Pudangs, Serdukpens, Naktas, Kanyāks, Singhphows, Semās, Syntengs, Chins, Luseis, Hmars, Paites, Hajongs, Raltes, Lakhers etc.

Muslims :

As a result of the invasions of the Turkī – Afghan adventures, fortune-seekers, the Mughal and many soldiers belonging to Islam, sometimes prisoners of war and sometimes on their own behalf, stayed back in Assam after the military expeditions were over.

Customs and rites followed by Assamese people during the medieval period :

The Brāhmiṇs, the Kāyasthas, the Daivajñās, the Kalitās, the Keots etc. followed the laws and customs prescribed by Smritis. The Āhoms accepted Hinduism. Tribes spread over the entire valley were governed by their age-old customary laws, practices and institutions.

Philosophical divisions of the Hindus :

Hindus were mainly divided into three sects – Śaivas, Śāktas and Vaiṣṇavas.

Śaivas

Until the coming of the Neo-Vaiṣṇava cult Śiva was a very important aspect of Hinduism in Assam.

Śāktas :

Due to the impact of the Tantric Cult, Śāktism played the most important part in the political, social and cultural areas of Assam.

Tāntric practices criticized :

In spite of Tantra's immense popularity, vast literature, universal character, scientific approach, royal patronage and stupendous influence upon the people's daily activities related to rituals, it lost its glory in Assam on account of its cryptic language, debased practices and actual abuses of injunctions.

Śāktas were vehemently opposed and bitterly criticized for human and animal sacrifices.

According to some scholars, human beings used to be regularly sacrificed in the Tāmreśvari Temple of the Śādiyā region when the territory was ruled by

rulers of the Cutiyā Kings. Animal sacrifice was common to all the Śāktapīṭhas in Assam.

Conversions to Islam :

Conversions to Islam began in Assam during this period for some reasons.

Sanskrit language and non-Aryan ethnic groups in Assam :

The Brāhmaṇical rites and rituals were conducted in the Sanskrit language. The majority of the people who belonged to the non-Aryān ethnic groups considered this language unsuitable for them in following the religious injunctions and practices.

Arrival of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva :

At this juncture Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva appeared in the holy land of Assam in 1449 A.D. He was born with the knowledge of Śaṅkarācārya, organizational power of Buddha and literary genius of Vālmīki. He ushered in the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam and Coochbehar.

Vaiṣṇavism in Assam before Śaṅkaradeva :

The seed of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism was shown in the soil of Assam before the birth of Śaṅkaradeva. The Vāsudeva Cult was popular in Assam. The names like Vāsudeva, Śaṅkarṣaṇa, Kāmadeva, Harideva and Aniruddha indirectly point to the prevalence of the Vāsudeva Cult before the advent of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva did not preach the Pāñcarātra Cult, but mentioned it respectfully in his 'Kīrtana'.

Monotheistic Bhakti Cult before Śaṅkaradeva :

The monotheistic Bhakti Cult was not unfamiliar to a section of people. This is evident from the writings of the pre-Śaṅkarite poets like Hemasarasvatī, Harihara Vipra, Mādhava Kandalī and Kaviratna Sarasvatī.

A revolutionary approach by 'Śaṅkaradeva' :

During the period of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's arrival Assam was torn by caste-ism, religious fundamentalism, political turmoil, instability, uncertainty and social degradation.

It was not easy for Śaṅkaradeva to change the priest-ridden, highly ritualistic and caste-based Assamese society which comprised of many castes, sub-castes, tribes, clans and classes.

His penetrative vision, deep Śāstrik knowledge, simple language, broad mission, poetical genius, trusted lieutenants, unchallenged organizational power

and easy philosophy of Ekaśaraṇīyā Dharma brought revolutionary changes. The neglected, down-trodden, ill-treated and politically tortured masses responded to his call. His revolutionary approach broke all the bondages and barriers of casteism. A new social structure emerged due to the impact of his Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement.

Features of Śaṅkaradeva's approach :

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's new approach to the people of Assam is mainly featured with the following –

a) **New faith based on the Bhāgavatapurāṇa and the Gītā :**

His new faith was based on the Bhāgavatapurāṇa and the Gītā. He got all the major elements of his Ekaśaraṇīyā Dharma from the Bhāgavatapurāṇa and the Gītā.

b) **Simplicity and purity of the new faith :**

The Brāhmaṇical Cult which existed during that period was ritual dominated. The simplicity and the purity of the new faith attracted the unsophisticated masses to the devotional faith.

c) **Open to all :**

The portal of this new faith was kept wide open to all communities. No discrimination on the basis of castes and status was made at the time of conferring initiation or ordination.

d) **Assamese language as the medium of mass instruction :**

He knew the pulse of the common people regarding the Sanskrit language. So he took simple Assamese language instead of Sanskrit. Observing the psychology of the masses, he felt that the Sanskrit language was a bar to religion and cultural unity among the tribal people. He tried to tie them all in the Assamese language for the religion and social unity.

e) **Scientific socialist thoughts :**

He expressed scientific, socialist thoughts by allowing all the tribes who were kept outside the doors of the Brāhmaṇical religious rituals, equal status in enjoying religious rites by saying thus-

Kirāta Kacārī Khachī Gāro Miri
Yavana Kaṅka Gowala/
Asama Muluka Rajaka Turuka
Kuvaca Mleccha caṇḍāla//

Ano yata nara Kṛṣṇa sevakara
saṅgate pabitra hay//

(Kīrāta, Kacārī, Khachī, Gāro, Miri, Yavana, Kaṅka, Gowala, Asama, Muluka, Rajaka, Turuka, Kuvaca, Mleccha, caṇḍāla and all other tribes and casts (which have been regded as untouchables and deprived of equality in the society) can be uplifted as soon as they penetrate Bhaktidharma)

f) Equality :

The following stanzas from Kīrtana-ghoṣā express Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's deep loyalty for the equality among human socity and kindness for neglected animals-

Samasta bhūtate byāpi ācho mai Hari/
Sabāko mānibā tumi Biṣṇu buddhi kari//
brāhmaṇar caṇḍālar nibicāri kul/
dātāt corat jār dṛṣṭi ekatul//
nīcat sādhut jār bhaila eka jñān/
tāhākese paṇḍit buliya sarbajan//
kukkura śṛgāla gardabharo ātmā Rāma/
jāniyā sabāko pari karibā praṇāma//

He won the heart of the masses by sowing the seeds of equality –

g) Nāmgharas and Satras :

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva knew the weaknesses of Hindu religion. Hindus did not give much importantance on the organizational activities. He realized its importance and established Nāmgharas and Satras. Nāmgharas established by Śaṅkaradeva, known as 'the museum of the culture of the Assamese people', bound all and made the plinth of the great Assamese society which was free from religious exploitations.

h) Literature :

Śaṅkaradeva realised that no new faith could be propagated without the literature of that faith. So he composed Bargītas and Kīrtana-ghoṣā besides other literary compositions in order to infiltrate the devotional messages into the mind of the masses and attract the millions towards Ekaśaraṇīyā Dharma.

i) Dramatic performances :

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva knew that common masses had much attraction towards dramatic performance. So he applied this technique in spreading his Eka śaraṇīyā Dharma. Dramatic performances were regularly held to attract a large

number of adherents to the devotional fold. He composed six dramas – i) Patnī Prasāda, ii) Kāliya Damana, iii) Rukmiṇī Haraṇa, iv) Keligopāla, v) Pārijāta haraṇa, vi) Śrī Rāmavijaya. Moreover he himself acted in Cinhayātra whose dramatic version is not available.

j) Two modes of practising Bhakti :

Out of nine modes of practicing Bhakti i.e. Śravana, Kīrtana, Smaraṇa, Padasevana, Arcana , Bandana , Dāsya , Sakhya , Ātmanivedana , he stressed on Śravna and Kīrtana. They are not subject to the restriction of time, place and persons.

k) Democratising the monotheistic Cult :

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva could enliven his talk with appropriate stories and parables. He adopted Eka śaraṇīyā Dharma to the needs of the parables and democratized the monotheistic Vaiṣṇava Cult.

l) Indigenous culture :

He gave a full form of the indigenous culture through the uses of Khola, mridanga, tal etc and the presentation of songs, dances and acting and made people know the value of the indigenous culture.

m) Selection of competent successor :

Śaṅkaradeva was a far-sighted dynamic religious leader. He started the movement and handed over the responsibility of carrying it to Madhavadeva who was an extra-ordinary religious leader who led the movement through the right path to the zenith of success.

Emergence of new social structure of Assam :

A new Assamese society with all castes, sub-castes, tribes, races, clans, communities and religions was reconstructed due to the impact of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement started by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva who “was a scholar without arrogance, persuasive in argument, humanistic in outlook, staunch believer in monotheism, astute social reformer and successful religious preacher.”

Conclusion :

In spite of fast technological developments, advancement of science, network system of information technology, economic reforms and increase in mass literacy, Assam is still torn by caste-ism, ethnic violence, communalism, terrorism, economic problem and corruption. In this moment we have to search

the panacea for all the socio-cultural-religious and political ills in the philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva. We are to apply the basic principles of the Neo-Vaṣṇavite movement started by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva to our life. We have enough theories but few do practicals. It is time for all the people of Assam to understand the essence of the Eka śaraṇīyā Dharma and follow it for the benefit of the Assamese people as well as the Indians. Corruptions are swallowing the vitals of the nation. The youth of Assam are bewildered and helpless. Most of the political parties are following the politics of votes. The number of unemployed persons is increasing. Values in all sectors are being suppressed. In the midst of these circumstances we have no other way but to follow Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's immortal messages.

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