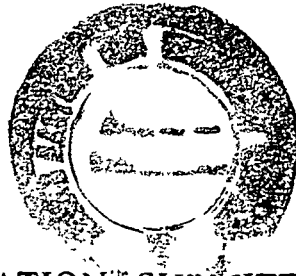


**THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE KIRTANA-GHOSA
OF
SRI SANKARADEVA**



**A DISSERTATION™ SUBMITTED TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY GAUHATI UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**



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November, 1993

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BY
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This is to certify that Shri Ajit Kumar Mahanta has completed his dissertation on the topic entitled 'The Philosophy of the Kirtana-ghosā of Sri Sankaradeva' as a part-fulfilment of M.Phil. Course in Philosophy, Gauhati University. The dissertation was prepared under my guidance and supervision. It conforms to the M.Phil. regulations of Gauhati University.

The dissertation, as a whole or any part thereof, was not submitted to any other University for any other degree.

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P R E F A C E

The Kirtanaghosa is considered to be one of the four texts (Chariputhi) forming the corner-stones of the teachings of Sankaradeva. The holy-book is taken as the essence of the Bhāgavata-purana. Sankaradeva attempted to give people the enlightening beauty of the twelve kāndas of the Bhagavata and in so doing produced a thirteenth book the 'Kirtanaghosa'. This great book seeks to bring home to people the teachings of the Bhāgavata with their Vedantic overtone while narrating various episodes regarding the life of Krishna and His intimate devotees. Kirtanaghosa has a profound influence on the socio-cultural life of Assam. It is customary among the Assamese Hindu families to keep a copy of the Kirtanaghosā in their house at the alter of worship.

In the present work an attempt has been made to study the different philosophical aspects of the Kirtanaghosā of Sankaradeva. This dissertation embodies six chapters including introduction and conclusion. A select bibliography appended at the end.

At the very out-set I express my deepest gratefulness to my respected teacher and guide Dr.(Mrs.) Nilima Sharma, Professor in the department of Philosophy, Gauhati University, under whose able guidance I have been able to complete my dissertation 'The Philosophy of the Kirtanaghosa of Sankaradeva'. I also offer my sincere gratitude to my revered teacher

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I shall be failing in my duty if I do not offer my thanks to Sri Kumud Deka who has typed my dissertation within a short period of time even in face of his other urgent preoccupations.

Lastly, I would like to offer my thanks to the Librarian of K.K. Handique Library, Gauhati University for allowing me liberal facilities of using the library.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

(A) The meaning of Philosophy :

Philosophy may provisionally be defined as an attempt to explain and appreciate life and the universe as a whole. A philosopher does not look at life and the universe piece-meal but always takes them as a systematic whole. For the philosopher genuine or philosophical knowledge is always knowledge of the 'whole' the organised totality of reality and value and such knowledge is not confined within the bounds of reason but may extend beyond it to other elements of experience to include the elements of faith, feeling or emotional intuition.¹

As philosophy aims at knowledge of truth, it has been termed in Indian literature 'darsana' or the vision of truth. The term darsana has been derived from the root verb 'drs' to see. This may be either perceptual observation or conceptual knowledge or intuitional experience. Generally however darsana means critical exposition, logical survey or a system. Darsana applies to all views of reality that are taken by the mind of man.

According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan 'Darsana' is a spiritual perception, a whole view revealed to the soul sense. This soul sight is possible only when where philosophy lived, when philosophy is not mere theoretical discussion but a way of life.

There are some philosophers who emphasise the knowledge aspect of philosophy and thus they define philosophy bringing out this aspect. Such philosophers are for example, Immanuel Kant, Fichte etc. Kant defines it as : Philosophy is the science and criticism of cognition. Fichte defines it as : Philosophy is the science of knowledge.²

As commonly used, however, philosophy means an attempt at a rational unification of knowledge - the endeavour to organise the truths furnished by the different branches of study and thereby to arrive at a rational explanation of the universe as a whole.³ According to Professor Weber - 'It is the search for a comprehensive view of nature, an attempt at a universal explanation of things'.

(B) The historical background of Kirtana-ghosa :

The Kirtana-ghosa is one of the most popular and important religious books composed of Sankardeva, the great religious and social reformer of Assam in the 15th century. Sankardeva composed different episodes of this sacred book with a view to preaching the principles of Vaisnavism or 'Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma' - the religion which appeals for surrender and prayer on the part of devotees to one ultimate reality symbolised as Krishna. Sankardeva expansively studied the ancient scriptures of India and discovered the truth of Ultimate Being and tried heart and soul to preach the same among the people of Assam through his valuable writings.

Among the many systems of Indian thought, the Vedanta is the most alive and is bound up with the religion of the people; it is both philosophy and religion. Different vaisnava sects in particular have been built upon vedanta. Sankardeva in his 'Bhakti-ratnākar' and Vaikunthanath Bhattadeva in his 'Bhaktiveveka' quote the following sloka from the ultimate chapter of the Bhāgavata-purāna, saying that the purāna is the essence of all vedanta; and Madhavadeva renders the same in to Assamese in his Nāmaghosa.

Sarva-vedanta-sāram he Sribhagavatam isyate
tad-rasāmṛta-trptasya nānyatra syād ratih kvacit.⁴

Sankardeva translated the Bhāgavata and composed a unique book called Kirtana-ghosā to be read and chanted by the devotees of all classes. The Kirtana-ghosa contains the quintessence of his creed.⁵ Sankardeva relied almost solely upon the purānas and the Bhāgavadgita and the tenets of his faith are firmly based on the Bhāgavata and the Bhāgavadgita.⁶

The religious thought of Sankardeva is based on the Bhāgavata Purāna. Sankardeva was greatly influenced by the teaching of the Bhāgavata-purāna. He composed the interesting as well as the significant episodes of the Kirtanaghosā for the purpose of propagating the religious faith among the people of Assam.

The Kirtana-ghosā is the first work of Sankardeva written precisely for the purpose of propogating the faith. A 'Kirtanaghosā' or simply a 'Kirtana' is song on behalf of

community singing consistency of two parts : a ghosā or refrain a number of padas ordinary verses in payāra or chabi metre. It is called Kirtana as it is narrative in character and several Kirtanas combine to make a story. The word 'Kirtana' is used to indicate the spiritual significance of the ultimate truth through the glorification of the versatility of Lord Krishna. Sankardeva began to compose Kirtanas after he had heard the whole of the Bhāgavata Purāna explained to him by Jagadisa Misra. Daityāri tells us that the sublime spirit of bhāgavata bhakti was revealed to him by this purāna and that as a first step towards propagation of this religion, he composed the Kirtana-ghosā. It is related how the Kirtana-ghosā had to be rescued by Sankardeva from his cottage, surrounded by some Kachāris, at the time of the exodus of the Bara-Bhūyas from Bardowa.

During the Sankardeva's life the different sections of the Kirtana-ghosā were not collected. According to the instruction of guru (Sankardeva), Madhavadeva asked Rāmcarana to collect the different sections of the Kirtana-ghosā. The texts were lying scattered in different places of Assam. Rāmcaran Thakur collected the texts from Hājo, Barpeta, Barnagar, Kāljar etc within about a year. Rāmcaran copied them out in an unappropriate order in one volume and the volume was presented to Madhavadeva in 1596 A.D. After examining the compilation, the different sections were placed in the most desirable order.

(C) A brief account of the different sections of the
Kirtana-ghosā :

1st chapter - Caturvimsati-avatara-varnan : Sankardeva describes the twenty four incarnations of God by the help of the substance of the first, second and eight cantos of the Bhāgavata-Purana. It contains four hymns; in the first two are enumerated the principal ten incarnations and in the next two hymns, the other fourteen incarnations are enumerated. Here Sankardeva advises people to listen to the mysterious birth story of Krishna and attain salvation by hearing and chanting it.

2nd chapter - Namaparadha : This chapter of the Kirtana-ghosā contains two hymns where in Sankardeva enumerates the offences against 'Hari Nāma' and he also suggests the proper means to avoid the offences. The source of this chapter is the Svarga-Kanda of the Padma Purāna. Description of ten aparādha and seven effects of Hari's name are given in this section.

3rd chapter - Pāsanda-mardan : According to Kathā-guru-carita Sankardeva composed this section at Dhūwaghat. This section is divided into four Kirtanas with seventy four verses. This section was composed on behalf of the opponents who protested against his Bhakti-movement. He (Sankardeva) suggests the ways to refute the allegations levelled against nāmaparadha by heretics and the author advises the people not to pay any heed to the hostile words of the irreligious men who dissuade others from the path of religion.

4th chapter - 'Dhyan Varnan' : There are only two Kirtanas with twenty eight verses in this chapter. These two hymns consisting of lucid and detailed description of Vaikuntha the abode of Lord Visnu, the temple of the Lord and the divine form of Lord Visnu to be meditated on by a devotee.

5th chapter - Ajamilopakhyana : This episode consists of four Kirtanas with forty two verses. It is adapted from the Bhāgavata-Purāna. In this episode Sankardeva narrates the efficacy of 'Harināma'. Ajamila, a debased Brāhmana, who committed a lot of crimes was able to attain salvation by uttering the word 'Nārayana'. Here the author expresses that Harināma is the only powerful medicine to destroy sin and evil thought.

6th chapter - Prahlād-caritra : This section of the Kirtanaghosa is made up of twenty two Kirtanas with two hundred fifty seven verses. This chapter describes the life of Prahlāda who practised devotion to Visnu from his childhood inspite of vehement opposition from his father. When Daityendra was ready to kill Prahlād ; God appeared in the form of Narasingha, a 'half-man' and 'half-lion' and saved the life of Prahlād, the great devotee of God. The greatness of 'Harināma' and devotion is depicted here.

7th chapter - Gajendropakhyana : This story is related in three Kirtanas with thirty eight verses and it is taken from the Bhāgavata-purāna. Here Sankardeva depicts a story in order to illustrate how God Visnu liberated an elephant who was about

to be swalled up by a huge crocodile in the ocean of Milk, when the elephant surrendered completely before God. This episode signifies that God saves his devotees in a terrible circumstances when they prays Him with all sincerity.

8th chapter - Hara Mohana : This section of the Kirtana-ghosā consists of ten Kirtanas with ninety eight verses. Here Sankardeva shows the superiority of Lord Visnu even to Lord Hara. Lord Hara was charmed by the Māyā of Lord Visnu when assuming the form of an exquisitely lovely damsel. Lord Hara describes the glories and greatness of Lord Visnu to his consort goddess Parvati and advises her to practise devotion to Lord Visnu with heart and soul. Sankardeva warns the people against the dire illusion created by woman through this story.

9th chapter - Bali Calana : In this chapter, in five hymns, the devotion of Bali, the grandson of Prahlād to Lord Visnu is narrated. Bali was driven to Śutala by Lord Visnu incarnated as Vāmana. But he continued to practise devotion to Lord Visnu and Lord Visnu also remained present by the side of Bali at Sutala. Here the author expresses the intimate relation between the devotee and God.

10th chapter - Sisulila : This section consists of eleven Kirtanas with hundred sixty five verses. The early-life of Krisna in Vrindāvana is described here with the divine sports of Kṛisna. Krisna killed all the demons sent by Kamsa to Gokula in search of Krisna to get Him killed.

11th chapter - Kaliya-daman : This chapter consists of three Kirtanas with forty five verses. Kāli, the King of snakes was subdued by Krisna in the lake of Kāli. This story depicts the divine power of Krisna.

12th chapter - Rāsalilā : This section consists of eighteen Kirtanas with a total of 218 verses. It has been taken from the Bhāgavata-Purāna. Here Sankardeva has emphasised the absolute devotion of the cowherdesses. The Gopis of Vraja became charmed with the extra-ordinary beauty and loveliness of Krisna. Rāsalilā does not depict only the love of the Gopis, but it explains the relationship of the individual soul with the Supreme soul.

13th chapter - Kamsabadha : This section is made of fifteen Kirtanas with two hundred three verses. Kamsa Akrura, a brother of Vasudeva to Gokula in order to bring Rāma and Krisna to Mathura. According to the order of the King, Rama and Krisna were brought to Mathura by Akrura. After arriving the city, Rama and Krisna killed the guards of Kamaa, the huge elephant Kuvalaya and the mighty wrestlers who fought with them. At last Kamsa was killed by Krisna with his eight brothers.

14th chapter - Gopi Uddhava Samvad : There is only one Kirtana with twenty four verses in this section. Here Krisna sent Uddhava to Vraja from Mathura to console Nanda, Yosoda and the Gopis, who were very much afflicted with sorrow for the departure

of Krishna. However, they were satisfied at the sweet words of Uddhava and the sweet message of Krishna.

15th chapter - Kujir Banca Puran : In Mathura, a hump-backed maid-servant of Kamsa name by Kujir decorated Rama and Krishna with sweet scented sandal paste. Krishna was pleased with her and she was changed into an extremely beautiful lady by Him. Kujir became charmed at the extra-ordinary loveliness of Krishna and desired to have amorous sports with Him. After the death of Kamsa Krishna visited her and fulfilled her desire.

16th chapter - Akrurar Banca Puran : This small section is consist of only one Kirtan with twelve verses. Krishna visited the abode of Akrura after the death of Kamsa according to His previous promise. Akrura worshipped both Rāma and Krishna as he knew them to be incarnations of Lord Visnu.

17th chapter - Jarasandha Yuddha : This chapter is consists of four Kirtanas with forty seven verses. Jarasandha, the King of Magadha invaded Mathura several time on account of killing his father-in-law. Once he took the help of Bāna, the king of Sonitpur, but he failed. During the last attack by Jarasandha, after shifting the people of Mathura to Daraka in the midst of the see by means of His super Yogic power, Krishna with Rāma departed to Daraka.

18th and 19th chapter - Kala Yavana Badha and Muchu-Kunda Stuti : These two sections, the first with two Kirtanas and the second

with four Kirtanas are adapted from the original Sanskrit. The first illuminated with a play of humour and the second is characterised by a deeply devotional fervour. Mathura was invaded by Kāla Yavana, and he was killed by Krisna through Muchukunda who was lying asleep in a cave in the hill. Krisna appeared before Muchukunda, a devotee of Visnu and knowing Krisna to be Visnu incarnate, the king prayed to Him.

20th chapter - Symantaka harana : There are nine Kirtanas with seventy one verses in this story of the Kirtana-ghosā. Satrajita being alarmed for having laid the blame on Krisna for the death of his brother Prasena and the loss of the gem Symantaka gave his daughter Satyabhama in marriage to Krisna along with the gem Symantaka as dowry which was recovered by Krisna from Jambavanta.

21st chapter - Naradar Krisna Darsana : This episode is retold from 69th chapter of the Bhāgavata and this section is made of four Kirtanas with 51 verses. Nārada, the great devotee of Krisna came to Daraka to visit the several residences of Krisna. He saw that Krisna was engaged in different house-hold duties in all the places of Daraka. Nārada was able to realise the super-power of Krisna and after praying to Him he went away to Heaven.

22nd chapter - Vipraputra Anayana : This section consists of four Kirtanas with fifty two verses and this is adopted from the 89th chapter of the Bhāgavata. Arjuna promised to save the

last son of a Brahmana of Daraka. Arjuna fulfilled his promise by the grace of Krisna.

23rd chapter - Damodar Vipra Upakhyana : This episode consists of four Kirtanas with thirty five verses. Here the author describes how Krisna received Damodar, a poor Brahmin and classmate of Krisna when he met Him at Daraka. Damodar acquired vast wealth superár to that of Indra by the graçe of Lord Krisna. This Brahmin was able to attain salvation through his sincere devotion of God.

24th chapter - Daivakir-Putra-Anayana : Daivaki told Ram and Krisna to show her the dead sons who had been killed by Kamsa. So Rama and Krisna went to the region of Sutala and asked Bāli to handover the six sons of Daivaki to them. King Bāli felt extremely joy for the presence of Krisna and Rāma at his residence and worshipped them. King Bāli handed over the six sons of Daivaki to Rāma and Krisna who brought them to Daivaki.

25th chapter - Veda-Stuti : In this section Sankardeva describes how the Vedas coming out along with the first exhalation of Lord Narayana, awakened Him who was in a state of deep sleep after the great Deluge and prayed to Him. This chapter reveals that Narayana is the only Supreme conscious Reality. Here we find the philosophical ideal of Sankardeva explained briefly so that the common people can comprehend some ideas regarding Brahman and His wonderful creation.

26th chapter - Krisna-lilā-mala : In this chapter the activities of Krisna from his childhood up to the time of His return to His eternal abode are briefly enumerated. By the different activities Krisna, assuming incarnation at the request of Lord Brahmā and destroying the enemies of the universe, He protects the devotees from the oppression of the wicked ones.

27th chapter - Srikrishnar Vaikuntha Prayāna : This section consists of nineteen Kirtanas with 235 verses. Brahmā requested Krisna to leave the Earth and to return to His original abode Vaikuntha. Krisna brought about the complete annihilation of the Yadus in a terrible fight amongst themselves and leaving the Earth He entered into Vaikuntha. Lord Krisna revealed the essence of the Bhāgavata Dharma to His devotee Uddhava before His returning to Vaikuntha.

28th chapter - Sahasra Nāma Vrittanta : This section of the Kirtana-ghosā is not the work of Sankardeva. It is composed by Ratnakar-Kandali, a follower of Sankardeva. This is taken from Padma-Purāna. Here Nārada relates how Lord Siva explained the Supreme Divine power of Harināma to goddess Parvati. This section exhibits that one can attain salvation through Sravana and Kirttana.

29th chapter - Ureśā Varnan : This portion of the Kirtana-ghosa is taken from Brahma Puran and Skanda Puran. Herein Sankardeva describes how the Jagannatha temple was installed by the great king Indradyumna of Malwa and how he had worshipped Lord Visnu by installing in the temple the image of Rāma, Krisna and Subhadra.

30th chapter - Bhāgavata Tatparyya : This section consists of two Kirtanas with twenty one verses and it is based on the Bhāgavata Purāna. This section indicates the essence of the religious teaching of Sankardeva. Here Sankardeva says that Lord Krishna having been incarnated, revealed the Nāma Dharma and thereby destroyed the sins and other evils of the Kali Yuga. He also says that Krishna is the Supreme Lord of the world and the devotees obtain liberation by His grace.

(D) The purpose of Sankardeva in composition of the Kirtana-ghosā :

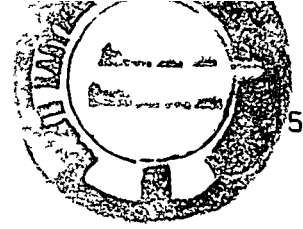
The main purpose of Sankardeva's writings was to preach Vaisnavism for the reformation of society. The Kirtana-ghosā is a valuable contribution to the literature, religion and ethics. Sankardeva was a practical religious thinker who thought that religion is not need for religion's sake and it must have certain practical value in the human life. Sankardeva made up his mind to teach the people of Assam the ideal of one Lord instead of worshiping Gods and goddesses. He also realised the utmost necessity of removal the feeling of inequality and untouchability from the society among the people of Assam. His aim was to organise a strong and ideal society and to build up moral character of the people. For that purpose, he felt the necessity of deep faith of people on God who is the absolute judge of all the right and wrong conduct of people. According to Sankardeva our devotion to God is a life long process and philosophy is needed for guiding and moulding human life.

Sankardeva made all efforts to popularise philosophy without using a definite philosophical method. He taught people that every individual should try to realise God and he extends his love of God for the love of humanity.

According to the principle of Vaisnavism, devotion is the chief means of union with God. Faith is the centre of devotion and this faith means 'Ekasarana'.

The period in which Sankardeva appeared in Assam was full of superstitions, corruption, exploitation, social diseases and evil-deeds. Sankardeva wanted to find out some ways to reform the society of that period. Sankardeva realised that religious principles was the sole means to reform the individual mind. So he propogated the Bhāgavati-dharma in order to make the people acquainted with the meaning and significance of religion. Sankardeva studied the old sanskrit religious books and acquired the essence of those sġriptures. He translated the important matters into Brajvali from sanskrit so that the common people could understand the intrisic meaning, aim and value of the life and the world.

The Kirtana-ghosā of Sankardeva is one of the valuable books of the Assamese literature and this book contains all sorts of elements that can satisfy the spiritual curiosity. Sankardeva composed the different sections of the Kirtana-ghosā in order to show the people of Assam the golden path of religion, morality, equality and universal brotherhood.



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(E) The distinguished characteristics of the Kirtana-ghosā
as a great book :

After analysing the philosophical thought of the Kirtana-ghosā, we can consider it as one of the great books of the world. Mortimer Adler points out in his article 'The great Book' certain signs of excellence that distinguish a great book. Great books are popular, contemporary, most readable, instructive and influential. The Kirtana-ghosā has these characteristics also.

Most of the families of Assam keep this sacred book in their nāmghar and the Assamese people use this book in prayer and in performing their rituals. Sankardeva compiled this book on behalf the common people so that they can enjoy it according to their own taste and out-look. Therefore this book is very popular among the people of Assam.

The Kirtana-ghosā remains contemporary at all times. This book is never outmoded by the movement of thought or shifting winds of doctrine and opinion. It is known to us that the fundamental human problems remain same in all ages and these problems can be got through by following the religious principles, ethics and social philosophy of the Kirtana-ghosā.

The Kirtana-ghosā never brings monotony to their readers if they try to read it well. This book can be read at many levels of understanding. For instances children find delight in reading the episodes of the Kirtana with out learning any significance inherent them. On the other hand,

the beauty and significance receive great appreciation from the adult readers.

The Kirtana-ghosā is the most instructive, because it is original source of knowledge and it has basic contribution to human thought. The Kirtana-ghosā is very practical and the greatness and glories of Krisna, the supreme-reality are narrated in this great book. The religion of devotion and human love is revealed in different sections of the Kirtana-ghosā. the study of philosophy of this great book is the source of spiritual inspiration.

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CHAPTER II

EPISTEMOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS OF THE KIRTA^{NA-}GHOSĀ
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Chapter II

Epistemology and Metaphysics of the Kirtanaghosā

John Hospers observes that the problems of metaphysics and epistemology are inextricably interwoven. Indeed the distinction is not always easy to be drawn. Metaphysical problems have to do with what is, whereas epistemological problems have to do with our knowledge of what is ; but in the discuss of the one the other is bound to enter.¹ Epistemology is the fundamental basis and groundwork of metaphysics. They are so intimately related to each other that one can not stand with the other. A particular theory of knowledge leads to a particular theory of being ; a particular theory of being presupposes a particular theory of knowing.

In order to ascertain whether knowledge reveals to us any reality we must know what knowledge itself is and the nature of reality can not be understood unless we know how it is related to knowledge. The question of the nature and validity of our knowledge and the question of the ultimate nature of what we know are in reality two sides of the same inquiry - two aspects of the same nature.

1. The concept of Ultimate Reality and God in the Kirtanaghosā :

Sankaradeva was basically inspired and influenced by Advaita vedanta of Sankaracarya. However, he retained his individuality in his thought. His concepts of God, Absulate Reality,

world, self, body, māyā are based on the Bhagavadgītā and the Bhāgavata-purāna. The Bhāgavata-purāna fixes God as the Ultimate essence of the universe and calls him Brahman. Paramātmā or Brahman is both efficient and material cause of the universe. Just as modifications of clay, iron or gold are nothing different from clay, iron and gold, the universe is born out of Him and will have its end in Him.²

In the 'Haramohana' (The charming of Hara) section of the Kirtanaghosā, Hara thus prays to Visnu :

'tumi paramātmā jagatara isa eka
eko vastu nāhike tomāta vyatireka
tumi pasu pakshi surāsura tarutrina
ajñānata murhājane dekhe bhinna bhinna.'

(Thou art the Supreme self, the only Lord of the Universe. There is nothing real except Thou. Thou art all beasts, birds, gods and demons, trees and herbs. People took at these in a sense of difference because of their ignorance)

In the Kirtanaghosa, Lord Krishna is accepted as God and He is also the Absolute reality. In the Gita, Lord Krishna declares Himself that He manifests¹ this world in order to protect the saints, to destroy the evils and to establish religion for the good of the world. The Divine-Bing^e of the Kirtanaghosa, is Narayana or Visnu who is Krishna Himself.

The first poem of the Kirtana is Caturvimsati-avatara (description of twenty four incarnations) and the first refrain here is -

Prathame pranāmo brahmārup sanatana
Sarva avatara karana nārayana.

(First I pay obeisance to Brahmā which is Nārayana and the source of all incarnations)

Krisna is also called Cakrapāni who is the greatest of all. All gods and goddesses worship Him. He is the protector and destroyer of this universe. He has created this wonderful creation by dint of His power of māyā.

In the episode 'Prahād carita' of the Kirtanaghosā this fact is expressed :

Savāto bara prabhu cakrapāni
āchoka tumi āmi kona jana
brahmā hare seve yāra carana
srejanta pālantā samhāre ante.

(The Lord Caḡrapani is the greatest of all. Who are we ? Even Brahmā and Hara worship at His feet. With His eternal power of maya. He creates, preserves and at last destroys.)

Sankaradeva expresses in the Kirtanaghosā that Krisna is the Supreme Being and He is eternal.

'parama purusa tumi sanātana hari
yadu-kula avatāri ācha chadme kari.'

(Thou act the Supreme purusa, O Eternal Hari, Thou hast incarnated in the yadu dynasty in guise.)

Krisna of the Kirtanaghosā, is the eternal, Omniscient and inner controller of this universe. He is the original Visnu who includes Brahmā, Visnu, Siva and everyone else. He has

created everything of this universe. Krisna is definitely the cause of all causes and nothing is real except Him.

In the section 'Syamantaka Harana' of Kirtanaghosā this truth is revealed :

Janilo tomāka jagata isvara
 tumi sanatana Hari
 Samasta bhutara tumi prana-bala
 jagatake āchā dhari
 Srastaro srasta tumi sarvadrasta
 uddhari dharila bhumi
 Jivara niyanta parama atma
 mrityuro antaka tumi.

(I could know that Thou art the Lord of the universe, the Eternal Hari Thou art the life-force of all beings, Thou art keeping up the universe. The creator of the creator, Thou art the Omniscient and hast uplifted the earth. Thou art the controller of the creatures and the Supreme Soul: again the destroyer of death.)

In the Kirtanaghosā, God is treated as both immanent and transcendent. The religious philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā has displayed Sankaradeva's evolution of thought from monotheism to absolute monism. God may be called Brahman or named otherwise. He manifests Himself in different forms and so come such manifestations of His personality as Brahma, Visnu or Siva. Some manifestations have also appeared in different times such as Krisna for special purposes. All these are avataras due to His lila or the gracious sport of God as portrayed in the life of Krisna given in the Bhāgavata-purāna. Of all His incarnations, that of Lord Krisna is considered as the most perfect and highest

form of God. He is God in fullness (purna brahma) others are considered as only partial.³ So Krishna is Supreme God or Absolute Reality Himself.

Sankaradeva has made an attempt to synthesize Nirguna Brahman with Saguna Brahman in his holy-book, the Kirtanaghosā. According to Sankaradeva, Nirguna Brahma is transcendent Lord devoid of any quality or action. God is Anaadi, Ananta, Niranjana etc. The creative principle of Māyā remains in an unconscious state in the Nirguna Brahman. The Nirguna Brahman becomes the Saguna Brahman with a view to creating the multiplicity of the world.

Māyā is beginningless and inherits the half part of Isvara who uses the power of māyā for the purpose of creation. But otherwise māyā or prakriti is absorbed into the Brahman.

Therefore the world is not wholly illusory as it is the partial manifestation of the Brahman. Therefore the Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman are the two aspects of the same reality. Basically Sankaradeva believes in the Nirguna Brahman. But while dealing upon the acts of his Lord Krishna, he appears as a devotee of the Saguna Brahman.⁴ Sankaradeva realised the significance of the Saguna Brahman as the means of worship.

Radhakrishnan states that Brahman and God have the qualifications of being ultimate Reality, they are not distinct entities but different aspects of the same reality. While Brahman is the Supreme spirit, God is the Supreme person. Brahman is 'God as he is' and Isvara is 'God as he seems to us'.⁵

2. The role of intellect and intuition in the realisation of God or the Absolute Reality :

According to the rationalists of Western philosophy, intellectual method is the organ of knowing the Ultimate Reality. According to rationalism, intellect must be given first preference to understand the clear conception of the essence of reality. Intellect, according to Bradley, is a falsification of the real by breaking up non-rational unity of reality into rational differences.⁶

In Indian Philosophy, the condemnation of reasoning or tarka is as old as the Upanishads which placed the ultimate reality entirely beyond the ambit of reasoning and argumentations.

Sankaracārya asserts that discursive intellect can not grasp reality. Arguments held valid by some, may be ingenious.⁷ In Sunyavāda, Nagarjuna shows the absurdity of dogmatic and rationalistic view of reality. The limitation of intellect according to Dr. Radhakrishnan is that it can not be regarded as an independent method in the apprehension of reality. Radhakrishnan says "If we want to know things in their uniqueness, in their indefensible reality, we must transcend discursive thinking."⁸ Intellect fails to give us whole truth - it gives us partial truth. So it is a creative effort of the whole man as distinct from intellectual effort that can apprehend the nature of reality.⁹ According to Sankaracārya, Brahman being a unique reality is beyond the reach of tarka or reasoning.

In the field of epistemology, intellect is found to work always on the materials supplied by sense experience.

Intellect can not be taken as an independent means. However, Dr. Radhakrishnan has not totally rejected intellect and he has taken it as a supplementary factor in the process of his ultimate realisation of intuition. "Intellect need not be negated but only to be supplemented."¹⁰

Reality is conceived as God and Absolute. Personality of God is manifested through His power as a creator whereas Absolute as the ultimate spirit is conceived as impersonal. Absolute knowledge in its concreteness is more in the form of effortless insight or intuition. It is immediate than mediate, perceptual than conceptual.¹¹

There are two types of intuitions - rational intuition and mystical intuition. Mystical intuition is a faculty of divine insight present in human consciousness by which one can transcend the intellectual distinctions in the intuitive reality by which the unperceived becomes perceived and the unknown becomes known.

Intuition gives us an idea of the whole, while intellect analyses the parts, though intuitive truths can not be proved by reason. So intuitive knowledge is not confined to the narrow region of individual self. Philosophical endeavour is not meaningful if the Ultimate reality remains unknown and unknowable. The application of intuition is found in the diverse fields of life and experience, in science, religion and philosophy.

The philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā is based on religious faith and devotion of God or ultimate reality. Sankaradeva emphasises on intuitive experience instead of reason or intellect in realisation of God and Brahman.

The metaphysical aim of the Kirtanaghosā is God realisation. As a mystical thinker, Sankaradeva has shown that spiritual intuition is the only way to realise the Absolute Reality. Discursive intellect or reasoning has little to do with such experience. In the rigid philosophical sense Sankaradeva may be regarded as the proponent of supra-intellectualism. He is found to make criticism against discursive intellect. However, he can never be treated as an irrationalist like some of the existentialists of the contemporary world.

In the Kirtanaghosā, Brahma expresses that his intellect fails to realise Krishna, the Supreme God :

Sariraka mai buli buddhi bhailā hata
hiyata harila tumi khojo bahirata.

(My intellect has become so dull by going to identify myself with the body and missing Thee in my heart while I look for Thee outside.)

According to Sankaradeva the greatness of God can be realised by intuition. Sankaradeva demands complete faith in God by the agent and complete faith signifies that it must be accompanied by self-surrender. Devotional faith depends upon intuitive knowledge instead of intellectual knowledge.

In the word of Sankaradeva -

'Jnana karma ari Harita biswās.'

(Leaving aside knowledge and action keep faith in Hari.)

In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva expresses that the devotional faith is more effective than the combined functions of intellectual knowledge and actions. He emphasizes that God can be realised through faith, love, devotion, dedication, service, meekness etc. Reason or intellect can not help a devotee in the ultimate realisation of God. The following verses of the episode 'Sisulilā' in the Kirtanaghosā proves this :

'yito Brahma nohe tarka gocara
Napāve becane mane ocarā.'

(Multifarious argumentations are impervious. Brahma is not known by reasoning. Neither speech nor mind can approach Him.)

Therefore, the importance of intuitive experience in the realisation of God in the holy-book, the Kirtanaghosā is greater than the argumentations of mind.

3. Relation of God with world, self, body and mind in the Kirtanaghosā :

The concept of God in the Kirtanaghosā displays more the monistic thought of the thinker. It tends to become more panthastic while it prefers to Krishna is accepted as Brahman as well as God in the Kirtanaghosā.

The world is evolved out of Brahman who is the material as well as the efficient cause of this universe.

In 'Sisulilā' of the Kirtanaghosā, it is reflected that the world is in God.

'Yasodā sundari dekhanta pāṣe,
samasta jagat garbhate āche.'

(Mother Jasoda was surprised when she saw all the oceans, islands, mountains, rivers, stars, animals, plants etc.in the mouth of Krishna.)

"Krisna is the Supreme eternal and we are subordinate eternals. Krisna is Supreme living entity and we are subordinate living entities."¹² Krisna is perfect Being and we are imperfect beings. He has no beginning and end, but we have beginning and end.

In the section 'Sisulila' of the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva expressed this fact.

'nahi ādi anta purbbapar
purnanda brahma jagata isvara.

(God is the supreme father of all creatures of this world)

According to Sankaradeva, Brahman is the only reality and the sensory world is unreal. But it appears as real because of its origin from the Brahman. Brahman can be called its efficient or material cause only in an empirical sense.¹³

tumi satya brahma tomāta prakāse
 jagata into asanta
jagatata sada tumio prakāsā
 antaryāmi bhagavanta.

(Thou art Brahman the truth, in Thee manifested this false world. Thou art also always manifested in the world as the inner controller, O Bhagvanta.)

Thus underlying the false world, God lends a semblance of truth to it. The world is really false being connected with nescience, it only appears as real, being born out of true Brahman.

Sankaradeva finds the presence of the paramatman even in animal's life. The soul of a dog, a jackal or of a donkey is God. So all creatures should be treated as one's own self and this is the best of all tenets. In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva says -

'Kukura srigāla gardavaro atmoram
janiā savāka pari karivā pranām.'

(Even the souls of dogs, foxes and asses are verily God with the idea that they shall be respected.)

Sankaradeva traces the origin of jiva to the Brahman's attribute of consciousness. The individual self is a part of God. The individual self or the embodied soul is called jivatman and Brahman is called Supreme Self or Paramatman.

Dr. Radhakrishnan says that the individual self is a portion of the Lord, a real not an imaginary form of the Supreme, a limited manifestation of God. The soul which derives from Isvara is not so much emanation as a member of the Supreme. It draws its ideal from this Superior principle.¹⁴ Likewise Sankaradeva holds that jiva is a part or amsa of the Supreme Self. As he says in the Kirtanaghosā :

'tomhārese amsa āmi jata jiva jaka.'

Birth and death are the characteristics features of the body and out of body a fresh body emerges. Though associated with the body, self is yet distinct from the body, as fire from the fuel it burns. Jiva suffers pain and miseries in the world so long as it is associated with the body, mind and senses. According to Sankaradeva, Jiva is mortified under the pressure of Isvara's māyā-sakti. The substantial existence of self is sprung out of the Divine-intellect.

The highest self is formless, all pervading, eternal, faultless, composite of eternal knowledge and without a body - but is the creator preserver and destroyer of the world. Just as the various ornaments of gold appears distinct and many, although the real substance namely gold is the same; in like manner Brahman appears to be many under different circumstances to the ignorant deduced by Māyā.¹⁵ The ego emanating from Brahman, envelops the jiva with ignorance. As soon as the ego is destroyed by dint of the power of spiritual knowledge, the self is able to perceive himself as Brahman.

In the episode 'Harmohan' of the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva writes :

mukutā kundala yena suvarnara bhinnanuhi
michā mātra nāma-rupa.

The apparent differences of gold-ornaments to its substantial identity, - i.e. gold. In the same way the jivas and the world, which have been called parts of Brahman are not real transfor-

mation of Brahman but are apparent names and forms. In the Bhāgavata, Sankaradeva calls - 'the appearance of the rope as snake is due to adhyāsa (super-imposition).'¹⁶

The world is really false (aset) being connected with nescience or avidye ; it only appears as real, being born out of true Brahman. This fact is reflected in the section 'Veda-Stuti' of the Kirtanaghosā :

asanta jagatakhāna tomāta udhāva bhaila
santa hena prakāse sadāya.

Sankaradeva has asserted the ever-presence of God in the world, - in its creation, maintenance and destruction. God transform Himself into the world at His will. According to Sankaradeva God is the material stuff of the world and therefore, the external world not unreal from the empirical point of view. Sankaradeva does not deny the empirical reality of the world. The world is not empirically false as it is the expression of the Divine. Alongwith the views of concrete monism, Sankaradeva is also found to suggest here and there the views of abstract monism.

The doctrine of inner controller is a prominent feature of Sankaradeva's philosophy.¹⁷ The Lord ever manifests Himself as the inner controller, makes jivas experience pleasure and pain and also judges and protects them and the world. The Lord is also witness consciousness in all individuals.

In the section 'Veda Stuti' of the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva expresses that God is the creator of all individual bodies and He is present in every jiva.

āpuni srajiḷā caracara dehā yata
 samasta asairya bhava acha samstata.
 jiva amse tumi pravesila gāweḡgāwe
 āve āmi tumhāka bhajoho sarvabhāve.

In the philosophy of Sankaradeva, the finites have no existence apart from the Infinite. Infinite can persist without the existence of the finites. The finites are the expressing of the Infinite. The world is an appearance of the Absolute Reality. According to Sankaradeva the matter and the finite spirits emerge from the Māyā. They have no separate existence without the existence of God.

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CHAPTER III

THE DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT IN THE KIRTANAGHOSĀ
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Chapter III

The devotional thought in the Kirtanaghosā

The Kirtanaghosa of Sankaradeva is full of religious, spiritual, ethical instructions and imbued with deep-feeling of love. Sankaradeva wanted to reform the Assamese society of the mediaeval period through love so that every man can observe an ideal life. The devotional thought of the Kirtanaghosā is related to love, faith, non-violence, emancipation, forgiveness, sympathy and truthfulness.

1. The path of devotion or bhakti and love :

Devotion means intense love of God. It is an emotional process by which God can be realised. In religion devotion means to worship God to adore and love Him. Some of our important ancient shastras and scriptural texts give a very high place to devotion as a means to attain the goal of God-realisation.

The word 'Bhakti' is derived from the verbal root 'bhaj' which means complete servitude or sevā. The concept of Bhakti is found in the vedic hymns and upanishads. The doctrine of single-minded devotion to God is clearly evident in upanishad.

Hindu sastra indicate four principal margas or paths leading union with God. A man can attain salvation by following any of these paths. They are karma Marga or path of action, Yoga Marga or the path of psychic concentration, Jnāna Marga or the path of knowledge and Bhakti Marga or the path of devotion.¹ The great Advaitin, Sankaracharya accepted the path

of wisdom in realisation of Brahman ; Patanjali was the exponent of Yoga Marga; Ramanuja, Chaitanyadeva, Sankaradeva, Madhabdeva accepted Bhakti Marga as the best way to attain emancipation and in realisation of God. Karma Marga or the path of action was given supreme importance by B.G. Tilak in the twentieth century.

The concept of Bhakti finds a prominent place in Sankaradeva's thought. Like the mediaeval mystics of his time, he is glorifying Bhakti. The central teaching of the Gita is Bhakti and of all the paths Sri Krishna gives prominence to Bhaktiyoga without the least doubt. In fact, Krishna reconciles the conflicting views of the different schools of thought and teachings of religion. He teaches that love of viewing all creatures as one's ownself and dedication of every action to the service of God should be the ideal of life. In Sri Mad-Bhāgavad Gita Krishna says -

"Those who following this immortal Dharma as declared and who are possessed with faith regarding Me as the Supreme Goal, such devotees are exceedingly dear to me."²

The Bhakti cult which is adumbrated in the Vedic hymns, partly developed in the Upanishads, blossoms forth in the epics and later devotional literatures.

"The impersonal Brahman of Upanishads is converted to personal God by some Indian saints and philosophers for their satisfaction."³

everything. A person who wants to become a true devotee, must give up greed, desire, envy, pride, anger, lust etc. Devotion should be accompanied by love and love means attraction for the Deity and also fellow-feeling. According to Sankaradeva, a devotee must love Krishna by giving up shame, fear and desire from his mind. Love generates joy and success of devotion consists in giving rise to joy.

2. Sankaradeva and his Bhakti movement :

The mediaeval bhakti-movement offered a fresh interpretation of religion and spirituality. It promoted the bond of oneness of the Hindu society. The main purpose of Sankaradeva's bhakti movement was to establish emotional integration among the people of North-East India without bothering for caste and creed. Sankaradeva derived his devotional idea from bhakti-sutras, the Bhāgavata-purāna and other holy-books. He invites complete faith in the Supreme by the agent. Complete faith signifies that faith must be accompanied by self-surrender. He says -

Jnāna karma eri Harita biswas.

(Leaving aside knowledge and action keep faith in Hari.)

According to Sankaradeva, the faith of people will be more effective than the combined functions of intellectual knowledge and action. He emphasises that God can be realised through faith, love and devotion, worship, prayer, service, meekness and humility.

As a monotheist Sankaradeva preached a religion of Supreme surrender to the One and therefore his creed is known as 'Eka-sarana-nāma Dharma'. In Eka-sarana Dharma, there is only one God, Vasudeva-Krisna and there is none else other than the 'One'. Sankaradeva protested against the worshipping of other gods and goddesses. He wanted to teach the people that the Supreme God is Krisna who is the saviour of all. Sankaradeva shows that devotion to Krisna is far superior to the worship of other dieties as Krisna is the Supreme Lord and the Supreme Preceptor, the solely adorable one and the sole cause of the world.

In Bhakti-ratnākar Sankaradeva says -

'ek deu eka seu, ek vine nāhi keu.'

(There is only one God, there is only devotion and there is nothing else besides them.)

In the Bhāgavata, Sankaradeva strongly interdicts the worship of any other gods than Visnu-Krisna.

'anya devi-deva nakaribā sevā
nakhāiba prasada tāra
mūrtiko nācāiba grho napasiba
bhakti haibe vyabhicāra.

(Do not worship any other goddesses or gods nor partake of the offerings made to them, nor cast your eyes on their idols, nor enter their temples lest thy bhakti be vitiated.)

In the Bhakti Pradip, Krisna says -

Devote yourself to me with a single mind,
 Forsake from a distance all other gods,
 Surrender your self to me alone
 Devote to me then will be fit for salvation
 Never listen to the glorification of other gods
 So that your devotion may remain unsullied.

Sankaradeva is of the view that if Krisna is worshipped all other gods are worshipped. So he says - "As the branches, leaves and foliage of a tree are nourished by pouring water only at the root of the tree, as limbs of the body are nourished by pouring food only in the stomach, so all gods and goddesses are propitiated only by the worship of Krisna ; Sankaradeva upheld the philosophy of Oneness in all. He comprehended one God, Krisna one service, the service of Krisna, the Supreme Brahman."⁶

Sankaradeva lays more emphasise on devotion and he proclaims the power of devotion to be the highest in the spiritual realisation of the Supreme. He preached his faith, giving a new and simple interpretation of the doctrine of bhakti. His faith concentrated on the dasya aspect of devotion to God which is conceived of man's relationship to God as that of a faithful slave to his Master.

3. Classification of Bhakti or devotion :

Devotion is classified by Sankaradeva into different modes in his book the Bhaktiratnakar, the Bhāgavata-purāna

In the words of Sankaradeva -

Hariguna bhakatara karana-alamkara
 Badhya bhakati āti sravana ihara
 Binasi bastuta māne hare birakati
 Purna Brahma Krisna havaye drhamati.⁸

(The praise of the glories of Hari are like the earrings for the devotees. Devotion increases by hearing, aversion arises for the perishable things. Firm conviction arises on the perfect Brahma.)

Kirtana - Kirtana or prayer is the singing of Lord's glories. As the Kirtana is sweet and pleasant, it can easily change the heart of the people. Prayer is an integral part of every religion. The religious creeds differ in beliefs, rituals faith from one another. But amidst these differences, the noticeable common element among them is the prayer or chouting the holy sings. According to Sankaradeva - Kirtana is the powerful means to attain Supreme God-head.

Pādasevana is the serving the feet of the Lord. Arcana means worship. Vandana is an act of homage to God. Dāsya means service in which the relation of the disciple to his Lord is that of a servant or slave. The next is the sākhyā - friendship, where the relation is the trustful comrad-ship of friend and friend. And lastly Ātma-nivedana, self-surrender where in the devotee surrenders his self completely to his Lord.

In Bhakti Ratnakar, bhakti is again classified on another basis into highest devotion (uttam bhakti), intimate or all-loving devotion (antaranga bhakti), absolute devotion

(nirguna bhakti), and purely emotional or loving devotion (saprēma bhakti).

The worship of Krishna is taken as covering the effects of the worship of all gods and niskāma or motiveless worship is preferred to sakāma worship which is performed with the motive of some gain behind.

The devotion of Prahlad to God is the best example of niskām-bhakti. When Nrsingha wanted to offer boon to Prahlad, he replied -

yano prabhu pariksha āmaka
sihetu bulila hena bāka
banchoi phala kari taju kritya
sito banijaru noho bhrtya.

(I know oh Lord, Thou hast tested me and that is why Thou hast spoken thus, I am not a man of trade to desire for some gain in return for services rendered unto Thee)

Prahlad again says -

tomahra akāma bhrtya āmi
tumio nīskama mora swami
nahi kama āhmara anyathā
nuhi rajsevakar yathā.

(I am Thy servant having no desire at all and Thou art also my Lord devoid of any desire. Unlike the servant of a king, I have no desire at all.)

4. The concept of devotion in the Kirtanaghosā :

Sankaradeva has accepted the concept of devotion of the Kirtanaghosā from the Bhāgavata-purāna and Sri Madbhāgvad-

Gira. In the Kirtanaghosā Sankaradeva emphasises on the devotion in Krishna. Sankaradeva wanted to teach people that the path of devotion is the only royal-road to purify the human mind and to reform the human society. In the Kirtanagoshā, it is exhibited that the path of devotion is more valuable than the other margas or paths that have been expounded by other greatmen, because it leads the devotee of God more easily and more naturally to the attainment of salvation. In the section, Rāsālila, Sankaradeva proclaims the supremacy of the bhakti-dharma.

bhakatira para dharma nāhi samsārata
cāriyo vedara jānā ehi tatta.

(There is no great virtues in the world other than the bhakti or devotion; this is the essence of all four vedas.)

In this holy-book, Sankaradeva expresses the infinite relation between God and devotee. The spiritual faith of this holy-book is concentrated on the dāsya aspect of devotion to God which is conceived of man's relationship to God as that of a faithful servant to his Master. As he says -

Krisna kinkara Sankare bhane
bola Hari Hari samste jane.

(Sankara, the most loyal servant of Krishna urges 'Let all people chant Hari, Hari.)

Sankaradeva says in the section 'Nāmāparādh' of the Kirtanaghosā :

Krisnara kinkare kahe Sankare
manusya-janamaka napaya senthare
āko brthā kara kīno abhagi
manikyaka bika kānsaka lāgi.

(Human life is not easily available ; how wretched you are to waste it ; as it were, you are selling gems for grass prices.)

Everything in this world is transitory including even human life. So Sankaradeva advises us to follow the path of devotion. So, Sankaradeva says -

kahe Krisna kinkare Sankare
neribā kirtana eko nare
āji kāli milibe maran
hari hari bola sarvayana.

(Prahlad Carit)

(Nobody knows at what moment mishap may be fall us ; even then we are not aware. Death may over take today or tomorrow ; so seek shelter in Harināma.)

In the section 'Sisulilā, Sankaradeva says -

Krisnara kinkare gīta bhanila Sankare
nāhi āna dharma aura kirtanata pare
suna sarvayane aita kedina jivana
bolā Hari Hari āse yawata cetana.

(Krisna's kinkara Sankara composed the song ; There is no other virtue besides the kirtana of Harināma. Let all listen, how long would life here last ? Hence let all sing the songs of Hari till consciousness is there.)

According to Sankaradeva, of all means to divine state, devotion is the greatest, easiest, simplest and most blissful. In the Kirtanaghosā, he says that those who follow the path of devotion are superior to those who follow the path of action, knowledge or yoga. Karma jnana yoga are methods to achieve result whereas bhakti is the result itself. In Kaliyuga there is no necessity of tapa, japa, dāna etc. and the grace of God can be attained through devotion only.

The section, Prahlad Carit of the Kirtanaghosā reveals this truth.

tap japa yoga dāna, save virabana
kebale bhaktita tusta hanta nārayana.

(For practising devotion, one need not be either a Deva or a twice born or a sage and there is no need of knowing too many sastras ; penances, meditation, sacrifices and act of charity are all deceptive, but through sole devotion alone Nārayana can be propitiated.)

Sankaradeva accepted the grace of the deity as the most fundamental amongst the means of devotion. The supreme importance of the grace is evident in the following

Krisnara prasade samaste hui.

(Through the grace of God everythings can be gained).

Prahlad, the true devotee of God, has explained the characteristics of devotion to his companions. Prahlad says that egoism should be destroyed to become a devotee in true

sense and to gain the blessings of God.

erio āta ahammam bhava
 drha kari dhara Krisnara pāwa
 Krisnara kinkare kahe Sankare
 Hari Hari bola samasta nare.

(Prahlad Carit)

(Hence give up the idea of 'I' and mine and hold firmly
 on to the feet of Krishna. Krishna's kinkara Sankara says -
 Let all people utter Hari and Hari.)

The devotion of Prahlad again says -

Laiya upadesa madhavaka ārādhiva
 yateka sukrti mone Krisnata arpiba
 Krisna katha sravanta sudha haiba mana
 sarvadaya karibeka Krisnara kirtana.

(Prahlad Carit)

(With his instruction, one should meditate on Madhava
 and all fruits of good deed should be dedicated to
 Krishna. The mind will be purified by hearing accounts
 of Krishna's deed. Sing about Krishna's glory everyday.)

Devotion in the Kirtanaghosā is considered to be
 greater than that of salvation. Some verses of this book keeps
 himself detached even from the desire for salvation.

In the section 'Prahlad carit', Prahlad prays to God -
 to-mahara pawate laile yijane sharana
 tayu gunanama karai sravana kirtana
 moksha prasadaka prabhu tomhate namage
 cāra sargasukha kone tasambara āge.

(He who had taken at Thy feet practises sravana and kirtana of Thy divine nama and fame, but does not beg of Thee the boon of Emancipation, the paltry happiness of Heaven is nothing for them.)

In the episode 'Hara Mohana' the following verses prove that devotion is greater than salvation.

namago sukha bhoga nālāge mukuti
tohmāra cārane mātra thakoba bhakati.

(I do not pray for any enjoyment of pleasures and also am not desirous of salvation, but let me have devotion only at Thy feet.)

Hara again prays to Visnu -

āra ki tohmāta baja mokshto nāhike kāja
āra kona cāra sargasukha
tumi bina nāhi āna tumi mora yogadhyana
thakiloo tohmara cāie mukha.

(With-out you not to speak of heavenly pleasures, I have no other desire at all even for Emancipation. I have none besides Thee ; Thou art my yoga and my meditation. I would keep on looking at Thy feet.)

5. Relation of devotee with God in the Kirtanaghosā :

Different episodes of the Kirtanaghosā show the intimate-relation between God and His devotees. A true devotee is very dear to God.

bhakata janse mora hridya.

mayo bhakatara hiya niscaya.

(Prahlad Carit)

(My devotee is my heart and Myself also am the heart
of the devotee.)

A true devotee never fears any critical situation and he has firm determination in serving God with deep faith. Prahlad was threatened by his father, Hiranyakasipu that he would be tortured if he would not give up the path of devotion to Krishna. But Prahlad was not afraid of at all and he said -

sunia Prahlāde bulilā bāni
savāto bara probhu chakrapāni
āsoka tumi āmi konyana
brahmā hare seve yāra carana.

(On hearing this, Prahlād replied "Lord Cakrapani is the supreme Master whose feet are adored by Brahmā and others, not to speak of you and me.)

Prahlād realised the power and greatness of devotion from his childhood and he requested his father to take resort to Krishna. Prahlad says -

janī pitri erā asura kāma
apun mana kara upashāma
satru mitra sana kario sama
ehise Krisnara bhakti uttama.

(Hence, Oh father give up evil nature and control your own mind, behave equally with both friend and foe ; this is the best form of devotion to Krishna.)

A true devotee wants to satisfy God through his devotion and God also loves His devotees. God incarnates Himself for the protection of His devotees.

dharilaha samsarmohini nāribesh
dusta daitaganaka muhilā hrsiksha
bakata devaka pana karaila amrit
tomara prasade indra bhoila krtakritya.

(O Lord Hrsiksha, assuming the female form that enchants the world, Thou bewitched the wicked demons, made the devout Devas quaff the nectar, through Thy grace Indra attained success.)

In the section 'Pasandamardan', the intimate relation between God and His devotee is clearly reflected.

bhakata yanese mora hradya
mayo bhakatara hiyā nicaya
maie bene bhakte nisinte āna
bhakata binā moro nahi dhyana.

(The devotee is My heart ; I too am definitely the heart of my devotee. Besides Me, the devotee has no other object of meditation ; I too have no other objects except My devotee.)

Nanda and Yosodā are the great devotees of God and they are able to obtain the company of Krisna at their own house. In the section Sisulilā it is said -

bhaktara vaisya tumi hari
sukhe pawe grhate sumari.

(You are obliged to your devotee and can be obtained in the midst of house-hold life.)

There is an important philosophical significance in the section 'Rasa Lilā'. We find that there is an evolutionary feeling of love of gopis (devotees) to Krishna (God). The ordinary carnal love (kāma) of the gopis is turned into spiritual love (prema) by Krishna. Krishna transferred their desire to divine love through His spiritual power.

yata gopi tata Krishna huya karia kirtana
 samaste gusaila gopikar kāma pirā
 purnakāma hari vaila bhakatara basya
 Hari Hari buli tārā kahilo rahasya.

(Krishna multiplied Himself, one for each of the Gopis, has enjoyed the sports they were fully relieved from the affliction of the lust. Lord Hari Purna Kāma thus became subservient to devotees, Let all be free by uttering the words Hari Hari ; I disclose the secret.)

God wants to fulfil the desire of His devotees and therefore, He played His Lilā with the gopis like human being. The lustful mind can be purified through realising the intrinsic meaning of rasalilā.

The following verses of the section rasalilā exhibits this truth.

srīngarā rasa yāra āse rati
 āke sūni houka nirmalamati
 bhakatara pade apuni hari
 kririla range naradaha dhari.

(Let the heart of the person who is given to the sexual pleasures, be purified through listening to these love sports which Lord Hari Himself had enjoyed cheerfully assuming the form of a human being for the sake of His devotees.)

In Krisna's rāsālilā kāma cupid, casting off His carnal coil of fickle nature has transformed Himself into divine prema. Kāma has got no separate existence of His own. Man's body is his sole habitation. When man will be attracted towards Krisna, the Paramātman, kāma will be nowhere. Jiva's union with Krisna is his lasting peace and bliss.⁹

A true devotee has firm determination and courage in his mind towards the love of God. Krisna wanted to frighten the gopis away showing dharmabhaya, lokabhaya and prānabhaya. But the gopis were never afraid of any circumstance. Prahlad was mercilessly punished by his father, but he persisted in the path of devotion.

God's grace is available for His devotees. Without God's grace bhakti is not attainable. A true devotee can succeed in any evil circumstance, if he attains the grace of God.

In the adoration to Sri Krisna of the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva says -

mūkong karoti vasalong pangu langhayate girim
yat krpa tamahong vande paramananda madhavam.

(I bow down to Madhava, the Supreme Bliss, whose grace turns the dumb garrulous and renders the lame capable of surmounting mountain.)

6. The ideal form of devotion in the Kirtanaghosā :

In the devotional thought of Kirtanaghosā, there is no distinction among caste, creeds or colours and a universal spirit in main principle of his faith. The teaching of this holy book embraces the lowest of the lowly. In sacred book he says -

nāhi bhakatita jati ajati viehār
Krisnate bhakti samastra adhikāra.

(In bhakti there is no distinction of caste. Everybody has equal right to chant the Hari Nāme.)

Some verses of the Kirtanaghosā exhibit that there is no discrimination of high or low caste in the path of devotion. The devotion of God does not depend upon status of birth. The following verses of the section Pāsandamardan reflects this truth.

Krisnara kathate yito rasika
brahmana janma laye tara kika
smaroka mātra hari dine rāti
nabache bhakati jati ajati.

(Those who are interested in Krisnalore need not be born in high castes. Let them only remember Hari day and night. There is no discrimination of high and low caste in the path of devotion.)

Devotion is not the property of a particular caste or individual and it is available to all kinds of people. A devotee belongs to low-caste can become great through the power of devotion. So Sankaradeva says in the Kirtanaghosā -

sito cāndālaka garistha māni
yahara jihbage sgrave Hari-vāni

(Even a candala is considered superior who utters the name of Hari.)

Even a true devotee belongs to low caste is considered to be greater than a man who belongs to high caste.

yito chāndalāra kāyā, vākya mane
sadāya sumare Hari
āche bahra vrata yito brāhmanara
si si sretha tata kari.

(Prahlad carit)

(The candala who by his body word and mind meditates always on the name of Hari, is better than a brahman, who performs all his twelve like-vows.)

In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva says that Hari-kirtana is the best way to open the door of the emancipation of the human life. In the episode symantaka haran, Sankaradeva advises the people to accept the path of devotion for salvation.

bhāi mukhe Rām bolā hridaye dharā rūpa
eteke mukuti pāibā kahilo svarupa.

(O brother, utter the name of Rāma and mediate on Him in your heart, thus certainly you will obtain salvation.)

B) Nām-Dharma, magnanimity of Hari's Nāma and salvation :

Sankaradeva points out the different ways of conduct for the different ages and prescribes Nāma-kirtana for the age of Kali. He says in the Kirtanaghosā,

anyatra dharme nāhi adhikāra
jānibā kalita nāmese sāra
kevale kirtane samsāra tari
bandha cindi howe apuni Hari.

(In the Kali age, people have no right in other creeds but only in the Nām-dharma. Man can get rid of the cycle of birth and death merely through kirtana and can attain God-head.)

Sankaradeva recognised nāma-kirtana as the proper religion of Kali-yuga. Tapa, japa, vruta, pujā, tirthadarsana etc. are found factual according to the religious philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā. The congregational prayer is the important aspect of Sankaradeva's religion. He discarded all other formalities and ritualisms of the Hindus and proclaims in the Kirtanaghosā that the Nāme of Hari is superior to both jñāna-marga and karma-marga.

yata tapa dharma veda vedanta
Hari nāme kare save susanga
jñānāta karmata kari samprati
Hari kirtanese parmagati.

(Pāsanda-mardan)

(All penances, religious deeds, performance of vedic rites etc. are accomplished by the Name of Hari. The uttering of the Name of Hari is superior to both jñāna-marga and karma-marga.)

The meditative chanting of God's virtue is found fruitful and practical. Nāma is referred to the essence of the veda and supreme religion. All religions are seen concentrated in Hari-nāma. Only Nāmakirtana can fulfil object of all forms of religion. Sankaradeva accepts the Name of his Deity as equivalent to tapa, japa, yajna, yoga dhyāna, punya etc. In the section Bhāgavata-tatparya, the following verses prove this.

tantra mantra yajna yata tapa tirtha koti sata
Hari nāme adhika savata.

(The name of Hari is higher than crores of tantras, mantras, sacrifices, penances and pilgrimage.)

Sankaradeva has propagated Nāma-dharma or the devotional recitation of the name of Hari as the supreme religion of the Kali yuga. Nam-dharma consists in the chanting the name of the supreme self with undeviating devotion, being pure in heart, thought and action.

Sankaradeva emphasises on the greatness of Hari-nāma through many verses of the Kirtanaghosā. In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva explains that the name of Hari is so powerful that any kind of sinner can liberate himself through chanting the name of God. The greatness of Hari-nāma is mentioned in different scriptures of the world. There is no difference between God and His 'Name'. One worships 'Name' means to worship God. In the seventh chapter of Sri Mad-Bhāgavad-Gita, Krisna declares that He exists every where as 'sound'. Because of the Oneness between

the name and the named, nāma is called Nāma Bhrahman.¹⁰ As a true follower of the upanisadic thought Lakshminath Bezbaroa explains that the first sound of the creation was O (or Om), which is a word of three letters 'a u m', 'a' means the preserver Visnu, 'u' means the destroyer, Siva and 'm' means the creator Brahmā. As such the word O signifies the supreme Lord who is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe. He is the syllable Aum in all vedas, He is the sound in ether and manhood in man.¹¹

Bezbaroa claims that worship of name is prevalent not only among the Hindus, the name or word has been recognised as God in the christinity also. The word Epeolatery means the worship of words. In Latin, there is the word 'Logos' which means the word of God-incarnate christ.¹²

"It is in the Bible that in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God."¹³

"In the very ancient Pāñcarātra doctrine of India, it is stated that the first manifestation of the power of visnu is called nāda, which is like a long drawn sound of a bell and which can only be perceived by great yogis. The next stage is like a bubble in the Ocean called vindu and third stage is the evaluation of the objective power which is called sabda-Brahman."¹⁴

In the Brahma sutra of Bādarāyana it is stated that the word is indestructible, because the whole universe including

the gods have originated from word. According to Sruti and Smṛti, creation begins with the word and ultimately ends up in word.¹⁵ So the sound is eternal.

The Sikh religious scripture Ādi Grantha also highly recommends the worship of the name of God. It is stated there that nāma sustains all knowledge and the whole universe. Nāma sustains all the sky and under worlds.¹⁶

Harināma or Rāmanāma, Krisna or Ramkrisna, Govinda or Mādhava, Mukunda Murāri, Nārāyana by which Sri Sankaradeva addresses the Lord and chants those names, are the attributive or definitive names of God. They are kirtana i.e. attributive or definitive names. Kabir taking of these current names of God says -

"Millions of names current in the world
Do not lead to release
The primal name is rarely known"¹⁷

The Divine name or Nām, the worship of which is recommended by Sankara, is the vital power itself. In the Kirtanaghosā he says -

Harira nāmara anata prabhāv
kone kahi pāwe simā
samsāra bināse harika prakāse
nāmara mahā mahimā.

The Nām, according to Sankaradeva, is Niranjana. Mind becomes clean only by hearing the sweet melody narrating the

glory of Lord. So long as one does not rise above the world of sense and matter, one can never get this Niranjana-Nām. Guru Nanak says, unless one vacates the body by leaving all the nine outlets of the body (control of senses) one can not attune oneself to that Divine Melody or the word of God. Sankaradeva also stresses the same point. Nām is chaitanya, i.e. pure consciousness and body senses and matter are all inert things; and unless one, through the chanting of Holy Names of the Lord or singing the praises of the Lord in the company of virtuous persons or saints rises above the body's consciousness, one can never get this most precious gift or Nam and take refuge at the red 'Lotus' feet of the Lord.¹⁸

Sankaradeva repeatedly exhorts his disciples that in this world of matter and sense, full of sin and suffering, if there is anything that can save them, it is Nām-bhakti. He has even gone to that extent to say that "All religions have their abode in Harināma".

"Nām or worship of the Eternal Word alone can give repose. It can lead man from unreal to Real, from darkness to Light and from death to Deathlessness. In brief, he who utters the Lord's name fulfil the objects of his life."¹⁹

In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva expresses the greatness of Hari-Nāma through different verses, The chanting the Name of Hari, can liberate us from all kinds of sins and one can succeed in his life through "Hari's Name".

Nāmesē karibe parama sidhi

Harir nāma jagatara nidhi.

(Nāmaparadh)

(The Nāma alone would lead to supreme success ; Hari Nāma constitutes the real riches of the world.)

For Sankaradeva, seven deeds are simultaneously fulfilled through nāmasmarana.

Prathame dahibe pātaka caya

karibe mahā punya abhyuday

karibe visnuta birakati

krisnata pawaibe prema bhakti

upajāibēzāti vaisnava jnāna

māyāko dahia kare niriyana

caitanya murti purnānanda Hari

thoibanta tente are eka kari.

(Nāmaparadh)

(Firstly, all the sins would be burnt out, great piety would thrive and foster indifference to the worldly affairs and augment the loving devotion to Krishna. It would arouse in Him the Visnu consciousness, illusion also would be completely burnt out and devotee would be in communication with the Lord Hari, the All-Blissful, the Embodiment of consciousness.)

In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva says that in the Kali yuga, no salvation can be attained without Nāma. The people of Kaliyuga would be sinful in motive. They have no right to other forms of religion and Nāma is the only essence in this age. If people do not always remember Hari in Kali, they through idleness move to self-destruction. In the section Nāmaparadh of the

Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva puts the following verses :

nāma bine nāhi kalita gati
kalira loka huibe pāpamati
anyatra dharma nāhi adhikār
yāniba kalita nāmesē sār
kalita sadā nusumarai hari
helāte marai ātmaghāta kari.

According to Sankaradeva, there is no other ways than kirtana and all the thirtyfour castes of people can attain God's region in the Ironage by Hari-nāma. Salvation that had been attained through meditation in the Golden age, through sacrifices in the silver age, through worship in the copper age, can be attained through kirtana in the Iron age.

In the section 'Pāsanda Mardan' Sankaradeva says -

satya yuge kari dhyana samadhi
tretāta sameste yajna āradhi
dapara puju nana bhakti bhāve
kalita kirtana si gatipāwe.

(What is attained through contemplation and meditation in the Satya-yuga, through performance of all sorts of sacrifices in the Treta yuga and through worship with diverse grades of humility in the Dapara age, is attainable in the Kali yuga through kirtana alone.)

Nārada says that Harināma is alone his life and he says that there is no other shelter for men in the Kaliyuga.

Hari nāma nāme nāme nisya
mohora yjivana narade kai
kalira kāle aura ata para
nahi nahi nahi gati lokara.

(Says Narada, Hari Nāma, Hari Nāma, Hari Nāma alone is my life. Besides this, there is no other shelter, none for men in the Kali yuga.)

Sankaradeva maintains that religious practices in the shape of constant recitation of the name of Hari, though begun mechanically, will succeed in generating a real feeling and devotion. According to him, even accumulated sins will be nullified if one remembers Hari's name and recites His glories. In many verses of the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva emphasises the effect that constant meditation of the name of the Lord produces on the mind of the devotees alone can take one to the highest goal. So the bhakti cult and the scriptures admit that there is no difference between God and His name.

To bring out the importance of the chanting of the name of the Lord, Sankaradeva narrates the story of Ajāmila in the Kirtanaghosā. There was a Brahmin Ajāmila by name, who degraded himself in the company of a harlot. In the womb of the harlot the Brahmin raised ten sons and out of great affection the youngest son was named Nārayana. At the time of his death, he called his youngest son Nārayana to his side. Hearing the sound of the name of Hari in the mouth of dying Brahman, and thinking it to be the uttering of the name of the Lord, four angelic Beings, the attendants of Visnu rushed forth to the spot hurriedly. Driving away the Yama-Dutas, the soul of the Brahman was taken to the abode of Visnu and not to the city of Yama. This clearly indicates even an unconscious recital of the name of God brings salvation to hard sinners

just as abdominal disease is cured by even unconscious swallowing of a powerful medicine.

yena mahausadhi najani bhunjila
taro garbha roga hare.

(Ajāmila Upakhyana)

The greatness of Hari's Name is very difficult to realise for a man.

Parama mangal harinama dharma
 jahar thakoi mukhata
tara tetikhane bhasma huya jaye
 mahapapa kouti shata.

(The hundred crores of sins of the person who has most auspicious Hari Nāma in his mouth are burnt to ashes then and there.)

God forgives the sins like murder of a Brahman, patricide, drinking, evil doing, killing of innocent animals, robbery, treachery to the friend etc. if one chant His name. So, Sankaradeva says in the Kirtanaghosā -

eto Harināme tokara jateka
 patak nirjyan kare
tateka patak prabandhe karibe
 nwaroi pataki nare

brahmachari griha basi banabasi
 sannyasi jateka juti

Harira kirtana eri keho nare

napawoi parama gati. (Ajamil Upakhyan)

(This Hari Nāma can destroy many of the sins of men, which a sinner can not commit, even with the greatest efforts. None of the Brahmacharins, house-holders, ascetics, the sanayasis and all other yatis by disowning Hari kirtana can attain the supreme state.)

According to Indian philosophy there are four ends or aims of the human life. These four main ends of human life are Kāma or enjoyment, artha or wealth, dharma or virtue and moksa or liberation are called the purusartha.²⁰ Attainment and enjoyment of the desirable objects becomes one of the ends of the individual's life. Wealth is essential to fulfil one's desires. Thus wealth as a means to enjoyment or Kāma becomes the second end or aim of the life of the individual. Aquisition and enjoyment of wealth are possible only in a stable social order, which enjoys upon each individual some well-defined law of good conduct and social behaviour. It is the moral duty of all the individuals to conform to these laws of social conduct and there in lies a great virtue for them. So the third end of life of human beings living in society is virtue or dharma. Attainment of all these ends brings in its wake heavenly pleasure. But the individual self can not remain contented with these ends which are short lived. Hence, the individual self goes on seeking for an ideal which is eternal and final and free from all flaws and in that sense the highest ideal or summum bonum of his life. This ideal is that of liberation or moksa from all sins and sufferings.

According to the philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā, the above four ends of the human life can be attained through the power of only Hari nāma. The following verses of the episode 'Ajāmila Upakhyān' are the evidence of this fact.

dharma artha kām yito abhilāse
ye chāwoi moksara path
sio hari nāma kirtana kariā
pawai sava monorath.

(He who seeks piety, wealth, desire and also the pain of emancipation, gets all his desires fulfilled only through practising Hari nāma.)

According to the religious philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā, salvation could be had only by uttering the name of Hari. Even for sinful deeds of any sort, no purifactory rite is necessary ; the name alone can purify in all cases. The Nāma aparadha section of the Kirtanaghosā is the best testimony to this view. If one fills his mind with the Name, the self will submerge in Divinity.²¹

yito mandamati adhama nare
harira mahā aparātha kare
nāmata sarana lawe bereka
nāme hari tāra save pātaka.

(If evil minded and degraded one, committing great sins even to Hari, take refuge in the Name only for once, all his sins will be washed away by the Name.)

kalira dharma harināma jāna

pāpīra nindata nidibā kāna.

(Pāsanda mardana)

(The religion of the Kali age is the Name of God (Hari) don't pay heed to the blasphemy of the sinners.) The kirtanaghosā glorifies the kali-age as the best of the four ages, because people can easily attain salvation by chanting nāmakirtana.

sakala dharmate kari visita

hari kirtanese dharma garistha.

(Pāsanda mardana)

(Of all religions, the religion of chanting the Name of Hari is the best.)

The religious philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā shows the people the best way to attain liberation. Indian philosophers believe that it is possible for the individual souls to attain freedom from miseries and death by the disinterested performance of their prescribed duties. The prayer of the Indians - "Lead us from unreal to real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality" - is a point in support of the statement that Indian philosophers aim at liberation.²²

Buddhism regards complete extinction of suffering as nirvana or liberation. Nirvan is complete extinction of fire of passions. According to the Jains complete destruction of karma-matter investing the soul and realisation of the fact that the soul is endowed with infinite perception, is called liberation. The Nyāya-Vaisesikas regard liberation

as the pure existence of the soul free from all connection with the mind and body. According to Advaita Vedanta liberation is the realisation of the identity of the soul with the Brahman. Rāmanuja regards similarity to the self with God in essence as liberation which is a blissful state.

According to the philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā, in the Kali age one can secure release through the singing of God's glory and cutting through bondage of māyā can become Hari himself. Man has to suffer a lot of miseries due to the impact of māyā or the bondage of karma. One can liberate from the bondage of karma through meditating on God. Sankaradeva says in the section 'Daivakir putra ānayan' -

Krisnara kimkare sankare bhane
kariyo kirtana samasta jane
kali yuge ito mahā upāya
hari nāme laile mukti pāya.

(Sayeth Sankara, the serf of kirtan you all chant the Name. This is the great way in this kaliyuga that by uttering the Name of Hari, salvation can be attained.)

Some verses of the Kirtanaghosā exhibit that a devotee can attain salvation easily in the midst of household life through remembering Hari's Name. In the episode Ajāmilopakhyana he says -

devaro durlabha ihena janmaka
 vrithā karā kona kāmē
 grihate thākiyā harika smariyā
 moksa sādihā hari nāme.

(This human life is not attainable even by the gods;
 what for do you pass it in vain ? Remembering Hari in
 the household life, obtain salvation by the Name of
 Hari.)

Sankaradeva advises the people to utter the Name of
 God to obtain salvation in the section 'Pāsanda mardan'.

bhai mukhe rāma bolā hridaye dharā rupa
 eteke mukuti pāiba kahilo svarupa.

(Oh brother, utter the Name of Rāma and meditate on
 Him in your heart, then certainly will you obtain
 salvation.)

In the section 'Prahād carita', Sankaradeva says
 that Hari kirtana is the best way to have relieve of the world
 and attain Vaikuntha.

sunā sarvajana kahe krisnara kinkare
 nāhi āna dharma aura kirtanata pare
 vaikuntha jāibā jeva samsaraka tari
 nirantare dāki ghusiyoka Hari Hari.

(Krisna's kinkara Sankara says 'Let all people listen,
 there is no other dharma besides kirtana. If you desire
 for vaikuntha on being relieved of the world, sing aloud
 ceaselessly Rāma and Hari.)

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21. K.D. Goswami. Life and Teaching of Mahapurusha Sankaradeva. P. 76.
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CHAPTER IV

THE ETHICS OF THE KIRTANAGHOSĀ
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Chapter - IV

The Ethics of the Kirtanaghosā

Ethics evaluates human habits, character and voluntary determinations and discusses their property. According to Machenjie "Ethics is the theoretical study which deals with ideal or with the standard of rightness and wrongness, good and evil, involved in conduct."¹ It deals with right adjustment of life on earth especially in the human society. Both are motivated by a desire to live in the light of ideals.² An action may be judged to be right or wrong by referring it to a rule of law; or it may be characterised as good or bad in relation to an end. The highest good or the summum-bonum of human existence is considered to be the highest moral ideal or moral standard.

The embodied human being constituted of material body and the divine spirit feels attracted towards the 'Kindred points' of heaven and earth. Moreover, as he is situated in a society of fellow beings, he can not but cherish the four ends as the main aim of his life. These four main ends of human life, viz., kāma or enjoyment, artha or wealth, dharma or virtue and moksa or liberation are called the purusartha.³

The Hindu strives to reach his destiny by means of this fourfold discipline and he strives to discover the world's potentiality for virtue and derives happiness from it. Of these four-fold objects of life the last discipline namely

spiritual freedom or liberation from the bondage of the world is the highest goal of the Hindu religion and philosophy. The spiritual freedom has been defined by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan thus : "To inquire into his true self, to live in and from it, to determine by its own energy what it shall be inwardly and what it shall make of its outward circumstances, to bound the whole life on the power and truth of spirit, is 'moksa' or spiritual freedom".⁴

The central Ethical view of Sankaradeva in the Kirtanaghosā :

The highest good, according to Sankaradeva can be achieved by self-surrender and self-alonigation at the feet of the Lord. It is only through devotion and self surrender, a devotee receives the grace of God.

To attain the spiritual freedom, the individual self should conduct itself in such a way as would enable it to attain the coveted ideal. According to Sankaradeva, God is the highest reality and He is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipo- tent. So liberation is possible through the devotion to God. Sankaradeva expresses in many verses of the Kirtanaghosā that it is only through perfect devotion, God can be obtained. Sankaradeva says in the Kirtanaghosā -

Krisnakathā sunā sarvajane
udhāribe krisnara kirtane
moksa pāibā grhabase thāki
jani hari hari bōlā dāki.

(Sri Krisnar Vaikuntha Prayan)

(Oh you people, listen to the activities of Krishna. It is the kirtana of Krishna (devotion of God) alone that would make you free. All would attain salvation leading the life of a house-holder, knowing this, utter Hari and Hari.)

According to Sankaradeva, Dharma excluding the services to Krishna is meaningless. Devotion to Krishna alone begets knowledge. Without the grace of God nothing can be achieved. Even Brahmā, the creator could achieve self-realisation on knowledge by the grace of Krishna. Many verses of the Kirtanaghosā exhibit that a great sinner can be emancipated through his devotion to God.

In the Gitā, Krishna says :

'sarvadharmān parityjya mamekekong sharmong braja
ahong tvaong sarvapapebhyo moksaisyami ma shucah.'

(Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reaction) or (Giving up all righteous and unrighteous actions come unto Me alone for refuge. I shall free thee from all sins.)

In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva says :

Samasta lokara dharmaka eri
visnura nāmaka satate bari
sijana ye-gati labhive sukhe
samasta dhārmike nāpāibe dukhe.

(Pāsanda mardan)

(Abandoning all the religious rites of the ordinary folk and chanting Nāma of visnu alone regularly one will attain at ease that deliverance which followers of folk religion will not achieve with pains)

In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva emphasises on the practice of non-violence, self-control, endurance humility, compassion to creature, detachment, good conduct etc. to become a true devotee of God. Every human being has his duty to society creatures and God, and he should perform his duty without any hesitation for the welfare of the human-society.

(i) Non-violence :

Sankaradeva has laid the greatest stress on the practice of non-violence. Non-violence is one of the greatest principles by which enemy can be defeated without harmful action.

The vedic command runs - "Do not injure any being". The Buddha who was the very incarnation of the ethic of compassion states. Let a man overcome anger by non-anger ; let the evil be overcome with good ; let the avarious man be overcome with gifts; let lair be overcome with truth ; through non-enmity - enmity comes to rest.¹

Sankaradeva strongly opposed against all bloody sacrifices that were committed in the name of religion in his time.

In Kirtanaghosā, he says :

yaita thāke mora bhakta udar carītra
 kit-patangako tathā kārya pavītra
 nakare pranika himsā nāhi eko sprhā
 amāta arpana kare apunara dehā.

(Prahlad carit)

(Wherever My devotees of liberal character happen to be, thereby they sacrifice even the worms and insects. They do not harm any creature and are above all desires; they even dedicate their own persons to Me)

Friend and foe are equal for a true devotee. So Prahlad says to his father -

jāni pitri erā asura kāma
 apuna mana karā upashama
 shatru mītra sava kario samā
 ehise Mrisnara bhakti uttama. (Prahlad carit)

(Hence, O father, give up evil nature and control your own mind behave equally with both friend and foe ; this is the best form of devotion to Krishna)

(ii) Self-control :

According to Sankaradeva, self-control is very essential in the path of devotion. Self-control implies both the control of the mind and the body. The concentration of mind is of great importance to ensure control of mind. Concentration

is possible only through constant meditation of the name of the Lord. Sankaradeva says :

Kāko ninindivā kāko navandivā
sravana kirtane samasta pape pariva.

(Do not turn or idolize others. Sravana-kirtana will alone free you from the snares of passions.)

Again he says : kebale kirtane samsara tari
vandachindi apani hove Hari.

(Kirtana alone will steer you clear and will make you God)

The passions like anger, pride, greed, lust are the enemies of the human life and they should be controlled by following the laws of God.

In the episode, 'Prahlad carit', Prahlad says to his father -

nījīnī sharīra shatrucai
jinilo dashodish hena kai
janiyā pitri erā aṁamkār
bhajio harika kahilo sār.

(Not controlling the enemies within one's own person, some boast of conquering the Ten-quarters. So father, I tell the truth, adore Krishna)

In the 'Ajāmīla-Upakhyana' it is said that the purification of mind is possible through the kirtana of Hari.

cittara shodhan harir kirtana
pāpara alu ubhanjoi.

(The Hari kirtana purifies the whole heart and thereby the sins are completely uprooted.)

(iii) Detachment :

Sankaradeva's New Vaishnavism like the Upanishads and the Gita emphasises detachment (niskāma) as the key to the individual and social welfare, healthy social relationship and attainment of the final goal. He emphatically states :

"vihaya kaman yah sarvan pumamshcaratinispriha
nirmamo nirahamkarah sa santimadhigacchati."⁵

(One who gives up all desires and frees one-self from all cravings, attachment and egotism (pride) attains supreme bliss.)

In the 'Namghosā', Madhavadeva following an aphorism of the Bhāgavata purāna writes is a beautiful verse which runs as below -

"Vairagyatapare bhagya nahi provodhat pare
Sukha aru nahi purusara
Hari vine paritran karta aru nahi jana
Ripu nahi samsarata para."⁶

(There is no greater merit other than detachment no happiness greater than wisdom no rescuer than God and no other enemy bitterer than worldlimindedness for a man and know this as certain)

Detachment is means to success, because it leads to self-control, self-knowledge, firmness of conscience and viewing unity in things and beings.

In Kant's opinion, moral law is a categorical imperative and there is no law or authority over it. A duty is always a duty and duty is obligatory. Action done with desire and feelings are immoral. According to Kant, if it is a moral duty to tell the truth then every person should tell the truth in every circumstance.

In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva advises the people to develop an attitude of detachment to mundane affairs and attachment to the higher spiritual values. In the Kirtanaghosā Sankaradeva says :

tevese alpate tusta haiva nārayane
konno durlbha āse hari suprasanne
hena jāni bisayata huyoka bimukha
pasu sharirato pāy bisayara sukha.

(Narayana would be pleased within a short time if detachment is exemplified. Hari being pleased, there is nothing unattainable. Hence, be detached from the worldly objects; even in animal life, all the worldly pleasures are available.)

According to Sankaradeva, man should do his duty without expecting the result of the work and he should do everything as a servant of God. A true devotee practises this habit and makes himself free from all the bondage of the world. Prahlada

was a such kind of devotee of God who never expected the result of his work.

Nrsingha (God) told Prahlada that He was satisfied at his devotion and asked him to pray for any boon. But Prahlada desired nothing and he said :

jano prabhu parikshā āmāka
 sehetu bulilā hena bāka
 bānchoi phala kari taju krtya
 seto baniyāru noho bhrtya.

(I know oh Lord, Thou hast tested me and that is why Thou hast spoken thus. I am not a man of trade to desire some gain in return for services rendered unto Thee)

Again Prahlada said to God :

tohmara ākām bhṛtya āmi
 tumīo niskāma mora swāmī
 nāhi kāma āhmara anyatha
 nuhi rajsevakara yathā.

(I am Thy servant having no desire at all, and Thou art also my Lord devoid of any desire. Unlike the servant of a King, I have no desire at all.)

iv) Compassion to creature :

A true devotee is kind to all creatures and his thoughts and actions are free from any feeling of malice. In

the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva has shown that all creatures should be treated as one's own self. Sankaradeva recognises the existence of Paramatma even in animals life. The attitude to all men and all beings of Vaishnavism is indeed very laudable, because it considers the universe as divine and treats all creatures equally. The following verses of the Kirtanaghosā prove this fact.

kukkura cāndala gardavaro atma-rām
jāniya savāko pari karivā pranām.

(Even the souls of dogs, untouchables and asses are verily God and with this idea in mind, they shall be respected.)

Prahlada was able to perceive all creatures like his own self.

Prahlad vaishnava bhaila āte
visnuka cintanta dine rātī
īndriyaka karilā nīyama
prānika dekhanta ātmasama.

(Prahlad became a devout vaisnava, day and night he meditates on visnu; controlling all the senses, he perceives all creatures like his own self.)

God exists in all creatures and therefore we should respect them equally. We should love all of them to enhance our feeling of devotion to God.

In the section 'Prahlada carita' Sankaradēva
says :

Krisnara carana cintiveka hr̥dyata
āśanta isvara hari samosta bhutata
henajāni prānika kariva satkāra
tevese krisnata rati haibeka tohmāra.

(Krisna's feet should be meditated upon within the heart.
Lord Hari is omnipresent in all creatures; hence have due
regard for all of them; only then will you have an
interest in Krisna.)

(v) Humility :

Sankaradeva preached the ideal of humility as the
ethics of compassion. A devotee must consider himself as the
lowliest of the lowly. According to Sankaradeva the psychic
ego is not an enduring-self. But it is one of the greatest
barriers to religious culture. A devotee must give up his
sensitive ego to attain the high degree of spiritualism. In
'Prahlada carita' Sankaradeva says :

erio āta ahammam bhāva
dr̥ha kari dhara Krisnara pāwa.

(Hence give up the idea of egoism and hold firmly
on to the feet of Krisna.)

Pride is the cause of destruction. Gajendra, the King
of elephants is able to realise this at a critical moment.

sankata belāta tāra sadbudhi bhaila
 ki bhaila ki bhaila buli gunibāka laila
 āmi hena Gajendra jagate yaka kahe
 mahagarve bhrmante paileka jalagrahe.

(At the critical moment a wise idea dawned upon his mind and there-upon he began to ponder on what had happened to him. I am the king of the elephants of whom the world speaks so highly. As I was roaming in pride and haughtiness, I was gripped by the crocodile.)

"In 'Krisna's Rāsa Lilā', Krisna disappears when the gopis' mind slips into their own-self. When the mind is deeply absorbed in the thought of God, it can not think of anything else. When the gopis' mind slipped in to the thought of their ego or self, Bhagavān disappeared."⁷

Krisnata hante mahaman paya
 bulila garve sava gopajāya
 amar sam subhagini nāie
 bhailanta adhin yadavarāy
 gopira maha ahammam bhāva
 dekhi nasahila Krisnara gāwa
 tasambāra darpa haribe mane
 bhailā antardhan taite tekhane.

(Being thus highly regarded by Krisna all the wives of the milk-men with pride proclaimed. "There are none more fortunate than us, as the Lord of the Yadavas has become obedient to us.

Having noticed this sense of pride of the milkmaids, Krishna could not tolerate it. With a view to smash their pride then and there, He disappeared)

The concept of Karma, rebirth, bondage and liberation in the Kirtanaghosā :

Morality implies conscious responsibility on the part of the agent for his actions. Popular mind identifies karma with fate and doctrine of karma with a counsel of despair. According to Bhāgavata, karma refers to the emotional being of man, his feelings and despairs.⁸

Moral life is not a chaos ; it gives no room for caprice and chance. Moral order implies that a man's actions in the past are responsible for his present state and his present deeds will condition his future fortunes.⁹

Action done with a sense of attachment is the root cause of man's continued involvement in the chain of birth and rebirth. Karma and samsāra therefore, go hand in hand, and if one wants to be liberated from the chain of samsāra, he will have to be free from karmas i.e. attached egoistic actions.¹⁰

The liberation of the individual is the central aim of the Hindu ethics. The need for the soul's salvation arises from the recognition of the transitoriness of life. Not only this, life in the world is seen to be complicated by the

operation of the law of action and reaction is called karma. Some thinkers discovered that the bondage of karma is due to the reaction which every action produces. It is explained by the fact of the unitary structure of the cosmos of which individuals are inseparable parts, and karma arises only when this inseparable connection of the individual with the cosmos is forgotten and the individual indulges in actions. With the false notion that it is an independent actor or doer, inviting thereby the nemesis of reaction.¹¹

An action is an effort towards the achievement of an objective. Man does not simply exist and he ever tends to become something else. The impulse for action is ingrained in the constitution of one's individuality. The desire to possess and develop relations with external phenomena is the vital spring of all actions.

An individual is born in a particular environment either because of a past wish cherished to live in such a condition or of an unknown consequence of desires. The miseries of the world are the forms of the reactions of deluded actions performed previously by its inhabitants.¹²

The bondage of worldly existence is the outcome of karma. The law of karma is an essential element of Sankaradeva's philosophied concept of rebirth. He says in the section 'Veda Stuti' of the Kirtanaghosā :

dvija shudra dhani dukhi tapaswai yateka
 raja rajbhrtya āno manusya aneka
 savāro grhata bāre bāre bhailo jāta
 anekara bhailo prabhu bhrtya asmakshyāta.

(The Dvijas, the Sudras, the rich and the poor, the ascetics and all others ; the kings, the king's officers and all other men, I took birth in all these places one after another again and again and besides sometimes I had become Lords and also servants of innumerable numbers.)

The principle of karma for the Buddhist is taken as an assumption generally i.e. as an article of faith; since the empirical evidence for it is negligible. Edward Conze says : The factual evidence for karma and rebirth appears imposing to some and quite negligible to others. In any case it is scientifically inconclusive. The doctrine contains two fairly unverifiable statements; it claims :

"(1) that behind naturally causality - there are other invisible chains of a moral causality which ensures that good acts are rewarded, all bad actions are punished, and, (2) that this chain of moral sequence is not interrupted by death, but continues from one life to another."¹⁴

The following verses of the Kirtanaghosā exhibit that the virtue and vice of the human life depend upon the actions of the previous life.

koti koti janama antare yahara
 āsa mahāpunyarashi
 sī sī kadachit manusya howaya
 bharat bhumita āsi.

(Ajamila Upakhyān)

(Those persons only who had earned heaps of virtue during the past crores of lives scarcely take birth in Bhārat)

On the other hand, Sankaradeva says in the section 'Ajamila Upakhyān :

sito pāpisava daive bhaila hata
 cinte apunāra māra
 upaji maribe yātanā bhunjibe
 nāhike tāra nistāra.

(These sinners have been ruined by destiny and they encompass their own death and can never be free from the tortures consequent on their entering the cycle of birth and death again and again.)

The ultimate freedom which the soul attains is Moksa. It is the cessation of transmigratory life and the experience of the bliss of the Absolute. The upanishad and the Bhāgavad-Gītā declare that the soul having attained liberation does not return to samsāra. As the rivers enter the ocean, losing their names and forms, souls enter the Absolute having been freed from spatio-temporal limitations in the form of worldly

relations. By restraint of the mind form, indulgence in the temptations of samsāra, by devotion to creator and by knowledge that one's essential being is identical with the universal substance, the soul attains Moksa.¹⁵

The condition wherein this experience of spiritual freedom arises in the consciousness even before the shuffling of the physical body, in certain cases is called jivanamukti or liberation while living and the attainment of this freedom after the leaving of the body is called vedehamukti or disembodied salvation.¹⁶

We find the above two types of mukti in the Kirtana-ghosā also. For instance Ajamila attained vedehamukti and Prahlad was able to attain jivanamukti.

Nārayan nāma bulibar pade
 nistāril ajamila
 Visnuka cintiā caturbhujā rupe
 vaikunthate ārohilā.

(Ajāmila Upakhyān)

(By uttering the name of Nārayana alone Ajamila saved himself and assuming a fourhanded form and musing on visnu ascended to Vaikuntha.)

Nrsingha said to Prahlad -

tora yasha vyapiva jagate
 rātri dine moka sumarante
 save karmabandha haiba kshina
 , antakāle mota yāibi lina.

(Your fame would spread throughout the world. As a result of meditating on Me day and night you would be free from shakles of action (karmabandha) and in the end you would attain union with Me (merge in Me).

The problem of good and evil :

The problem of good and evil can be discussed as an ethical problem. This problem is closely related to the existence of God and His attributes. The fact of evil is apparently incompatible with the actuality of an omnipotent and all loving God. If God be not infinitely good, then for a theist, He will be not be worthy of worship. Therefore, the problem of justification of evil in the presence of God.

Different thinkers have given different arguments in order to solve this problem, but they are unable to satisfy the human mind completely. However, evil is real and none can deny it.

The evil for Indian thinkers is most patent and Lord Buddha has taught the reality of evil so vividly and so cogently that Buddhism and Indian thought have been dubbed 'pessimistic'. But the teaching is for the purpose of withdrawing men from ephemeral pleasures and of including them to a life of spiritual bliss. Hence, for Indian thinking the endless chain of birth and rebirth has the sole purpose of realising the eternal state of Moska. Hence, evil is there to be overcome : it is not allowed to be last word about the universe.¹⁷ Good and evil are

sometimes described by the Hindu thinkers as the pair of opposites.¹⁸ According to Radhakrishnan, "Good acts are those which aim at the well being of oneself and others and evil one are those which interfere with the wellbeing of oneself and others."¹⁹

According to Veda, suffering is basically an experience and it depends more on how one takes life. It is an instrument which cuts human beings off the objects of attachment and induce them to good actions. According to Upanishads, "the root cause of suffering is ignorance regarding the true nature of reality".²⁰

Therefore Hindu solution of the problem of evil, mainly consists in holding that man himself and not God, is responsible for his suffering and he can annihilate it by his own effort.

Jaina approach to the problem of good and evil is practical. The Jaina believes that a man suffers due to his own past karmas.

"Zoroastrianism account for evil by attributing it wholly and solely to Ahriman, the force of evil and darkness and the supreme Lord, Ahura Mazda, can not be held responsible for that."²¹ Like all other theistic religions, Judaism has to face the real problem of evil. It takes God as all-powerful just and merciful and so it has to account for evil. According to Judaism, God has granted free will to human beings and they are themselves responsible for various kinds of sins they commit.

The Christian approach to suffering makes Satan on the one hand and man himself on the other hand to directly responsible for evil, but God has allowed it without interference with a moral purpose of the ultimate good of man.²²

"According to Koran, evil and suffering is one of the necessary parts of God's purpose. The Koran seems to decipher at places God's purpose behind allowing the existence of evil in the following two ways - (1) Suffering is a punishment for sin, and (2) Suffering is a trial or test for faithfulness in God."²³

The Grantha Sahib depicts that ignorance is the cause of evil and suffering. The world is fleeting and changing, but we generally take it as something permanent and cling to it. Attachment to the world is an illusion and it is this which is the cause of all suffering. Under the spell of ignorance, we are attached with the various passions and cling to worldly objects. Attached karmas and rebirth are the real symbols of suffering. All human suffering is due to egoism or self-centredness. The important point of Sikhism seems to be that evil is a product of wrong perspective. God is not directly responsible for it.

The Omnipotence of God is attributed to Him with a view to inducing a shuddering dread in the worshipper. Most probably this has been best clarified by Rudolph Otto and we shall therefore follow his suggestion. According to Otto, God is felt numinously as 'Mysterium Tremendum' and He is felt as awful with holy dread. He is apprehended as exalted

and over powering majesty. The wrath of God is a terrible thing indeed.

As a mystic thinker, Sankaradeva is the up holder of the view that the world is created by a benevolent and an almighty God and His solution to the problem of evil is more pragmatic than theoretical. According to Sankaradeva, God is the creator as well as the destroyer of this universe. He is able to reconcile the two opposite forces of good and evil in his book the Kirtanaghosā. There are three types of evils - (1) Physical evil, (2) moral evil, and, (3) meta-physical evil.

According to Sankaradeva, among the three types of evil, the meta-physical evil and moral evil can be controlled except natural evil. Many verses of the Kirtanaghosā have shown that man is himself responsible for his sufferings and he can annihilate the sufferings of his life by dint of his own effort. Ignorance is the root cause of moral evil and due to ignorance worldly people are guided by sensual pleasure, anger, greed etc.

"According to Sankaradeva the individual soul and the world outside appear as real to the impure mind which is clouded with māyā or illusion."²⁴

jata suta dhana jana save visnumāyā
 akasata prakase meghara yena chāyā.

(Gajendra Upakhyān)

(All riches son and other members of the family are but illusion of Visnu, they appear like shadow of cloud in the sky.)

The ignorant people prefer the earthly things to the devotion of God. In the section 'Pāsanda mardan' of the Kirtana-ghosā, Sankaradeva says :

stri dhana jan youvana made
andha howai vidya garvara pade
bisnu vaishnava japāyā nindoi
harināme tāra kānata vindhoi.

(He being intoxicated with haughtiness for the possession of beauty, wealth, power and youth and blinded by pride of learning, derides at both Visnu and Vaisnavas combined and the Harināma as it were, pierces his ears.)

In the Nāmaghosā, Mādhabdeva says :

āpuni āpun bandhu āpuni āpun shatru
āpuni āpun rakhe māre.²⁵

(Each man is his own friend, he himself is also his own enemy ; he himself protects or destroys himself.)

The 'free will defence' solution is accepted by the both mystic thinkers - Sankaradeva and Mādhabdeva.

A man commits sins for want of his spiritual knowledge. But his sin can be uprooted through the name of Hari. The Kirtanaghosa exhibits that the Harināma is so powerful that any kind of sin can be washed away by it.

The following verses of the section 'Pāsanda mardan' reflects this truth.

brahmabhadi gurubadhi yateka
 pitri-mātribadhi papi aneka
 kukura khaye hena mlecchagane
 sio sudha howe hari kirtane.

(The murderers of Brahmans and preceptors, the patricide, matricide and all other sinners and the outcastes who eat dogs as their food all these are purified by Hari kirtana.)

In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva shows the terrible effect of the evil deeds, but he also encourages to become optimistic. It is possible for a great sinner to overcome his sufferings through his devotion to God.

A Brahmin name by Ajamila committed a lot of sin by breaking the laws of God as well as the custom of the society. At the dying moment he called his youngest son named Nārayan out of fear. Though he uttered the name of God (Nārayan) unwillingly, God liberated Ajamila from his all sins. Cosequently Ajamila was able to attain the supreme state.

Hari nāma dharmā smarana mahīmā
 dekhīyo duta smprati
 pāpi Ajamila Nārāyana buli
 pāile kena sadgati.

(Oh Dutas see the greatness of meditation on Hari through Nama Dharma, how the sinner Ajamila had attained the supreme state by uttering the word 'Nārāyana'.)

The episode 'Harmohan' of the Kirtanaghosā, depicts that ignorance can be removed by true knowledge. As a creative philosopher, Sankaradeva is highly optimistic and he encourages people to look in to the brighter side of life. Man possesses the freedom of will and he has power to control his moral evil. It is the great duty of every person to subdue evil. Sankaradeva asserts that neither by thinking nor by feeling, it is possible to get rid of the influence of evils. Evil can be destroyed only through devotion.

In the episode 'Harmohan', Sankaradeva warns men not to long for carnal attachment towards woman, which is harmful for their spiritual development. Sankaradeva remarks that of all the terrible apparitions of the world, woman's is ugliest. Sankaradeva considers woman as a symbol of māyā or nescience. So he says -

ghor nārimāyā sava māyāle kuteit
 maha sidha muniro katakshe harai citta
 darasane karoi tap jap yoga bhangha
 jāni jnānigane eroi kāmīnira sanga.

Woman is the ugliest of all māyās, by her single glance, the heart of Sidhas and sages are fascinated. The sight of it undermines panances meditation and yogas. Hence the wise avoid the company of woman. Hara was anxious to witness the woman form due to lack knowledge of its harmful affect. But ultimately he realised the power of māyā of Visnu and he confessed his guilty.

Visnura āgata maie parama agnāni
 jinilo māyāka buliloho garvabani
 ese ahamkare kare hr̥dyata tapa
 hari hari smarane khāndoka eto pāpa.

(In comparison to Visnu, I am utterly ignorant, I have uttered the words of arrogance saying 'I have controlled the māyā, this egoism pains me at heart ; as I recall Hari and Hari, may the sin be atoned.)

In the section 'Nāmaparādh' of the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva exhibits that the man who commits offence against Harināma, sinks to the ocean of the sins and he can not be saved even by God. This sort of man has to suffer a lot of troubles in his life. However, the sinful man, offender against Nama be made immune from the offences only by incessantly singing Hari Nāma.

tevese nāmara droha erāi
 svarupa suna rshi udasin
 yejana nāma aparādha hina
 harira teve eke nāme taroi
 sunoi ba bhanoi ba manote smaroi.

(Hear the compact truth, oh the sage of detachment, he who is free from Nama-offences gets salvation by a single Nāma of Hari heard uttered or recalled in mind.)

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CHAPTER V

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THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE KIRTANAGHOSĀ

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(1) Meaning of Social Philosophy :

Man is a social being and he can not live without a society. The social nature of man, man's place in this universe, the relation between the individual and society common-good, the relation between common-good and individual-good etc. are the subject matter of social philosophy. Social philosophy deals with the primary cause of social unity and social disintegration. Social philosophy can determine the true nature of culture and can also point out the possibility of man in this world.

Social philosophy is the thoughtful consideration of human society which is perpetually undergoing change. It studies the meaning, purpose and value in changing human society.¹ The branch of knowledge which discusses and evaluates the fundamental postulates of the various social sciences decides as to which of the conclusions of social sciences are acceptable, deliberates how the various social sciences can be synthesised and tries to solve whether the social evaluation is mechanical or teleological is characterised as social philosophy.

Social philosophy determines the ultimate value of social life or the highest social ideal and evaluates the various aspects of social life in the light of that ideal. According to Meckenze, social philosophy concentrates its attention on the social unity of mankind and tries to interpret

the various aspects of human life in reference to that unity. "Social philosophy is the study of values, ends and ideals."² Social philosophy has value not merely as a pre-scientific body of reflections on social phenomena, but it has also great value as post scientific speculation on the nature and purpose of social phenomena.³

(2) Social philosophy, social philosopher and religion :

A social philosopher tries to study the nature of human society from the philosophical point of view. He tries to find out the link between human society and basic nature of reality. A social philosopher makes effort, find out the basic laws which operate in society. He tries to find-out the fundamental principles in accordance with which social bonds are established among the members of a society. A social philosopher tries to find out those basic principles which are responsible for social organization and social disintegration. His final aim is to find out the basic nature of human society in the context of the reality itself.⁴

"According to the ancient, Hindu social thinkers, a society can function smoothly if the members of its various communities perform their respective duties faithfully."⁵ There are four main castes in the Hindu society. The main function of the Brahmin in ancient times was to perform the duties of a teacher. The main duty of the Khatriya was to fight in the battlefield. The main duty of the Vaishya was

to tend the cattle and carry on agriculture. The duty of the Sudras was to serve the members of the upper castes. They did not have any right or privileges. They were treated by the members of the three upper castes as slightly higher than the beast.⁶

Sankaradeva tried to reform the Assamese society by practising the principles of Vaishnavism among the people of the Assamese society. He was against the prejudices of casteism. According to Sankaradeva, the status of man in the society should not be measured according to the caste. A true devotee of God belongs to a low caste should be considered as great.

"Religion occupies a prominent place in the social life. Religion is the basis of social integration. Religion, according to McDougall, has profound influence 'on social development."⁷ Rituals and religious practices have social significance. Religion has a great cohesive force in society. It helps the stabilization of society. The establishment of well-ordered society depends to a large extent upon religious sentiment.⁸ Religious rites and customs have tremendous consolidating effect on society. Sankaradeva tried to reform the Assamese society through spiritualistic humanism.

(3) Sankaradeva as a social-thinker :

Sankaradeva is one of the greatest religious thinkers of India. The society, where Sankaradeva was born, was full of

superstitions. Most of the people were the blind supporters of Saktism, tantricism and practised all sorts of evil deeds. Sankaradeva realised the causes of degradation of the society and he tried heart and soul to reform it. At that time the influence of Buddhism was also very great. The so-called votaries of irreligion being guided by their extremely selfish motives tried to dominate over the social customs of that time and they were infact responsible for distorting the noble teachings of both Buddhism and Hinduism.

In Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva says :

Buddha avatāra veda pantha kari sanna
 Bāmanaya sāstre muhi āsā ajnājana.

(Caturvimsati avatāra)

(Thou in the Incarnation of the Buddha, setting aside the vedic way had misled the ignorant by the Vāmanaya scriptures. Even intoxicated and unculy in conduct, the messages neither meditate on Thy feet nor take Thy name.)

During Sankaradeva's time, some people did not hesitate to sacrifice even men like animals and birds at the altars of gods and goddesses. Countless misdeeds were done in the name of religion.

Like the Gita of Vyasadeva, Sankaradeva writes in the Kirtanaghosā that God appears in the world with a view to establishing the rule of dharma in the human society by destroying the evil doers.

In the Gita, Krisna says to Arjuna :

yadā yadā hī dharmasya glanibhavati bhārata
 abhuythānam dharmasya tadātmanam srjamyaham
 paritrānaya sadhunam bināshayam chaduskritam
 dharma samsthapanārthaya sambhavami yuge yuge.⁹

(O . Bharata whatever there is decline of virtue and
 predominance of vice, then I embody Myself for protection
 of good and for destruction of evil doers and for the
 re-establishment of dharma, I am born from age to age.)

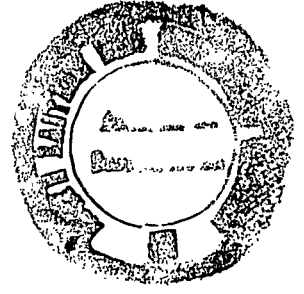
In the Kirtanaghosā, Krisna says to Akrura -

tohmāra bhakti pathaka pasande
 karāya yewe ussanna
 santaka raksāra hetu avatāra
 howā tewe nārayana. (Akrurar banca puran)
 samprati āpuni basudeva grhe
 rāma same avatāri
 durjana rajaka badhiya madhava
 udharila basundhari.

(While heretics subvert the path of Thy devotion, for
 protection of the pions, Thou oh . Nārayana dost take
 an incarnation. For time being, Thou with Rāma in the
 abode of Vasudeva, taking an incarnation hast resuced
 the earth. O . Madhava, by killing the vile King.)

In the section 'Kāli Daman', the Kāli, the great
 serpent says :

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durjina-janara cintiba mār
sehise karjyo taju avatāra
pātaki sarpajāti durashaya
tohmāra dande pāpa bhailakhaya.

(Thou wouldst bring about the destruction of the wicked
and for this purpose alone Thou hast taken incarnation.
By nature the race of the serpent is sinful and treache-
rous, but through Thy punishment all are wiped off.)

"Whenever the moral fibre and religious order reached
a low ebb, God in the person of blessed souls appeared in the
sacred land to re-establish the rule of Dharma and reorganise
the moral order in the society."¹⁰

According to some verses of the Kirtanaghosā, God
incarnates Himself to protect the path of piety in the society.

dharma patha raksā kari
srsti pravartawa hari.

(By giving protection to the path of piety Thou art
promoting the cause of creation.)

It was the 15th century. India that dark clouds of
ignorance and superstition engulfed the masses; irreligion
replaced religion which meant only believing in a multitude
of gods and goddesses and practising rituals including
sacrifice of animals, nay even of human beings. To rescue the
degenerated masses from out of chaos and confusion, a galaxy

of blessed souls appears in different parts of this land or ours. Sankaradeva was one of these godly persons who tried to reform the Assamese society by preaching the glory of Visnu (Krisna) through the Kirtanaghosā and his other religious books. Sankaradeva wanted to teach the people of Assam that the social harmony, peace and happiness of every member of society depend upon the self-surrender before God (Krisna) and taking the path of devotion to Lord.

(4) The concept of 'equality' in the Kirtanaghosā and Sankaradeva's attitude towards society :

Sankaradeva undoubtedly the boldest social reformer ever born in Assam. Standing firm against all ills and injustice in the society he effected the most revolutionary reform by according to social reorganization of man irrespective of caste, creed or colour.

In the Kirtanaghosā it is considered that caste division is a serious social evil. This social evil destroys the peace, discipline and unity among the members of the society. The feeling of hatred and cruelty is developed in the human mind due to the caste division. According to Sankaradeva, human beings should be guided by understanding that everything is created and sustained by one Lord (Visnu). Various distinctions among the people are harmful for the social integration. This sort of evil feeling of the human mind can be removed by the help of love and sympathy for each other.

The most tragic out come of vedic degeneration was the ugly concept of casteism in which the so-called upper classes closed all the doors of wisdom and worship to the so-called lower classes. The lower class people were deprived of all socio-political right in the society. Sankaradeva was a saint who thought over this social pathology five hundred years ago and tried to rescue the down-trodden people.

In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva advises that God exists in all animals and human-beings and therefore, we should show respect them equally. Sankaradeva says in the Kirtanaghosā :

Kukura cāndala gaddarvaro ātmārāma

Janiyā savāko karibā pranāma.

(Even the souls of dogs, candals (untouchable man) and asses are verily God and with the idea in mind, they shall be respected.)

Sankaradeva was successful to abolish the class and caste distinction through preaching his eka-sarana-nāma-dharma. Many verses of the Kirtanaghosa teach us the tune significance of fundamental equality of all religions and the unity of God head.

Sankaradeva held the banner of revolt against excessive rituals, superficial formalities of religion and domination of priestly class. He brought a new message of hope to the common people that they could also attain spiritual excellence through simple devotion and faith in one Supreme God. "The compassionate

saint who saw the Supreme being in all forms of life and respected the inner souls of all including even the humblest creatures did not find any justification behind the system of abhorring man only on consideration of so-called low birth."¹¹

Sankaradeva tried to annihilate all prejudices of caste-creed and rank. His teachings embrace the lowliest of the lowly. In the Kirtanaghosā he says -

nāhi bhakatita jāti-ajāti vichār
krisnata bhakti samastare adhikāra.

(In bhakti, there is no distinction of castes and everybody has equal right to chant the Harināma.)

Not only did Sankaradeva defy and expose the hollowness of untouchability but gave initiation to the so-called lowly born ones in the same manner as he did to those of the higher castes. The mighty was against all forms of social debility like untouchability and the vehemence of external formalities launched by the saint went a long way in ridding the Assamese society of many of the demerits of the Hindu caste system which had done immense harm to the Hindu society elsewhere in the country.¹²

(5) Social justice and status in the Kirtanaghosā :

The teaching of the Kirtanaghosā, generate a clarion call for social justice and equality of all beings in the plan of the Supreme God. Sankaradeva preached the democratic set-up

sunio uddhava āro rahasya bhakti
kariba abhyasa tumi sthira kari mati.
samasta bhutale vyapi āso maye hari
savāko māniba tumi visnu-budhi kari.

(Oh Uddhava, listen to more about the mystery of devotion and practice this with firm determination. I Lord Hari am pervading through all creatures - respect them all in the way you respect Lord Hari.)

Some verses of the Kirtanaghosa, exhibit that 'service to men is indeed service to God'. Every man is the creation of God and therefore, we love and respect each other so that we can remove our evil thoughts from our mind.

Krisna says to Uddhava :

Vishesata manusya ganata yito nare
Visnubudhibhave sarvadaye manyakare
erisā asuyā tiraskāra ahamkāra
save nasta howai teve tawakshave tāra.

(The men who pays special respect to the human beings and treats them ever as forms of God Visnu, immediately becomes free from all sorts of evils such as jealousy, enmity, pride.)

(6) The concept of war and peace in the Kirtanaghosā :

There are some descriptions regarding to war and peace in the Kirtanaghosā. In the Gitā Sri Krishna says to Arjuna about the necessity of war for the establishment of peace in the human society. It is a universal fact that good and evil co-exist in the human life. We have to fight against the wicked men for the attainment of welfare of the human society. Therefore, war is inevitable for the destruction of the evil doers. God incarnates Himself in the human society in order to maintain peace and order among the people of the earth.

The section 'Caturvimsati Avatāra' of the Kirtanaghosā is the evidence of the above fact.

bhailāhā parasurama nāme avatāra
 pradiksina kari bhumi tini satbar
 kshatriaka kātīla parasu kare dhari
 niksatriya karila samasta basundhari.

(The hasdst assumed the incarnation, Parasurām by name and traversing the world three into seven times annihilated the ksatrīyas (the warrior class) pick axe in hand. Thou hadst thus made the whole earth devoid of the Ksatriyas.)

Kalira sesate haiva kalki avatāra
 kātīmāri mlesaka kariva bundamār
 savāko badhiva boudhagana yate āse
 kalira sesata satya pravartayeva pāse.

(Caturvimsati Avatara)

Krisna and Bolorām had to fight with Jarasandha, the the King of Magadha and they had to kill countless enemies.

balobhadra krodhe rāgi
 dhāila magadhaka lāgi
 karilā durghor ron
 samharilā bairāgan
 yata āila rājājāka
 ekale gopāle tāka
 mārila samara sāje
 hata bhoila sāmraje.

(Balobhadra being enraged rushed at Madadha and fought a fierce fight and destroyed the enemies of the crowd of kings that came, Gopala alone killed them all in the battle, thus the entire army was destroyed.)

The teaching of the social philosophy of the Kirtana-ghosā has helped to uproot the social evils like the difference between high and low, family tradition and shown the principle of socialistic pattern of society.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
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The contribution of the Kirtanaghosā to philosophy and religion is laudable. It is noted for its religious conviction and poetic excellence. The main purpose of this great book is to preach the principle of 'Eka-Sarania Nāma Dharma' among the common people and to establish peace and order in the society.

Kirtanaghosā commands merits for its ethico-social and religious values. K. D. Goswami says, 'His most popular composition was the Kirtanaghosā which is held in high esteem and respect as the main scripture by the Vaishnavites of Assam and is in daily use in Vaishnava homes.'¹

The Kirtanaghosā comprises a type of devotional song performed cheerfully by Vaishnava devotee irrespective of caste, creed, sex and age with the accompaniment of drums, cymbals and clapping of hands. This kind of congregational prayer is held in Nāmghar. Each kirtanaghosā reproduces a dialogue of Krishna, Rāma or Nārayana narrating a story or a situation or little action where success of the virtuous and defeat of the wrongdoers are depicted.² The classical variety of song is very popular among the Assamese people in general and the villagers in particular. The Kirtanaghosā is performed and practised regularly in the Satras of Assam. This sort of religious practice helps in the creation of spiritual feeling of the human mind.

In the daily prayer services in the Nāmghar and in other places also the Kirtana is used in the Nām Prasanga by both men and women. It is so popular that even illiterate woman who leads the congregational prayer, can recite the whole work from her memory and this proves the reverence for the Kirtanaghosā.

The chanting and repeating of the Name of God is the main feature of Sankaradeva's religious practice. In this 'Kali Yuga' emancipation could be had only by uttering the Name of God. Even for sinful deeds of any sort, no purificatory rite is necessary; the Name alone can purify in all cases. The Nāma-aparādha section of the Kirtanaghosa is the best testimony to this view. If one fills his mind with the Name, the self will submerge in Divinity.

yito mandamati adhama nare
 hariro mahā aparādha kare
 nāmata sarana lawe bareka
 nāme hare tara save pataka.

(Nāmaparādha)

(In the evil minded and degraded one, committing great sins even to Hari ; takes refuge in the Name only for once; all his sins will be washed away by the Divine Name.)

Sankaradeva says in the Kirtanaghosā that it is Hari-nāma and Harināma alone can give liberation and nothing else.

Lakshminath Bezbaroa presents some beautiful and stimulating discussions on the Kirtanaghosā of Sankaradeva. Commenting on this book he says : It can be asserted with total certainty that to spread religious faith, to inculcate spiritual teachings and to form a religious mode of life, there is no such book as perfect and comprehensive as the Kirtana in other Indian languages.³

Bezbaroa maintains again : The land of Assam where a book like the Kirtanaghosā came to be written, can never be backward in the sphere of literature Had Sankaradeva not composed any other book, yet he would have remained immortal on earth on account of the Kirtanaghosā.⁴

The Kirtanaghosā is a compilation of philosophical and theological episodes and we can learn the ethical, social and religious teachings through this holy-book. The philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā reconciles the conflicting views of the different schools of thought and teaches the religion of devotion and love of viewing all creatures as one's own-self and of dedication to the service of God. The following verse of the Kirtanaghosā exhibits this :

Krisna surya bhailanta udit
nāma dharma karilā vidit.⁵

(There arose the sun Krisna, who made known the nāma-dharma).

Sankaradeva is worshipper of the formless Brahman as the Sakara Brahman. He has written the opening passage of the Kirtanaghosā as follows :

prathāme pranāmo brahmārūpi sanātana
sarva avatārara kārana nārayana.

(Caturvimsati avatāra)

(First of all, I bow down to the Eternal Nārayana, Brahmana in manifestation, the cause of all incarnations.)

According to the theological point of view, Lord Visnu is the Supreme cause of all incarnations throughout the ages. Bezbaroa says : Sankaradeva at the beginning of his Kirtanaghosa salutes the eternal formless Brahman as the sākara Brahman who is the causes of all incarnations.⁶

The aim of the Vedanta is to attain the indeterminate Brahman, who is beyond the reach of common man. So there arises the necessity of the determinate Brahman.⁷ In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva accepts the view of the Vedanta and according to him the Ultimate is the both - Saguna and Nirguna. Sankaradeva says that Krisna is the Ultimate-Reality of the universe and he himself is devoted to Lord-Krisna with heart and soul. In the Kirtanaghosā, Krisna is both immanent and transcendent, because Krisna Himself is the Supreme Reality. The Avatāra of Krisna is considered as the most perfect of all incarnations. In this holy-book Sankaradeva advises the people to take the

company of the Vaishnavas and worship only on Visnu-Krisna. God is the only ultimate resort of all jivas both in this world and the next world. God exists in all hearts of all creatures and hence we should respect them equally. The philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā exhibits that all the earthly objects, such as wealth, sons, wives, and life itself are transitory and sincere-devotion to God is the best way of life.

Sankaradeva intended his episodic poems to be a part of the nāma-kirtana of the Lord, the episodes being revelations of His līlā, His descent into time for His love of man. Every story is meant to be a miracle, a conveyer of the word of God to man. This is the true translation of the Bhāgavata purāna and the Uttarākānda of the Rāmāyana as of his Upakhyana Kavayas and plays.⁸

The religious philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā has a democratic appeal as the cultivation of the universal spirit is the main principle of this faith. Sankaradeva knew that brahmanical pretensions have raised a barrier between man and God and so both by pen and from the pulpit he endeavoured to break down all prejudices of caste, creed and rank.⁹ The people who are interested in the name of Lord Krisna, for them, the high caste like Brahmin is not required, simply one should recite the name of Hari; there is no barrier of caste distinction in devotion. Therefore, Sankaradeva has left a permanent mark on the religious, social, literary and cultural life of Assam through the philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā.

In the Kirtanaghosā, the author expresses that all phenomena, animate and inanimate, be a man or animal, body, mind, soul are all the manifestation of God. There is no difference between the creator and the creation. The episode 'Sisulilā' exhibits this fact :

yosodā sundari dekhante pāse
 samasta jagat garbhate āse
 sātokhan dvīp sāto sāgar
 giri ban nadi grām nagar
 bāyu surya shashi dish ākāsh
 tārāgano taite kare prakāsh.

(Yosoda perceived that the entire world was in stomach; the seven islands the seven oceans, all mountains, the forests the rivers the villages and the cities. Air, the sun, the moon, all the directions and the sky, the stars also were shining there.)

The Kirtanaghosā reveals the intimate relation between devotee and God. A true devotee is fortunate, because God wants to fulfil the spiritual desire of the devotee. In the episode 'Sisulilā', Sankaradeva says :

bhakatara bashya tumi hari
 sukhe pāwe grhate sumari
 bhanila sankare Krisna pade
 hari hari bolā sarbhasade.

(Thou art subordinate to the devotees and obtainable through meditation practised at home with ease. Sankara recites the verses about Krishna. Oh people, sing aloud the Nāma of Hari and Hari.)

There are some self-contradictory views in the Kirtanaghosā.

In the Kirtanaghosa, Sankaradeva expresses that there is no necessity of making pilgrimage for acquiring spiritual values. But contrary to his views, he went to different holy-places of India for two times in his life. Besides it, according to the philosophy of the Kirtanaghosā, there should not be any distinction among the different classes of people. But Sankaradeva himself did not want to initiate the Brahmin, king and women.

In the story 'Syamantaka Harana', Sankaradeva describes the miraculous power of the gem - 'Syamantaka' :

nāhike byādhi byāghra sarpa bhaya
eko upasarga nupoje taya.

(There is no fear from any disease, tiger or serpent;
no other trouble would occur.)

Inspite of having such wonderful qualities of the gem, Prasena, the brother of Satrajita was killed by a lion, in the presence of the Symantakamani.

In the Kirtanaghosā, Sankaradeva puts more emphasis on devotion than human courage and physical strength to annihilate the sufferings of the human life. Any kind of sin can be destroyed by virtue of the power of devotion. Sankaradeva says this in the story - 'Ajamila Upakhyana' :

Parama mangala harināma dharma
 yahāra thākoi mukhata
 tāra tetikhane bhasma huya jāya
 mahapapa kouti sata.

(The hundred crores of sins of the person, who utters the most auspicious Hari name, are burnt to ashes then and there.)

But Sankaradeva got through the burning questions of his life as well as social problems by dint of his own courage, tolerance and firm determination of his life.

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