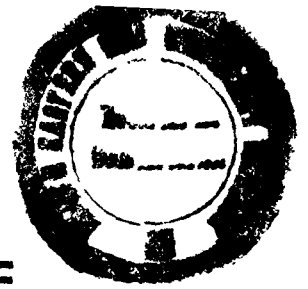


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A STUDY OF THE SOCIO-ETHICAL THOUGHTS OF SANKARDEVA AND MADHAVADEVA

THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GAUHATI UNIVERSITY
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY



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This is to certify that Ms. Gayatri Devi, M.A.,B.T. did her research on the topic, 'A Study of the Socio-Ethical Thoughts of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva' under my guidance and supervision. She has completed her work and made it ready for submission. Her thesis is the result of her own investigation. She has fulfilled all the requirements under the Ph.D. regulations of the Gauhati University.

I also certify that to the best of my knowledge and belief she has not utilised her thesis or any part thereof for any degree under any other University. The thesis may be accepted for adjudication.

I wish her all success.

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PREFACE

The social and ethical principles propounded by Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva in the last decade of the 15th century through the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement, are the epoch-making contributions to the religious and social life of mediaeval Assam. My present work entitled "A Study of the Socio-ethical Thoughts of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva" is an humble attempt to present critically the social and ethical thoughts of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Though, social philosophy and ethics have their own distinctive characteristic features, yet, they are not dissimilar. Social philosophy endeavours to find out social good and social good is not understandable apart from moral values. All human virtues have their social significance.

Though Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva did not expound any system of philosophy, yet their thoughts are philosophically significant and they have had profound influence on the socio-cultural life of North-East India. Their concepts of Brahman, Māyā, Īśvara, Universe, Self-realisation, Individuality, Man, Nature, Ethics, Religion, Devotion etc. are scattered all around their thoughts. All these concepts are basic to any system of social thoughts. These concepts, further, define the relationship between individual and society, individual

self and universal self, freedom and equality etc.

I am indebted to several persons for their direct and indirect help to me in preparing this work. First of all, it is not merely out of a sense of duty, but with deep gratitude that I acknowledge the help and guidance of my respected teacher and guide Dr. (Mrs) Nilima Sharma, Professor and Head, Department of Philosophy, Gauhati University. Without her inspiration, encouragement and valuable suggestions this work would not have come to its present shape.

I have a pleasant duty to express my heart-felt gratitude to Dr. Maheswar Neog, formerly Jawaharlal Nehru Professor, Gauhati University and Saint Sankardeva Professor, Punjabi University, Patiala, for his valuable suggestions.

My thanks are also due to the Librarian and staff of Nagaon Girls' College Library; Nagaon College Library; District Library (Nagaon); Central Library, Guwahati; K. K. Handiqui Library, Gauhati University; Library of Assam Agricultural University (Khanapara, Guwahati); Tezpur District Library for their help in providing the library facilities to me.

All the writings of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are not available in a particular place or institution. Therefore, I had to search original manuscripts written by them in the libraries of some 'Satras'. In this connection, I offer my

thanks to the staff of following Satras - Auniati (Sibsagar District); Dakhinpat (Sibsagar District); Garamur (Sibsagar); Kaliabor (Nagaon District); Kuruabahi (Nagaon); Gajala Satra (Nagaon); Barpeta (Kamrup District); Madhupur (Cooch Behar); Sundaridiya (Kamrup). I am also thankful to the staff of the Srimanta Sankardeva Research Institute, Batdrawa, Nagaon.

Thanks are duly extended to my honourable teachers and colleagues whose untiring efforts enabled me to undertake the present work.

I am also indebted to my husband Dr. Sashindra Barthakur who inspired me from the beginning. My sons Jan and Jiki helped and inspired me in their own ways.

Finally, it is to my parents that this thesis is dedicated.

Gayatri Devi,
Gayatri Devi

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INTRODUCTION

ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF SOCIO-ETHICAL CONCEPTS IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY - ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD; MEDIEVAL VAISHNAVISM OF SANKARDEVA AND MADHAVADEV, SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS OF THAT TIME

Social Philosophy being the philosophy of society, is bound to be limited in scope in comparison to philosophy which is multi-dimensional. In the words of Mackenzie, "Social philosophy in particular, concentrates its attention on the social unity of mankind, and seeks to interpret the significance of the social aspects of human life with reference to the unity."¹

Social philosophy has two aspects : creative and critical. In its creative aspect, it seeks to discover the supreme values of social relations. The social philosopher evaluates the sociological facts in the light of the supreme good of man. It does not discover facts. Facts are taken from other social sciences. Its main function is to examine social values in the light of social facts.

In ancient Indian literature, there were concepts like interpersonal relations, group life, social control, social organisation, social stratification, human nature, and social institutions including the family, the state and

property etc. The Vedas which are the oldest documents of Indian civilization father the growth of ethico-social concepts. The subsequent Indian thought is profoundly indebted to the Vedas for its ethico-social philosophy. Max Muller remarks, "Here in the Rgveda we have poems, composed in perfect language, in elaborate metre, telling us about gods and men, about sacrifices and battles, about various aspects of nature, and the changing conditions of society, about duty and pleasure, philosophy and morality."² The Vedic hymns express facts about religion, social structure, economic and political institutions and ethical ideas of the ancient Indian people.

Caste is recognised practically in India. Manu's classification of the members of the society into four different castes is similar to Plato's four-fold classification of the society. These are (1) guardians, (2) the warriors, (3) the artisans, and (4) the slaves. It is thus, obvious that, the concept^{of} social stratification has a very old history. Apart from the caste system it is difficult to understand either the ethical or the social principles of Hinduism. These divisions of human society are necessary for the performance of the various functions needed for social welfare.

Indian philosophy sees a moral system in microcosm and macrocosm alike. This universal moral system is called

Rta in the Vedas. It is the physical order. It governs the uniformities of nature. According to it, gods, living beings, plants all move in accordance with one universal moral pattern. This moral system is manifested through the theory of Karma in the life of an individual. Varuṇa is the custodian of the moral law of Rta. He adheres to the right, and punishes sin.³

The first organic conception of society we find in the Puruṣa Sūkta of the Ṛgveda where the supreme reality is identified with the person.⁴ There is a cosmic Person (Parama Puruṣa) who pervades the entire universe and transcends it. According to the Puruṣa Sūkta of the Veda, the Supreme Puruṣa is both transcendent and immanent. He is the Lord of immortality. He is not affected by the fruits of actions. He envelops all creation inside and outside.

The Upanisads constitute the central basis of Hindu socio-ethical philosophy. The monism adumbrated in the Ṛgveda is developed into idealistic monism in the Upanisads, which regard Brahman, the infinite, eternal, omnipresent, omniscient and pure Spirit as the ultimate reality. The Upanisads speak of Para Brahman and Apāra Brahman. Para Brahman is the indeterminate Absolute. Apāra Brahman is the determinate Lord or Īśvara related to the empirical world and the individual souls. The Absolute related to the spatio-temporal world is God (Īśvara). Īśvara is the inner controller (antaryāmin) of

the whole world with all its objects and of the individual souls.

The individual soul (ātman) is different from the body, the sense-organs, manas and buddhi. The manas is superior to the sense organs. The buddhi is superior to manas. The atman is superior to the buddhi. The body is its material vehicle.

The finite self with an uncontrolled and impure mind and devoid of discrimination enters into bondage and undergoes birth and death. The individual soul's individuality is due to avidyā. Knowledge of the Ātman is liberation. Discipline of body and mind and practice of Yoga purify the mind and make it fit for acquiring knowledge of the Atman.

The Purāṇas are popular treatises on Hindu religion. They contain socio-ethical elements of popular Hinduism, rites, ceremonies, vows, modes of worship, heaven, hell, virtues, sins, atonements, pilgrimage, reverence for gurus and Brahmins and the like. They have a great philosophical importance, because they discuss the nature of Brahman, Prakṛti, Puruṣa, creation and dissolution of the world, bondage, liberation, virtues, vices and the means to liberation.

Manu was one of the greatest social thinkers of ancient India. His social theory had profound influence on

the development of socio-ethical concepts of India. The laws of Manu were mainly concerned with ethico-social conduct. Manu's social laws were based on the ancient Indian scriptures. The social laws were codified by Manu for maintaining the sanctity of social order laid down by the ancient Indian scriptures. According to him, individuals could realize the highest ends of lives by performing their social duties and moral actions.

According to Manu, the realization of the highest good and subsequent liberation were the ultimate end of life. In his view, individuals had to practise 'dharma' for the realisation of the highest good. Dharma is of divine origin. The social laws were based on Divine Laws. An individual should practise penance, equanimity of mind, compassion for all creatures. He ought to cultivate friendship with his fellow beings and practise altruism for general social welfare. The ethical development of the individual must be compatible with the general social well-being.

Kautilya's Arthasāstra is considered as one of the most important treatises produced in ancient India. There is no aspect of human life which has not been discussed in this great volume. Though primarily, Arthasāstra discusses political system and organisation, it also discusses with same competence social problems and organisation of Hindu society.

Ethics is a science which deals with human conduct systematically. It is the normative science of human conduct for living in society. The life of society is the normal atmosphere and the training ground of morality.

In ethics inner motives are important than outer acts. The Hindu thinkers speak of three kinds of activity :

1. Mental (mānasika),
2. Verbal (vācika), and
3. Physical (kāyika).⁵

Morality implies responsibility on the part of the agent for his deeds. All actions do not fall within the domain of morality. Freedom is essential for morality. Here a question arises, are men free to choose what they will? To solve this problem Hindu thinkers offer the theory of Karma. Moral order implies that a man's actions in the past are responsible for his present state and that his present deeds will condition his future fortunes.⁶ In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, "The cards in the game of life are given to us. We do not select them. They are traced to our past Karma, but we can call as we please, lead what suit we will, and as we play, we gain or lose. And there is freedom."⁷

The Law of Karma is the law of moral causation. A good action produces merit (punya) and a bad action produces

demerit (papa) in the life of man.

Almost all the systems of Indian philosophy regard ignorance as the cause of bondage and ignorance can be removed by right knowledge. The Hindu thinkers felt the necessity of meditation and self-control as the pre-requisites of right knowledge. According to the Sāṃkhya system of Indian philosophy, right knowledge can never dawn in an impure mind. So the mind has to be purified first. Right conduct, right knowledge and right livelihood are essential for liberation, according to Jainism and Buddhism.

The germs of Vaiṣṇavite cult may be traced back to the Vedic period. Vaiṣṇavism is a type of Monotheism based on personal devotion to the Supreme Deity, variously named as Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa, Hari, Krishna, Vasudeva, Bhagavāna, Rāma and so on.

The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement started in the middle ages in India. Love and devotion were its cardinal features. In South India, the seed of Vaiṣṇavism was sown by the Alvar saints between the 7th and the 9th centuries A.D.⁸ They gave prominence to the emotional aspect of Vaiṣṇavism and used the language of the people in their songs and hymns. Then their thoughts were systematised and codified by the great acharya Nāthmuni in the ninth century.⁹ The Vaiṣṇavite thought reached its blossoming state in the thoughts of

Yamunācharya and Rāmānuja. It was Rāmānuja who laid down the lines of its doctrine by elaborating the system of Visistā-daita.

In Northern India, Rāmānanda, Vallabhachārya, Nimbāditya, Śāṅkara and Chaitanya were the Vaiṣṇava reformers of great repute.

The Vaiṣṇavite movement of Assam initiated by Śāṅkaradeva* and Mādhavadeva** in the fifteenth century is remarkable for its many sided contributions to the socio-

* Śāṅkaradeva was born in 1449 A.D. at Bardowā. Bardowā is a small territory in the Nagaon District. One of his ancestors Chandivara, a Kāyastha by caste, was not an original inhabitant of Assam. He was from Kanauf, and sent by Durlabhanarayana, the king of Gaur, to the king of Kāmarupa to enhance the friendship between the two kings. Kusumvara, the grandson of Chandivara was the father of Śāṅkaradeva. Śāṅkaradeva lost his parents in his infancy and was brought up by his paternal grandmother Khersuti.

All the ancestors of Śāṅkaradeva were followers of Tāntric faith. He had his education in Sanskrit and very soon it appeared that he was a gifted child. Within a very short period he composed a poem which described the form and qualities of Lord Krishna. Mohendra Kandali, a Brahmin scholar was very much pleased with him and requested the other students to call Śāṅkara, Śāṅkaradeva from that day. Śāṅkaradeva was a man of robust health and strong body, because he practised Yoga for bodily discipline. As a man of robust health and strong body, he possessed an imposing appearance. He was a charming personality. He pleased everybody and none could go away from him with a feeling of displeasure or disagreeableness (Mādhavadeva).

** Mādhavadeva (1489-1596) was born in a small village in the district of North Lakhimpur in Assam. He met Śāṅkaradeva in 1522 and moved with him like shadow. Mādhavadeva did not try to propagate any new doctrine of his own. He engaged himself completely in the propagation of the neo-Vaiṣṇavism as was done by his guru. He was a Sakta worshipper before he came into contact with Śāṅkaradeva. Mādhavadeva's

ethical history of the land. The Assam Vaiṣṇavism did not differ much in essential points from similar Vaiṣṇava movements of mediaeval India. The characteristics like belief in one God, Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, emphasis on love and devotion, recognition of the equality of all persons, the ignoring of the caste distinction, the high place given to love, piety, and non-violence are common to all Vaiṣṇavite sects of India. The Assam Vaiṣṇavite movement may, therefore, be called a part of the 'All-India Vaiṣṇavite Movement' of the middle ages. But the Assam Vaiṣṇavism had some unique characteristics of its own.

The neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva has had its root in the 'Puruṣa Sūkta' of the R̥gveda. The ethico-social ideals of classical Indian thought have profoundly influenced Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, the two great exponents of the Assam Vaiṣṇavism. Prior to the critical observation of the neo-Vaiṣṇavism

contributions to the field of literature and music are no less insignificant than those of his guru. "Nāmghosā", the greatest monumental work of Mādhavadeva's literary life is one of the important scriptures of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. Enriched by the ethico-religious instructions of Śaṅkaradeva and different scriptures, the 'Nāmghosā' is also a product of the spritual experiences of Mādhavadeva's eventful life. The philosophy of Mādhavadeva as revealed in the 'Nāmghosā' divided itself into different sections, namely, Māyā, its nature and cosmology, the Brahman, means of self-realisation, the goal of human life etc.

of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, an analysis of the historical background of their thoughts is a prime necessity.

Since the beginning of the thirteenth century the ancient kingdom of Kāmarupa was slowly undergoing a process of disintegration.¹⁰ Before Śaṅkaradeva's time in religious life of Assam was far from satisfactory. The Assamese society was composed of heterogeneous elements. The people of Assam had no uniform codes of conduct, no uniformity of religion. It was an age of Tāntricism which is characterised by the worship of Divine Energy in the female form called by many names such as Kālī, Durgā etc. The political condition of the country was unstable. The political instability helped to bring about a chaotic condition in the religious sphere also. Śaṅkaradeva was not happy to find the mental degradation of the common people, who were eager for royal favour, and averse to religion and culture. His Bhakti movement with the co-operation of Mādhavadeva came out as a protest against irreligion, inhumanity and immorality that prevailed at that time. The neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva marked the advent of a new era in the social history of Assam.

Śaṅkaradeva was basically a social reformer and not an academic philosopher in the technical sense. That is why he diverted his attention solely towards the propagation of the new faith without caring for whether the religion propagated

by him was based on a systematic philosophy or not. Yet the devotional works of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, viz., Bhakti Ratnākara, Bhakti-Ratnāvalī, Nāmghosā, Kīrtanaghosā etc. have indirectly dealt with philosophical problems.

The Assam Vaiṣṇavism mainly derived its devotional theologism from the Bhāgavata-purāṇa and the Gītā. Describing the nature of God Śaṅkaradeva wrote, "Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme Soul and is the One and the only Lord of the Universe. Nothing exists without him. He is the cause (kāraṇa) as well as the effect (kārya) of the creation. Just as ornaments made of gold do not differ in substance from gold itself, similarly, there is no distinction between God as the ultimate cause and God as the effect."¹¹

In the 22nd chapter of Bhakti-Ratnakara, the difference between Īśvara and Jīva is brought out.¹² Īśvara is the controller of māyā through his power of consciousness. Jīva can be released only when it attains knowledge through the love of God. Śaṅkaradeva held bhakti to be the means by which one can attain release. He advocated the cult of devotion as the summum bonum of life and it is considered even more desirable than liberation (mukti).

Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva consists of absolute devotion to God, absolute dedication to the service of God and his creatures. To feel the presence of God every-

where, to listen to and chant the names and qualities of God are some of the basic principles of neo-Vaiṣṇavism.

Religion is the central theme of Śāṅkaradeva's philosophy. He was convinced that social structure and religion are organically interwoven. Caste hierarchy, sex inequality and untouchability exist because of the misinterpretation of religion. Religion is the guiding force of the human life. He further felt that religion has creative force for integration and stability of the society. He pointed out that he who sees Viṣṇu everywhere in the Universe attains release even when alive. Hence the best way to realize God is to serve His creatures. In Śāṅkaradeva's social philosophy religion plays a dominant role.

The creed profounded by Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva is theoretically religious and practically it is socio-ethical. They felt that the overall development of all sections of people is essential for the development and progress of human society. But this is not possible without education. They ignored caste distinctions and condemned untouchability in practice.

Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva brought about a radical reformation in the social structure of Assam. Though spiritual realisation is individualistic in character, yet it has also social bearing. Individuals are important members of

the society in so far as they dedicate their lives for the service of the entire community. In an ideal society, all individuals impose moral law from within themselves. In Śāṅkaradeva's view, in the society which aims at the uniform development of all its members there is perfect social order because the greatest good of all individuals is the social end.

The basic ethical and social ideas of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are based on spiritual interpretation of human nature and human society. It appears from the different writings of them that ethical, social and devotional teachings are intimately connected. Therefore, according to them, good man and true devotee are one and the same.

In the present work, ethical and social thoughts of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva have been laid down in the following captions :

1. Social thought and social philosophy:

Social thought has been variously defined by different social thinkers. Society is an ever-changing phenomenon. So social thoughts have developed with the passage of time. It cannot remain static. According to MacIver, "the social structure is subject to incessant change, growing, decaying,

finding renewal, accommodating itself to the very variant conditions and suffering vast modifications in the course of time."¹³

In Indian history and civilization, religion always played a dominant role. The ethical basis of a society is generally strengthened by religion and social life draws its inspiration largely from religion. Keeping this view in mind, Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva propagated 'Eka-Śaraṇa-Dharma' (the religion of taking refuge to one God only). Their religion furnishes us with a spiritualistic humanism where ethico-social concepts find a wider dimension.

2. Highest Ideals:

Since ancient times in the social life of the Hindus, 'Purushārthas' (dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa) played an important role. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva also realised that to achieve spiritual values one should not reject the physical and mental aspects of reality. The creative sources of human life are available not only on the spiritual level, but on the biological and mental level as well.

3. Social Organisation:

Social organisation is a system of social relationship. In maintaining discipline, order and morality of the

society 'Satras'* (residential places of the Vaishnavas) and 'Nāmghars'* (prayer halls) have been playing a prominent role.

4. Values and Society:

The concept of social progress leads us to the concept of moral values. Social development refers to the development of character of individuals of a society.

Śaṅkaradeva's secular views on education, art and culture, marriage etc., were also based on ethico-social principles.

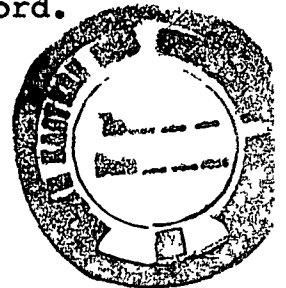
5. Bhakti and its different forms:

Bhakti is the state of mind, in which one has no separate existence apart from God.

6. Morality and liberation:

To achieve success in life, moral discipline is indispensable. In the 'Nām-Ghosā' a large number of verses say that by love and devotion one can captivate the Lord.

* A detailed discussion has been made in the Chapter III.



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Chapter I

SOCIAL THOUGHT - NATURE OF SOCIAL THOUGHT - NATURE OF SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY - ELEMENTS OF HINDU SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE THOUGHTS OF SANKARDEVA AND MADHAVADEVA

The history of social thought is as old as human society itself. Social thought arises in response to social problems. In fact, problems of human life cannot be separated from the problems of society. Both these problems are blended together. "If man is by nature a philosopher, he must naturally be a sociologist when the perplexities of social life become the object of his deliberation."¹ There could be no social thought as long as man was self-centred and exclusive.²

Social thought is not easy to define. Yet, social thought has been variously defined by different sociologists and social thinkers. These thoughts have developed with the passage of time. From the history of social thought it can be realised that such a thought is not the outcome of each and every person. There are a few pioneers who contribute to such thoughts. In some societies these thoughts are quickly accepted, while in others, the rate of acceptance is slow. As for example, prior to neo-Vaishnavite movement the religious rites and social orders were in a chaotic state in mediaeval Assam. To uplift the mass people from this chaotic state,

Sankardeva started a new movement, named, 'Ekasarena-nama-dharma' which enjoined the worship of one God and also attracted all sections of the people. "All thoughts concerning the relations of man with man and the general problems of their social life can be called social thought."³ But, this relation of man with man and the problems of social life change from time to time and society to society. There is, however, a general current underlying all these human inter-relations and inter-actions. This general current forms the basis of social thoughts and social principles.

There is a division of labour in any systematic study of man and his life. So, we have economic thought, political thought, religious thought, social thought etc., which are concerned with the realities of social life.

Social thought can broadly be divided into three categories, namely, (a) pro-social thinking, (b) anti-social thinking and (c) scientific thinking.⁴ Pro-social thinking is such a thinking as is used by some people for the development of social advantage and growth. Anti-social thinking does not take social welfare into consideration, but only out of selfish motives, welfare, or advancement is taken into account. As this type of thinking takes the interest of only few and not the society as a whole into consideration, it is called anti-social thinking. Then comes scientific thinking. It is continuous and selfless research for collective welfare.

Social thoughts arise out of social problems. Without human beings there can be no social thought. It can be, therefore, realised that the basic characteristic of social thought is that it originates from social problems.

Another characteristic of social thought is that it is an integral part of social utility. Social thinking must be social in nature. Social thought is the outcome of social interaction and social relation. Social thought is neither absolute nor static. It is related to time and place. No social thought can be true for all time and at all places.

In the growth of social thought, the role of social thinkers is significant. Every social thinker is the product of society. So, social thinkers may not be ego-centric. All great religious prophets of the world, e.g., Jesus Christ, Hazarat Mahammad, Gautama Buddha were essentially great social reformers. Śāṅkaradeva of Assam was also not an exception. Almost all great social thinkers were born in societies rampant with ethico-social evils. There were certain factors, situations, which influenced their thinking. It is said in the Gītā, that whenever 'Adharma' got ascension to the exclusion of 'Dharma', when chaos became the order of the day, then God manifested Himself with the message of a new faith and social justice. The dharma or religion of the Gītā is a force that binds all together for a pure and harmonious social living.

In the fifteenth century, the people of India were in a great quandary. 'Tāntricism' in its naked form and accompanied by animal sacrifices and other vices got the upper hand. Casteism, untouchability and other superstitions prevailed under the cover of religion. At that critical moment of social, ethical and religious crises, many saints arose in different parts of the country. Rāmānanda, Kabir, Tukārām, Rāmdās, Mirā Bai, Guru Nānak, Sri Chaitanya and in Assam Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were some of them.

Social thought is also influenced by the culture and civilization of the people. Śāṅkaradeva, the great social and ethical reformer of Assam, visited Gayā, Puri, Brindāvana, Mathurā and many other holy places. He met, at all places, the Vaiṣṇavite teachers and held discussions with them and came to know about the culture and civilization of different parts of the country.

Man lives in society. Man's social nature, man's place in the universe, the relation between individual and society, the common good, the relation between common good and the good of the individual comprise the main subject-matter of social philosophy. Social philosophy attempts at a critical enquiry into all the intellectual enterprises concerning man in relation to his society, while making an analysis of the fundamental social ideas of any particular

place at a particular time.⁵

Any social and moral principle has to be grounded on a philosophical conception of the relation between man and the ultimate nature of things. Social and moral consciousness must include a conviction of the reality of ideals. When man realises his essential unity with the whole of being, he expresses this unity in his life and conduct.

Social philosophy enquires into the nature of social progress. Social progress does not consist merely in the development of material and economic progress but also incorporates moral progress and a realisation of the moral values. This progress is not possible without the proper development of the physical, mental and moral powers of all the members of the society.

Progress is change or motion in an ascending direction. It can be called progress when physical and mental health of the masses are protected; proper education, social security are granted; and equality and fraternity are promoted.

There are many social evils. Just as the body has its peculiar diseases, so has society. Social philosophy has therefore, to deal with the social maladies. Every society has its own social ideal which leads the society to progress. Disorganisation of society means the ignorance of this social ideal on the part of the members of the society. Śaṅkardeva

and Mādhavadeva did not deny the existence of evil. They gave practical solution to the problem of evil. Just as fire lighted for the purpose of cooking can consume all kinds of wood, so also bhakti directed to the Lord can destroy all sins.⁶ Thus, by uttering the name of Nārāyaṇa, Ajāmila saved himself.⁷ Dr. S. Radhakrishnan stated, "good acts are those which aim at the well-being of oneself and others and evil ones are those which interfere with the well-being of oneself and others."⁸

Social thought cannot be delinked from the past. Ethico-social ideas are lucidly reflected in ancient Indian thought. Śaṅkaradeva built his system upon the socio-ethical thoughts of the Gītā and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. "The 'Bhāgavata Purāṇa', the Bhāgavad Gītā' and 'Sahasra-nāma' Section of the 'Padma Purāṇa' are popularly considered to be the authorities from which Sankaradeva accepted the main articles of his faith, namely, Satsamga (the assembly of bhaktas as a means of Bhakti), ekasarana (shelter in one God - Viṣṇu, Kṛishna alone) and nama (Kirtan or prayer) as the main form of devotion."⁹

Sankaradeva was a social reformer. But he cannot be strictly called a social philosopher. His main aim was to introduce certain basic reforms in the Assamese society. Though, he was not a philosopher, he accepted the authority of the ancient Indian scriptures for the philosophical

foundation of his theory of social reform. He accepted the ethical codes which were prescribed by the ethico-religious literature of India. Dr. S.N. Sarma stated that Śaṅkaradeva could clearly and rightly perceive that the society was more in need of a reformation than a system of philosophy.¹⁰ With that intention he played the role of a preacher for bringing about uniformity in the ethico-social behaviour in the members of a society. The following are some of the social concepts which Śaṅkaradeva contributed for ushering in his conception of ideal society.

According to Śaṅkaradeva, there is spiritual unity of the entire mankind. God is the indwelling spirit of the universe. One divine soul permeates through all human personalities. The ultimate end of individuals consists in the realisation of God. The path of realisation cannot be the exclusive right of a socially privileged few. All actions must be dedicated to God. As all things are the manifestations of God, the service to humanity and all living creatures are the moral duty of individuals. Individuals can serve God by serving mankind.

It is the common belief of the Hindus that man is spirit. Spirit is uncreated and deathless. Ātman is immutable and immortal; it was neither born in the past nor in the present. Birth and death are the characteristic features of body.¹¹ Spirit is different from individual ego.

Therefore, according to Hindu thinkers, in order to know the nature of the Universal Spirit, we must renounce the narrow views of our individual ego by means of ethical and religious disciplines. Śāṅkaradeva holds that individual ego envelops the jīva with ignorance. He beautifully expresses it in the Bhāgavata that, just like the visibility of the Sun becomes clear when clouds disappear, in the same manner, when the individual ego is enlightened by true knowledge, the self can perceive itself as Brahman.¹²

It is also the view of the Hindu thinkers that the realisation of the spirit is not possible, unless it embraces the collective self. The aim of individual is to realise oneness with the social being and through it with the Universal Being. To an enlightened man society means entire humanity. It was the motto of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva also.

In ancient India, social thought was essentially ethical in character. Different moral principles were laid to regulate the whole life of an individual as well as the society. The doctrine of 'Varnāśrama dharma' was employed to explain the harmonious relationship between the individual and the society. The duties of varṇa and āśrama together constitute the code of relative duties, the duties of station in life, the duties obligatory on the individual in consequence of social status, temperament, specific powers and capacities.¹³ The duty of an

individual is considered to be closely related to his social duty. Good of the individual is the good of the society. Śaṅkaradeva also recognised the social significance of the 'Varnāśramadharmā' where people would follow their own traditional duties.¹⁴ But modern caste-restriction is a barrier to social progress. It gives rise to the idea of inequality among man and man. So modern social thinkers like Gandhiji, Vivekananda etc, have laid emphasis on the need of revival of the true varna-dharma.

The ancient Indian thinkers attempted to discuss elaborately about various social institutions which regulate the social life of man. A developed social life is possible only if there are well-organised social institutions. Through the different works and thoughts of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva we can easily realise the social and ethical significance of different social institutions. To build a well-organised society they feel that education should be imparted to the mass people. They also feel that good character and good behaviour are the result of true knowledge. Disciplined and virtuous conduct are conceived to be the essence of true knowledge. In this connection, we can describe the idea of the rites of initiation in the Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva. The rite of initiation is called 'Saraṇa' by Śaṅkaradeva.

Śaṅkaradeva's prime concern was to mould the character and life of the people. This he achieved by drawing the

attention of the mass people to religious and ethical literature. All the religious scriptures were in Sanskrit. So, these scriptures failed to touch the mind of the common people. To make mass people familiar with the essence of the religious books, Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva used their mother tongue in their compositions. Śāṅkaradeva introduced one-act plays based on religious themes to educate the ignorant. In his first drama 'Chihna-Yatrā' he himself painted the picture of Vaikuntha (heaven) to infuse into the minds of the people a sense of religious consciousness and a sense of devoted service for the progress of humanity. Thus, he used paintings as a popular means of communication that could be understood even by the illiterate and the children. He composed and he himself sang and enacted what he composed. So he gave us practical education.

The ancient Hindus considered the institution of marriage as a religious sacrament, an eternal spiritual union of a man and a woman for the performance of various social duties. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan said, "The Hindu ideal emphasises the individual and the social aspects of the institution of marriage."¹⁵ Śāṅkaradeva also clearly described it in his book 'Rukmini Haran' Kāvya through the marriage of Krishna and Rukmini.

Family is the most important social institution. According to the ancient Hindus, 'Grhasthasrama' is the symbol

of family-life of an individual. The family is the smallest unit of society. Domestic life is the primary training ground for the culture of the altruistic feelings and the spirit of service. Self-control, self-sacrifice, co-operation, service to humanity, brotherhood, love for living beings - all are altruistic ideals of man. On the other hand, rivalry, hostility, hatred, suspicion, malice etc., infect the harmony of society.

Śāṅkaradeva was a householder and Mādhavadeva lived a life of celibacy. They taught the people that to find God one need not forsake the world. But the ideology of Mādhavadeva was different. "It was probably the ideal of Mādhavadeva's individual life that brought into being an order of ascetics (Kevaliyā) who formed the innermost circle within the Satras."¹⁶

Śāṅkaradeva did not embrace the way of a 'Sannyāsin' because he was well-aware of the demerits of such a way of life. It is evident from the fact that he himself married second time after his return from the long travel. So, for Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, it is family which gives us training in both the ethical and social spheres of our life.

In this connection, we can analyse the status of women according to Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. They made no distinction between caste and creed in the matter of preaching. For them, all creatures of God were equal. Among the disciples of Śāṅkaradeva there were tribals, Ahoms and even Muslims.

Dr. M. Neog said, "It is the Catholic outlook of this religion that could thus unify different people into one spiritual fraternity, and also achieve a cultural synthesis."¹⁷ But in case of women Śāṅkaradeva's attitude was marked by a strange intolerance. Śāṅkaradeva considered women to be an evil influence on the male devotees; so, he advised his disciples to avoid attachment to women. He wrote in the 'Kīrtana-Ghosā', -

Ghora nārī māyā sarva māyate kutcit
 Mahasiddha muniro katākhyā mohe citta
 Darasane kare tapa japa yoga bhanga
 Jani jñānigane kaṇinira are sanga.¹⁸

(the infatuation to woman is the ugliest of all māyās; by her single glance the heart of the Siddhas and sages are fascinated. The very sight of her undermines penances, meditations and Yogas. Hence, the wise avoid the company of woman.)

Though Śāṅkaradeva was himself a twice married man yet, he never gave woman proper status in his religious system. Even today women are not allowed to enter the important Satras of Assam. But in spite of these he was sympathetic towards women as the weaker section of society.

From the earliest stage of social evolution, there has been a division of labour among different social groups. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva also laid emphasis on this particular point. So, they did not give initiation to any king and

woman. In Durkheim's view, society evolves through division of labour.¹⁹

Purusārthas are basic to Hindu ethics. The ancient Hindus believed family life to be a means for the practice of dharma, for helping the realisation of artha, kāma and mokṣha and for learning the lesson of unity and adjustability with the different members, ultimately leading to the extension of the same for the entire human society.²⁰

In the Srimad Bhāgavata and the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, there were nine forms of bhakti. In Śāṅkaradeva's Vaiṣṇava Order there were also nine modes of bhakti. Of these Śāṅkaradeva considered 'Śravaṇa' and 'Kīrtana' to be sufficient in the religious endeavour of man.

According to Indian philosophy, the success of human life lies in the attainment of liberation. There were two types of mukti, according to Indian thinkers. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva accepted jivan-mukti and Videhamukti without any hesitation.

After Rāmānuja, we can place Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva as those who fought relentlessly to remove untouchability. Among the twentieth century Indian philosophers, we remember Mahatma Gandhi for his insistence on the removal of untouchability. According to Gandhi 'untouchability was a social

stigma of the Indian society.'²¹ Five hundred years back, Śāṅkaradeva preached this concept in his 'Eka-sāraṇa-nāma-dharma' (shelter in one God). In his system, we find brahmana disciple of Sudra teacher. He, being a thorough-going and skilful reformer declared in his Kirtana-Ghosa :

Chandālo Hari nām lawe mātra
Karība ucit yajñar pātra.²²

(An untouchable is fit to be the priest in the sacrifice only if he often recites the name of God.)

For creating a new ethical society Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva tried to eradicate this social evil.

The greatest external manifestation of the mental impulses is physical action. To live well we need to have a sound mind in a sound body. Śāṅkaradeva also felt, physical exercise is one of the fundamental needs of the human body. He was a man of robust health and strong body. Physical health is invariably related to mental health and strength and that is essential not only for personal happiness, but also for community welfare.

Śāṅkaradeva could not remain content with only household responsibilities. He had thirst for more light and wanted to see for himself the main centres of advanced learning outside Assam. Thus, he widened the geographical outlook of .

the Assamese people and linked up Assam with the rest of India. This wide outlook is essential for social and ethical development. All contemporary social thinkers in India including Sri Aurobindo, Rabindra Nath and Vivekananda have stressed the importance of generating this feeling in all educands,

The national solidarity of the people of our country was recognised by Śaṅkaradeva five centuries ago. He wanted the people to feel proud of being born in this country of Bhāratavarsha, as she provides an immense opportunity for the development of man's moral and spiritual potentialities.

A society is an aggregate of persons having relationship with each other. The fundamental elements of human life seem to be universal today and perhaps will remain the same in future also. Character building, development of personality, social welfare, proper use of leisure, development of culture, development of communal feeling, development of some innate qualities are some important objectives of the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. For both the leaders, social progress and ethical development take place in society only when there is equality amongst all its members. They propagated the teachings against communal tension and conflicts. Their thoughts on caste and untouchability point out that they also sowed the seeds of ethical secularism and democracy especially in the field of religion and culture in the north-

east of India. Hence they recognised the socio-ethical values such as truth, mercy, love, forgiveness etc. They taught us to give up unclean ways of living and practise 'Sadāchāra' or good conduct for the establishment of harmony in society and for promoting fellow-feeling.

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Chapter II

HIGHEST SOCIAL IDEALS - DOCTRINE OF PURUSARTHAS - CONCEPTS OF ARTHA, KAMA, DHARMA, MOKSA

Man is a composite being. He has in him mental, physical and spiritual being. The development of each and every aspect of human being is the development of his personality as a whole.

The Indian philosophers take an integral view of man and his life, and mention two ideals of which each is complementary to the other. One of the ideals is concerned with the material aspect of life and the other with the spiritual aspect. The satisfaction of material aspect is essential for the proper growth of spiritual life.

The concept of social ideals is represented in the concept of four-fold aims of human life. These four-fold ideals are :

1. Artha (economic values)
2. Kāma (hedonistic values)
3. Dharma (moral values), and
4. Mokṣa (religio-spiritual values).

These four-fold ideals are called 'purusārthas' in Indian Ethics. According to these concepts, the aim of every person

in the world is to attain the four purusārthas.

Philosophy in India has been a practical attempt to realise the ultimate truth. The aim of the Indian philosophers was not only to fulfil intellectual curiosity but also to find out a way for a better life.

The theory of purusārtha consists in the perfect realisation of the true being of man, his inner spirituality. The Hindu philosophers recognised the need for considering the personal as well as the social aspects of man in society. The four-fold values of life - dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa cannot be realised apart from society. Artha, as a social value cannot be realised by isolated individuals. Kāma also gets its significance in social life, because no individual can realise his desires unless it be in the company of others. Man likes his fellow beings. He leads his life in collaboration and co-operation with other men. The materials which are indispensable for the production of pleasure cannot be attained without the co-operation of other human beings. Hence, it can be said that, none can achieve success or pleasure by his own efforts apart from collective life. Realisation of artha and kāma should be regulated by dharma, because seeking of wealth should not be at the cost of others in society. Similarly, if kāma is not regulated by dharma, it would be harmful for society. In the words of S. Gopalan

life in society is the backdrop against which alone man can hope to actualize his aspiration for values.¹ According to Hindu philosophy, the function of society is to provide opportunities for the disciplined and well-balanced realisation of the Purusārthas.

Prior to the advent of the neo-Vaishnava movement of Śaṅkaradeva many religious cults, e.g., Śaktism and Śaivism, were prevailing in Assam. Degeneration and disorderliness of the society in the name of religion made Śaṅkaradeva search for the true path. He started a movement of religion of love and devotion. Among the three ways of God-realisation, i.e., knowledge, devotion, and action, Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva laid stress on the power of devotion to be the highest.

Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva have mentioned about one more purusārtha in their ethical thoughts in addition to the four purusārthas of dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa. The fifth purusārtha according to them, is love for devotion. Devotion or bhakti is a process of realising the Supreme. Each of the purusārthas provides necessary conditions for leading a moral life and discharging one's duties towards the promotion of social welfare. According to Manu, a proper synthesis of dharma, artha and kāma pave the way for the realization of the Supreme bliss or mokṣa.²

ARTHA

In the context of the purusārthas, artha means the aim of acquiring wealth, property, economic means for living - food, shelter, clothes etc. in general. It excludes property or wealth acquired illegally. Artha was recognised as an object of human pursuit even in the Vedic age. Aryans prayed for wealth such as cattle, food, progeny, dwellings and abundant harvest.³

Of all the sources in Sanskrit literature which deal with the subject of material gain (artha), Kautilya's Arthasāstra is most systematic. He discussed the topic in comprehensive detail including the science of politics, the form of government, the rule of law and other values of worldly life. Besides this, we have a few more references to this topic in the Mahābhārata and in the Law book of Manu. But Kautilya's work is quite representative of all arthasāstras for its systematic and exclusive treatment of the politico-economic values of life.

Man is not only spirit he is body too. Our body demands certain things. To satisfy the demands of the body we need food, clothes, house, items of luxuries etc. But one must not try to fulfil one's wants in an unrighteous manner. Artha is needed for the maintenance of our body and other

family members. Physical existence is a necessary condition for spiritual growth. Lives, that are strained and starved cannot normally be religious.

According to Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, the economic factor also plays a vital role in human life. It is through wealth by which any economic necessity in life can be fulfilled. But he never recommended unrighteous means for the acquisition of wealth. Śāṅkaradeva maintained that poverty has degrading effect on the personalities of individual. In his view, poverty tends to make individuals corrupt. Excess of wealth also tends to make rich persons corrupt. Śāṅkaradeva was an ideal householder. He emphasised the importance of wealth and tried to denounce poverty. It is said that a meat-hawker once came up to the place of Śāṅkaradeva's disciples and offered meat for sale. On seeing the hawker the bhaktas said that the meat was a taboo with them and asked him to go away. But the hawker requested them to purchase at least half a seer of meat so as to make provision for feeding his hungry children at home. On over-hearing the conversation, Śāṅkaradeva called the hawker to his side and advised him to give up this bad profession and earn livelihood by some peaceful means. He gave him twenty five rupees and advised him to buy a pair of bullocks and other necessities. Being pleased with the advice of the master, the hawker bowed to him, took the money and left the place. On his way back, he thought about his

profession in the new light.⁴

Hindu thinkers recognise the value of wealth in human life and recommend its acquisition through virtuous means, not only for one's own self or one's own family but also for the welfare of the entire society. Śāṅkaradeva also felt that the persons not directly engaged in earning wealth were to be provided subsistence by the society or by the able individual.

Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva claimed that we should regard all beings as one and as our own self. This is considered to be the best means of all, as Viṣṇu is pervasive in all things and beings of the universe. Śāṅkaradeva says in the Bhagavata :

Samasta prāṇika
dekhībaha ātmasama.⁵

(Regard all beings as your own self.)

This is the highest ethical teaching of Śāṅkaradeva. We should seek good and if the good can be universalised, there can occur no crime or anti-social activity in society. Peace and progress will prevail in such a society. Rādhakrishṇan says, "The Hindu code insists on the motive of social service, not personal gain. The different values of life must be pursued equally, not one at the expense of the other."⁶

The economic condition of a society is the most important factor in determining the nature of social relations between individuals. According to Marx, unsatisfactory relation between the capitalist class and the working class leads to class conflict.⁷ Social reformers feel that justice and equality should prevail in every society.

Though Śaṅkaradeva was neither a socio-political philosopher nor an economist, yet his views on those aspects had also been recorded casually in his works. On the economic front he wanted that every one must get a job not only to earn his livelihood but also to perform his socio-religious obligations.⁸

In the Bhāgavata Śaṅkaradeva advocated that wealth earned by an individual should be divided equally for the five types of duties⁹ (for dharma, artha, kāma, jasa (fame) and for sons). Furthermore, he warns that deviation from this rule means deviation from regular duties that lead a man towards the causation of decay of a healthy society. Hence, he imparted to the people a simple but noble socio-ethical principle based on the Bhāgavata, the Gitā and other Vaiṣṇava Sāstras. He put emphasis on proper means of livelihood for the sake of individual and social welfare.

KAMA

Kāma is an important objective of human life. In the context of Purusārthas, Kāma is not 'bhoga'. Kāma is not sexual indulgence. According to the Mahābhārata, Kāma or enjoyment is of two types.¹⁰ It is both physical and mental. Hindu thinkers recognise the value of mental and bodily pleasures for the normal life of man.

The greatness of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva lies in the fact that they are successful social and ethical thinkers. It should be noted that Śāṅkaradeva advocated a religion neither of extreme asceticism nor of complete renunciation of family life. He upheld the intermediary means between the two. He felt that if spirit is separated from the body, freedom of the spirit becomes an unattainable ideal. He himself led a full family life. Family is the basis of all dharmas. An all-round development of the individual is not possible in the absence of family life. For a Hindu, family is the ultimate unit of society. S.R. Ghosh remarks that the main argument stressed by Śāṅkaradeva for the 'grihastha stage' of life was that, man in this stage could do many welfare works of the society by supporting one's own family and relatives, giving gifts to the needy and the poor and performing religious duties.¹¹ In upholding this view, Śāṅkaradeva was

more influenced by the Mahābharata and the Pravṛtt mārga or Karma Yoga of the Gītā.

Through the different works of Śāṅkaradeva, people will easily realise the social and ethical significance of mental and bodily pleasures for the normal and healthy development of man. According to Hindu thinkers, an individual is to live not only for his own self, but for the greater social or universal self. The individual is a part and parcel of society. There is really no difference between the individual good and the collective good or social good. Realisation of the universal self is possible only in and through a society. There are some institutions in society, which are the media for the realisation of the moral ideal. Such institutions which have been devised for the good of the individuals are called moral institutions. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan remarks, "The Hindu ideal emphasises the individual and the social aspects of the institution of marriage."¹² Proper social behaviour depends upon proper organisation of families. Families can develop the different social and ethical characters of the members of society. In fact, family is the school of moral education. It evokes sympathy, love and fellow-feeling.

No valid social philosophy can ignore the biological needs of man. But man is superior to animal. So, social

philosophy cannot be developed exclusively on the foundation of biology. It is true that the repression of desires disturbs the normal growth of the individual as well as the society. But, an unwise pursuit of pleasure is dangerous both for the individual and for the society. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva prescribed strict control over sex-relationship for maintaining social order. The family acts as a preventive measure to the individuals. One major cause of social dis-organisation is family disorganisation. Freud and other psychologists have proved that a child exhibits the same character which he acquires in the family. So, like marriage, family is important to mould the character and personality of the individual. In the 'Harana-Kāvyaś' Śāṅkaradeva has depicted the romance between Kṛṣṇa and Rukmini, Aniruddha and Uśā. He described through Kṛṣṇa's marriage with Rukmini that sexual gratification is not detrimental to spiritual well-being if it is consistent with the ideals of family life.

All human activities are really directed towards the attainment of life's enjoyment. Delicious food and drink, dress, ornaments, cosmetics, company of pleasant fellow are pursued for pleasure's sake. Śāṅkaradeva, in his 'Rukmini-Haraṇ' Kāvya portrayed a fine picture of Rukmini while at her dressing before going to the temple of Goddess Durgā, just on the eve of her elopment with Lord Krishna.¹³ Thus, pleasure and enjoyment are the normal pursuits of human life.

The concept of love has been the main theme in the different writings of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. The relationship between man and woman is regarded as pure, perfect and most intimate. In ancient time, domestic life was regarded as the basis of the fulfilment of all ethical and social duties. S. Gopalan said, "The Lord is the eternal lover and the longing of the human being for the Lord's eternal life is analogous to the longing of the lover for his love."¹⁴ According to Śaṅkaradeva also, Īśvara is 'Parama Ānandamaya' and devotion alone enables man to have direct communion with Īśvara, the Eternal Lover.

For the spiritual enlightenment listening to the discourses on the divine life of Nārāyaṇa and chanting his name are necessary. Śaṅkaradeva's concept of 'Satsaṅga' or association with the noble is necessary for such enlightenment. Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva took resort to different modes of art for mass mobilization which they realized to be indispensable for ethico-social upheaval. They played music, sang, danced and acted in order to create devotional sentiments in the hearts of the masses and also to provide enjoyment. Different 'Ankiyā-nāts' * were staged in different festive occasions in the village 'nāṁghars' (prayer halls).

* Śaṅkaradeva wrote a new type of drama called 'Ankiyā-nāt'. These are one-act plays in classical concept. The subject-matter of 'Ankiyā-nāts' were taken from traditional Hindu scriptures.

In the words of L.N. Bezborua, "there are two egos in everyone of us. One is real and the other is an unreal copy of it. As we have mixed up the real ego with the worldly self, so we have mixed up and confused the real prema (love) with kama (carnal desire)."¹⁵ It can be concluded from the writings of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, that the life in the world is the preparing ground for spiritual uplift.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says, "Kāma refers to the emotional being of man, his feelings and desires. If man is denied his emotional life, he becomes a prey to repressive introspection and lives under a continual strain of moral torture."¹⁶ Therefore, Śaṅkaradeva did not exclude any one of the aspects of human life. He says in the 'Kirtana-Ghosā' that even after knowing the sufferings of the worldly objects, none of the creatures renounce them. He writes :

Viśaya dukha jāni
tathapito eko prāni
nere dunai taka bhunji mare.¹⁷

(Even knowing the sufferings of the worldly objects, none of the creatures renounce them; they suffer again and again and die.)

DHARMA

Etymologically, dharma means to uphold, sustain and nourish. Mahābhārata holds that dharma is that which is ordained for the advancement and growth of all creatures. It directs us to uphold all creatures and prevents us from injuring anyone. Dharma prescribes a code of conduct which disciplines complete life of the individual and the society he lives in. Manu defines, 'dharma is conduct sanctioned by the Vedas and Smṛti.'¹⁸

The dharma of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva is named 'Eka-śaraṇa' meaning self-surrender to 'One'. For them, Ek Dev, Ek sev, Ek bhine nai Kev (One God, One shelter, none else, but One). Their dharma is also known as 'Nām-dharma' on the basis that it gives stress on constant recitation of the Name of God. Śāṅkaradeva gives a detailed analysis as to how 'nāma-kīrtana' acts and reacts on the mind for spiritual uplift. In the 'Nāmaparādha' Section of the Kīrtan-Ghoṣā he describes the seven stages :

"Prathame dāhība patakacay
 Karība maha punya abhyuday
 Karāibe bisayala birakati
 Kṛṣṇata bahibe prem bhakati
 Upajāibe ati Vaisnava jnana
 Mayako dāhiya kare nirjan
 Chaitanya murti Purnananda Hari
 Thāibeka tente-ere kari."¹⁹

(First, Nām-kīrtan will burn out the sins; then it will arouse great merits; it will create aversion for worldly pleasures; then, it will develop loving devotion to God; it will give birth to the mood of a Vaiṣṇava; it will extinguish illusions from the mind; and lastly, it will merge with God who is all life and all joy.)

Dharma consists of such principles which man has to observe in daily life and social life. According to Rādhakrishnan, 'dharma is truth's embodiment in life and power to refashion our nature.'²⁰ It is the psychological assumption that man naturally seeks pleasures and avoid pain. Many hedonists like Bentham, Mill and others assume that we naturally seek pleasure and avoid pain.²¹ Desire is primarily directed towards pleasure. Mādhavadeva maintains that the nature of our sense organs, mind, heart etc., are in favour of pleasant things. He says in his 'Nām-Ghosā' that our tongue knows only the essence of taste, but instead of sensual longing for taste the tongue should be transmuted to drink the nectar of the name of Kṛṣṇa.²² Our ear wants only sweet and pleasing sound. But instead of it our ears should hear the name of Hari, which is sweeter than thousand kinds of nectar.²³ According to him, the mind has two dharmas - Sankalpa (determination) and Vikalpa (indetermination). Our minds should be determined to utter always the name of Kṛṣṇa which is the highest good.²⁴ Such ethical

teaching is a means to spiritual welfare.

All religions are the different ways leading to the same goal - God. 'Re' - meaning again and 'ligion' - to join. Therefore, religion means to unite with God. In the Vaiṣṇava order of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, nama, deva, guru, bhakat (devotee) are the four principles or reals (vastu) in which faith is to be cultured. Nama is singing the name of God. The purification of the mind is possible by constant recitation of God by any name. Just as dirt from clothes can be removed by washing with soap, we can also wash our minds by remembering God. The company of bhaktas creates an attitude of love to Viṣṇu. The word 'guru' is derived from 'Gu' meaning darkness and 'Ru' meaning remover.²⁵ Thus, a guru is one who removes darkness. In Sikhism also the role of 'Guru' is vital. In 'Grantha Sahib' guru has been termed 'Sant'. Guru is the indispensable guide in the spiritual field. D. Neog has remarked that the chain of the four (nama, deva, guru, bhakat) 'Mahapurusiya Saranas' constitute a ring where the four are one as the one showed itself in four. It is a cult of Love which seeks direct communion with God being purged of all formalities and ritualities.²⁶

Devotion or bhakti is the earliest path for God-realisation. There are nine* modes of bhakti.²⁷ But all the

* A detailed discussion of the nine modes of bhakti has been presented in Chapter VI.

nine forms of bhakti are not self-sufficient and according to Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva they are complementary to one another.

There is no concept of duality of God-head in the Eka-Śaraṇa system preached by Śaṅkaradeva unlike in the case with the system of Chaitanyadeva in Bengal. Chaitanyadeva preached prema-bhakti or Madhura-bhāba. But Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva emphasised the 'dāsya-bhakti' (self-submission); because it burns selfishness, pride or egoism which are the main obstacles in the path of devotion.²⁸

To Śaṅkaradeva, bhakti is the highest treasure of life. Śaṅkaradeva declares that knowledge without bhakti is futile. The process of seeking God by knowledge alone is compared to the husking of seedless paddy.²⁹ He also admits that knowledge is inherent in the process of devotion, it comes automatically to a person who is deeply devoted to Lord Kṛṣṇa. Mādhavadeva says that self-knowledge (ātma-bodha) comes through the grace of God.³⁰

Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are not against karma in general. Dharma, according to the Vedas, is in the nature of commandments, prescription (vidhī) and prohibitions (nisedha). Of the Vedic rites some are optional (kāmya) which are for the benefit of those who seek certain ends; there are some others

which are obligatory to all (nitya). These are unconditional imperatives. The concept of dharma comprises a number of moral injunctions and prohibitions.³¹ Mādhavadeva observes that in the initial stage, a devotee should not give up daily and occasional works prescribed by the Smrtis. But, these works should be performed as the steps to the higher end of the Vaishnava-bhakti.³²

The term 'Yuga-dharma' is used by Hindu philosophers to visualise human history as falling into four periods, referred to as Krta-yuga, Tretā-yuga, Dvāpara-yuga and Kali-yuga. According to Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva also dharma is different in different ages. Each age has its own specific characteristics. Śaṅkaradeva says in the Kirtana-Ghosā, what is attainable through contemplation and meditation in the 'Satya-yuga', through performance of all sorts of sacrifices in the 'Tretā-yuga' and through worship in the 'Dvāpara-age' is attainable in the 'Kali-yuga' through Kirtan alone.³³

From the above discussion it becomes clear that Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva used dharma for modelling human conduct because they felt that a well-ordered and stable society needs ethical foundation. They gave emphasis on personal cleanliness for the purpose of establishing harmony in society. Their dharma is freed from creeds and greeds.

There is no room for class and caste. In fact the Vaiṣṇava order preached by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva is "a genuine life process and not an intellectual speculation."³⁴

MOKṢA

Mokṣa means liberation. In Indian philosophy it is regarded as the final destiny of man and it is important in the scheme of Puruṣārthas. A man is neither wholly animal nor wholly divine. In the Gītā Śrī Krishna unveils the true character of the human self and gives a clear picture of what man really is. He says that a man is essentially a divine spirit, though, embodied in a psycho-physical organism. Unlike other animals, man has rational consciousness and self-consciousness. A man is essentially neither the physical body nor the sense, nor the mind. A man is the owner of them, master of them. The body has birth and death, but the spirit (ātma) of man has no birth and death, no decay or change. Mokṣa consists in the realisation of the true nature of man.

According to most of the schools of Indian philosophy, the success of human life lies in the attainment of mokṣa. The Buddhist conception of the highest destiny of man is known as 'nirvāṇa'. Nirvāṇa is the solution of the problem of human sufferings. According to Advaita philosophy of Śaṅkara, mokṣa

is the realisation of the absolute identity or oneness of the self with the Highest Reality, Brahman. Mokṣa is liberation of the self from avidyā (ignorance).

In Western philosophy, "if any view of the highest destiny of man as freedom or salvation comes close to the Indian concept of mokṣa, it is that of Spinoza, who has conceived of the two distinct states of man, namely, of human bondage and human liberty, on the same pattern as most Indian thinkers do. Spinoza believes that so long as the body remains, the mind, which is otherwise eternal, is subject to the effect of passions; but when the body ceases to be, the mind (soul) stays eternally as a part of God. This state, according to him, is blessedness".³⁵

For Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, liberation is the attainment of jiva's natural state. In all their devotional writings, they regard bhakti as more important than mukti. For them, liberation cannot be attained either through knowledge and action. Without an admixture of bhakti no one can lead to salvation. On the other hand, bhakti alone is sufficient to beget liberation.

Following the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the Assamese Vaiṣṇavism has recognised and enumerated five kinds of Videha-mukti, viz., (1) Sālokyo (being in the same place

with God), (2) Samīpya (nearness to God), (3) Sarūpya (likeness to God), (4) Sarsti (equalling God in glory), (5) Sāyujya (absorption in God).³⁶

There are two types of liberation according to the Indian thinkers - (1) Liberation, that is attained in the life or jivan-mukti and (2) absolute liberation from birth and death. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva accept jivan-mukti. For them, one need not wait for the other life to attain liberation. Mokṣa is possible in this life only through devotion. Mādhavadeva says, jivan-mukti is the consequence of devotion.

At the very outset 'Nām Ghosā' explains that just as a dreaming man believes in the dream world which is his own creation, the individual self, under the influence of māyā forgets its true nature, the Pure Self and takes the unreal as real. That is why Mādhavadeva says, avidyā (illusion) is the cause of māyā and it should be rooted out from the mind. Māyā is an important principle in the teachings of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. For them, those who are devoted to the Lord can alone overcome maya. Kali Ram Medhi (a great genius of Assam) writes, by using the machine of an organised illusion (māyā) or negation of knowledge (avidyā) the Almighty, who is all existence, all knowledge and all joy (sat, cit, ānanda) assumes, He though one, has diverse forms.³⁷ Naturally, the

question arises - what is the remedy? How can the jivātman free itself from bondage or influence of māyā? The remedy is not far to seek. It is 'Eka-Śaraṇa-Bhāgavat-Dharma (self-surrender to One) and through the practice of bhakti by which jiva can free itself and attain 'Eternal-bliss'. Likewise, Rāmānuja also claims that ultimate release can be achieved through 'Śaraṇāgatī (self surrender).

According to Mādhavadeva, there are two steps to self-realisation - bhakti and grace of Guru. The Guru is God to the disciple. Although, the guru has different bodily existence, really, both are one.³⁸ The hearts of both the guru and his God are full of grace, both always think of the good of others. They are devoid of pride and pleased with others out of their own virtues. This is the bond of love that unites us with other fellows. In this connection, we can compare Kant's regourism with the Vaiṣṇava order of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. However, Kant's doctrine is individualistic, because love has no place in the moral life. So, his ethics of pure reason is inevitably individualistic.³⁹ But Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva feel that we are not isolated from one another, that we are all members of a social system and we should not seek our own personal good apart from that of others.

God-realisation is not possible without meeting a God-realised person or Guru. Mādhavadeva says in his Nām-

Ghosā that by the grace of Guru, a devotee can visualise the Brahman and gradually makes him jivan-mukta. Real knowledge of Brahman cannot be had without the Guru. Here he mentions about 'Guru-Riṇa'.⁴⁰ It is the duty of the devotee to discharge his debts to the Guru who imparts true knowledge because, every individual has self-regarding duties as well as duties to the society.

Liberation has been termed by Śāṅkaradeva as 'parama-gati' in many places of his devotional writings. He says in the 'Kirtana-Ghosā' that, it is needless either to be a Deva or a sage and no necessity is there to know the plentiful scriptures; it is useless to perform other rituals; Lord Hari is satisfied with devotion alone.⁴¹ The Yaksas, the Rāksas, Daitas, all the inhabitants of Braja, the birds, the deer and even the Cāṇḍālas have attained the Highest Bliss by their devotion to Lord.⁴² Hence, according to Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavaḍeva, devotion is the highest ideal. There are many lines in 'Bhakti-Ratnākara', 'Nām-Ghosā', 'Kirtana-Ghosā' and 'Bhāgavata', where bhakti has been preferred to Mukti. But it does not mean that bhakti is averse to Mukti for them. They only mean that the devotees should not direct their attention to the attainment of salvation alone. As mukti is inherent in Bhakti, so, mukti comes automatically in its own time. Nārada, Sanaka, Sanātana are such devotees. Mādhavaḍeva salutes those devotees who are indifferent to Mukti and seek

only passionate devotion (Rasamayī bhakti).⁴³

The Summum Bonum in the socio-ethical thoughts of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavaḍeva is the attainment of the state of Supreme Bliss. The chanting of the name of Hari is the main stream and four Puruṣārthas of human life are the sub-streams.⁴⁴

The importance of a particular puruṣārtha varies with the different stages of life. Artha is the means to live and Kāma is the will to live. Dharma is essential for 'lokasam-graha'. It gives disciplinary and ideological inspiration for healthy living. From that particular point of view, actually, there is no hierarchy among the puruṣārthas. Each of the puruṣārthas is inter-related with the other.

The first three puruṣārthas are regarded by the modern scholars as socially functional, where as mokṣa is regarded as personalistic, individualistic and socially non-functional. The liberation does not lead to indifference to surroundings or to the social problems. The ideal of mokṣa could be both personalistic and universalistic.⁴⁵ Ramakrishna in the nineteenth century warned Vivekananda against cultivating 'nirvikalpa samādhi' to attain identity with the absolute, on the ground that it was a form of pleasure forbidden to those noble souls whose duty was to sacrifice their own happiness in the service of others. Again, Ramakrishna himself prayed to Mother, 'O, Mother, let me remain in contact with man. Do

not make me a dried-up ascetic.'⁴⁶

Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva felt that conduct of man cannot be understood thoroughly without knowledge of the conditions under which he lives. Conditions leading to misconduct need to be removed so far as possible and the natural and biological impulses of man need to be so directed that a well-integrated character results. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva felt that positive and practical instructions regarding the attainment of good life are very valuable than negative instructions or warnings to avoid evil.

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Chapter III

SOCIAL REFORMATION - SATRA INSTITUTION - NAMGHAR - DELINKING OF BHAKTI FROM ANY OBJECTIVE REPRESENTATION OF GOD - CASTE SYSTEM - MORAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT OF SATRA INSTITUTION

Society is not perfect in itself and so there is always a scope for improvement and for change. There are many factors which are accounted for reformation. They may be grouped under different heads - political factor, social factor, economic factor and religious factor etc. It is the task of social reformers to take special notice of these different factors of social reformation.

The dictionary meaning of social reformation is the act of reforming, amendment and improvement.¹

Hindu society has had a long history. Till today our culture, our social system has survived with many of its distinctive features. The social systems have changed with the passage of time. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says, "the Hindu view makes room for essential change."²

Change is the law of life. It may come either consciously or unconsciously. According to S. Bhattacharya, the unconscious changes often 'come as a result of organic evolution, imperfect imitation, and alteration in the physical and

social environments through contact with other cultures, through migration and also increase in population.'³

Society changes, evolves and progresses. Dynamism is one of the aspects of a society. It is because of the operation of the dynamic aspect of society that human civilization has advanced down the ages. Change, in a particular aspect of society produces corresponding change in other aspects of society. Structural modifications take place in society as a result of change.

Every form of social reformation cannot be regarded as an important aspect of social progress. Social progress must consist in the realisation of the ethical order. In the words of L.T. Hobhouse, "the social development coincides with ethical development."⁴

The medieval vaishnavite movement preached by Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva is a conscious cultural reformation, because it is a planned or designed effort of the two great social and ethical reformers.

In the 15th century Assam was a land of religious and social chaos. The socio-political situation was not favourable for Śāṅkaradeva to freely preach his creed. Rituals and worship of Śakti in different forms captured the minds of the mass people. The great socio-ethical principles of Ahimsa, Karuna tolerance etc. were forgotten under the cover

of ritualism, whereas these principles were traditionally associated with Hinduism. The social evils like caste-prejudice, untouchability and other superstitions prevailed under the name of religion. Morality had declined to the lowest ebb. Being confronted with such vile situations in society Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva without succumbing to them, evolved a new creed to wipe off the prevailing social and moral evils.

As I have already stated that Sankaradeva while drawing his inspiration from the 'Puruṣa Sūkta' built his system keeping its basis upon the ideals of the Gita and the Bhāgavata Purana. He studied different traditional religious books with a purpose to evolve a right and proper way of life. With that practical purpose, he set out on a pilgrimage to the holy places of India and visited Gayā, Puri, Mathurā, Kāshī and shared his thoughts with others in such places and got an added strength in religious ideas. He returned home after prolonged pilgrimage of twelve years and devoted himself for the service of humanity.

But, it is really a difficult task to control the changes of society, because there are many factors. Sometimes, it is seen that social reformation were not welcomed by the elderly people due to their conservative attitude. They suffer from fear psychosis to face the novelty and to change habits

of mind. It is also difficult to transform the selfish motive of a particular group of people. In Assam, as in other parts of India the new cult of Śāṅkaradeva met with divergent types of obstacles. But his Neo-Vaiṣṇavism came like a flash of light amidst the surrounding gloom of society. He kept the doors open to all people from all ranks of society, from the Brāhmins and Mahmmedans to the aboriginals of the hills.

Change is a continuous process in the realm of material world as well as in the mental world. Nothing stands still in this universe, as every order is subject to change. As a result, the trend of society is undergoing change day by day. Śāṅkaradeva's Neo-Vaiṣṇavism brought a change to the society. He preached a pure and simple form of religion to enrich moral and social life of the people.

Social institutions are very intimately related to man's social life. In the earlier stages of development social institutions performed various types of functions. Śāṅkaradeva's creed has many aspects and it finds expression in various ways. In social aspect he was a great organiser. Man has certain wants and these wants are for food, shelter, sex-gratification etc. Besides these, there are social needs too, e.g., 'the necessity of suppressing the desire to kill fellow-beings except in certain circumstances, the necessity to regulate sex-relations, the necessity of passing on from generation to

generation the social heritage of the group, the necessity of maintaining internal order and protection from external aggression, the necessity to explain the natural and the supernatural etc.'⁵ The feeling of need may be in respect of some present need or it may be in respect of some future need. Man being a social creature tries to satisfy the different needs in a socially acceptable manner. Social institutions are, therefore, necessary ways through which people reflect their behaviours. So, society needs social institutions through which they can proceed towards the common good. Individual and society are organically related. According to Perfectionism, 'Perfection of one's own character can be achieved with the co-operation or with the wider life of the community.'⁶ Śāṅkaradeva's 'Satra' and 'Nāmghar' are two such institutions.

Dr. S.N. Sarma has thoroughly discussed about the origin, development, functions of the Satras. In his words, "Satra institution of Assam is a product of the Vaiṣṇavite movement initiated by Śāṅkaradeva towards the closing decade of the fifteenth century of the Christian era. This institution has, since its inception been serving as the radiating force of all religious activities of the Vaiṣṇavite communities."⁷ It played a dynamic role in spreading the Vaiṣṇava faith and movement in Assam.

⁷ Satra, is an institution for perpetual dissemination of holy thoughts and teachings. The headquarters of the

Vaiṣṇava gurus were known as Satras in the words of Raj Mohan Nath, Tatta-Bhusana.⁸ Satra is an instrument which liberates the noble. 'Śravaṇa' as the hearing about God's greatness is the important aspect for spiritual enlightenment according to Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Their idea on Satra or association with the nobles is one of the important aspects of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism. Hearing of religious discourse from the nobles purifies the mind from all vicious thoughts.

Satras of Assam resemble the Vaiṣṇavite maths of other parts of India. In Indian philosophy, Buddhism is found to establish monasteries to enable the monks to lead a dedicated life. In Assam, Satra institutions also help the devotees to lead a life of dedication.

Each Satra consists of three principal parties or categories of persons intimately connected with the welfare and management of the Satra. These parties are -

- (1) Adhikāra and Deka Adhikārā,
- (2) Bhakat,
- (3) Śiṣya.

The first two parties generally reside within the four walls of the Satra campus and the last, viz., the Śiṣyas live in villages outside the Satra leading householder's life.⁹

Adhikāra is the head of the Satras. He is the religious head and spiritual guide of the devotees. In the opinion of Dr. N. Mahanta the Satrādhikaras (head of the Satras) are like the 'man-gods' for the devotees.¹⁰

The Satrādhikar for the devotees is all-knower and all-powerful. Mādhavadeva mentions devotion to Guru, Bhakta and Bhagavan in the 'Nām-Ghosā' - loyalty to the Guru being a cardinal principle of Vaishnava Tantras. The Satrādhikar is the Guru for the devotees. For such relationship between Guru and devotees, it has been held by Mādhavadeva that, the Guru may suffer for the sin committed by his devotees.¹¹ The constant and intimate association between the Guru and the Śiṣya is emphasised by the Hindu thinkers.

Functions of the Satra institution may be classified into two categories - primary and secondary.¹²

'The primary function of the Satra is to propagate faith and initiate neophytes. Satras always keep a watchful eye upon the moral conduct of their disciples and try to enhance the standard by formulating and explaining the ethico-devotional code of life among the disciples.' Satras have been acting more or less as the guardians of religion and morality. By maintaining regular agents at different localities and by personal visits the heads of the Satras tried to elevate the spiritual and moral standard of the villagers. According to

Dr. S. Rajguru, when the states of Assam were indifferent towards education, these satra institutions were serving as the centres of education and learning.¹³ The Satra institutions have been rendering valuable services in the different branches of art, music, painting etc. In the past, they were the main literary centres which enriched Assamese literature.

'The secondary functions of the Satras are to see that good social relations are maintained amongst the villagers, to develop spirit of co-operation, to provide adequate facilities for the dissemination of ancient learning and to dispense justice on all social and religious controversies.'¹⁴

In Satra there are mainly three constituent elements.
They are -

- (1) A Nāṃghar (prayer hall),
- (2) A Manikūt (the room attached to the Nāṃghar, where the idol or the sacred scripture is kept on a specially decorated seat called *Simhāsana), and
- (3) A Cāri-hāti (clisters for monks).

The Nāṃghar is the centre of all religious activities in a Satra. It is the prayer hall of Vaishnavas. It can also

* The Simhāsana is a specially decorated wooden seat having three or five or seven or nine stairs, each stair being supported by four wooden leogriff models. The Simhāsana, where the scripture is kept, is also called 'Thāpana'.

be regarded as the medium of spiritual and moral progress of the people.

The Nāmghar is a social, religious and cultural centres of the villages. In it villagers sit together to discuss the different problems regarding social, economic and political also. In the words of Dr. M. Neog, it is the village club and theatre. It exercises a close spiritual control over all members of the community and held them back from many an evil act. In fact, this institution may be called the 'village parliament run on purely democratic principles'.¹⁵

Nāmghar is like a village court. So, everybody living in the village can demand equal social and moral justice and status through Nāmghar. A social institution, in Cooley's view is an established form of public mind. It has certain characteristics of public opinion.¹⁶ The Nāmghars are public institutions. A social institution is a structure of society. It is society that makes individuals cultured. Nāmghar, being a social institution is the centre of some occasional social functions and festivals. Social institutions are found to provide suitable opportunities to the individual members, so that, they may express their potentialities. Śāṅkaradeva himself was an expert in all respects. He was a social reformer, poet, dramatist, musician, painter and actor also.

Apart from discharging the duties towards the moral and social upliftment of the general masses the Namghars also contribute considerably in maintaining discipline and order among the members of society. While observing the occasional social functions and festivals in the Namghar, due attention is also paid to settle the petty cases of offence, crime, feuds, and quarrels by pronouncing judgements and punishing the wrong-doers. Again, whenever the Namghar authority considers a social or religious crime or an offence to be of serious nature, such a case is committed to the Satra to give verdict upon it. In the present society also the ends of punishment are the protection of society, prevention of crimes and the reformation of the wrong doers. Crime means violation of the law. Plato suggested severe punishment for the violation of the laws. The object of punishment is to improve the moral and social conditions of society.

Sometimes a plan or decision is taken by the Namghar authority for the general welfare. As for instance, 'when the village people feel the need of a road, or a tank, they all assemble in the Namghar and take a decision to construct a road or to dig a tank, and accordingly all the adult male members of the village work unitedly to construct a road or dig a tank for their common use.'¹⁷ Thus, the Namghar has been a potent factor in generating a spirit of co-operation and mutual benefit amongst the masses of the village.

Besides, the village people assemble in the Nāmghar to spend their leisure time. They listen to the religious discourses or reading of different traditional religious books in the Nāmghar. Hearing and reading are the most powerful media for spiritual realisation. One of the main aims of this institution is to teach an individual to make the best use of leisure. Using leisure time in creative activities is itself useful.

Sankardeva expounded the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite cult, in which he preached the belief in one God and the Supreme devotion to Him - the Bhakti-Mārga. But he delinked bhakti from any objective representation of God, preferring to give to the 'Bhāgavata' itself 'the place of pride and veneration' in the namghars and Satras. Śāṅkardeva and his follower Mādhavadeva advocated in favour of formless nature of God, even that of Krishna in any form. For them, Lord has no other image than the word. Lord is 'Sabda-Brahma'.¹⁸ They, therefore, gave sole emphasis on the recitation or chanting of the name of Krishna. The idea of the formless nature of God is evident from the sloka of the 'Nam-Ghosa' -

Abyakta Īśvara Hari,
 Kimate pujibā tānka
 Vyāpakata kiyā bisarjan,
 Elayanta murti sunya
 Kenamate cintibāha
 Rāma buli sudha kara man.¹⁹

(Unmanifested is the Supreme Deity, how could you worship Him? How could you meditate on Him who is formless? So, purge your mind by recitating the name of Rāma.)

Śāṅkaradeva explicitly depicted this idea in the Kirtana-Ghosā' -

Tirtha buli kare jalata suddhi,
Pratimaḥ kare devata buddhi.
Vaiṣṇavaḥ nei esava mati,
Garuto adham Kṛṣṇa badati.²⁰

(to seek purification in water, calling it pilgrimage, to consider an image to be a God are unlike a Vaiṣṇava. He must be worse than a bull.)

But, for the purpose of concentration, the construction of the mental image is advised by Śāṅkaradeva. He says, 'recite the name of Rāma on your lips and contemplate His image in your heart to get mukti.'²¹

Guru Nānak and Śāṅkaradeva were contemporaries both having the same outlook on man and society. Śāṅkaradeva's institution of Satra is akin to Nanak's 'Gurudwaras'. In the 'Sikhism' also 'Grantha-Saheb' is placed in the Sikh temples to the exclusion of all idols. Nānak denounced the worship of images and all distinctions of caste and creed.²²

Satra institution played a most important part in the social, educational and also in the realm of literature and

art. One of the most notable social contributions of the Satra institution is the upliftment of the backward classes. Śaṅkardeva received disciples from all classes and caste of people not excluding even the Muslims and the hill tribes, such as, Gāro, Miri, Nagā etc. In religious congregation all people are equal. Equality and spirituality alongwith the liberalisation of caste system make Śaṅkardeva's cult extremely popular. The following verses from 'Daśam-Skandha' by Śaṅkardeva clearly bring out his attitude towards caste in the sphere of religion :

Jānilo Brāhmaṇa janma
 huibeka nālāge tāra
 yito Kṛṣṇa kathāla rasika/
 Yaita taita haukā janma
 sise jana sarvottama
 yāra śradhā hari bhakatika//
 Jāti kulāchāra dharmā
 kano kārya sādhibeka
 jñāna kano kāryata sakata/
 Ajñāni ajāti pāpi
 Kṛṣṇaka bhajako mātṛa
 jara haibe parama mahata//²³

(He who is interested in the deeds of Kṛṣṇa need not born a Brahmin. He is considered to be the best of persons, no matter where his birth place might be, who has deep regard for Hari. What purpose would race and caste, their customs and manners serve? What knowledge is capable of? The ignorant,

the out-caste, the sinner, whoever he might be, will acquire great merit if only he worships Kṛṣṇa.)

Caste divisions have prevented the development of homogeneity among the Hindus. 'To develop a degree of organic wholeness and a sense of common obligation the caste spirit must go.'²⁴ According to modern psychology, heredity and environment play vital role in determining man's nature and future occupation. Manu also does not believe in any rigid caste-distinction between a twice-born and a Sudra. He allows ascent or descent of varna on the ground of good or bad conduct.²⁵ Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva also consider caste-division and untouchability as the serious social evils. They give much emphasis on the personal cleanliness both inward and outward and correct social behaviour for the purpose of establishing social harmony among the masses. Gandhiji also opined that for creating an ethically elevated society the prevailing social evils must be eradicated.

Satra institutions were serving as the centres of education and learning in medieval Assam. The Buddhist Sangharams were also used for academic centres. The chief aim of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva is to elevate the village people through the process of education. Because they know that education is a process which helps in shaping, forming and

moulding the behaviour of individual. They know well that character and personality of the individual develop through the physical, mental, ethical and social education. Śāṅkaradeva himself showed example of practising Yoga for physical strength.

Education is necessary for developing the sense of community. This feeling is the basis of national integration. French sociologist, Emile Durkheim says, social solidarity promotes collective consciousness.²⁶ Social cohesion gives mental satisfaction and solace to the members of a society.

Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are remembered even today as the greatest integrators of the Indian people. At the present time many disintegrating forces such as regionalism, casteism, communalism, linguism etc. are working towards a complete disintegration of the country. But, overall progress of a nation is not possible without universal education, without emotional unity among the members of a nation. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva have realised it and they found a fertile ground for propagating their doctrine of 'Bhakti' based on the principle of universal brotherhood in the midst of various disturbing social scene.

Sankardeva and Mādhavadeva were not only religious and social reformers, they were also great literateurs. But they did not produce literature for the sake of literature. The aim of their literary works was to make an effective spiritual impact on the mass people. They translated several cantos of the epic and the purāṇas, composed a few independent kāvyas and dramas. In these translations they laid stress on the ethical ideas of liberality, truthfulness, tolerance, purity of mind, body and speech and cultivation of many virtues. Another very important type of literature that developed under the direct aegis of the Satra institutions is the 'carit-puthis'.* Recitations from the biographies of saints as a source of religious inspiration to devotees are made after congregational prayers even to this day. According to 'Kathā-Guru-Carit'** it was Mādhavadeva who first introduce this practice.

The art of wood and ivory carving was practised in some Satras. Figures of deities and masks were carved out of wood and little doll-like figures of god and goddesses were beautifully carved out of ivory by artisans of some Satras. These proved the constructive ability of individual. These

* Carit-puthis - Prose biography of many Vaishnava saints.

** Kathā-Guru-Carit is the prose biography of Sankardeva and Mādhavadeva.

artisans contributed to the economic progress of society. The economic prosperity of villages can be considerably increased through the development of improved methods of self-employment. In fact, Satras have certain other objectives, such as, training an individual to earn his livelihood, achieving a balanced development of personality, self-employment, cultural development etc. Hence, S.N. Sarma remarks, "Satras have been acting more or less as the guardians of religion and morality by keeping a close vigilance over their devotees."²⁷

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Chapter IV

VALUES AND SOCIETY - DIFFERENT TYPES OF VALUES - SOCIAL VALUES IN THE THOUGHTS OF SANKARDEVA AND MADHAVADEVA - THEIR VIEWS ON EDUCATION, ART, CULTURE, SECULARISM, MARRIAGE AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'value is worth, utility, desirability and qualities on which these depend.'

Generally, value is regarded as an economic and also as an ethical concept. An object is said to have value. All things that satisfy noble human desires are good and have values. In economics, the notion of value is used in two senses, viz., value in use and value in exchange. The purchasing power of a commodity is certainly to be distinguished from its capacity to satisfy human needs.

The word 'value' is elusive in nature. There is a great controversy regarding the subjectivity and objectivity of values. 'Just as hot or cold, green or red, sweet or sour need to be experienced if one is really to know them, so, a value also must be experienced.'¹

Values like truth, beauty and goodness depend upon our appreciation or valuation. Self-conscious personality is needed to derive satisfaction. Satisfaction is a state of

mind. So, value is entirely subjective. According to Emotivists, the moral predicates like 'good', 'bad', 'right', 'wrong' do not refer to or describe any objective character or facts to which they apply; they only evince or express the subject's attitude or emotion. Prof. C.L. Stevenson holds that "the emotive meaning of a word is the power which it acquires on account of its history in emotional situations, to evoke or directly express attitudes, as distinct from describing or designating them."² The word 'good' has a pleasing emotive meaning which fits it specially for the dynamic use of suggesting favourable attitude. According to G.E. Moore values are objective in the sense that they inhere in things and facts as properties, independent of human appreciation. But, objectivity of values without valuation or appreciation by some mind or other are not values at all. Hence, values are both subjective and objective.

Man is a social being. Man cannot live apart from society. Ethics seeks to determine nature of the Supreme Good and the means of self-realisation. So, what is conducive to self-realisation is intrinsically valuable. The altruistic self is largely a social product and society is composed of individuals. Society reflects minds of its members. Social philosophy is more concerned with the ideal. There must be ideal towards which human society develops itself. An individual is a storehouse of many potentialities which

require to be fulfilled. Harmonious fulfilment of these potentialities helps us to realise the ideal.

Ethics, as the science of human conduct gives us the right ways to attain the values of life. Development of morality is closely connected with the development of social life and different social institutions. Our moral life and social life are the outcome of long periods of development and of adaptation to changing environmental situation.

Language, fine arts, music, dance are some of the socializing agencies. Language, in its spoken and written form is the strong tool of communication. Through these unifying agencies, Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva tried to bring people together in mutual sympathy and support. They knew that bad art and literature can cause the death of society, while good art and literature can give immortality to society. Bad art is just like a slow poison that ultimately kills a person. Discord, disharmony, conflict, exploitation, cruelty etc. are sure to develop in a society affected by bad art and literature.³

Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were social reformers. They were aesthetes of highest repute. Every artist is not only an exponent of personal values, he is an exponent of social values too. Śāṅkaradeva thought that it is his duty to give importance to those values which are creative in nature.

He created new values, because his art and literature set new norms before society. His values are creative in the sense that they give fine shape to society.

The Satra and the Nāmghar are primarily meant for observing religious functions and festivals. Nāmghars are the community prayer halls and also the institutes of culture. Through Nāmghars, the different ceremonies and festivals of the group propagate the sense of social solidarity and the spirit of co-operation. A splendid instance of such ideals for seeking some common good are witnessed in the institution of plays. Each of the plays concludes with a 'mukti-māṅgala-bhatimā'* wishing everybody general welfare and the attainment of final beatitude.

The term value is multi-dimensional. An intrinsic value is one which has worth in its own right, it is an end in itself. An extrinsic value is one which is a means to some other value. The word valuable is practically equivalent with the word desirable in meaning. Some of the values of life are desired for their own sake, while others are desired as means to some other desirable things. The writings of Sankardeva

* Just as the play begins with a characteristic benediction, so, it ends with a prayer in Assamese called 'mukti-māṅgala-bhatimā' where the Sutradhār (the chief actor-cum-interlocutor in the prelude to each scene of 'Ankiyā-Nāts' or one-act plays) begs forgiveness of God for any omission or commission in the management of the drama.

depict the significances of instrumental values, as the main aim is to arouse the devotional sentiments in the hearts of the people. He has developed the devotional sentiments through songs, dances, and dialogues. In the thoughts of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, values have been treated in both the relative and absolute senses; the 'absolute' signifies the highest ideal whereas the 'relative' is always accompanied by pragmatic applicabilities.

Truth, beauty and goodness are generally regarded as intrinsic values of life. Truth is infinite ideal of thinking which satisfies only our intellect. Beauty is also a form of emotive value, so, it is the ideal of our aesthetic life. The aesthetic, intellectual and religious values satisfy the cravings of the spiritual self for impersonal ideal, e.g., beauty, truth and the holy. Śāṅkaradeva preached a religion of Supreme surrender to One. His concepts on devotion, prayer, and divine communion have religious value and are also intrinsically valuable. Communion with God inspires man to love mankind and make this earth a kingdom of God. Love of God finds expression in loving service of humanity. His architecture, painting, poetry, music etc. have aesthetic values because they interpret life or nature and serve humanity in some instrumental way.

Every society believes in a system of values as the latter plays a vital role in the life of an individual and the

community value regulates our social life and acts in the integration and organisation of society. Values also help in the maintenance of social order and social progress.

The philosophy of life including the system of values which Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva propagate are primarily spiritualistic, humanistic, socialistic, and progressive. Values elevate human nature so that man becomes able to grasp his true individuality. Hence, our individual life, moral life, and social life, all depend upon the system of values.

Ancient Indian thinkers classify human values under four heads - dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa. Mokṣa is intrinsic value and dharma, artha, kāma are regarded as instrumental or extrinsic in the realisation of mokṣa. According to ancient Indian social thinkers, principles of 'Varna' and 'Āsrama' constitute the foundation of social life. In addition to these, man's distinctive order and status in life and society, Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva recognise certain more values which must be cherished by men in their normal conditions of life. Following are some of them.

Truth is a value and it is believed to be the cause of all spiritual prosperity. Observance of truth in thought, word and deed is the real dharma. According to Śāṅkaradeva, there is no other dharma except the observance of truth. He says,

Nāhi nāhi āna dharmā
jāna satya bine.⁴

(no dharmā except the observance of truth.)

He also says :

Satya nei uddhaka
Asatya adhogati
Hena jāni satyaka
rākhibe karā mati.⁵

(Truthfulness is the index of prosperity while untruthfulness is the cause of moral degradation, therefore one should follow the path of truthfulness.)

Bravery is also a social value. A brave man protects the world and his duty is to fight and kill evils or enemies. Śāṅkardeva depicted in his dramas the bravery of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and other moral heroes. In 'Bhāwona' (drama), actors use effigies (cho) and masks (mukha), weapons of battle such as sword, shield, bow and arrow, discus, club etc. to express different bhava or emotion. The fighting with all these tools is nothing but a symbolical expression of a moral crusade against social evils.

Non-violence is regarded as an abiding social value by Śāṅkardeva and Mādhavadeva. But, this does not mean that they teach us to tolerate the sinners and avoid fighting against injustice. In the 'Kāṁsa-badhā' of the 'Kīrtana-Ghosā'

Krishna is found to kill Kamsa for his non-compromising attitude. It is said in the Sastras that the king is the resort of all creatures and the king being satisfied everyone is pleased.⁶ To establish justice, God killed Kamsa. But, if violence has at all to be done, it should be done for a good cause. Thus, violence is treated as a means for promoting social value in particular circumstances.

Abstention from anger, lust, and greed is also a great social value. Mādhavadeva states in the Nām-Ghosā :

Kāma, krodha, lova apuna nāsana,
Jāni karā parihār.⁷

(Of all the vices that are prevalent in the world there are three, that are principal, viz., lust, anger and greed. These are self-killing and so, should give them up.)

There can be no peace in the world if anger prevails upon tolerance, sympathy and kindness. The two great social thinkers, Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva advised their fellow beings to be kind, sympathetic and tolerant and to conquer anger, lust and greed by the grace of Kṛṣṇa, because there lies the way to liberation.⁸

Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva consider charity as another social value. Every Hindu is expected to give as much as he can for the good of others. Hindu tradition has, therefore,

worked out a scheme of five kinds of offerings (Yajña*) by every man who earns.⁹ 'Dāna' is a part of this Yajna. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa, one of the most widely read and respected Sanskrit texts of India says that, 'a man should possess only as much as is necessary for his maintenance. He who accumulates more than needs is a thief.'¹⁰ Mādhavadeva stated in his 'Rājasui' that donors are impartial and keep no difference between self and other fellow beings, so, their hearts are great.¹¹

Service to the venerable 'gurus' who impart knowledge, self surrender to one God, gratefulness to one's own father are regarded as values. Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva conceive of intuitive faith, Sarana (initiation) or surrender to One God are unavoidable. Śaṅkaradeva mentions three classes of gurus in the 'Bhakti-Ratnākara'. First, the father who brings one into the world; secondly, the person, who initiates one to the knowledge of the Vedas, and thirdly, the person, who leads one to Supreme knowledge (jñāna, brahma-jñāna, bhakti-jñāna).¹² Thus, they prescribe the value of respectfully serving those gurus.

* Five kinds of offerings are - (1) Deva yajña (offerings to God), (2) Rishi yajña (offerings to the great seers), (3) Pitri yajña (offerings to our ancestors), (4) Bhuta yajña (offerings to the various species of creatures that surround us in the world), and (5) Nri-yajña (offerings to the fellow human beings).

Fraternity is also considered as a great social value. A friend or 'suhrit' is he who unselfishly does good to another. For the spiritual enlightenment, company of good, learned and virtuous is indispensable. The idea of 'Satsaṅga' or association with the learned and honest people is one of the important aspect of Śaṅkaradeva's social and moral order. His idea of 'Satsaṅga' is consistent with his notion of social consciousness that the social consciousness is not an individual experience and it is effective not in isolation, but in association. Hearing of religious discourses in the company of virtuous men purify the mind from all irrelevant thoughts. On the other hand, company of fools and ignorant persons brings misfortune. Mādhavadeva says :

Bāhe triṣṇā ādi jata āsata saṅgata

(association with bad company enhances the lust and other vices).¹³

In the company of good animosity disappears and peaceful tranquillity prevails. .

In addition to that, 'atithi-satkara' or hospitality to a stranger is entertained as a great social value. Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva direct people to satisfy even an enemy if he comes as a guest and to accept him as a god. Śaṅkaradeva states in the Bhāgavata :

Jadi mahā śatru āshi
 hoyaya atithi
 Deva hena māni tāka
 karibā bhakati.¹⁴

(Even if a great enemy comes as guest, he should be treated as God.)

So far as the social values are concerned, the Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva comes very close to the Christian ideals of the New Testament of the Bible.

Individuals constitute society. If individuals are sickly, how can society be healthy? Naturally, condition of the society cannot be better. Hence, in order to build a healthy society Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva thought that good education was one of the most important necessities of life. They tried heart and soul to attract the people's mind towards art and literature, because the latter are very powerful and significant instruments of educating people.

The Sanskrit word for art is 'Kala' which means beautiful. Only that is beautiful which is in the interests of all; that is ugly, which is in the interests of one person or a few persons or a small community.¹⁵ Forgiveness, kindness, purity of mind and body, affection to all, fidelity are some of the qualities which make man more cultured. Śaṅkaradeva unequivocally pleads for spiritual equality. Culture is a quality of

heart and mind. A cultured man has no ill will for anybody and always wishes the betterment of one and all. During the medieval period, Śāṅkaradeva also concentrated his mind towards the regeneration of the Assamese way of life and culture. He knew that the greatest resource of any developing society is its members. Hence, social progress is possible only when its members will accept and follow spiritual values like truthfulness, charity, mutual co-operation, peacefulness, harmony etc.

In India, a special connotation has been ascribed to the term secularism which has no relevance to its old dictionary meaning. It means 'Sarva-Dharma-Sama-Bhava'. Secularism treats all religions equally. Śāṅkaradeva upheld the worship of one God and discarded any form of idol worship and advised his followers not to exhibit any hostility towards other's creed and declared :

'Parara dharmaka nihiṁsibā kadācit'.

(hurt not other peoples' religion.)¹⁶

Catholicity is one of the most important characteristic of Indian culture. In 'Bhakti-Ratnākara' Śāṅkaradeva writes :

Nakaribā nindā āna panthi samastaka.

(Censure not the followers of other religious path).¹⁷

He, thus, enjoined his followers to be guided by the principles of tolerance and it is his catholic outlook that could unify different people into one spiritual fraternity.

Marriage is a social institution. Hindu marriage can be defined as a religious sacrament in which a man and a woman are bound in permanent relationship for physical, social, and moral purposes of dharma.

Sex is a normal human phenomenon concerned with the perpetuation of the race. Marriage, love and motherhood are glorified and have social and moral significances according to Śaṅkaradeva. Hence, the disregard to asceticism and encouragement of family life are the most important characteristics of Śaṅkaradeva's thought.

The intimate binding force of the family is love between husband and wife. The love is spiritual. Certainly, love is much more than physical sex appeal. Family fulfils the physical, mental, and social needs of the child also. Śaṅkaradeva mentioned in the 'Bhāgavata' about the different duties of a woman. To serve faithfully one's husband and relations and to rear up children is the 'parama dharma', i.e., the chief duty of a woman. It is the duty of a housewife to manage all household affairs, looks after the comforts of family members, guests, and keeps full account of income and expenditures. These are called 'griha-karma' (household

affairs).¹⁸ He also said, wives should not leave their husbands even if he be of a bad character, or ill-lucked or old or invalid or sickly or poor, but of course, if he is not a sinner.¹⁹ According to Dharma-Sāstras there is no other dharma for a wife excepting 'patisevā'. It is a great sin for the married lady of a family to come to a lover (upapati).²⁰ Thereby, she loses reputation. So, Sri Kṛṣṇa says the Gopis, better go home, living at home, practise devotion to 'Me'. That will give you more happiness than my companionship with you.²¹

Normal human conduct is guided and regulated by some or other value. When a man realises that he is a spirit and everybody is a spirit like him, then, he cannot harm anybody. This 'ātmasama-dṛiṣṭi' preached by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva to be followed by the devotees and the lay men in society. The impulse of separation and selfishness are responsible for disorder in a social and moral set-up. They gave great stress on the performance of one's own duty properly. By selflessly serving all men is enable to attain higher values of life, like, justice, equality, fraternity, truthfulness, kindness, unity etc. A spirit of dedicated service is the Hindu motto of life.

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Chapter V

NATURE AND DEFINITION OF ETHICS - BASIC ETHICAL CONCEPTS IN THE THOUGHTS OF SANKARDEVA AND MADHAVADEVA

It is not easy to define ethics, because while giving its definition, we have to establish its limitations. No subject can be restricted to a watertight compartment, because all disciplines overlap one another. Especially, ethics is concerned with the human conduct or human actions from the point of view of their rightness and wrongness as means for the achievement of Supreme Good or Summum Bonum of human life. Ethics is the systematic study of human actions.

Men are rational social beings and so, live with moral values. They have faith in morality and believe in right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice etc. We get these ideas from our social environment but normally we do not indulge in rational reflections, on the nature of right and wrong. But ethics is the science of reflective morality. It converts our moral faith into a rational insight.¹ It investigates the nature and validity of rightness and wrongness of human conduct with reference to the ideal of the Highest Good. R.M. Hare also attempts to rehabilitate rationality in our moral discourse.²

The word 'Ethics' is derived from the Greek adjective 'ethica' which comes from the substantive 'ethos'. 'Ethos' means customs^{or} habits. Customs are uniform ways of acting by which men meet their common needs. Customs originate and evolve in human society through development of human experience and knowledge.³ Customs are useful for the members of the society. Once these are formed they are passed on from generation to generation through social transmission. Customs constitute the basis by which the moral life of the people is sustained and developed. Most needs of the people are common needs and there is also similarity among people living at any level of culture.

Change is a natural process. Change in customs comes when strain appears. But change always occurs in the direction of better adaptation to the conditions and different purposes of life.

Ethics is called moral philosophy. The terms moral and ethics are thus synonymous. If the ideal of ethics is ultimate good and if this good is the basis of human behaviour, then it is evident that ethics is the normative science of conduct. The concept of ethics will not be clear until and unless we explain the nature of normative science. Sciences have been classified into two groups - (1) Positive or Naturalistic, and (2) Normative Science.

Naturalistic or positive sciences deal with 'what is' and Normative sciences deal with 'Norms', 'Ideals', 'Standard'. There are three ideals of human life. These are Truth, Beauty and Good. Ethics is a normative science because it is the science of Good and Supreme Good is regarded as the ideal of human conduct. In order to make this definition of ethics more clear it is necessary to distinguish the nature of science and art and decide whether ethics is science or an art. The answer depends very largely upon one's definition of science. If the term science is used in a broad sense meaning 'any body of facts in a particular sphere classified and systematized' then ethics can be called a science.⁴ Knowing is important in so far as it helps doing. All sorts of knowledge bear utility of the guidance of conduct. But ethics determines the art and goals of good living. Life is not simple, it is a unit of many facts, so human conduct with which ethics deal must be studied from different angles. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, the two great ethical thinkers expressed that our different organic needs must be satisfied, directed and integrated if they are to be the aids and not hindrances to the good life.

Apparently, problems of human life cannot be separated from the problems of society. From times immemorial Indian thinkers have contemplated over the problems of life and existence. Therefore, in ancient Indian literature we get extensive discussions on social and ethical problems of human life.

Ethics deals with the ultimate end of human conduct. Conduct is good or bad, not merely relatively, but absolutely. This characteristic of ethics brings it into close connection with metaphysics, which investigate the ultimate principles underlying all reality.

Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were not philosophers in the academic sense of the term nor did they endeavour to propound a new system of philosophy. Yet, they discussed the different philosophical problems, like, the nature of the self, freedom of will, immortality of soul, the relation of the individual to society, relation of the body to self, immanence and transcendence of God. Ethics is also indirectly concerned with such metaphysical problems.

According to Manu, the ethical principles and social laws are based on the metaphysical doctrine of the Vedas. The social laws were codified for maintaining social order laid down by ancient Indian scriptures. According to Manu, man can realize the highest end of life by performing social and moral duties. Man ought to cultivate friendship with others and ought to practise altruism for social welfare.

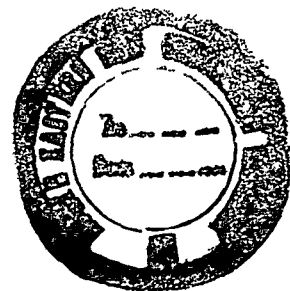
The four ends of life, the four classes of society and four 'āśramas' with the corresponding duties of the individual and society prove the fact that Vedic philosophy presents us an integrated scheme of life. Vedic teaching is pragmatic

because it leads to the all round development of the individual and society. The Vedic philosophy is dynamic and it presents morally an evolutionary view of life. The Upanisads also uphold the same ideals of life as the Vedas and reaffirm that mokṣa is the Supreme Good of life.

The ethics of the Gitā arranges and organises the proper development of all aspects of man. The ethics of the Gitā has synthesized both social interests and individual interests. The individual soul and universal soul are not two separate entities. All distinctions are the result of ignorance. The Niskāma Karma of the Gitā is the golden means not only from the spiritual viewpoint, but also from the practical and worldly viewpoint. It is the synthesis of action and abstinence, enjoyment and asceticism. Kant's ethics is jural, individualistic and ascetic. The Gitā never treats desire, emotion and feelings as completely evil. The Gitā has stressed devotion and worship only for the development of man's emotional aspect. The Gitā's practical teaching is to transform or divinise and not to exterminate feelings. But Kant wants to remove these completely from life. So, his opinion becomes regoristic. The great thinkers like Śāṅkara, Rāmānuja, Gandhi, Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were inspired by the teachings of the Gitā.

As stated earlier, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the Bhāgavad-gītā are popularly considered to be the authorities from which

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Śaṅkaradeva has accepted the main principles of his faith. Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva lays down certain ethical principles which are duly graded for the uplift of the individual as a social being. Their songs and poems, prose and stories with highly philosophic and socio-ethical ideas are aimed at awakening the slumbering humanity from their deep sleep to the life of dynamism and spiritual excellence.

Śaṅkaradeva is humanist in the broader sense of the term and his philosophy may be branded as pragmatic idealism. He does not attempt to shut his eyes to the concrete facts of life. The way of goodness, according to him, does not mean total rejection of the flesh. He says, entire virtue remains hidden within the name of Rāma.

The reality of the permanent self is the foundation of morality. The relationship between 'jivātman' and 'paramātman' can be technically called as mokṣa or liberation. This fact can be realised by those who attain the grace of God. The grace of God can be had only by devotion and self-surrender which ultimately begets knowledge. Kṛiṣṇa is the moral governor and spiritual guide according to Śaṅkaradeva. He accepts the living presence of the Brahman as an ethical principle.

Śaṅkaradeva expressed in the Bhāgavata that the Kṛiṣṇa is in the heart of all,⁵ and it is only devotion which paves

the way for the realisation of Brahman. Devotion is an active process. Thus, he laid much emphasis on bhakti, particularly of the dāśya* type (a servant's devotion to the Lord).

Śaṅkaradeva maintains that bhakti based on love is one and the only way to realise God. In this state bhakta (devotee) sees the Lord everywhere and finds Him revealing Himself in the form of Universal Love. For the common people it is easier to picture God as Love than to conceive of Him as Truth. He holds that a real bhakta will not seek salvation. His wish is to remain in a state of perpetual enjoyment of bhakti.

In the 'Bhakti-Ratnākara' it is stated that God favours those who practise devotion in the association of devotees. By associating with saintly persons one can purify one's mind by driving out all evil desires and the path of bhakti is thereby cleared.⁶ Indifference to worldly pleasures and knowledge of God then comes to them. Till this stage, a devotee should perform all duties which are not in conflict with the path of devotion.

Śaṅkaradeva believed in the well-known doctrine of Karma. He wrote in the 'Bhāgavata', creatures take their birth and are subject to pleasure, pain, affliction and fears

* A detailed discussion on different types of bhakti has been given in the Chapter VI.

owing to Karma. On the other hand, man cannot avoid Karma. Life cannot be one of inaction; it may either be good or bad action. People enjoy or suffer as inevitable consequences of their deeds.⁷ of the three types of Karma, viz., prarābdha, ārabdha and anārabdha, the consequences of the first type of action is inevitable. But people can destroy the impressions of the other two types of karmas by their conducts in this life.⁸

The aim of ethics is to define the nature of the Supreme Good which man as a member of a society aspires to attain. For the realisation of the Highest Good, devotee has to undergo certain modes of discipline. Sankardeva fully realised that the elaborate and highly complex system of religion could never become the religion of the people. He, therefore, sponsored a simple way of spiritual life in which everybody irrespective of caste, creed, sex could participate. It is the simple way of devotion or bhakti.

Sankardeva and Mādhavadeva, both were Saktas and so they were destined to attack the fort of corruption from within. They studied the scriptures and society alike. After that they found and applied the remedy in ethical and social life of the people. Like Sankardeva, Buddhadeva also tried to restore purity of personal life.

In the 'Prahlaḍ-Carit' of the 'Kirtana-Ghosā' Śāṅkaradeva expresses some practical and ethical means of attaining deliverance. The doctrine of 'Ahimsā', that is, non-violence is the pivot point in the teachings of Śāṅkaradeva. It is also the most important principle of the 'Jaina system of thought. According to Śāṅkaradeva, all living beings are nothing but part and parcel of God and hence they are sacred. So, they are not to be hurt or killed either in the name of religion or for the sake of our ownself. On this particular point, Jainism is more rigid, more elaborate and uncompromising. Śāṅkaradeva says that every soul can become God by virtuous deeds.

In his translation of the Bhagavata, Sankaradeva observes, 'If acts are done with sinful motive, no virtue results. In this dire Iron age evil intentioned people have no competence for any act whatsoever. Just as neither earth nor plenty of water can purify gold, but only repeated heating of it on the fire can do purifying, So, by practising penance, mutterings, sacrifices and Yogic exercises trouble is counted in vain. Since the knot of action is served unless God is enshrined in the heart. Let me tell you this truth, the heart cannot be purified by worshipping Gods, by practising Yoga, by taking ablutions in all sacred waters, nor by donation, and penance. I cite you, O Parikshit, this essence of the scriptures. In Iron age no rescue is there like purifying the mind

but harbouring the God of the world in the heart.'⁹

Śaṅkaradeva stressed on pure conduct alone as the way to internal purity. If our intention is good or pure, all our actions will lead us to punya or dharma.

In the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, it has been repeatedly mentioned that even the sinners can purify themselves with the aid of devotional love.

Sin is an evil deed. It is wilful violation of neglect of duties. According to Śaṅkaradeva, any transgression of the rules of bhakti is sin. The sin against bhakti is generally of four kinds¹⁰ ; viz., against -

- (1) Nāme,
- (2) Deva,
- (3) Guru, and
- (4) Bhakata.

God's name is necessary in destroying sins.

According to Śaṅkaradeva, without vairāgya (aversion) towards the material objects devotion cannot attain its fulfilment.¹¹ He, in his 'Bhakti-Ratnākara' deals a chapter on Vairāgya. Four kinds of Vairāgya are mentioned here. These are, (1) indifference to palatable food and drink, (2) indifference to wealth or property, (3) indifference

towards all the objects of pleasure and enjoyment and lastly, (4) indifference to all these, both mentally and physically.¹² This last stage is the ideal one according to ethico-devotional teachings of Śāṅkaradeva. But indifference to worldly objects does not come so easily. It can be acquired slowly and steadily by the devotees through a gradual process of detachment.

The process of formal initiation into the religion is known as Śaraṇa. 'Śaraṇa' begins with the ceremony of initiation. In this ceremony, the novice officially takes oath in the name of 'Guru', 'Deva', 'Nāma' and 'Bhakat' which will be his objects of concentration from that very moment. These are called 'cari-vastu'* or 'four reals or principles' in the Vaiṣṇavite literature. Though these four are the external objects of concentration, yet they become gradually more inarticulate and subtle till the spiritual truth is realised.

There are some principal 'rules of initiation'**;

1. The person concerned is required to keep himself clean in body and mind from the previous day of Śaraṇa or initiation and

* It is said that Śāṅkaradeva at first, established the first, second and the fourth of these principles. The third was introduced by Mādhavadeva and accepted Śāṅkaradeva as his Guru. - The Kathā-Guru-Charit, p. 493

** The detailed procedure of the initiation ceremony is not uniform in all Satras, yet there is general agreement in fundamental points. - S.N. Sarma, The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam, p. 120

should keep religious fast which consists of a vegetarian meal only.

2. On the day of initiation from the time of morning bath, there is the rite of purification and expiation.

3. The person is now taken before the image of Vishnu or the Bhāgavata and he bows five times to the image or to the book.

4. The real initiation takes place when the person is asked to take an oath by which he surrenders himself to the four fundamental principles.

5. 'At this stage the significance of and difference between manas and atman and the process of achieving their unity for spiritual attainment are explained to the novice.'¹³

6. 'Description and explanation of six plexuses (sat-cakra), nerves (nadis), five subtle elements (panca-tanmatra), five gross elements (panca-mahabhuta), ten-organs (dasa-indriya), ten winds (dasa-vayu) and lastly, cosmological and cosmogonical accounts of the creation are given out in details.'¹⁴

7. The Guru then explains to the neophyte how the universe remains in a miniature form within the microcosm.

8. The process of mental worship of the Guru and of the deity is then taught to the person.

9. 'Beatific form of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa, Hari are analysed and explained.

10. Elements and characteristics of bhakti, meritorious and sinful deeds, ways and conducts of life and such other topics relating to Bhakti are explained to the newly initiated person.¹⁵

After the formal initiation a 'bhakat' (devotee) is expected to abide by the rules of the 'Satra'. Because if the moral being of a person or a community is not properly moulded, there can hardly be any uplift on the social and spiritual side of life. Attending the 'Prasāṅga'* at the appointed time and chanting the name of God with the accompaniment of musical instruments were intended to discipline the mind of the devotees. Discipline means some particular kind of training in self-control, orderliness, obedience and co-operation. Śaṅkaradeva feels its necessity for the development of one's own potentialities and for enriching society. The 'Satra' institution indirectly took upon responsibility of imparting religious and moral education to the masses. The important feature of Śaṅkaradeva's socio-ethical doctrine is that it encourages and promotes the right way of attitudes,

* The devotees assemble in the Nām-ghars hold discussions with the guru and sing prayers. This small concourses were known as 'Prasāṅgas' and as the talks and songs centred around God they were also known as 'Hari-Prasāṅga' or Hari-Katha-Prasāṅgas'.

conduct and values.

It has been seen from the above discussion that whatever is true of human mind is true of human society. Man and nature, both are the expressions of the One Universal Spirit. Man can attain endless joy and can adjust one's individual self to the Universal Spirit. According to Śāṅkaradeva, this is made practical by the inculcation of love for all living beings. His message for mankind is the message of love, harmony, peace, universal brotherhood and spiritual unity.

Man is potentially God and the aim of all ethics is to transform man's divine potentiality into actuality, manhood into Divinity. In order to achieve this goal, 'man has to rise from the level of selfishness to the state of self-sacrifice and self-devotion, from narrow sensual satisfaction to the state of equipoise and equilibrium and from personal, individualized and egoistic attachment to the impersonal, universalized and absolute transcendence.'¹⁶ This state is called Sthitaprajña in the Bhāgavata Gitā. It is also known as jīvan-mukti in the Jaina, Sāṅkhya and Yoga systems and also in the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śāṅkaradeva.

The ethical and devotional teachings of Śāṅkaradeva are inter-related. All moral qualities exist in sincere devotion. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were ethical thinkers and social reformers with a religious outlook. They paid utmost

attention on personal cleanliness - physical, mental and spiritual. To quote the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, "The duty of man is to effect a transformation in his own nature. It is to grow from unrest to serenity, from man-beast to God man."¹⁷

Spiritual uplift is not a man's personal achievement. One cannot attain it without concerning himself with the society in which he lives. Personal emancipation is only the starting point which must extend its horizon to embrace whole society. The tradition of our country gives evidence of the fact that ethical and social uplift go hand in hand and that they cannot be alienated from one another. Thus, ethics plays a vital role in the thoughts of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. To them, spiritualism is also a discipline where the self-interest and total personality of man are merged into the great well-being of the entire human race.

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Chapter VI

ETHICO-RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS - BHAKTI, ITS ETHICAL IMPLICATION - TYPES OF BHAKTAS AND FITNESS OF BHAKTAS - TYPES OF BHAKTI

Morality and religion are closely connected with each other. Both are concerned with the elevation of human personality. Both the religion and morality formulate the laws of conduct in society. These laws are obeyed because of the internal urgings or pressures. In morality, it is the pressure of conscience and in religion, this internal pressure is the fear of God. According to Bergson, 'moral pressure is nothing but social pressure and the verdict of conscience is the verdict which would be given by the social self.'¹

At the medieval period ethical values drew their inspirations from the religious values. Ethical values find expression in the context of interaction between human beings in society. So, ethics is inseparable from the social context.

'Religion springs from the spiritual constitution of man.'² According to Radhakrishnan, "man's love for eternal is itself eternal."³ Man is a religious animal. The sense of the religious ideals is already within man. Religious experience is as old as smiling, and weeping, loving and forgiving.⁴

In Hinduism, 'Divinity is the essence of Humanity and the realization of this Divinity is the ultimate Ideal of human efforts. Religion, being the general name for the entire system of self-discipline necessary for reaching this goal, it should govern, regulate, harmonize and illumine all the diverse aspects of human life, and should direct every kind of human endeavour towards that one ultimate object, - the realization of Divinity.'⁵ A truly religious life is a life of harmony, - of harmony within and of harmony with the environment.

Morality means virtuous conduct and discrimination between right and wrong. Goodwill, truthfulness, absence of envy and anger, spirit of co-operation, non-violence, non-stealing etc. are ethical values. Religion is the most perfect sanction of morality. Ethical questions cannot be separated from the questions as to the nature of man, nature of the universe in which he lives, existence of God, immortality of soul, freedom of will etc. Ethics alone cannot decide such questions. The theists conceive that moral ideal must be realised in God because God is the embodiment of moral perfection.

Man's is an owner of dual consciousness. 'There is in him an 'individual consciousness' - a consciousness which makes him an individual among countless individuals and at

the same time there is in him a 'universal consciousness' - a consciousness which inwardly unites him with all other individuals and with the universe as a whole."⁶ In the Hindu religious literature, the individual consciousness has been described as 'Nara' or 'Jiva' and the Universal consciousness as 'Nārāyana' or Paramātmā. Every man is essentially 'Nara-Nārāyana' or 'Jiva-Paramātmā'. The religion of humanity, according to Comte also is the source of inspiration for the entire human race. The worship of humanity alone can have universal appeal.⁷ Even though Comte disregard the concept of God, he did not completely ignore the importance of religion. In his view every society needs some kind of organised religion with a system of beliefs. Religion has social importance. It is a cohesive force in society. It is responsible for producing harmony in society. It improves the moral tone of society. Comte's positivism seeks to substitute morality for religion.⁸

Indian philosophy believes in the existence of moral order. This moral order has been termed Rta in the Vedas, Apūrva in the Mīmāṃsa, Adṛsta in the Nyāya Vaiśeṣika. The principle of Law of Karma has been accepted by almost all systems of Indian philosophy. This is an ethical and spiritual principle which can be expressed by the proverb 'as you sow, so you reap'. Ethical and religious values can lead in life of man on the path of virtue, benevolence and spiritual progress.

Śāṅkaradeva was an ethical activist and a religious thinker. His 'ism' is known as 'Mahāpuruṣism'*. He feels that religion is needed not for religion but for practical usefulness in human life. It is already mentioned that 'ism' preached by Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva is really a genuine life process and not an intellectual speculation.

'Prophets and saints appear in this world for fulfilling two important tasks.'⁹ They create belief and faith in the living and eternal God and they establish relationship between man and God. Śāṅkaradeva took ethics and religion as the prime means to purify human life. Hence, he started purifying society which is a conglomeration of human soul and body. He laid emphasis on the uplift of the individuals through society and of the society through the individuals. The individual was an individual in relation to society. So, purification of individuals brings about purification of society. Purity of heart creates good character. Śāṅkaradeva says :

Huṁvā susi karā nite manaka saṁjam.

(regulate the affairs of mental faculty through purification of heart.)¹⁰

Before the attainment of the stage of spirituality, ethical considerations are necessary for human beings .

* Mahāpuruṣism is not the name of a religion like Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity or Muhammadanism. It is a

according to almost all systems of Indian philosophy. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva also laid emphasis on purity^{of} character and conduct and a high ethical code, rather than any dogma or creed of any sect, as the sole means of salvation.

The religion of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva is ethico-devotional. Of the three paths prescribed for the attainment of the Lord, namely, jñāna (knowledge), karma (action), and bhakti (devotion), the highest importance has been attached to bhakti in the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa, though all the three paths are mutually interlinked.¹¹ Among the three paths Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva proclaim the power of devotion to be the highest.¹² But, according to them, devotion does not neglect jñāna and karma. Knowledge arises automatically in the process of devotion.¹³ Bhakti or devotion is defined as disinterested service to God. So, it is a form of karma. And disinterested action is not possible without knowledge. Hence, bhakti too, like 'Niskāma karma' can be performed only by a true jñānin.¹⁴

The beginnings of bhakti may be traced in the hymns of the Rgveda. Bhakti, however, was preached as a doctrine for the first time in the Bhāgavad-Gītā.¹⁵ In the Bhāgavata, it is stated that "Being fully practised in meditation one

term used for the faith of devotion to Mahāpurusa (God). - D. Neog, Jagat-Guru-Sankardew, p. 1

attains bhakti-yoga in a short time", which indicates that bhakti is not a means to an end, but the end itself.¹⁶

Śankara, in his commentary on the Gītā says that "worship is bhakti and defines 'ananya bhakti' as non-experience of anything other than Vāsudeva."¹⁷ The great protagonist of bhakti, was Rāmānuja, to whom meditation (dhyāna) and devotion (bhakti) were interchangeable terms. Thus, according to Rāmānuja, continuous meditation or dhyāna is bhakti which is a synonym of Upāsana.¹⁸

Devotion is the spiritual practice that helps the bhaktas to realise God. Devotion is a means to attain the goal of human life. Without devotion no one can achieve the purpose of life. The absolute self-surrender to God and a feeling of joy and happiness in worshipping Him are the two main characteristics of bhakti. Śankaradeva, Mādhavadeva and their followers glorified the bhakti cult of the Bhāgavata throughout their literary works. Both Śankaradeva and Mādhavadeva composed a good number of literary works including plays, songs, narratives giving importance on bhakti. The 'Bhakti-Ratnākara' and 'Bhakti-Pradīpa' of Śankaradeva contain bhakti as the principal 'rasa'. Of all the works of Mādhavadeva, it is in the 'Nām-ghosā' and 'Bhakti-Ratnāvalī' that we find the most elaborate discourses on the cult of bhakti. In his 'Nām-Ghosā' he has spoken of bhakti as 'rasamayī'.¹⁹ All

these works of both religious thinkers are unanimous in holding that in Kali age there is no better mode of worship than Bhakti. Besides, it is easy to practise and accessible to all irrespective of caste and creed, the high and the low.²⁰

Bhakti is illustrated by Śāṅkaradeva in the Bhāgavata : "Bhakti is mother, father, friend, brother, relation and the highest treasure of life. Bhakti is the movement (gati), the desire (mati) and the guiding force of life. It is the highest desire and wealth (vitta) and the germ of liberation; it is the solace of life. There is no other way of life save and except Bhakti in this world and the next.²¹ But, according to Śāṅkaradeva intensity of devotion differs in different individuals according to the capacity, temperament and taste. Everyone must cultivate devotion to attain the state of final beatitude. Thus, depending on depth and nature of devotion Śāṅkaradeva divides devotion into three categories and explains with it the different qualities of bhaktas.

The bhaktas who find God in all beings and all beings in God are the best type of bhaktas.²² Egoism or self-pride does not arise in them even though they may be very high by birth, religious activities, caste and social status. They are dear to the Lord. The best type of bhakta does not consider property and physical existence as belonging to

oneself and others separately. Śāṅkaradeva feels that everyone should endeavour to promote the good of another while trying to achieve his own ends. This type of bhakta never desires the state of Brahma. He only seeks the Lord.

Desire never ends. Satisfaction of one begets another. "Those, who are under the control of the senses, cannot get rid of fear even if they fly to the forst. On the other hand, those whose senses are under control, can attain to the highest even amidst family life."²³

"The bhakta, who makes a differential treatment - love to the master, friendship to the bhaktas, compassion to the foolish and indifference to the inimical - is considered as a middle type of bhakta."²⁴ "Such a bhakta adopts an attitude of indifference to the objects of attachment, takes the company of bhaktas and offers kindness, friendship, and quarters to all beings as they may deserve."²⁵ Association with others, comradeship, friendship and love are values in themselves as well as instruments of self-realisation. Madhyama bhakta (middle type of bhakta) realises God through the service of humanity.

"The bhakta, who offers worship with reverence to Hari only in the form of an icon, but does not show that reverence to other bhaktas is a Prakṛta bhakta (ordinary type

of bhakta).²⁶ This is only preparatory stage. But, such a bhakta may, in course of time improve himself to the highest grade of bhaktas (uttama bhakta).²⁷

Our desires are seekers of ananda. Pleasure is the natural end and motive of human action according to psychological hedonism.²⁸ Longing for pleasure is the characteristic of life. But, Epicurus claims that reason has an important place in our moral life. It is the proper guide for the attainment of true happiness.²⁹ According to Śāṅkaradeva, by the power of bhakti, prakṛta bhakta shall not be overpowered by the objects of senses. He says, just as fire lighted for the purpose of cooking can consume all kinds of wood, so, also bhakti directed to the Lord can destroy all sins.³⁰

About the fitness of devotee Mādhavadeva mentions that a devotee in the real sense, is desirous of doing good to all. He is quiet and saintly, and ready to forgive the penitent. A devotee should dedicate himself only to Hari. A bhakta must possess the qualities of sympathy, beneficence, softness of heart and complete mastery over his passion. He must be competent to offer spiritual advice to people. Sri Swami Sivananda mentions in his 'Sādhana' (A Text-Book of the psychology and practice of the Techniques of Spiritual Perfection) four qualifications of a bhakta : (1) Humble as a blade of grass, (2) Forbearance like a tree, (3) Not to desire

praise or respect for himself but to praise and respect others, and (4) Always repeating Lord's Name.³¹

According to devotional scriptures, there are two kinds of bhakti : (1) Kāmya (having desire for fruit), and (2) Nishkāmya (desireless). The 'Bhakti-Viveka' and the 'Ghosa-ratna' have again classified bhakti as Phalarupa (fruit) and Sadhanārūpa (means).³² Bhakti-Ratnākara classifies bhakti into four types :

- (1) Bhāgavatī Bhakti,
- (2) Antarāṅga Bhakti,
- (3) Nirguṇa Bhakti,
- (4) Sāprema Bhakti.

'Bhāgavatī Bhakti is defined as that type of bhakti where the motor-organs (karmendriya) and sense organs (jñānendriya) naturally operate and take delight in the services of Viṣṇu.'³³ Bhāgavatī Bhakti is selfless and is superior even to mukti and can destroy even the subtle body.³⁴ The Antarāṅga Bhakti (intimate love) consists of seeing God in all creatures as well as in oneself.³⁵ The 'Bhakti-Ratnākara' defines Nirguṇa Bhakti as that type of bhakti whereby a devotee giving up all kinds of activity revels only in desireless adoration to Kṛṣṇa.³⁶ Those, who in their mood of devotion remember and make others in their company remember Hari, the remover of

sins, Sāprema Bhakti is born.³⁷ Gopis of Vṛndāvana are the model devotees practising this type of bhakti.

A distinction is made between nirguṇa bhakti and saguṇa bhakti. The nirguṇa bhakti is also called niskāma bhakti or bhakti without attachment.³⁸ Nirguṇa bhakti or niskāma bhakti is possible only when everything (mental and physical) is dedicated to the Lord.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa has mentioned nine forms of bhakti. In the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite doctrine of Assam nine forms of bhakti have found frequent reference. These nine forms are :

1. Śravaṇa (listening to the recital of the name and glories of Hari),
2. Kīrtana (recital of the glories of Kṛṣṇa),
3. Smaraṇa (recalling of or meditation upon the Lord's form),
4. Arcana (worship of the Lord's image),
5. Vandana (adoring),
6. Padasevana (personal services),
7. Dāśya (a servant's devotion to the Lord),
8. Sākhyā (friendly attitude), and

9. Ātmanivedana (self-surrender in the Lord's feet).

A devotee can practise any method of Bhakti which suits him best, so that, he will attain Divine illumination. But Śāṅkaradeva puts utmost importance to the Sravana and Kirtana forms of devotion.³⁹

I present below a brief introduction to the nine forms of bhakti as discussed by Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva.

1. Sravana: Śravana is the first and excellent path to bhakti. Śāṅkaradeva says, 'just as dirt in water is naturally cleaned with the coming of the autumnal season, so also Kṛṣṇa enters the heart through the ears and sweeps it absolutely clean.'⁴⁰ According to Mādhavadeva, those who are indifferent to the chanting of Hari's glory and engage in worshipping other deities by sacrificing animals and birds are sure to be thrown into hell.⁴¹ They are like animals, concerned only with the carnal need for food and sleep.⁴²

Satsaṅga or association with the wise is another important aspect in Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Sri Śāṅkarāchārya says : "The company of the wise, even for a moment, becomes the boat to cross across the Ocean of Sansara."⁴³ Nāṅghar is the place where the village people assemble together, they learn not only to stand united but

also enjoy the bliss and benefits of a homogeneous social life. This feeling is the basis of national unity. This community feeling urges the people to co-operate with his fellows and to rise above the considerations of caste and creed and develop a sense of oneness. Without Satsaṅga 'Sādhana' or devotion does not become perfect and strong.

2. Kirtana: Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva adopt nama as the best form of bhakti. This is a distinguishing feature of the Assam school of bhakti, which is also known as Nāma-dharma.

Kirtana is singing of Lord's glories. It is an integral part of every religion. Even a sinner like Ajāmila* could earn salvation by simply uttering the name of the Lord. The recital of the deeds of God enhances one's spirit of bhakti during the Kali-yuga according to Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. This is the prescribed method of devotion for this age. Such practices should be the outcome of pure heart.

3. Smarana: Smarana is remembrance of the Lord at all times. This is unbroken memory of the Nāma and Form of the Lord. The

* The fifth chapter of Kirtana-Ghosa is 'Ajāmilopākhyāna' - the story of Ajāmila, a degraded Brāhmin. Here, Śaṅkaradeva describes the efficacy of Hari Nāma. Ajāmila, who committed numerous heinous crimes, by uttering the word 'Nārāyaṇa' brought about a change in his life from debasement to piety - and at last, he attained emancipation.

remembrance of Nārāyaṇa at the end of one's life is believed to be the summum bonum of life. Even those who recall Him as an enemy are also not deprived of such a bliss.⁴⁴ Kings like Śisupāla, Salva etc. became liberated by constant remembrance of God as their enemy. Prahlāda attained redemption with the help of loving remembrance.⁴⁵

Generally, the mind runs extrovert. But remembrance of God makes it introvert.

4. Padasevana: Padasevana is serving the Lord's feet. By serving Lord's feet a devotee can cross the shoreless ocean of the world without building any bridge.⁴⁶ 'Padasevana' symbolises one's sense of self-humility. Padasevana is service of the whole humanity at large. The whole universe is only Virāt-Swarupa.⁴⁷ Service of the humanity is service of the Lord. It improves the moral tone of society.

5. Arcana: Arcana means worship. It is niskāma type of worship which has prominent place in the socio-ethical thoughts of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva.

Lord is the cause of the Universe. The Lord is greatly pleased when He is worshipped with a little water and other things like a single leaf of 'Tulsi'.⁴⁸ Mādhavadeva writes in the Bhakti-Ratnāvalī that, just as the water poured

into the roots of the tree reaches its branches and leaves as well, so also the worshipping of Viṣṇu pleases the other deities.⁴⁹ So, by worshipping Him, the devotee worships his own self. To develop socio-ethical aspect of personality, Śankardeva teaches the masses that one should not only respect and be non-violent to the fellow beings, but should show kindness and sympathy to all living beings.

6. Vandana: By Vandana to Viṣṇu man can achieve final release. Śankardeva uses the term Vandana in a wider sense. According to him, an ardent devotee should extend service towards all living beings including the trees, animals and the birds in proper manner.

7. Dāśya: Dāśya bhakti is the love of God through servant - a sentiment. It is always in an attitude of dāśya, not of madhura or conjugal feeling, or sākhyā or friendship or anything else that Śankardeva and other saints of Assam approached Godhead.

Śankardeva preached dāśya bhakti as the relation between the Lord and his devotees. Chaitanyadeva adopts 'madhura' conception of devotion, but Śankardeva discarded it. Because, "The amoral and antisocial ideal of the figure of the parakiyā has always had the risk of bringing in

eroticism and even moral turpitude, and this was carefully avoided by Śāṅkaradeva."⁵⁰ The religious attitude of Chaitanyadeva was Rādhā-bhāva, i.e., the love attitude of Rādhā towards Kṛṣṇa.⁵¹

The ultimate goal of life of a devotee is to become a servant of the Lord. So long as devotee does not surrender himself at the feet of Lord, he lives as a prisoner within the four walls of domestic life. According to Śāṅkaradeva, dasya bhakti arouses immediate power in the minds of the devotee to withdraw pride or egoism which is the main obstacle on the path of devotion.

8. Sākhya: Sākhya-bhāva is the cultivation of the friendly-sentiment with God. This form of devotion is regarded as an easy path to attain to salvation. Lord is omnipresent. So, there is no fear of separation from God. The milkmaids of Vṛndāvana and even the birds and animals of that place enjoyed the fruits of friendship with the Kṛṣṇa.⁵²

Friendship is also considered as a great social and ethical value.

9. Ātma-nivedana: Ātma-nivedana means self-surrender. The devotee offers everything to Lord, including his body, mind and soul. Through this path of devotion the devotee gets rid

of all worldly worries.

Bhakti gives eternal bliss, joy, and equanimity. Whole hearted devotion to the Supreme Being is the royal road to salvation.

Devotion to Supreme Being is inherent in man, but it may not blossom for want of proper practice and atmosphere. The real purpose of devotion is to please the Lord, to purify the heart through surrender of the ego. In that stage devotee feels that there is supreme joy in loving God than becoming God.

During the middle ages India saw the birth of many great saints. They were Rāmānanda, Kabir, Tulsidās, Nāmadeva, Guru Nānak, Chaitanyadeva etc. They preached a powerful movement against all forms of corruptions, superstitions and tried to purify the hearts of the people. They also preached complete devotion to God, tolerance, and love to fellow creatures. This movement is popularly known as Bhakti movement. Among those, Śāṅkaradeva has also a prominent place. He upheld the supremacy of moral values in everyday life. He believed in the Nirguna form of bhakti and was against idol worship at the ultimate stage. Within the limitation of mundane existence, Śāṅkaradeva tried to live a life based on spiritual equality through the performance of noble deeds.

He preached truth and humility which are the virtues of a higher life. His teachings on different socio-ethical aspects gave inspiration to the people and helped them to lead a simple and honest life with good conduct and character against the background of a high ethical standard of life.

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Chapter VII

MORALITY AND LIBERATION - SIN AND OTHER EVILS - FAITH;
BEST OF ALL FAITHS - SUPREME RELIGION IN THE KALI YUGA
- DETACHMENT TO THE RITUALS - AVIDYA - MUKTI, THE STATE
OF PERPETUAL BLISS

Genuine spiritual life rests on the cultivation and practice of ethical values. One cannot make real spiritual progress so long as one's character has not been rightly built. 'Character is the sum total of a person's attitudes and responses both inherited and acquired.'¹ Men of well-integrated and good character are also necessary for the greatest social welfare. To make real progress towards spirituality it is essential that our daily conduct and other affairs of life should conform to our moral practice. Since the day of initiation (sarana) the life of a disciple becomes the life of dedication. 'Along with the initiation ceremony, a disciple is taught the ways of a clean life (dhuti-niti, saucādi-kriyā) in minute details, to which he has to adhere with the greatest care possible.'³

All the practices under the heads of Abstention*

* 'The Abstentions (yamas) are twelve in number : (1) ahinsā (harmlessness), (2) satya (veracity), (3) asteya (refraining from theft), (4) asanga (non-attachment), (5) hri (modesty), (6) asaṅcaya (non-hoarding), (7) astikya (belief in sacred traditions), (8) brahmacarya (sexual abstinence), (9) mauna (abstention from useless gossip), (10) sthairyā (calm), (11) ksama (patience), (12) abhaya (sense of security).

(Yama) and Observances* (Niyama) in 'Bhakti-Ratnākara' are highly conducive to mental peace and progress. Therefore, one who has succeeded in mastering them, will not only acquire the power of concentration, but also make his mind a proper instrument for contact with Reality.

Mokṣa, which ordinarily means liberation, is regarded as the final destiny of man according to almost all systems of Indian philosophy. Mokṣa has also the highest importance in the scheme of values.

The concept of liberation is connected with the problem of self. Because, the nature of self, immortality of soul constitute the metaphysical ground for the state of liberation. There are various views on self in Indian philosophy. They can be classified into two main groups - (1) those who do not believe in the existence of soul (anātmavāda) and (2) those who believe in the existence of self (ātmavāda).³ The latter view is further divided into two - those, who maintain many selves (anekātmavāda) and those, which believe in one Supreme

* The observances (niyamas) are also twelve in number :
 (1) bāhya saucha (external purity), (2) abhyantara saucha (internal purity), (3) japa (the muttering of prayers), (4) tapa (asceticism), (5) homa (offering of oblations), (6) śraddha (faith), (7) atithya (hospitality), (8) surar-cana (the worship of the Lord in icon), (9) tirthatana (pilgrimages to holy places), (10) pararthaha (charity), (11) santosa (contentment) and (12) acarya-sevana (proper service to the Guru). - Śaṅkaradeva, Bhakti-Ratnākara, Chapter XXXVIII.

Self (ekātmavāda).

The 'Bhakti-Ratnākara', the Bhāgavata, the 'Kirtana-Ghosā' of Śaṅkaradeva and the 'Bhakti-Ratnāvali' and 'Nām-Ghosā' of Mādhavadeva deal with the devotional theology of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. Śaṅkaradeva derives the idea of God from the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa. He states in his Kirtana-Ghosā :

Tumi Paramātmā jagatara īśa ek,
Eka bastu nāhika tomāta byatirek.⁴

(God is the ultimate essence of soul and matter and there is no other thing in the Universe without Him.)

He is the cause (kāraṇa) and effect (kārya) of the creation. Just as gold ornaments do not differ in substance from gold itself, similarly, there is no distinction between God as the ultimate cause and God as the effect.⁵ He is all-pervasive and transcendental and in Him the world exists and yet He is beyond the world.⁶ Śaṅkaradeva mentions in his 'Nimi-Nava-Sidha-Saṁvād' the different characteristics of Brahma, Paramātmā and Bhagavanta. But They are different in names only, in essence They are one and same.⁷ According to Mādhavadeva God is the Ordainer of both Prakṛti and Puruṣa (matter and mind). He is the friend and guide of all.⁸

Śaṅkaradeva holds like Rāmānuja that jiva and the world are the separate parts of the Supreme. The relation

between God and the world can be compared with the relation between gold and the gold ornaments. To Rāmānuja universe is real, but to Śāṅkaradeva universe is false or mithyā at the ultimate level. Philosophically, the central doctrine of Rāmānuja's teaching is quite in agreement with Śāṅkaradeva.⁹

According to Śāṅkaradeva, there is identity between the individual self and the Supreme Self. The only difference is that jiva is under the influence of māyā and Supreme self is above the influence of māyā. Selves are not born, but are contained in bodies as fire in wood.¹⁰ Here a question may arise, what happens to life when the body is no more? Ātman is immutable and immortal. It was neither born in the past nor at present. Birth and death are the characteristic features of the body.¹¹ Śāṅkaradeva gives an example in this context, he says, a lamp means the contact of fire with wick and oil and its extinction means ceasing of such contacts, so, death means only the cessation of contact of life with the body, as extinction of the lamp cannot mean annihilation of fire which is ever present as light or heat, so death does not mean destruction of life or self, but simply means that life in a body has merged in the Brahman or Paramātmā.¹² Due to māyā the Brahman appears to be many under different circumstances to an ignorant. Men are not conscious of real nature of self, its origin and thus suffers misery.¹³ Though Śāṅkaradeva makes

no distinction between jiva and Īśvara, but in some places he admits that God has created jiva, so, jiva is to some extent separate from as well as dependent on Īśvara.¹⁴ Here Śāṅkaradeva has accepted monotheism.

Śāṅkaradeva believed in the theory of incarnation. He mentions twenty-four incarnations of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu in the beginning of his 'Kīrtana-Ghosā'. Mādhavadeva also in his 'Nām-Ghosā' speaks of the ten incarnations.¹⁵

It is believed that in incarnation God assumes human form in every age, out of His divine free-will for the preservation of the world, for the destruction of irreligion, and for the resuscitation of religion and also to confer God's grace upon holy men and devotees.¹⁶ In Christian and Buddha theology Jesus and Gautama are incarnations of divinity.

Like the Gītā, Śāṅkaradeva emphasises the necessity of a personal relation of man with God, whom man can love and adore. For Śāṅkaradeva Lord Kṛiṣṇa is the highest and ideal divinity.

Bhakti is the only method preached and practised by Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Bhakti leads to mukti or liberation. But bhakti is not simple utterance of the names and glories of the Lord. Without purity of mind, faith, devotion, dispassion and unceasing effort, emancipation cannot be attained.

Sin is the deliberate negligence of duties. Social evils are due to lack of proper understanding of the social values. The good aspects of character are called virtues and bad aspects are called vices. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavaḍeva try to remove social and moral evils positively. They formulate some rules and regulations and show the path for leading a virtuous life. A devotee should observe certain rules and refrain from doing some forbidden deeds.

Mind resides in the heart and does all good and evil deeds. Mind makes vice, mind makes merit, mind makes the hell.¹⁷ According to Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavaḍeva cause of moral and social evil resides within ourselves. Like the lower animals, the natural tendency of human beings is to seek pleasure and to avoid pain. As long as man lives in the darkness of ignorance and cannot trace the causes of happiness and unhappiness, so long he fails to be the master of himself. So, the right discrimination of the conditions which make one happy or unhappy is the surest guide in the path of spirituality.

Real vidyā (knowledge), according to Śāṅkaradeva dawns in the sense of discrimination between self and non-self.¹⁸ Self-knowledge and self-control are essential for removing sin and other moral and social evils from society. Self-knowledge means knowledge of the higher-self - 'the divine nature of man; and self-control means the control of the lower self or the

animal nature of man by developing the higher powers that are latent in the individual soul.'¹⁹

Right knowledge can never dawn on an impure mind. Self-control is also not manifested in the character of any man who blindly obeys the dictates of the senses. Mādhavadeva warned those who are constantly guided by sudden waves of passion, anger, pride, jealousy, hatred etc. According to him, sense organs are in favour of pleasant thing, so, they should be disciplined for the Divine realisation.²⁰ He says, in 'Nām-Ghosā' that each man is his own friend, is his own enemy, he himself protects and destroys himself.²¹

Individual should know that his own good and good of the society are identical. Self-control and self-knowledge (ātma-bodha) imply rational and harmonious control of all the impulses. Such self-restraint is also necessary for the interest of the whole self and of society. A considerable degree of self-control is the very basis of morality.

To remove sin from the mind of man and from the society Śāṅkaradeva and Madhavadeva give some practical solutions. They say that, we should pay special attention to the study of the mind, because purification of 'citta' is possible

when we know its real nature. It has four forms*.²² This world as a whole is the creation of mind. Waking, dreaming and sleeping are the three states of mind.²³ The citta cannot work properly until and unless the evil effects of different sense organs are removed. Therefore, self-purification which includes social and moral laws are necessary not only for ourselves, but also to our fellow members in the social order. Our attention should be directed towards the observance of socio-ethical laws which leads to the freedom of soul from the bondage of ignorance, delusion and selfishness and results in the attainment of Absolute Bliss.

Morality presupposes freedom of will. Man is responsible for his habitual actions, which constitute conduct of individual. So, a man should be rewarded for his good deeds and should be punished for evil deeds. Punishment may be used in a reformative sense for the spiritual good of the criminal and society. Sankardeva also depicts a dreadful picture in his different writings. The main aim of such horrible picture of hell is to arouse fear in the minds of the people. He hopes that the fear of punishment will prevent people from committing

* The four forms of mind are, Mind (Mana), Intellect (Buddhi), Ego (Aham), and Psyche (Citta). Mind is that which proposes to do many things, but is not settled in any of them. The intellect is that which plans any making or unmaking. That is aham which considers itself as the author of all things, and lastly, citta is that which does all good deeds day to day.

offences. Hence, Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva appeal to their disciples to surrender to God, as that is the only way to get rid of sin. All the great virtues and vices are subservient to Hari Nama.²⁴ Mādhavadeva, himself prays to God - 'I am the vicious one, the great offender to you. O God, forgive me, take me as your servant, I take refuge in You.'²⁵

Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva declare that God can be realised through faith, love and devotion. Faith or Sradhā is of three types. The Sāttvika type of faith keeps faith only in the Ātman. The Rājasika faith keeps it in the fruits of action. In Tāmasika faith one keeps faith in the vice regarding it as virtue.

'Hari Nāma' is sufficient to destroy a hundred of sins. But, the name of Hari should be taken not like a parrot, but by the application of kāya, mana and vākya, i.e., body, heart and soul and voice all put together.²⁶

Faith is sradhā. One cannot prove God if he has no faith in God. But, faith without understanding is blind faith. Without faith in God perfection can never be reached. So, faith is the fundamental necessity for spiritual sradhā. In Sāttvika state three types* of devotions are possible. These three

* I have discussed different types of devotion in the Chapter VI.

types are called by Śāṅkaradeva as the 'Uttama bhakti', 'Antarāṅga bhakti', and 'Saprema bhakti'. Uttama bhakti is the best type of Bhagavati bhakti. Bhāgavati bhakti is selfless and superior even to release.²⁷ Besides these, 'Mahābhāgavata' should possess many other attributes. He thinks only of Lord and nothing else. He considers this universe as the product of maya. He should possess tranquility of mind. Śāṅkaradeva writes in the 'Bhakti-Ratnākara'*:

Na mayaikāntabhaktanam guṇadoṣodbhāva guṇah
Sādhunam samacittānam budheh paramupeyusām. 11 | 490 //

(no apportionment of merit and demerit (pāpa and punya) and having a balanced mind which apportionment is due to omission and commission of scriptural injunctions and interdictions.)²⁸

The wise people praise the 'Kali Yuga' as the best among the four ages, because in it Kirtana of God's glory leads to all attainment. Śāṅkaradeva propagated 'Nām-Dharma' as the devotional chanting of the name of Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Religion of the 'Kali Yuga'. He expressed in the 'Bhakti-Ratnākara' that 'to one, in whose heart Gobinda resides, Kali age is Satya age and to one, who does not have Viṣṇu in his

* The 'Bhakti-Ratnākara' is Śāṅkaradeva's only book in Sanskrit.

heart even Satya age is Kali age.²⁹

According to Śāṅkaradeva, the name of Hari and Hari himself are identical and as such name is a living entity. He, therefore, does not give any importance to the rituals and ceremonies. He fought against ritualism and preached simple religious practices.

In 'Nimi-Navā^{siddha}-Saṁvād', Śāṅkaradeva has given an account of the nature of worship or bhakti. In it, he says avidyā or ignorance is the cause of bondage. The soul, by nature, is free. It has no birth and death. But, when it enters a subtle body, it undergoes the process of birth and death. It is the stage of bondage and complete cessation of this process is called liberation or mukti.

Except 'Lokāyata' all the systems of Indian philosophy accept the idea of liberation or mokṣa as the highest end of life. But, they differ among themselves with regard to the nature of the state of liberation. Liberation, according to Buddhism is complete extinction of suffering. Some Buddhists regard nirvāṇa as a state of positive Bliss. Jainism regards the attainment of liberation as the highest end of human life. The self has infinite knowledge, infinite bliss and infinite power. Perfection is attained by the complete cessation of activism of body, speech and mind. Ahimsā is the fundamental virtue.

According to Advaita philosophy of Śāṅkara knowledge or jñāna is the means of attaining mokṣa from the cycle of birth and death. According to this school, Universal soul or Brahman and the individual soul or ātman are one and the same. The individual self is eternally free. The self, due to ignorance or avidyā identifies itself with body-mind complex. The body-mind complex is the product of cosmic nescience (māyā). The erroneous identification is bondage and it is removed by true knowledge. The state of liberation is a state of Absolute Bliss.

The Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda of Rāmāṇuja regards similarity to the self with God as liberation, which is a blissful state. Rāmāṇuja's Brahman is subtle, conscious and qualified. The individual selves are modes or aspects of the Brahman. The mokṣa, according to Rāmāṇuja, means understanding the highest self by intuition, which is the natural state of the individual self.

Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva advocate the cult of bhakti as the summum bonum of life, and it is considered more desirable than mukti. Almost all the devotional writings of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva regard bhakti as superior than mukti. In many places of the 'Kīrtana-Ghoṣā', Śāṅkaradeva has given importance to 'Eka-Śaraṇa' or complete surrender to Lord. Without it, none can attain liberation or experience the state of bliss.

But, the real bhaktas are indifferent to liberation. They want to remain in a state of perpetual enjoyment of bhakti. They believe that liberation is sure to come. Bhakti is sādhanā and liberation is the final goal. In the first verse of the Nām-Ghosā, Mādhavadeva says : "I bow down to the devotee who has no desire even for final beatitude. I pray for that devotion which is full of ineffable bliss. I adore such Lord Jadupati as is the crown-jewel of all heads as it is the command of his own devotees."³⁰

Narada, Sanaka and Sanatana were the devotees who preferred to conceive God as love rather than to conceive Him as Truth. They like to absorb themselves in perpetual ecstatic mode of bhakti.

To change the society by introducing reforms is a very difficult task. A single individual cannot achieve this goal within his very short-span of life. But, religion can change the society more easily, because Indian people are more religious minded. Śankaradeva first aimed at religious reform and then devoted himself to social transformation by advocating social values and moral norms through religious prescriptions. He observed that man as a religious being cannot be asked to follow blindly any faith or moral laws. He preached to lead a social life in accordance with the rules of righteousness.

Śāṅkaradeva's ethical system is neither extreme rationalism preaching asceticism, nor hedonism advocating mere sense pleasure. In fact, Śāṅkaradeva, both as a religious preacher and a social reformer was more practical and he had a very broad outlook.

Therefore, it is evident from the foregoing discussion that the sole aim of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva was to convert a rigid and closed society into an integrated and open society by prescribing social and moral values.

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CONCLUSION

The present work is an analysis of socio-ethical ideas in the thoughts of Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. The foundations of their thoughts lay primarily on the Gita and the Bhagavata. But, they were not simply restating and re-interpreting them. They studied all the sacred scriptures of India. They got themselves acquainted with the wisdom contained in the different sacred books, combined the best thoughts of these books and were adopting an integral and synthetic view of life and society.

Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, the spiritual torch bearers in Assam preached that the basis of their social and ethical thoughts was the altruistic love of man. For them 'jīva is Śiva'. Hence, their notion of universal love implied the absence of jealousy and hatred. That is why their philosophy, being the philosophy of love is positive and dynamic even today.

The basic unit of society is man. Again man is more than his body. He has a moral self. Moral self springs from his spiritual self. Thus, man is essentially divine. Considering man as divine, Śāṅkaradeva treats society as a moral and divine institution whose function is to keep the individuals on the right path and to lead them towards moral perfection.

nama-mantra to any person.¹

According to Varnāśrama dharma, each social order had its own allotted duties. According to Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, there were no spiritual injunctions in reciting the name of the Lord. Devotion is not the monopoly of any cultured man. It is open to all classes of people. Śāṅkaradeva says, "Why need one be a Brāhmin, who devoutly recites the name of Kṛiṣṇa? He might be a Cāṇḍala, but, he is far superior to any man, who is not attached to the name of Hari."²

The decentralisation of power is another advantage of the Varna system. Centralisation of all the powers of society in the hands of one class may lead to exploitation and despotism. Thus, by division of responsibility, the present day society is saved from the defects of centralisation of power.

Just as human organism is one and every part of it is important, in the same way, society is one and every part of it is important. Literature, art, culture, etc. focus the different aspects of social life and have great influence over the thoughts of a person. Literature is an art. Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva have used this powerful weapon in a constructive manner. For them, the different modes of art are not merely tools of communicating ideas in attractive manner. They use them for sublimating human urges and feelings. By nature, man is a slave of selfish desires. But, art and literature

help him in broadening his mental horizon. It is commonly known that Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva drew the main inspiration for writings from the humanitarianism and the democratic ideas of the classical Indian thought. That is why, their literature has an abiding appeal. It worked as a cementing force at the social level during the medieval period.

The progress of the society is possible only when noble values like self-sacrifice, fellow-feeling, co-operative spirit etc. are aroused in the minds of the people. There are different layers in human consciousness. The ethico-spiritual values are present in human consciousness, but they lie very deep into the layers of consciousness. Now-a-days ordinary art and literature on sex or other physical needs become popular, because they touch the surface of human mind. The absence of socio-ethical values has been the cause of the disunity that exists in our society at present. The different slokas in the 'Kirtana-Ghosā' - 'nindibāhu nāhi, bandibako nāhi' (toleration of other's religious belief); 'parara dharmaka nihimsibā kadācit' (toleration); 'sakalo prānika dekhibekā ātmasam' (regard all beings as your own self); 'satru-mitra-udāsina sabato samana' (friend-enemy all are equal); 'saboko māniba tumi Viṣṇu-budhi kari' (an attitude of Viṣṇu's presence in all), helped in the progressive thinking and educating the masses.

Culture implies spiritual awakening, inner development which alone can pave the way of real progress of man and society. Śāṅkaradeva brought about a cultural revolution in Assam five hundred years ago. He took the help of dance, drama, music, art and culture as media for the propagation of his faith. Spiritual education and feeling of national integration are possible through these media. The ideals of equality, compassion, love and non-violence as preached by Śāṅkaradeva and Madhavaśaṅkara would continue to inspire us for great deeds of national unity and spiritual excellence. Their eternal messages stated above, should now be the guiding principles for all of us for the well-being of mankind as a whole.

The great religious leaders from time to time made their appearance to remove the ills of society. The western conception of culture is largely materialistic due to the result of the increasing scientific attitude. 'Culture, according to Vivekānanda, was psychologically the cultivation of the mind, which yielded values that governed human behaviour and human relations.'³ These values were derived by a nation through true religion. So, 'true religion' or 'dharma' is the backbone of human life. It is the backbone of any institution also which keeps up integrity, morality, humanity, mutual tolerance and faith in the Almighty. The theists believe that without faith in God, peace will never be possible. Śāṅkaradeva, being a theist has expressed this idea many times in his

'Kirtana-Ghosā'. Hence, if one feels that only one Absolute exists in all and spirit is eternal, one shall not indulge in any destructive activity or conflict. Even the scientist like Einstein has come to see the limitations of human knowledge, and seen dimly into the presence of the Beyond in the functioning of Nature.⁴ But, Karl Marx was highly critical of religion. Religion, according to him, is a sentiment which has no practical value. On the contrary, Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva claim that negligence and ignorance of religion is responsible for all disturbances in society.

Śāṅkaradeva was neither an impractical idealist nor a sentimentalist. The way of spirituality does not mean any total rejection of the flesh. It means that material nature has to be placed under the control of spirit. In chanting the name of God in congregation the offering of 'prasād' with green fruits is necessary. 'Pañcopacāros' (gandha, puṣpa, dhūpa, dīpa and naivedya) are sufficient enough for an ordinary devotional rite. Of the five 'upasaras' the offering of 'naivedya' is considered to be of vital importance. Naivedya, usually consists of softened gram, pulse, rice, banana, sugar-canes - cut into pieces, betel-nuts and other palatable things.⁵ All these vitaminous things indirectly give vitality to bodily limbs. This practice makes it clear that Neo-Vaishnavite faith admits the existence of body or material

needs which is the spiritual counterpart of total man. Long after Śāṅkaradeva, in the nineteenth century, Sri Rāmkrishna echoed the same, 'a man of empty stomach cannot have religion'. Swami Vivekānanda said, 'it was a sheer mockery to preach religion to the starving people.' Gandhiji also said that to the hungry God dares, not appear in any form other than bread.

There is no fundamental conflict between material value and spiritual value. Spirit cannot disregard the world, because the latter is the vehicle of the former. Śāṅkaradeva also sought to integrate both the spiritualistic and material values, as both were complementary to each other. According to Indian religious tradition, dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa are values. In my opinion, excessive wealth leads to contradiction of economic power in the hands of the property holders and leads to unfair and unjust relationship among the people. Kāma is also not used, in this context in the ordinary sense of the term. Kāma of the 'gopis' are not ordinary kāma. Bhagavan has himself told the gopis that 'those whose mind and soul are devoted to Me, their kāma is not Kāma. 'As fried paddy does not germinate, in the mind or citta that has been entirely devoted to Me, no Kāmanā or other desires can germinate.'⁶ Dharma commonly stands for religious practices and beliefs. It also refers to the codes of social duties, political duties, economic duties etc. In the 'Kirtana-

Ghosā' of Śāṅkaradeva, we find the concept of 'Stri-dharma', 'Kula-dharma'. Mokṣa does not mean indifference to social problems. The Vaiṣṇavas do not hanker after mukti, but long for the continued service of the Lord in the form of man.

The life in the world is a training and preparation for spiritual life which is eternal and ever-lasting. Worldly actions have reactions in Nature, and result of good action will be good and the result of bad action will be bad. Only ethical and spiritual principles will uplift us from the conflict of materialism and will inspire us to lead a moral, disciplined life and will infuse into the mind a sense of human dignity, social duty and responsibility. Though, Śāṅkaradeva has recognised the due place of materialism, he is also speaking about the transitoriness and unreality of the ordinary pleasures, because they cannot give spiritual peace and happiness. It is spiritual awareness that generated real peace and happiness, love and unity. Śāṅkaradeva conveys through a Bargita (devotional lyrics) :

"athira jivana dhana yauvana deva
suhrido, saroda, suta kichu nohe keva."⁷

(Life, wealth, youth, friends, brothers, and sons are all meaningless as they belong to none.)

He also narrates :

" bhaba gahana vana
 ati moha pase channa
 tate hamu harina berai
 phandilo mayara pase
 kala vyadhe dhaya ase
 kama-krodha kuttā khedi jai. "8

(The world is like a deep forest where snares of illusion are laid on all sides, and there I am roaming here about as a deer. As a result, I am caught and arrested by the snares while time as a hunter is rushing towards me and desire and anger in the form of dogs are chasing and gnawing me.)

As the world is insubstantial, no faith on it is rewarded. So, we should cultivate devotion to Hari. Accordingly, Śaṅkaradeva made an appeal to every human being to follow the path of devotion. We should also respond to his appeal in the present crisis of faith in our country and also work for the betterment of the whole human race.

Science and technology have had an impact on Indian society. Science is not opposed to ethical and spiritual values, but, are complementary to each other. Any code of conduct should be common for all walks of life. Spirituality can be practised as an experimental science. Yoga is witness to that. There are four kinds of Yoga - Rāja yoga, Jñāna yoga, Bhakti yoga and Karma yoga which help the 'sādhaka' to

realise God. According to Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, it is by devotional practices that a devotee can gather intuitive experiences that one can have God-realisation. Pure intuitive experience has also a tremendous impact on the growth of the scientific knowledge. But, modern scientific trends in the society are in the direction of more ego-centric and less for a broad outlook based on universal love and permanent values. At present, most of the people think that the way of pleasure and happiness alone is real and has to be followed. It is, therefore, the duty of each one of us to change this attitude which is the by-product of science, so that, it responds to the call of the spirit. The need of the socio-ethical reformers like Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva is immense in this modern age of science. Our present society needs them who can give instructions on universal love. They are needed, at present, to promote inner peace in place of restlessness. They are also needed to give advice to transform lower values to higher ones in a creative direction. A scientist can do his best for the outward comfort of people, but not for the inner peace and happiness of the mankind.

It has been a custom with many spiritual seekers of Indian history to condemn women and wealth with a view to evoking detachment.⁹ Śāṅkaradeva made no distinction of caste in accepting disciples, as one and the same conscious self

was present in all beings. He married twice; yet his attitude towards women seem to be contradictory on many spheres. The only reference in the history of Assam Vaishnavism to a woman playing an important religious role is the story of Kanaklata aie, the grand-daughterⁱⁿ-law of Śāṅkaradeva. Even today women are denied entrance to most of the important Satras of Assam. But, the influence of women on Śāṅkaradeva's life should not be denied. In early stage, Śāṅkaradeva was more interested in spending his time in playing with his friends and had no time for studies. One day, he was admonished by his grand-mother Khersuti, for his negligence of studies. She reminded him the scholastic tradition of his family. He, then, set his mind and within a very short period he displayed a sign of unusual intelligence.

Having finished education he settled down as a householder. But sudden demise of Śāṅkaradeva's wife appeared to have influenced in the life style of Sankaradeva and inspired him to undertake extensive pilgrimage, for a long time. Thereby, through his own experience and study, Śāṅkaradeva became a 'dharma-guru'. I am not interested to analyse his socio-religious activities in the contexts of equal rights of man and woman. Everything is dependent on time. Had he been able to give the status of equal right to women-folk as in the case of other castes, the Assamese women would have acknowledged

Śāṅkaradeva's ever-lasting generosity and felt proud of it.

Education, Śāṅkaradeva believed was the means whereby a society could attain its desired goal of social development. Education, in real sense, should aim at the development of physical, mental and spiritual well-being of an individual and whole human society. According to Vivekānanda, 'religion was the innermost core of education and it was the manifestation of the divinity already in man.'¹⁰ Likewise, centuries before Vivekānanda, Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva through their translations of the Bhāgavata and other Sanskrit texts into Assamese language popularised among the common masses the religious themes of these books and enlightened them. At present, inequalities in different spheres, viz., social, political, economic is the result of defective attitudes of individuals. Thus, they felt the necessity of spiritual education for socio-ethical development of the society. According to R.N. Vyas, 'real education teaches a person that death through righteousness is better than victory through a sinful act.'¹¹

To propagate his faith, Śāṅkaradeva established the institutions of 'Satra' and 'Nāmghar'. These institutions have contributed immensely to the socio-ethical development of Assam. The different functions of Satras and Nāmghars recall to our mind some of the concepts of modern period like the community Development, Adult Education and the Panchayat Raj.

Our discussions on the socio-ethical thoughts of Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva show that ethical values find manifestation in the context of interaction between human beings in a society. Ethics, therefore, is inseparable from society. It is like a cementing factor uniting man with man in society.

Now, it is seen that we have lost faith in our religion. As a result of this the younger generation has no ideology or moral teachings before them. To earn money by hook or by crook and seek the maximum material pleasure is their chief aim. Now, we are becoming self-centred without caring for others. What is necessary today is a bit of reflection, a kind of self-criticism. There is no time limit in character formation. It is a continuous process from birth to death. Good acts and good habits constitute the basis of good character. Progress and happiness are possible only through good conduct.

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