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EDITOR

**Dr. Babul Barhoi**



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## Editorial

Our Earth is the only habitat till this date where living beings can sustain. It is the only habitat where air, heat, water etc. are found in the proportionate amount to make a living! Perhaps, it is the reason why the superhuman beings called the *avatāras* came to our world to destroy the evil-doers, to keep our world livable for its inhabitants. Hence, our sole duty is to keep our world livable, keep it free from problems, ensure sustainability, ensure the lives of the new generations, the future generations of the world than worshipping God, than hoarding wealth for comfort, than accumulating hoards of degrees, prizes etc. for self-aggrandizement. It can also be asserted that God also considers Himself as a worker, a serviceman like us who is trying to redeem the world from the problems in order to ensure its sustainability.

There are certain rules which every living being must abide by to ensure the sustainability of his or her habitat. But these rules lay hidden to our common people. Only persons with super intelligence can perceive them. These persons, therefore, come to our Earth from time to time, expose these rules to us again and thereby redeem the society from the problems that are engulfing it as a resultant of the violation of those rules and then they depart. They establish some societies to ensure the future of their teachings. But the followers, being not so intelligent enough, forget many of them and being unable to understand many of them, become incompetent to perceive the souls of the doctrines—the meaning that lies hidden underneath, and, thereby, the rules gradually transform to some creeds or meaningless rites. And, at a time these rites veer to the opposite direction causing much harm than that of benefit to the society as a whole.

This part of the world, the North East of India was also fortunate enough of being the birthplace of such a great personality Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva by name. The saint has enriched our world simply by being alive. Unfortunately, the people of the other parts of the world are yet in almost darkness about this great saint of Assam. Those who have already discovered him are now overwhelmed and are expressing their wonderments with awe. This towering personality, who was a polymath not less than that of Leonardo da Vinci of Italy and an exact conemporary of him in a different part of the globe, has also many unique contributions for the solution of the persistently unsolved problems of the world. Śaṅkaradeva is undoubtedly the most towering personality of Assam of all times. People of Assam have been considering him as an incarnation of God (Lord Kṛṣṇa) Himself. He is also forenamed as *Jagatguru*, that is, the leader as well as the teacher of the world. But the saint remained quite unknown to the world up to the mid twentieth century. He comes to the world's view because of a few great noble sons of Assam as well as some other great researchers of the world during the last sixty years of the independence of India. Mahatma Gandhi was born in the second half of the twentieth century and yet he gained the opportunity to be declared as the Millennium Man of the second Millennium. What Śaṅkaradeva did more than 500 years ago is, undoubtedly, not

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less important than Gandhiji's, still we have not seen any remarkable recognition of Śaṅkaradeva either in the Encyclopedia Britannica or in the Encyclopedia Americana or in any other records of world eminence.

MAHĀPURṢAJYOTI, the English Research Journal of Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha has been in an incessant endeavour till its very beginning to disseminate the valuable research outputs of the unique contributions of this great saint, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, towards literature, language, art, architecture, sculpture, painting, social reform, religion, philosophy, music and musical instrument, drama, choreography, handicraft, ethics, education, politics, feminism, economics, health and nutrition, tourism, environment and sustainable development, national integration and above all spirituality. It has been being published in the English language by the giving the prime importance of disseminating these research finding in the global perspective. It has also aimed at creating a global field of research activity on the contributions of the great saint in the elite level of the research workers of the different Higher Educational Institutions (universities and colleges) of the world.

This annual research journal in English has been published regularly since its birth in the year 2000. One issue was not published during the COVID-19 period. It has been publishing hundreds of research articles completed numerous research scholars, research guides and university and college academicians from state national and international level. This issue of the journal is published as a PEER REVIEWED issue for the first time. Attempts will be kept in future to publish the journal as a UGC Care-listed research journal in the subsequent issues so that the journal can attain a national and international circulation for attaining its conceived aim and objectives in future.

In the process of publication of this journal, it has been seriously noticed that the Indian authors, those who writes about India and her literature, has not been following a consistent methodology in using Indian words in English. Although a definite transliteration table is followed by all, authors are not found consistent in the rules of italicization and capitalization of Indian words. In the case of the rules of transliteration also, many authors do not use separate letters for ष and ष and again for ष and ष; . And again, no diacritical mark is used for nasalisation Indian letter ष . This problem has compelled this author in this issue also to to follow the authors as they used them. Attempts have also been made to find out a definite methodology in the subsequent issues.

Although it was declared to the resourceful authors of the journal to publish the present issue as a Special Issue, it has not become possible to do so as desired. The editor has also to express his inability in publishing several valuable articulated because of some technical difficulties and the editor solicits those authors to forgive him, if possible.

The editor has also to confess very humbly that although there are several very

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efficient and pricient are there in the Sangha who have been publishing MAHĀPURṢAJYOTI regularly with much dexterity, this peron, who do not know even the ABC of editing research journal and even a very novice among the authors also, is conferred the the herculean responsibility. He was at a loss at the very starting. This issue, is therefore, not at all a credit of this editor to boast of. He must acknowledge his indebtness to all those who are associated in publication of this issue. Professor Dr. Suresh Chandra Borah, Former Head, Department of Sankaradeva Studies, Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva Biswavidyalaya, Nagaon, Professor Dr. Jagat Chandra Kalita, Former Head, Department of Sankaradeva Studies, Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva Biswavidyalaya, Nagaon and President Literary Committee, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, Mr. Kushal Thakuriya, Chief Secretary, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, Professor Manash Pratim Borah, Secretary, Literary Committee, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, Professor Kailash Das, Department of Physics, Aanadaram Baruah College, Nagaon, Professor Dr. Ratul Chandra Borah, Former Resistrar, Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva Biswavidyalaya, Nagaon, Professor Biswajit Kalita, Department of English, Haju College, Mr. Narendra Mahela, Professor, D.H.B.K College and the valued authors of the issue are the to name some prominent personnel whose common effort has resulted as the present issue of MAHĀPURṢAJYOTI.

*jaya guru śaṅkara sarve guṇakara*  
*yakeri nāhike upāma /*  
*tohāri caraṇaka reṇu śatakoṭi*  
*bāreka karoḥo praṇama //*

Panigaon  
 Lakhimpur  
 5th February, 2024

Editor  
 Dr. Babul Barhoi

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## Śaṅkaradeva's Classical Scholarship

Prof. Dipak Kumar Sharma

Sanskrit, the grand classical language with its rich literary products coming down throughout so many centuries since the Vedic age, made, as may be seen, lasting impact upon the regional writers and philosophers of India since the medieval period. All the systems of Indian philosophy as well as the religious beliefs and rites have their base on the Sanskrit texts. In most cases, the literary works of various regional languages too were modeled after the Sanskrit ones in the initial period. It was the practice rather, up to the advent of the western literary and philosophical thoughts and ideas. Such an assertion appears true in the case of Śaṅkaradeva, whose religio-philosophical ideas and literary works made everlasting impact upon the course of history of Assamese culture.

'Śaṅkaradeva's Classical Scholarship' is therefore appears, on the one hand, such a hypothesis which needs very little effort for attestation. A passage through the pages of the works of the saint is sure to serve the purpose. On the other hand, the wide domain of knowledge of Sanskrit texts, both scriptural and literary, upon which this great personality made a deep tread, requires sufficient energy for assessment of his erudition. That the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* moulds the thoughts and ideas propagated and the works penned down by him, is a well received conclusion. But, that he was well familiar with other *purāṇas* and the epics and was well-versed in various Sanskrit literary canons does an equally important issue that deserves a discussion. With this aim in view, the following few lines are presented for the learned.

I. As in the case with the literature of all languages, in Sanskrit also verse preceded prose, the obvious reason being that verses endowed with the different metres are the first choice for the writers owing to their retentive nature. For the Sanskrit writers, it became as if a priority to use maximum varieties of metres which would be the recognition of their ability to compose poems. Kṣemendra's<sup>1</sup> remark that a poet who is satisfied with the employment of a few varieties of metres deserves little importance may suffice to such a proposition.

Śaṅkaradeva too started with *karatala kamala kamaladala nayana*, though it is difficult to assess this poem from the standpoint of Sanskrit metrics. The nine verses starting with *madhu dānava dāraṇa devavaram*<sup>2</sup> are said to be in the metre *ṭoṭaya* which is nothing but the *ṭoṭaka*<sup>3</sup> of Sanskrit metrics. A verse in this metre contains twelve syllables in each line with the four *sa-gaṇas*. Kṣemendra<sup>4</sup> says that *ṭoṭaka* is seen in use in the free *muktaka* verses, and bears little association with *rasa*. As noticed in the work of a typical Sanskrit poet, brilliance of *anuprāsa* is a notable feature of these nine verses. The four verses starting with *kṛṣṇāya vāsudevāya*<sup>5</sup> etc. set at the beginning of the *Kīrtana-ghoṣā as maṅgala śloka*, are in the metre *anuṣṭubha*, which, as held by Sanskrit prosodists<sup>6</sup>, is suitable in a *śāstra*, wherein the clarity of meanings can be had of with the advantage of involvement of only eight letters in each line. Further, it is suggested that in all the books having the reflections of the *purāṇas*, showing the right direction of duties and mainly aiming at imparting some ethical suggestions, the *anuṣṭubha* should ideally be employed.<sup>7</sup>

The *nāndī* verses of the *aṅkiyā-nāṭas* are composed in Sanskrit and therein too diversity in regards to selection of metre is noticed. The *nāndī* in the *Patnī-prasāda* is in the metre *śārdūla-vikrīḍita*; while in the *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* it is in *vasanta-tilaka*. The *Kāliya-damana* bears two *nāndīs* composed in *śārdūlavikrīḍita* and same is the case with the *Rāma-vijaya* also. The two *nāndīs* in the *Keli-gopāla* are composed in *upendravajrā* and *vasantatilaka* respectively; whereas both the *nāndīs* in the *Pārijāta-haraṇa* are in *bhujāṅgaprayāta*. The Sanskrit verses used by the *sūtradhāra* in the *aṅkiyā-nāṭas* for narrating the events are mostly in *anuṣṭubha*, which as indicated earlier, bears the advantage of having only eight syllables in each line. For example:

*paścāt purandaro devo  
nāradena sahāgataḥ  
praṇamya keśavam sarvaṃ  
provāca bhaumaceṣṭitam //*

(*Pārijāta-haraṇa*)

Such instances are in plenty in all the *aṅkiyā-nāṭas*. For narrating a situation or event, verses composed in metres other than the *anuṣṭubha* are also available therein. However, in a few cases, there is noticed some interesting features in regards to the use of metre. For example, the following one from the *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*:

*atha rathamadhiruḥya keśavo 'sau  
sapadi sārathinoddhavana yuktah  
karakṛtadhanurīśvarah priyāyā  
premākulaḥ kuṇḍilamojasā yayau //*

In this verse, the first and the third lines contain the *gaṇas* namely *na, na, ra, ya*, the third one *na, bha, ra, ya* and the fourth *ta, ta, ja, ra*. The fourth line is in the metre *indravamśā* (cf., *syadindravamśā tatajairasamyutaiḥ - Vṛttaratnākara*, III.47). Though the verse mentioned herein is a case of the metre *upajāti*, yet the nature of the remaining three lines cannot be ascertained. Similar is the case with the following verse from the *Keli-gopāla*:

*na pārayāmastava pādapaṅkajam  
vayam vihātum navakañjalocana  
gītena te mohitamānasā bhṛśam  
tyajasva mā mādhava naḥ kṛpām kuru //*

Herein, the first line bears the *gaṇa* required for *vamsasthavila* (*ja, ta, ja, ra*); the even lines have the same *ganās* namely *ja, ta, ja, bha* which is not related to any known metre of the *jagatī* class, discussed in the famous texts like the *Chandomañjarī*, the *Vṛttaratnākara*, or even the *Vṛttamañjarī*. However the uniformity of the third line having the *gaṇas* namely *ta, ta, ja, ra* could be restored with the substitution of the first word *gītena* by suitable synonyms viz., *kalena* or the like. Of course, there is room for consideration of the said verse as belonging to the class *upajati*. Another *śloka* from the *Patnī-prasāda* may also be taken note of in this context. The first line of the verse runs as: *śyāmam hiraṇyaparidhim navamālavaha*, wherein the last two syllables are *laghu* (short)

as per metrical consideration. The said line can be scanned as *ta, bha, ja, ja, la, la*. The remaining three lines have the *gaṇas* namely *ta, bha, ja, ja, ga, ga*, which is a feature of the metre called *vasantatilaka*. The metrical irregularity in the first line can be addressed by substituting *mālyavaha* with *mālyagandham* or the like. However, it is felt that such irregularities might have not been done by the saint as he had complete command over Sanskrit language. The irregularities noticed may be due to the lack of knowledge of the people who copied the manuscripts.

II. That Śaṅkaradeva's literary works found in Assamese version carrying newer and suitable ideas relevant to the contemporary society, is undoubtedly an accepted proposition. Sanskrit epics, *purāṇas* and some *sātvata* texts had deep impact upon him. The *Guṇa-mālā* with 441 *padas* (stanza) is a hymn to Kṛṣṇa. Herein, it is noticed that the exploits of the Lord in His different incarnations, narrated mainly in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, are presented in a language which may be called quasi-Sanskrit in form. The *Devabhaṭimā* as hinted earlier, begins with nine Sanskrit poems and is followed by 45 *padas*. Herein also Kṛṣṇa is eulogized with emphasis upon His marvelous activities. The *guru* had so much inclination towards Sanskrit that in a *pada* of the *Devabhaṭimā*, it appears that two words with Sanskrit declensional form are employed with the apparent objective to add a classical coat to the composition.

Cf.:

*keśava caraṇa            paduma kiṅkara*  
*śaṅkara ehu viracitaṁ*  
*bairī bimardana        daivakī nandana*  
*bijaya birājita gītāṁ //*

The *Kīrtan-ghoṣā* contains 2263 *padas/ghoṣās* (including the *Ureṣā-varṇana*), the sole purpose being to establish the supremacy of Lord Kṛṣṇa and also to advocate for *nāma-kīrtana* as the best means as well as the end of all spiritual endeavours. This poetic composition with musical overflow has the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* as its primary base. The contents of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* here get an abridged form. The saint remains content with select episodes or themes taken from the said *purāṇa*. Sankaradeva's translation of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* is simply wonderful and stands as an undisputable testimony to his scholarship, as accepted in the Śaṅskritic tradition.

Cf.

*havirbhujē hi hāṭakaparīkṣā*  
*mahāhave śastrabhṛtām parīkṣā*  
*vipattikāle tu strīṇām parīkṣā*  
*vidyāvatām bhāgavate parīkṣā //*

The *Bhakti-pradīpa*, containing 316 *padas* (including the eight interpolated ones) attempts at showing the importance of *bhakti* (devotion) to Lord Kṛṣṇa as the best means for attaining the highest seat.<sup>8</sup> However the book under discussion takes the *Garuḍa-purāṇa* as its base. The conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna as narrated in the said *purāṇa* is presented by the author in his own poetic style thereby facilitating to show the acceptability of *bhakti* as the best means in comparison with the other ones namely *jñāna*

and *karma*<sup>9</sup>.

Śaṅkaradeva rightly believed that the *purāṇas* are the storehouses of knowledge. Hence, in order to propagate his ideas, he composed his works adding poetic flavour, on the themes taken from the *purāṇas*. These may appear to be translated works; however with genuine modesty, he submits that these are sure to stand as curry if not the main course of food.<sup>10</sup> His close familiarity with the *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa* is noticed in the *Hariścandra-upākhyāna*. The said *purāṇa* is considered as a *śākta purāṇa*. However, the saint has successfully extracted the theme of this *kāvya* from the said *purāṇa* to show that there is little difference between Viṣṇu and His devotee (Vaiṣṇava)<sup>11</sup>

As hinted earlier, Śaṅkaradeva had thorough knowledge of the two epics namely the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* including the *Harivaṃśa-purāṇa*, considered as the *khila* (supplement) also. The *Uttarākāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was translated by the saint, which too had the objective of establishing the importance of Viṣṇu in his incarnation as Rāma<sup>12</sup>. The simple figure of speech (*alaṅkāra*) in this translated *Rāmāyaṇa* is very much enjoyable<sup>13</sup> and this was surely due to the impact of the original book wherein too *upamā* is employed in plenty, with spontaneity expressed even with metrical restriction of limitation of words.

The *Rukmiṇi-haraṇa*, another *kāvya* of Śaṅkaradeva contains 795 *padas*. By way of presenting Kṛṣṇa as a *yuddhavīra*, the poet makes a fine blending of *vīra* (heroic) and *śṛṅgāra* (erotic) *rasa* which ultimately culminates in *bhakti*. This *kāvya* is primarily based on the *Harivaṃśa-purāṇa*, the supplementary part of the *Mahābhārata*.

Cf.

*harivaṃśa kathā kabi śaṅkare samprati  
rukmiṇīharaṇa padabandhe nigadati* // (4)

or,

*harivaṃśa pada racilā śaṅkare  
aśeṣa hauka pracāra* // (793)

As stated, though this *kāvya* has the *Harivaṃśa-purāṇa* as the main source, yet necessary and relevant elements from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* also are added to it. The poet himself states it to be a compound of *madhu* (honey) and *dugdha* (milk).<sup>14</sup>

So far the *aṅkiyā nāṭas* are concerned, Śaṅkaradeva 's indebtedness to Sanskrit dramas and dramaturgy can easily be felt. This is a unique class of plays, the elements of which are gathered from Sanskrit. The *sūtradhāra* in Sanskrit dramas play a small role of introducing the play; whereas in the *aṅkiyā-nāṭas*, he is the chief character present during the whole period of the play. This is a major difference from the Sanskrit plays and it was purposefully done so as to facilitate easier communication with the spectators. Sanskrit plays begin with a *nāndī* (sometimes more than one also), and it is the case with the *aṅkiyā-nāṭas* also.

Śaṅkaradeva's plays normally have two *nāndīs*, the first one being a eulogy of the Lord and the second one an indicator of the central theme of the play.<sup>15</sup> It may be noted that in the Sanskrit plays, the *nāndī* is presented by the *sūtradhāra*, but the word *sūtradhāra* is not mentioned in the beginning, lest it might disturb the auspicious note at the beginning of the dramatic event. After presentation of the

*nāndī*, the entrance of the *sūtradhāra* is indicated (*nāndyante sūtradhāraḥ*). This practice is followed in the *aṅkīyā-nāṭas* also. *Prarocanā* is a dramatic plan in Sanskrit plays, by which the *sūtradhāra* along with his companion(s) on the stage, arouses a feeling of curiosity among the spectators about the theme of the play. The theme of the play as well as the playwrights also sometimes, are appreciated (cf. ‘*unmukhīkaraṇam tatra praśamsātaḥ prarocanā*’—*Daśarūpaka*).

For example, in the *Śakuntalā*, the *sūtradhāra* tells his wife:

*adya khalu kālidāsa grathita vastunā abhijñāna śakuntala nāmadheyena  
nāṭakenopasthātavyamasti.*

It is followed in the *aṅkīyā-nāṭas* also.

For example, in the *Keli-gopāla*, the *sūtradhāra* states:

*bho bhoḥ sabhāsada yūyam śṛṇuta sāvadhānataḥ  
keligopālam nāma nāṭakam mukti sādhakam //*

The *prastāvanā* in Sanskrit plays is a way of facilitating the entry of the main character to the stage. In the *Śakuntalā*<sup>16</sup>, the *sūtradhāra* appreciates the song in *sāraṅga rāga* sung by his wife and states that his mind is dragged by the *rāga* (*sāraṅga*), as Duṣyanta is dragged by a *sāraṅga* (deer) and on this pretext, Duṣyanta, the hero enters the stage following the antelope. Though a specific poem akin to a Sanskrit *prastāvanā* is wanting in the *aṅkīyā-nāṭas*, yet the author creates a similar situation.

For example in the *Pārijāta-haraṇa*:

Sūtradhāra : *āhe saṅgi sakhi, ki bādya bājata?*  
Sangi : *āhe saṅgi sakhi, āḥ deva bādya bājata*  
Sūtradhāra : *āḥ, milala milala*

The condition for entry of the hero is created in this way. It can be said that Śaṅkaradeva had the Sanskrit plays in his mind before he ventured to compose his dramatic works. Of course, there are both deviations and innovations. However, one important aspect of Sanskrit dramas had a lasting effect in the *aṅkīyā-nāṭas*. In Sanskrit *nāṭaka*, the main *rasa* is either *śṛṅgāra* or *vīra* (*eka eva bhavedaṅgī śṛṅgāro vīra eva cā*). Ānandavardhana says that *śṛṅgāra* takes the primary position due to its universal pleasing appeal (*śṛṅgāro eva madhuraḥ paraḥ pradhāneno rasaḥ*). *Vīra* as a dramatic sentiment has a wider acceptability. Hence Śaṅkaradeva too, it appears, opted for these two *rasas* in the *aṅkīyā-nāṭas*, though these ultimately brought for culminating in *bhakti*.

The *muktimaṅgalabhaṭimā*, presented by the *sūtradhāra* in the *aṅkīyā-nāṭas*, seeking blessings of the Lord for the wellbeing of all, bears some affinity with the *bharatavākya* of Sanskrit dramas. The *bharatavākya* (called *kāvyaśaṁhāra* also) is the wish declared by a character of the drama for the grace of the divine force for universal wellbeing (*varapradāna saṁprāptiḥ kāvyasāṁhāra ucyate' iti bharatavākyaṁ nāṭavākyaṁ*- Rāghavabhaṭṭa's commentary on the *Śakuntalā*). In the *Nāṭya-śāstra*, this is called *praśasti* (*nṛpadeśa praśāntiśca praśastirabhidhīyate*, XIX.104). In the *Daśarūpaka*, any prayer or wish is termed as *praśasti* (*praśastiḥ śubhaśaṁsanam*, I.54). Later on, this *praśasti* came to be known as *bharatavākya*. The *muktimaṅgalabhaṭimā*, pronounced by the *sūtradhāra*, contains a brief gist of the play and carries a prayer or wish for the higher

spiritual attainment of all concerned. This element of the *aṅkīyā-nāta* is an adaption of the *bharatavākya* of Sanskrit dramas. It can therefore be said that Śaṅkaradeva, the harbinger of Assamese dramatic literature, was well-versed with Sanskrit dramatic canons as well as dramas.

III. The *Bhakti-ratnākara*, which focuses upon the nature and importance of *bhakti*, is also primarily based on *Bhagavata-purāṇa*. This book, divided into 38 chapters, contains 533 *śloka*s collected mostly from the *Bhagavata-purāṇa*. It appears as an anthology of relevant portions from the said *purāṇa*s. However, quotations from some major and minor *purāṇa*s are also met with here. Moreover, the *Gītā*, *upaniṣads* and some *sātvata* texts are also quoted on many an occasion. The book contains a gloss in Sanskrit written by the saint himself. The language of this gloss is simple and like a typical commentator of Sanskrit texts, quotations from other relevant scriptures are made wherever it is felt necessary. Śaṅkaradeva shows his acquaintance with the rules of Sanskrit grammar also, as is done by other Sanskrit commentators (cf. *yeṣāmiti kartari ṣaṣṭhi karmani'vā*, on III. 16). Though most of the notes in the gloss are brief, yet long explanations are also made depending upon the necessity of the context (cf. commentary on I.1, V.17, VII.10, 16, 17 etc.).

The major *pūrāṇa*s quoted in the *Bhakti-ratnākara* are *Padma-pūrāṇa*, *Kūrma-pūrāṇa*, *Brahmāṇḍa-pūrāṇa*, *Matsya-pūrāṇa*, *Viṣṇu-pūrāṇa*, and *Nāradya-pūrāṇa*. The following two stanzas in XXXVII.17 of the *Bhakti-ratnākara*, stating the speciality of the *Bhagavata-purāṇa*, are taken from the *Padma-purāṇa*:

*aṣṭādaśasahasraṁ tu purāṇaṁ parikīrtitam  
grantho 'ṣṭādaśasahasro dvādaśaskandhasammitaḥ/  
hayagrīvabrahmavidyā yatra vṛtravadhastathā  
gāyatrīyā ca samārambhastadbhāgavatamucyate //*

Another verse from the *Padma-purāṇa* is placed in VIII.10 for showing the importance of the uttering the name of Hari. Except these quotations placed as the main text, the remaining ones from the *Padma-purāṇa* are taken for explaining some points in the commentary. There are extracts from the said *purāṇa* under I.1 and VII.26. The *Kūrma-purāṇa* is quoted as a text once in XXIX.18.

Cf.:

*kalinā duṣṭasarpēṇa daṣṭanāmiha bheṣajam  
nāsti nāstyeva nāstyeva rāmanāmāmṛtaṁ vinā //*

The *Brahmāṇḍa-purāṇa* is also quoted as a text once in XXIX.20.

Cf.:

*kṛte kaliyugam tasya kṛtam tasya kaliyuge  
hr̥daye yasya govindo hr̥daye yasya nācyutaḥ //*

This quote is preceding for supporting the contents of another quotation from the *Matsya-purāṇa*.

*te'pi pūjyāste'pi dhanyāsta eva suhr̥do janah  
smarantaḥ smārayanto ye harernāma kaliyuge //*

Another *śloka* from the said *purāṇa* is placed under XXXVII.15 in the context of appreciation of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*.

*yatrādhikṛtya gāyatrīm varṇyate dharmavistarahaḥ  
vṛtrāsuraavadhopetaṁ tadvai bhāgavataṁ viduḥ //*

Altogether seven *ślokas* from the *Bṛhannārādīya-purāṇa* are presented within the main text portion. The concerned *ślokas* are placed in the *Bhakti-ratnākara* under V.23, 24; IX.9, XIX.17, 18; XXI.20 and XXIII.22 on three contexts, the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* is also referred to and quoted. In the context of appreciation of birth and duties of a devotee this *purāṇa* is quoted under XXVI.3, 7. Another famous *śloka* from the said *purāṇa* is placed under XXXIII.6, in the context of narrating the superiority of Bhārata to the other places:

Cf.:

*tatrāpi bhārataṁ śreṣṭhaṁ jambudvīpe mahāmune  
yato hi karmabhūreṣa hyanyāstu bhogabhūmayahaḥ //*

Among the minor *purāṇas*, the *Narasimha-purāṇa* and the *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa* are quoted on certain contexts. The first one is referred to and quoted on six contexts. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the *Bhakti-ratnākara* (II.11), while elaborating the importance of concentrating upon the Lord, the following verse from the *Narasimha-purāṇa* is quoted:

*śubhamidamupalabhya mānuṣatvam  
sukṛtavaśena vṛthendriyārthahetoḥ  
ramayati kurute na mokṣamārgam  
sa dahati candanamiva bhasmahetoḥ //*

This *upapurāṇa* is quoted under VIII.11, IX.2, XIX.12, 13 and XXVII.11. The following verse from the *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa* is quoted under XXIX.19.

*rāmeti varṇadvayamādareṇa  
sadā gr̥ṇau muktimupaiti jantuḥ  
kalau yuge kalmaṣamānasānā –  
manyatra dharma khalu nādhikāraḥ //*

Besides the *purāṇas*, the following famous *śloka* from the *Īsopaniṣada* (3), is quoted in the commentary under XXIII. 17.

*asūryā nāma te lokā andhena tamasāvṛtaḥ  
tāmste pretyābhigacchanti ye te ātmahano janāḥ //*

The *Gītā* is quoted on nine occasions. For example the following verse of the *Gītā* (III.37) is quoted in the commentary under VI.4.

*kāma esa krodha esa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ  
mahāśano mahāpāpanā viddhyenamīha vairiṇam //*

Besides this, two more verses are incorporated in the commentary under XVI.17 and XVIII.5 of the *Bhakti-ratnākara*. The following famous verse (*Gītā*, XVIII.66) is put at the end the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Bhakti-ratnākara*.

*sarvadharmān parityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja  
aham tvāṁ sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayisyāmi mā śucaḥ ||*

Moreover, six more verses from the *Gītā* are placed as the text of the *Bhakti-ratnākara* in XIX.1, XX.4, XXIII .28, 29, 30 and XXXVI.27. The *sātvata* text called *Vaiṣṇavānandalaharī* is also quoted on nine contexts (IV. 7, VII.31, XXI.24, XXIII.32, and XXIV.6). The *Śāntiśataka* of Silhana is also quoted in the *Bhakti-ratnākara* (XXVIII.6, XXXV.8-11). The *Mohamudgara* is also quoted as notes under XXXV.11.

The *Bhakti-ratnākara*, a *saṁgraha* (anthology) in nature, belonging to the class called *prakaraṇam*, bespeaks the vast knowledge of Śāṅkaradeva of various Sanskrit scriptures. He quotes relevant texts from different sources and elaborates, as per requirement of the contexts, in his self composed gloss. The gloss too exhibits his profound knowledge of various disciplines like *koṣa* and grammar. Hence, with consideration of his erudition in so many branches of Sanskrit literature, noticed in his *kāvya*s, dramas and the *Bhakti-ratnākara*, it will be proper to state that Śāṅkaradeva was endowed with scholarship which has its solid base on classical Sanskrit literature, including the *purāṇas*, epics and minor poems, besides scriptural texts.

#### References

- <sup>1</sup>*ekasminneva yairvrtte kṛto dvitreṣu va śramah  
na nāma viniyogārḥāste daridrā ivotsave || Suvṛttatilaka, III.26*
- <sup>2</sup>*madhudānavadāraṇa devavaram  
varavārijalocanacakradharam  
dharāṇidharadhāraṇadhyeyaparam  
paramārthavidyaśubhanaśakaram ||*
- <sup>3</sup>*vada toṭakamabdhisakārayutam – Chandomañjari*
- <sup>4</sup>*cf. Suvṛttatilaka, III.23.*
- <sup>5</sup>*kṛṣṇāya vāsudevāya devakīnandanāya ca  
nandagopakomārāya govindāya namo namaḥ ||*
- <sup>6</sup>*śāstraṁ kuryāt prayatnena prasannārthamanuṣṭubhā  
yena sarvopakārāya yātin suspaṣṭasetutām || - Suvṛttatilaka, III.6  
purānaprativimbeṣu prasannopāyavartmaṣu*
- <sup>7</sup>*upadeśaprudhāneṣu kuryātsarveṣvanuṣṭubham || - ibid., III.9  
purānaprativimbeṣu prasannopāyavartmaṣu*
- <sup>8</sup>*yāra icchā āse kṛṣṇa caraṇa sevāka  
yeve icchā āse mane vaikunṭhe yāivāka  
bhakti pradīpa nāme bhāgavata pada  
śunā ekacitte mane save sabhāsada || Bhaktipradīpa, 7-8.*
- <sup>9</sup>*śuna sabhāsada pāpa kariyā ucchāda  
garuḍa-purāṇa kṛṣṇa-arjuna samvāda  
bhakti pradīpa nāma mahantara gati  
kṛṣṇara kinkare kahe śankare samprati || ibid., 3.*

*deva nivarāṇi garuḍa purāṇa*  
*kṛṣṇara nāma mahata*  
*bhakti pradīpa pustakara kathā*  
*ehimāne samāpata* || *ibid.*, 308.

<sup>10</sup>*śuna save buddhajane sāvaśeṣe jānā kone*  
*purāṇa kathāra tattva sāra* /

*kathāra āśaya cāi kāvyarasa thāi thāi*  
*yadi anubāda hui tātese byañjana hui*  
*bhuñjivaka pāra kone nare* || *Hariścandra-upākhyāna*, 294

<sup>11</sup>*mārkaṇḍeya purāṇara kathate pradhan*  
*payāre racibo hariścandra-upākhyāna*  
*viṣṇu vaiṣṇavare kathā duyo samatula*  
*śravaṇa kīrtane kare pāpaka nirmūla* || *ibid.*, 2.4.

12 *hena jāni subhāsada śunā rāmāyaṇa pada*  
*mukutika yāra abhilāṣa*  
*āmāra kabitā jāni nindā nubulabā baṇī*

*nakaribā āta upahāsa* || *Uttarākāṇḍa*, 756.

<sup>13</sup>*cf. rāma nāma pramatta simhara mahānāde*  
*palāi pāpa hastyūtha parama viśāde* || *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>14</sup>*eke harivaṁśa kathā amṛta sāksāta*  
*āro bhāgavata kathā miśra dilo tāta* /  
*duyo kathā padabandhe karo misalai*

*yena madhumisra dugha svāda āti pāy* || *Rukmiṇiharaṇa*, 5.

<sup>15</sup>*namah kṛṣṇa viṣṇo' cyutānantanantaśakte*  
*namo rāma rajīvanetra prabho te*  
*namo brahmamūrte murāre paresa*  
*namo visvavasa prasida prasīda* ||

*khagendraṁ samāruhye nirjitya śatruṁ*  
*mudā līlayā daivakinandano yaḥ*  
*priyaṁ pārijātaṁ jahāra priyārtham*  
*paresāya kṛṣṇāya tasmai namo me* || *Pārijātaharaṇa-nāṭa*

<sup>16</sup>*tavāsmi gītārāgena hariṇā prasabham hr̥taḥ*  
*eṣa rājeva duṣyantah sārāṅgenātiramhasā* ||

## Śaṅkaradeva's Literary Contributions

Prof. Kailash Das

### Abstract:

One of the audacious feats of the medieval saint-poets of India had been the creation of a large corpus of Vaiṣṇavite literature in the vernacular language of the common people, because in their times it had been promulgated as an act of sacrilege by the priestly class. At the instance of the leaders of the All India *Bhakti* Movement, Śaṅkaradeva used Assamese, the language spoken by the people of Assam (Middle Assam, Kāmrūp and Behār), as the medium of propagation of his Vaiṣṇava faith. Thus, Śaṅkaradeva, his ardent devotee Mādhavadeva and others ushered in a golden age in Assamese Literature and imparted both mundane and spiritual knowledge to the unlettered people through *śravaṇa* and *kīrttana* (listening to the recitation of the names and attributes of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the most worshipful deity.)

In this paper, a bird's eye view has been casted on the depth and expansion of Śaṅkaradeva's literary contributions.

Keywords: Medieval, *Bhakti*-Movement, Śaṅkaradeva

### Introduction:

Śaṅkaradeva was a versatile genius. For the promotion and propagation of his *bhakti* faith, he created a large corpus of literature and innovated different forms. In this respect, his dearest disciple and successor Mādhavadeva also made considerable contributions. Thus Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva ushered in a golden age in Assamese literature and culture in the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. In this article we would make a short survey of Śaṅkaradeva's literary contributions which comprises of:

- 1) Six *kavyas*: *Harīścandra-upākhyāna*, *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*, *Bali-Calana*, *Amṛta Manthana*, *Ajāmila-upākhyāna* and *Kuruṣetra*.
- 2) Two prayer books: *Kīrttana-ghoṣā* and *Guṇa-mālā*
- 3) Rendering from Sanskrit texts: *Srimad-Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, Books—I, II, X (1<sup>st</sup> part) XI, XII and *Rāmāyaṇa (Uttarā-kāṇḍa)*
- 4) Four doctrinal treatises: *Bhakti-pradīpa*, *Nimi-navasiddha-sambāda*, *Anādi-pātana and Bhakti-ratnākara (Sanskrit)*
- 5) Lyrical hymns: *bargītas*, *bhaṭīmā* and *ṭoṭaya* (Sanskrit)
- 6) *Naṭakas*: *Patnī-prasāda*, *Pārijāta-haraṇa*, *Kālīya-damana*, *Keli-gopāla*, *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*, and *Śrīrāma-vijaya*

Śaṅkaradeva used three languages in his writings. The *Bhakti-ratnākara*, the *ṭoṭaya* and the *ślokas* of the dramas are written in Sanskrit, the *bargīts*, the *bhaṭīmās* and the *nāṭakas* are in *Vrajāvalī* or *Vrajabuli*, and the remaining major portions are in Assamese. Śaṅkaradeva wrote in Sanskrit for the learned scholars. He used *Vrajāvalī* in order to have a larger audience and spectators in Northern India. Adoption of vernacular languages as vehicle of religious matters by Śaṅkaradeva and his counterparts in the rest of India was an epoch-making audacious feat because in their times it had been censured as an act of sacrilege. In Indian perspective, it is to be noted that Śaṅkaradeva happened to be first poet to have composed something (*bargīts*) in the *Vrajāvalī* that developed almost simultaneously in Assam, Bengal, Orissa and Nepal. Secondly, it was Śaṅkaradeva who for

the first time dared to use *Vrajāvalī*, the junior-most modern Indian language in dramatic dialogues (prose). Thus, it was Śaṅkaradeva who had given rise to the first prose and the first play in Assamese. Śaṅkaradeva was a great preacher as well as a poet. For him literature was not only a means to an end, but also an end in itself. Śaṅkaradeva dedicated his writings and other forms of art to the cause of Vaiṣṇavism and for this reason his literary and other output has acquired enduring strength and beauty.

As a legacy from his predecessors, Śaṅkaradeva had received a literary form of language which underwent a sea change at his hand. Well-versed in Sanskrit poetics, he embellished his writings through proper use of metrical styles and forms, adroit application of traditional figures of speech and delineation of various sentiments—*bhakti or śānta* being the principal sentiment. He made his writings acceptable to the common people by incorporating local and folk elements in it and by embellishing it with popular vocabularies and adages.

The canonical literature of Assam Vaiṣṇavism includes the writings of Śaṅkaradeva as well as of Mādhavadeva, specifically, the four main scriptures called *caritputhi*, the *Kīrttana-ghoṣā* and the *Dasama* by Śaṅkaradeva and *Nāma-ghoṣā* and *Ratnāvalī* by Mādhavadeva. Mādhavadeva also wrote bargīts, *bhaṭimās*, *kāvya*s, dramas, and the *Rāmāyaṇa* (translation) etc.

We may now cast a bird's eye view on the literary works of Śaṅkaradeva:

- i) The *Harīścandra-upākhyāna* ( the episode of the king Harīścandra)

It is a small story of 618 verses, adapted from the chapters VII and VIII of the *Mārkeṇḍeya-purāṇa*. It is said to be the first work of Śaṅkaradeva where he fixed the four corner-posts of *bhakti*, i.e., *guru*, *deva*, *nāma* and *bhākata*.

- ii) *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa Kāvya* ( The Abduction of Rukmiṇī) :

Based on the *Harivaṁśa-purāṇa* (II chapters 59, 60) and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (X, chapters 52-54) the *kāvya* is the most popular work of its kind in Assamese literature. The characters of king Bhisma, queen Śāśiprabhā, the nurse Sumālinī, the priest Vedanidhi, Rukmiṇī—are all living and ideal.

- iii) *Bali-calana* (the deceiving of the demon king Bali) :

This *kāvya* is based on the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (8 chapters, 15-23) mixed with some sweetening matters from the *Vāmana-purāṇa*. The story of Viṣṇu's dwarf incarnation is beautifully told here.

- iv) *Amṛta-manthana* ( the churning of nectar):

This *kāvya* is in 738 verses based on the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (8 chapters 5-12). Here the *kṣīrodadhi*, the ocean of milk) is churned by the gods with the help of the demons, primarily to rescue the goddess Lakṣmi from the bottom of the sea.

- v) *Ajāmila-upākhyāna* ( the episode of Ajāmila)

This *kāvya* in 926 verses is based on the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (V chapters 26, VI, Chapter 1-3). The poet narrates here the story of a fallen Brahmin who got rid of his sins simply by uttering the name of his youngest son Nārāyaṇa.

- vi) *Kurukṣetra*:

*Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. It describes the meeting of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma with Nārada, Yaśodā and the *gopīs* of *vraja* in the war-field of Kurukṣetra. The eight principal consorts of Kṛṣṇa told the story of their marriages. Vāsudeva's hymn to Kṛṣṇa and bringing back the sons of Draupadī are also described here.

vii) The *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*:

This is the first one of the four cardinal scriptures of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. There are 28 sections in the *Kīrttana-ghoṣā* and each section contains one to twenty two *kīrtanas*. Each *kīrtana* is divided into two parts: a *ghoṣā* (refrain), usually of two lines and a number of *padas* (verses) written in different metres. The *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*, meant for congregational prayer, exercises a unique influence upon the Assamese people as does Tulsī Das's *Rām Carit Mānasa* upon the people of Northern India.

Excepting three sections (*Pāṣaṇḍa-mardana*, *Nāmāparadha*, and *Ureṣa-varṇana*) the remaining twenty five sections of the *Kīrttana-ghoṣā* have the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* as their source, furnished by the commentary, the *Bhāgavata-Bhāvārtha Dīpikā* of Śrīdhara Svāmī.

Viii) The *Guṇa-mālā*:

This is a quintessence of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (*Skandhas* X and XI) composed in six sections and 378 *padas*. Each *pada* has four feet of six syllables. The metre and diction are such that the tiny book can be easily memorised and recited in one sitting.

ix) The *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa*:

The first *skandha* of the *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa* i.e. the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* contains 810 *ślokas* in 19 chapters. Śaṅkaradeva's rendering contains only 422 *padas*. The work is a summary of the original.

The second *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* contains 391 *ślokas* in 10 chapters. Śaṅkaradeva's rendering contains only 262 *padas*. This work is also an abridgement of the original. The interdiction and injunction of Śaṅkaradeva's faith have been proclaimed in this *skandha* (VV. 124b, 125a):

“Bow not your head to other gods and goddesses; neither partake of the offerings made unto them. Cast not a look at the idols, neither enter their shrines; otherwise, your devotion will be vitiated (v. 124b). Make devotion unto Kṛṣṇa alone and recite His names, Be a servant unto Kṛṣṇa and partake of the offerings made unto Him, and perform His duties with your hands” (v 125a).

The tenth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* contains 3949 *ślokas* in 90 chapters. Śaṅkaradeva's *Ādya-daśama* in 2465 *padas* is based on 1949 *ślokas* of the first 47 chapters of the original. This work is the second one of the four cardinal scriptures of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. It records the early life of Kṛṣṇa.

The eleventh *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* contains 1367 *ślokas* in 31 chapters. Śaṅkaradeva's rendering (excluding *Nimi-navasiddha-saṁvāda*) in 848 *padas* is based on 1182 *ślokas* containing the chapters 1<sup>st</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> of the original. It narrates the passing of Kṛṣṇa, the annihilation of the *Yādavas*, the plight of Kṛṣṇa's consorts, and the death of the *Pāṇḍavas*.

The twelfth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* contains 566 *ślokas* in 13 chapters. Śaṅkaradeva renders it into Assamese in 540 *padas*. Here he has left out some of the contents of the original as they do not conform to his faith.

Śaṅkaradeva followed a very efficacious method of rendering the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* into Assamese. Firstly, he drew heavily only those matters which conformed to his faith. Secondly, he added local colours and folk elements to his rendering. Thirdly, the famous commentary of Śrīdhara Svāmī, the *Bhāgavata-Bhāvārtha-Dīpikā* has been thoroughly followed by Śaṅkaradeva. But, no matter that is opposed to his faith has been accepted for the rendering. Fourthly, matters from other *purāṇas*, besides *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, conforming to the principle of *Nāma-dharma*, have been incorporated into the Assamese rendering. Fifthly, Śaṅkaradeva has added a large number of colophons to his rendering of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. These are not direct translations of the original texts, but are the creations of the preacher. Hence, these are very important so far Śaṅkaradeva's thoughts and ideas are concerned.

x) *Rāmāyaṇa: Uttārākāṇḍa:*

The Assamese *Rāmāyaṇa* by Madhava Kandali lacked in the first and the seventh (last) *skandhas* which were later on supplemented by Mādhavadeva and Śaṅkaradeva respectively. Śaṅkaradeva's *Uttārākāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa* in 762 *padas* is an essence of the final *kāṇḍa* of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, furnished with devotional fervour.

Though Śaṅkaradeva's *Uttārākāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa* is based on Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is a trans-creation so far as the delineation of the character of Sītā and the two sons Lava and Kuśa is concerned. Further, he has skipped a number of episodes not connected with the tales of Rāma and Sītā.

xi) *Bhakti-pradīpa: (the lamp of devotion)*

It is a devotional treatise on 308 *padas* where the tenets of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* faith have been expounded in the form of a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. It interdicts the *bhaktas* against performing Vedic rites and rituals. Based on the *Garuḍa-purāṇa* (non-extant) the work seeks to assert that *bhakti* shows the way unto Lord Kṛṣṇa.

xii) *Nimi-navasiddha-saṁvāda* (Dialogue between the king Nimi and the nine accomplished sages) :

This doctrinal work in 427 *padas* is a rendering from the chapters 2-5 of the 11<sup>th</sup> *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. Here the king Nimi puts nine questions to nine accomplished sages who expounded their faith in *bhakti* and *nivṛtti mārga* (the path of devotion through detachment) in reply to the questions.

xiii) *Anādi-pātana:*

This is a small book in 301 *padas*, based on the *skandhas* II, III, XI and XII of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. Śaṅkaradeva says that he has taken some elements from the *Vāmana-purāṇa*, but the editions of the *Vāmana-purāṇa* available at present do not support it.

The book dwells on the creation, preservation and annihilation of the universe.

xiv) *Bhakti-ratnākara:*

This is the only doctrinal treatise in Sanskrit authored by Śaṅkaradeva. A compendium like the *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* by Viṣṇupurī Sannyāsī or the *Bhakti-sandarva* by Jīva Gosvāmī, the *Bhakti-ratnākara* is a collection of 571 *ślokas* culled from a large

number of Vaiṣṇavite scriptures. More than 81 percent of *ślokas* are taken from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. The *ślokas* are arranged in 31 chapters of different headings.

Śaṅkaradeva, unlike his contemporary *gurus* did not write any commentary on *Brahma-sūtra* as the basis of his faith. He accepted the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* as Vyāsa's commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra*. Therefore, Śaṅkaradeva culled a maximum number of *ślokas* from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and added his own commentary on the *ślokas*. But, in case of the *ślokas* from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and the *Gītā*, he followed the commentaries of the *Bhāgavata-Bhāvārtha-Dīpikā*, and Subodhinī of Śrīdhara Svāmī very closely.

The *Bhakti-ratnākara* was composed by Śaṅkaradeva only for convincing the exponents of the Brahmanism of the scriptural foundation and the efficacy of the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*.

xv) Lyrical Hymns:

It goes without saying that powerful feelings and the emotions of the heart get spontaneously overflowed through songs. So, *bhakti* being the supreme love of God, the *Bhakti-Movement* of India witnessed preponderance of devotional songs composed by Kabir, Mirā Bāi, Sura Dās, Tukārām, Tulsīdās and others. Śaṅkaradeva happened to enjoy such songs during his first pilgrimage and he also composed devotional lyrics *bargīts* (Great songs) *bhaṭimās* (panegyrics) and *ankīyā gītas* (songs of the plays)

a) *Bargītas*:

*Bargītas* are purely devotional songs set to *rāgas* (melodies). Śaṅkaradeva composed the first set of his *bargīts* “*mana meri rāma caraṇahi lāgu...*” (O my mind, rest on the feet of Rama) in the ninth decade of the fifteenth century. According to Dr. Maheswar Neog, these were the first specimens of the *Vrajabuli* in Assam, Bengal and Orissa.<sup>1</sup> We have now 35 *bargīts* composed by Śaṅkaradeva and 157 *bargīts* by Mādhavadeva. Here we shall deal with the *bargīts* composed by Śaṅkaradeva only.

The *bargīts* defy definition. But their characteristic features are sufficient to prove their uniqueness. (i) The language used the *bargīts* is *Vrajāvalī* which is called *Vrajabuli* in Bengal and Orissa. (ii) The songs contain the essence of Vedānta in easy lucid idiom, the spiritual thought in the mystic tune of unflinching devotion and the depiction of child incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa in fascinating words. (iii) According to their theme, aim and occasion, the *bargīts* have been set to different *rāgas* (melodies) by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. It can be said that the *bargīts* belong to the classical music of Assam. (iv) The *bargīts* find prestigious place in the *caidhya prasāṅga* (fourteen point devotional service) carried out by the devotees and (v) the authorship of the *bargīts* is ascribed to Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva only.

According to Dr. Satyendranath Sharma, the characteristics of the *bargīts* are: mobility of theme, elegance of composition, gravity of classical music and restraint of imagination<sup>3</sup>.

The Vaiṣṇava tradition of Assam holds that there exist six categories of subject matters in the *bargīts*: *paramārtha* (supreme truth), *virakti* (detachment), *viraha* (separation), *līlā* (divine sports), *cauryya* (theft) and *cāturi* (cleverness).

In this respect, Dr. Banikanta Kakati is worth quoting, “In most of the *bargīts*, one perceives the two-fold personality of Kṛṣṇa—on one side His supreme self and on the

other, His activities as a common man.... Human life is precious but transitory and fraught with illusion; devotion to God is polestar in the infatuated ocean of life—in such sentiments and idioms is couched the general purport of Śaṅkaradeva's song<sup>4</sup>.

b) *Bhaṭimās*:

The *bhaṭimās* are a class of Vaiṣṇavite lyric in *Vrajāvalī*, initiated by Śaṅkaradeva. A *bhaṭimā* is a song with a devotional tone, eulogizing God or a person of high rank. Its origin can be traced to the *bhaṭimās* of a particular class of songs sung by the medieval *bhāṭas* or professional bards in praise of the king and the rich.

Śaṅkaradeva composed three classes of *bhaṭimās*: *deva bhaṭimā*, *rāja bhaṭimā* and *nāṭa bhaṭimā*. There three types of *nāṭa bhaṭimās* according to their placing in the body of a drama—initial *bhaṭimā*, final *bhaṭimā* and the middle *bhaṭimā*. Śaṅkaradeva composed three *deva bhaṭimās*, sixteen *nāṭa bhaṭimās* and two *rāja bhaṭimās*. One of the *deva bhaṭimās*, called *ṭoṭaka*, is composed in Sanskrit using the metre *ṭoṭaka*. The *ṭoṭaka* hymn is a garland of attributes of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa in nine verses. The other two *deva bhaṭimās* describe the activities Kṛṣṇa's early life and the heroic exploits of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Śaṅkaradeva composed two *rāja bhaṭimās* addressing the king Naranārāyaṇa.

An initial *bhaṭimā* excepting that is used in *Patnī-prasāda*, has a reference to the concerned dramatic performance. It is sung by the *sūtradhāra*. It eulogizes Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma and the supremacy of *Nāma-dharma*. Śaṅkaradeva's dramas, excepting *Patnī-prasāda*, contain each a final *bhaṭimā*, called the *mukti-maṅgal bhaṭimā*, sung by the *sūtradhāra* along with all other actors. It corresponds to the *bharata-vākya* in Sanskrit drama. The *mukti-maṅgal bhaṭimā* contains the attributes and the activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa or with a burden of benediction to the audience. Eulogies of the hero and the heroine are sung in the middle *bhaṭimās* inserted in three plays of Śaṅkaradeva.

c) *Aṅkīyā-gītas*:

The *aṅkīyā nāṭas* of Śaṅkaradeva abounds in songs. There are about 120 songs in the six *nāṭakas* of Śaṅkaradeva. Of course, this number varies in different editions of the dramas.

In the songs of a *nāṭa*, the *rāgas* and *tālas* are specially mentioned, as the songs refer some dramatic situations or delineate some characters of the play.

The dramas (*nāṭa*, *nāṭaka*, *aṅka*):

The Śaṅkaradeva's dramas, popularly known as *aṅkīyā nāṭas*, are six in number:

- (i) *Patnī-prasāda* (The grace to the wives of *Brāhmaṇa* priests by Kṛṣṇa), 1540 A.D.. source: *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* X,23
- (ii) *Pārijāta-haraṇa* (the seizing of the divine tree *Pārijāta* from the heaven) 1544 A.D. source: *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* V, 29-31 and *Harivaṃśa-purāṇa*, chapters 120-133.
- (iii) *Kālīya-damana* (the taming of the serpent *Kālīya*), 1550 A.D. source *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* X,15-17.
- (iv) *Keli-gopāla* (The *rāsa* sports of Gopāla) 1551 A.D. source: *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*, V, 33 *Harivaṃśa-purāṇa*, chapter: 76
- (v) *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* ( The abduction of Rukmiṇī) 1564/1565 A.D. source: *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, X, 52-54

- vi) *Śrīrāma-vijaya* (The Victory of *Śrīrāma*) 1568 A.D. Source: The *Rāmāyaṇa* I, 18-77, *Agni-purāṇa* chapter V.

These are the few specimens of Assamese dramas and, for that matters, Śaṅkaradeva is the first dramatist or playwright in Assamese literature. Moreover, before Śaṅkaradeva, no other playwright dared to use modern Indian language in the dialogues and stage directions.

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## Śaṅkaradeva as a Sociologist and Social Reformer

Dr. Jagat Ch. Kalita

Sociology or Social Science although a modern term, has been within human society since its inception. It is the socialistic attitude of the human mind that brings people together and initiates the superiority of humans over all other animals, that makes humans able to speak the language, which brings humans from the base level to today's miraculous progress.

One important fact about the progressing human society is that it faces degradation and needs reformation from time to time. This fact is expressed in the *Śrīmadbhagavad-gītā*'s very popular verse '*yadā yadāhi dharmasya glānirbhavati...*' etc. Indian society is, on the other hand, formed and run especially on the basis of religious beliefs, i.e., Indian society cannot be differentiated from religion. It has a long history of degradation and subsequent upgradations by reformation movements. As far as human history can trace, the first Indian great social reformation movement was initiated by Gautama Buddha who, sidelining all the traditional rituals and even defying the existence of God, declares that nonviolence is the actual religion, i.e., '*ahiṃsā parama dharma*'. Buddha's reformation movement, especially with the strong patronage of the great king Ashoka, inundated Indian society in the third century B.C. Although it could not last long in India, Buddha's reformation movement left a strong impetus for the next reformation movement which was not initiated by one individual and was not limited to a short period, but by a large group of thinkers of a long period. The *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* can be called the mouthpiece and best outcome of that greatest social reformation movement of India which in turn is again the foundation of the next great reformation movement known as the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement. Śaṅkaradeva was one of the initiators of that social reformation movement.

In the religious society of India, like other thinkers, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva has also been known as a religious preacher. Even in modern times, when western modern ideas like socialism, humanism and many other '-isms' are being popularized here, Śaṅkaradeva's life and ideology should have also been compared to such '-isms'. The great thinker is still known as a religious preacher only. This is, actually, due to the negligence of the so-called elite or educated section of people to this great genius of North-East India. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, however, was a sociologist par excellence as well as a great socialist, humanist and social reformer.

To be a socialist and to be a sociologist are not the same thing. A man can be a sociologist by his deep study of different aspects of society. But to be a socialist the precondition is that the man must be a humanist and he must have a heart that is full of love, kindness and deep sympathy for others. Prominent among such Indian personalities of different ages are Gautama Buddha, Vedavyāsa, Śaṅkaradeva, Mahatma Gandhi, etc. On the other hand, a good socialist cannot be a good sociologist if he or she lacks the power of intuition to look into the deepest level of a society. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was a rare personality who possessed both these qualities to a very high degree and that is why he was able to kick off a new way of life, a new ideology for a society that is full of peace, full of aesthetic pleasure and which is acceptable for any human society of any country, of any age and in any situation.

To find out Śaṅkaradeva as a sociologist and a social reformer we need to search

three different sources – his biographies called *caritputhis* (hagiography), his highly artistic works and his religious tenet or ideology. The three sources are, however, complementary to each other. His biography, as depicted in the *caritputhis*, tells us how he was devoted to the noble cause of establishing a human society that is full of peace and harmony, love and respect for each other (even for animals), and which is free from any kind of violence and injustice to any section of people and even to any animals.

The *caritputhis* let us know that Śaṅkaradeva lost his parents in his childhood and therefore was brought up by his grandmother Khersuti. The melancholy of losing his parents in his childhood and the incomparable affection and love of his grandmother for him made Śaṅkaradeva's heart extremely soft and kind. Ironically, that kind-hearted, sympathetic Śaṅkaradeva was born in a *śākta* and confrontational family, who were believers of animal sacrifice and were always ready to fight against rival groups or rival kings. These facts of his family must have hurt the sympathetic heart of Śaṅkaradeva. When the kind-hearted child Śaṅkaradeva came out of his family and mixed up with the children and elders of different communities, he witnessed the notorious caste difference among the people based on birth. When at twelve years of age Śaṅkaradeva joined the school and started the study of Indian *sāstras* he was able to realize that the religious rituals that prevailed in his family as well as in the whole society were based not on any logic but on some superstitions. Although nothing of those rituals were fruitful to human society and even injurious to the weaker sections of people, a section of people from higher classes was interested in continuing them for their own financial gains and to prevail supremacy over the lower classes of people. The kind-hearted but bold minded Śaṅkaradeva vowed to revolt against those rituals, and to carry that message to the common people. He wrote his first *kāvya*, i.e. poetic work *Hariścandra-upākhyāna* in his student life, as evident from *caritputhis*. There was the story of king Hariścandra and his subjects including his family members who were the representatives of the people who are the targets of religious exploitation of the people of the higher class; the higher class being represented in the *kāvya* by the two sages Biśvāmitra and Baśiṣṭha. The narrative—the mighty king Hariścandra, who dared not to worship semi-gods like Gaṇeśa, started trembling out of fear when sage Biśvāmitra came near him and, although a Kṣatriya, Hariścandra is far more truthful and kind to others than the sages, i.e. Brāhmaṇa, and, although the sages, Biśvāmitra and Baśiṣṭha, do not have minimum control over their passion and lust (which is exemplified by their shameful fight becoming two birds, i.e. degrading themselves to lower animals, etc.)—all are highly significant and may be called Śaṅkaradeva's bold strike against the mighty Brāhmaṇism, i.e. exploitation of a small class on the masses in the name of religion. Another very significant work of Sankaradeva's vast corpus of literature that is directly motivated by his mission of social reformation is *Bhakti-pradīpa*, where, with the help of a story from *Garuḍa-purāṇa*, he places a woman of most neglected *Cāṇḍāla* caste above a *Brāhmaṇa* who worships the semi-god Indra. That woman, who knows that there is only one Supreme God and He is the only God to worship, has even been saluted and honoured by Devarṣi Nārada. His other works also have the same motives directly or indirectly.

The *caritputhis* also tell us that Śaṅkaradeva was the elder son of the *Śiromaṇi Bhūñā* (i.e. Chief of the *Bhūñā* i.e. landlords) Kusumbara, who ruled over a part of the middle Assam centering the present district of Nagaon. Kusumbara's uncle Jayanta Dalai,

who was in charge of the *Śiromaṇi Bhūñā* due to the untimely death of Kusumbara in Sankaradeva's childhood, handed over the charge to Śaṅkaradeva as soon as he returned from his *guru-grha* (Educational institution) completing his formal education. Śaṅkaradeva took over the charge but only for few years during which he realised that he had a lot to do for the welfare of human society, which is far more important than ruling over the people of an area. He handed over the charge of *Śiromaṇi Bhūñā* to his grand uncles and started a twelve-year-long journey to different parts of the Indian mainland like Purī, Mathurā, Vṛndāvana, etc. which were at that time the centres of learning. This twelve-year-long journey is a very significant episode of Śaṅkaradeva's life. It is a matter of wonderment whether to call this twelve-year-long journey to different parts of India as a pilgrimage or otherwise. Instead of being called as a pilgrimage one can call it the period of rumination of the great thinker in search of his goal of an aesthetic way of human life. Because, after that Śaṅkaradeva devoted himself to preaching the great ideology he established on the foundation of the *Purāṇa Sūrya Śrīmad Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā* by creating highly artistic *kāvya*s, writing and staging dramas, composing and performing his great songs called *bargīt* and *bhaṭimā*, choreographing and performing classical dances, carving artistic wooden masks called *mukhās*, weaving the cloth of record length (called *Vṛndāvanī -vastra*) depicting the whole *Vṛndāvana Līlā* of Kṛṣṇa in it and many other artistic excellences and by establishing *nāmgharas* or *sattras* as a centre of worship and for the practice of arts and culture, which became also the centres of the social life of a democratic nature. The most notable point is that in doing so much for the welfare of human society during his 119 years long life Śaṅkaradeva earned zero assets for himself or his future generations of blood relations. The *Kathāguru-carit* tells us that the daily expenditure of Śaṅkaradeva's family was born by his disciples. When he was at Kochbihar at the last stage of his life leaving his family members at Barpeta-Patbaosi, Mādhavadeva had to manage everything for Śaṅkaradeva's family, and this last permanent residence of his family at Barpeta-Patbaosi had possessions such pieces of cloths, wooden beds, etc. used by Śaṅkaradeva and his family but no precious items like jewellery or so. There has been no record elsewhere that his family possessed any precious item. Such a fully dedicated and perfect socialist and social reformer was Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva.

Let us now come to the third source, i.e. Śaṅkaradeva's religious tenet, which is based mainly on the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. Personally, Śaṅkaradeva likes to offer his *bhakti* to Lord Kṛṣṇa as a *Kiṅkara* or *Dāsa*, i.e. servant which can be ascertained by the *bhaṇitās* of his master piece *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*, where he introduces himself as *Kṛṣṇara Kiṅkara* (i.e. servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa) as much as 68 **times**:

কৃষ্ণৰ কিঙ্কৰ কহে শঙ্কৰে সম্প্ৰতি

/ কৃষ্ণৰ কিঙ্কৰ শঙ্কৰে ভণে/

কৃষ্ণৰ কিঙ্কৰে ভণিল শঙ্কৰে এড়া সৰে আন কাম/

কৃষ্ণৰ কিঙ্কৰে এভু ভণে হৰি হৰি বোলা সৰ্ব্বজনে/

কহে কৃষ্ণ কিঙ্কৰ শঙ্কৰে বোলা হৰি হৰি সৰ নৰে/

পৰমানন্দ কৰা কৃপা ভূত্যক সম্প্ৰতি। তুমি বিনা নাই আনগতি/

কৃষ্ণৰ কিঙ্কৰে এভো ভণে নেড়িবা কীৰ্ত্তন একোজনে/

কৃষ্ণৰ কিঙ্কৰে ভণিল শঙ্কৰে ভাগৱত পদচয়/

কৃষ্ণৰ কিষ্কৰে কহে শঙ্কৰে যুগুতি ৰামনাম বিনে নাহি কাহাৰো মুকুতি/  
কৃষ্ণৰ কিষ্কৰে কহে শঙ্কৰে বোলা হৰি হৰি সমস্ত নৰে

....

That is, he personally loves *dāsya-bhakti*. Significantly, out of the nine types of *bhakti*, Śaṅkaradeva gives prominence on *śravaṇa* (i.e., hearing) and *kīrttana* (singing of holy names). This is because of Śaṅkaradeva's socialistic outlook. Genius Śaṅkaradeva did this with the aim to bring people together for unity among different castes and communities and to attract people of other faiths to his clean and easy way of worshiping God by aesthetic tunes of singing of holy songs what have been proved extremely affective. Lakhs of people, even in his life time, thronged into the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* of Śaṅkaradeva being attracted by his artistic creations and performances in the *nāmghars*.

Śaṅkaradeva's doctrine believes in the service to *bhakata* to get the favour of God. His disciple Mādhavadeva writes- '*kṛṣṇaka pāibāra jānā bhakatese panthā*,' i.e. *bhakata*'s service is the only way to meet the Lord. This is another important socialistic element in Śaṅkaradeva's Dharma.

Strict prohibition of worshiping of semi-gods and goddesses, prohibition of meaningless and harmful rituals like animal sacrifice, encouragement of a simple life of renunciation, not of sensual pleasure, etc. are all the elements of the socialistic outlook of the great *mahāpuruṣa*.

These entire lifelong endeavours in artistic creation for the peace of grief-stricken human society proves his deep sense of humanism and socialism.

The knowledge of his practical life, the knowledge gathered from *śāstras* and his deep study of different aspects of human society made Śaṅkaradeva realise that human life is full of earthly lusts and desires, which are the root causes of human afflictions. Everybody takes birth—but soon he or she finds himself in the grip of *māyā*. Śaṅkaradeva has taught us that our duty in life is to try to come out of this bondage of temptation (*māyā bandhana*) to get a peaceful life. To be completely free from this bondage is, however, not so easy in one's lifetime. For that, Mahāpuruṣ Śaṅkaradeva gives us a way of life that leads us to that goal removing the stains of temptations from our mind and soul. Śaṅkaradeva's way of religious life gives us both worldly peace and *moksha*, the *summum bonum* of Indian ideology.

What Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva has done for human society becomes possible only because he was a sociologist by heart.

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## A Study on *Śaṅkarī* Music of Assam and its *Tāla* System in the Perspective of Indian Classical Music

Sarangapani Bordoloi,

### Abstract

This paper deals with *Śaṅkarī* music of Assam that was introduced by Śaṅkaradeva more than 550 years ago on the basis of different theories of Indian classical music conglomered with the local indigenous and ethnic elements; and same was practiced, developed as a part of integrated ritualistic service since its inception till today. *Śaṅkarī* music has its distinctive *tāla* system with various kinds of *tāla* patterns which are about 60 in numbers along with their specific structural components with different theories of *tāla* formation, their classification, structural components etc.

The study of *Śaṅkarī* literature and direct observation of the researcher provide many valuable materials for considering *Śaṅkarī* music and its *tāla* system as a major segment of Indian classical music. *Śaṅkarī tālas* have specific structural components, attributes of the theory of *tāla* formation, method of teaching and performing technique, reflection of *tāla-daśaprāṇa lakṣaṇa*, method and techniques of application of *tālas* into *rāga* etc. in its ancient history, intricacy with religious activities based on *śāstras*, its own literary materials, capability and application of specific *tāla* to produce specific *bhāva* and *rasa* and its vast repertoire of different *tāla* patterns.

The study will help place *Śaṅkarī* music as a classical one and it is hoped that it will open a new horizon in the field of musicology for future research.

Key words: *Śaṅkarī* music, Assam-*tāla* system, Indian classical music.

### Introduction:

*Śaṅkarī* music has its own and distinctive *tāla* system with various kinds of *tāla* patterns. The *Śaṅkarī tālas* have their specific structural components with different theories of *tāla* formation. The salient features of the *tāla* system reflect different similarities with the characteristics of Indian classical music. The scholars and the exponents of this art form are trying to prove its tendency to be a class-based music form of India.

Indian classical music which as old as 2000 years, has successfully build the golden chronicle of its glorious past with various development of the musicological theories. In the passage of time, Indian classical music has left behind different phases of its developments in the nature of *mārga-saṅgīta*, *deśī-saṅgīta*, *prabandha-saṅgīta*, *dhrupada*, *dhāmāra* etc. up to its present status in the form of Hindustani music and Carnatic music.

As an ancient music form of India, the *Śaṅkarī* music system also occupies a place in the arena of Indian classical music in its various developmental phases. This paper deals with a study on the salient features of *Śaṅkarī* music along with their reflections in different *tāla* theories of Indian classical music on the basis of *śāstras*.

***Tāla* System in *Śaṅkarī* Music:**

There is a unique *tāla* system in *Śaṅkarī* music, which has specific *tāla* theory with some remarkable musical characteristics. The *tālas* (rhythms) of *Śaṅkarī* music prevailing in different *sattrā* and *nāmghars* of Assam are more than 50 in number which follow the characteristics of Indian classical music along with their own distinctive features. One cannot get a perfect idea of its characteristics and different elements without study of its formation and classification, constituents, style of application etc. The authentic documents in this regard are: different literatures by Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and their followers, *caritas* (Hagiographies on Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva), *Vādyapradīpa* of *Yadupati* as text and direct observations of practices of *Śaṅkarī* music prevailing in various *sattrā* and *nāmghars* of Assam at present.

The *Vādyapradīpa* of *Yadupati* already stated, is the only book written on the basis of *Śaṅkarī* music prevailing in different *sattrā* and *nāmghars* of Assam, due to following reasons:

- i. The book is written in old Assamese language.
- ii. The book is found in a *Sattrā* of Jorhat, Assam.<sup>1</sup>
- iii. The writer of the book uses different terminologies of particular genre of local music such as, *ghāt*, *ghātani*, *cāt*, *cāpar*, *gāyana* etc., which are prevalent as the most useful terms in the *Śaṅkarī* music system.

As referred to by *Yadupati*, the *tāla* is constituted by *kalā*. *Yadupati* defines *kalā* with a reference to the *Sanata Kumārīya Tantra* that the *tāla* is constituted by *kalā*.<sup>2</sup> As held by *Yadupati*, *kalās* are of different kinds, i.e., *laghu*, *guru*, *druta*, *yugma*, *śaśī* etc. at present these ancient terminologies are not in use. However, when we examine the *tāla* composition, their presence is clearly found. *Yadupati* not only applied the musical terminologies of *śāstra*, i.e., terms of Indian classical music, but also used the terminologies of local or ethnic music, such as *cāt*, *cāpar*, *ghātani*, *ghāt* and the like.

As referred to by *Yadupati*, *Nārada* told this knowledge of music which he got from *Kṛṣṇa* to *Gautama*, as mentioned in *Gautamīya Tantra*. *Nārada* describes to *Gautama* different variations of *tālas*, which are *ekonapañcāśa*, i.e., forty-nine, in number. Out of those *tālas*, *Yadupati* deals with only twenty-six of them in his *Vādyapradīpa*.<sup>3</sup>

*Yadupati* also refers to *tālakriyā* or its *mātrā* by using the term *mān*, i.e., *tāla-māna*. He used term *bhāga* in respect of *aṅga*. He also refers to the variation in *kalā*, i.e., *kalā-bheda* to constitute a *tāla*. Moreover, *Yadupati* mentions the names of some other texts viz. *Sanatakumārīya Tantra*, *Gandharva Śāstra*, *Gandharva Sukavibhūṣaṇa*, *Vādyapradīpa*, *Harismṛti Śudhānkura* of *Raghunandana* and the like.

### **Formation and Classification of *Śaṅkarī tālas*:**

So, from the above discussion, it can be concluded that to form or constitute a *Śaṅkarī tāla*, the basic component is the *kalā* and a *Śaṅkarī tāla* is constituted by the definite number of *kalā* or *mān* (*mātrā*). The *mān* or *mātrās* are divided into different *aṅgas* or *bhāgas*. These *aṅgas* or *bhāgas* determine the basic *laya* or metre of the *tāla*, which is done by *kalā-bheda* or by creating variations in *kalā* or *mān* (*mān*, the colloquial use against the term *māna* in Assamese) of different *bhāgas* or *aṅgas* of a *tāla*.

### **Structural Composition of *Śaṅkarī tālas*:**

A *Śaṅkarī tāla* has generally three basic components: *gā-mān*, *ghāt* and *cok*.

<sup>2</sup> The *gā-mān*, *gā-bājanā* or *mūl-bājanā* is widely accepted concrete audible form of a

*tāla*. It is the basic or standard pattern of a *Śaṅkarī tāla*, which forms its main body, repeated generally when the text of song is sung. Apart from songs, *gā-mān* is also used in dances and orchestral performances of *khol* and cymbals, i.e., *gāṇikā* or *yorā*. In case of some minor *tālas* of *Śaṅkarī* music there is no *gā-mān*. The *gā-mān* resembles the *ṭhekā* in *Tabla* of Hindustani music.

The *ghāt*, *ghetā* or *ghātā* is the extended and ornamented form of a *tāla* created by *prastāra* in bols, following its *mārga*. Generally, there are more than one *ghāt* attached to each of the principal *tālas*. The first one is known as *mūl-ghāt* or *gā-ghāt* (main *ghāt*) and subsequent ones are called as *bhāṅgani-ghāts* (derivative *ghāts*). There are also two more divisions of *bhāṅgani-ghāt*, they are *chorā-ghāt* (short or part) and *purā-ghāt* (full scale). The *chorā-ghāt* is small and *pūrā-ghāt* is elaborate. Another type of *ghāt* is *laṇā-ghāt* (the graceful *ghāt*). Sometimes a special type of *ghāt* is played after *cok*, which is called as *cokar-ghāt*. The *ghāt* resembles *ṭukḍā* and *paraṇ* in *tāblā* and *pākhawāj* of Hindustani music.

The *cok* or *cak* is the shorter audible form of a *tāla* created by following its *mārga*. To compose the *cok* or *cokar-bājanā* the main importance is given on its respective *jāti*. In *cok* part the behaviour of a *tāla* appeared more prominently. According to Dr. Maheswar Neog, *cok* means 'sharp, quick and pungent'. In *cok* part *laya* increases markedly.<sup>4</sup> So, it is also called as *jā-mān* (*jāti-mān*) or *mān* in short. It may be compared to *relā* in *Tabla* of Hindustani music. Some times the *cok* part is more elaborated, especially in some *tālas* like *yati-tāla*, *pari-tāla*, *kharmān-tāla*, both in the case of songs and dramas. It is called as *jā-mān* in the case of former and *thāk-tāla* in the case of rest two *talas*.

The *cok* is found not only in case of singing but also in *cāhinī* and *dhemāli*, in different independent dance items and different dances in *aṅkiyā* dramas etc., where vigorous application of *cok* is noticeable. In some *sattras* of Bardovā origin, after *bar-dhemāli* or with *ghoṣā-dhemāli* total eleven different *coks* are performed, which is called as *cok-marā* or *cok-govā*. Every *cok* has its own identity by its name, like *pāji-kaṭā*, *khol-piṭā*, *hāt-diyā*, *ragar-diyā*, *calanā* etc. In the *rāma-dhemāli* of Narowa (Batadrava) *Sattrā* has ten such types of *coks*. As such, in *cor-dhemāli* also there are nine different *coks*, while in *ghoṣā-dhemāli* twelve different *coks* sare there and in *bar-dhemāli* seven *coks* or *khāndīs* are present.

In *aṅkiyā bhāonā* performance, at the last part of a song, some extension or elaboration of *bol* composed in *khol* is performed along with *cok* for specially dancing purposes of the actors and actresses, which are called as *jāmānar-bājanā*.

Generally, the last part of a *tāla* is called as *cok* and the last part or finishing musical composition of *dhemāli* is called as *dhumuhī* or *sañcāra*. Sometimes this *sañcāra* or *dhumuhī* is called as *cok* or *khāndī* in different *sattrā* traditions as mentioned above.

### **Classification of Śaṅkarī tālas:**

After examining different rules of *tāla* formation of existing *tālas* found in different traditions, a system of *tāla* formation may be formulated, according to which the *Śaṅkarī tālas* can be classified into four different classes. These are: 1. *mūl-tālas*, 2. *upa-tālas*, 3. *mīśra-tālas* (*yugma* and *yauga-tālas*) and 4. *bhaṅgi-tālas*.

#### 1. **Mūl-tālas** (Main or Primary *tālas*):

The principal *tālas* which have their specific identity are called as *mūl* (main)-*tālas*. Normally, the main *tālas* have their all the structural components, like, *gā-mān*, *ghāt*, *cok*

etc. It is also noticed that every *mūl-tāla* is used in different songs, music, dance and dramas independently. Following *tālas* of *Śaṅkarī* music can be considered as *mūl-tālas*: i. *ek-tāla*, ii. *pari-tāla*, iii. *rūpak-tāla*, iv. *chuṭkalā* or *chuṭikalā-tāla*, v. *domāni-tāla*, vi. *yati* or *bar-yati-tāla*, vii. *dharam-yati-tāla*, viii. *dahbāri* or *daśbāri-tāla*, ix. *viṣam* or *saru-viṣam-tāla*, x. *bar-viṣam-tāla*, xi. *āṭhtalā* or *āctalā-tāla*, xii. *kharmān-tāla*, xiii. *racak* or *rakta* or *hraccha-ek-tāla*, xiv. *gañjal* or *śuddha-gañjal-tāla*, xv. *jorphalā-tāla*, xvi. *pat-pari* or *nācar-ek-tāla*, xvii. *mānacok-tāla*, xviii. *jāmān-tāla*, xix. *dovāj-tāla*, xx. *nāndī-ek-tāla*, xxi. *chaibāri-tāla* and so on.

## 2. **Upa-tālas** (Minor *tālas*):

The *tālas* which are derived from *mūl-tālas* by the slight modification of their *mārga* or pattern are called as *upa-tāla* (minor-*tālas*). In respect of their applications, the *upa-tālas* are generally used as subordinates to other *mūl-tālas* in songs, dances and dramas. Many of them have *nogā-mān*; as such, some of them have only the *gā-mān*, but the *ghāt* and *coks* are not in use. They are basically applied as the minor *tālas* with other *mūl-tālas*. Some examples of *upa-tālas* prevalent in different *sattras* schools are: i. *ūn-yati-tāla*, ii. *khan-yati-tāla*, iii. *repan* or *saru-yati-tāla*, iv. *māṭh-yati-tāla*, v. *ṭhekechā* or *ṭhekec-yati-tāla*, vi. *oloṭā-āṭhtalā-tāla*, vii. *melā-āṭhtalā-tāla*, viii. *obhoṭā-jorphalā-tāla*, ix. *obhoṭā-dahbāri-tāla*, x. *yati-jāmān-tāla*, xi. *oloṭā-gañjal-tāla* and so on.

## 3. **Miśra-tālas** (mixed *tālas*):

The *tālas* which are created by mixing of two or more *tālas*, are called as *miśra* (mixed) *tālas*. They are sometimes also called as *yautha-tāla*. The *miśra-tālas* are again divided into two sub-divisions, viz. i. *yugma* (paired)-*tālas* and ii. *yauga* (compound)-*tālas*.

i. **Yugma-tālas**: The *tālas* created by the addition of two *mūl-tālas* are called as *yugma* (paired)-*tālas*. It is noticed that in practice, the *yugma-tālas* are mainly used with songs in *prasaṅga*. Some examples of *yugma tālas* are: i. *rūp-gañjal* or *rūpak-gañjal-tāla*, ii. *yor-viṣam-tāla*, iii. *rūp-domāni-tāla*, iv. *viṣam-domāni-tāla*, v. *ār-viṣam-tāla*, vi. *ār-rūpak-tāla*, vii. *pari-yati-tāla* and so on.

ii. **Yauga-tālas**: The *tālas* which are created by the admixing of two or more *tālas*, where original *tālas* almost lose their distinctive identity and by which a different *tāla* appear, is called as *yauga* (compound) *tāla*. These *tālas* are mainly applied in different *naimittikaprasaṅgas* with dances. The *tālas*, viz. i. *tinimāni-tāla*, ii. *cārimāni-tāla*, iii. *pācmāni-tāla*, iv. *cārikhanīyā-tāla*, v. *rūp-gañjal-śuddha-gañjal-tāla* etc. are some examples of *yauga tālas*.

## 4. **Bhaṅgī-tālas** (ornamented *tālas*):

In *anḱyā bhāonā* some special *bājanā* or compositions are created by the elaboration of *tālas* on the basis of ornamentation of their *gā-bājanā*, *ghāt*, *cok*, *jāmān* etc. to use mainly in different dances related to entrance, exit, battle etc. of the dramatic characters. Every such composition is done on the basis of one or more *tālas*. This type of *tāla* elaboration is called as *bhaṅgī* or *bhaṅgī-bājanā* or *bhaṅgī-tālas*.

The *bhaṅgīs* are basically of two types: i. *gītar-bhaṅgī* and ii. *nācar-bhaṅgī*.

i. **Gītarbhaṅgī** (ornamentation of *bols* in song): In the *sattras* of Lower Assam, like Barpeta Sattrā, there are some such *bhaṅgīs* which are accompanied with songs. These *bhaṅgīs* are called as *gītar bhaṅgīs*. There are five such *bhaṅgīs*, all of which are in *pari-tāla*. These are: *saru-bhaṅgī* (number one), *saru-bhaṅgī* (number two), *māju-bhaṅgī* (number one), *māju-bhaṅgī* (number two) and *bar-bhaṅgī*.

ii. **Nācar bhaṅgī** (ornamentation of *bols* in dance): The *nācar-bhaṅgī* is also mainly of two types: i.e., i. *goṭnācarbhaṅgī* and ii. *āṅkarbhaṅgī*.

i. **Goṭnācarbhaṅgī** (*bhaṅgī* of pure dance): There are some dance numbers in the *sattras* of Kamalabari origin which are post *Śaṅkarī* addition, composed in the style of *bhaṅgī-tāla*. But these are known as *goṭ-nāc* instead of *bhaṅgī-nāc* or *bhaṅgī*. Only in the case of *nādu-bhaṅgī*, the term *bhaṅgī* is used. The *Goṭ-nāc* has mainly three parts; i.e., *rāmdāni*, *gītarnāc* and *melānāc*. Different *goṭ-nācs* preserved in Kamalabarisattra traditions are: *jhumurā-nāc*, *nādubhaṅgī-nāc*, *cāli-nāc*, *rajāgharīyācāli-nāc* and so on.

ii. **Aṅkar-bhaṅgī** (*bhaṅgīs* of *aṅka*): The *bhaṅgī-bājanās* of different dance related to dramas are called as *aṅkar-bhaṅgī* (*bhaṅgīs* related to dramas). It is also called as *nātar-bhaṅgī*. The *bhaṅgīs* of *aṅkas* can be divided again into three types: i.e., a. *praveśar-bhaṅgī*, b. *prasthānar-bhaṅgī* and c. *yuddhar-bhaṅgī*.

### Classical Elements in *Śaṅkarī tālas*:

Various elements of Indian classical music are preserved in the different characteristics of *Śaṅkarī* music and its *tāla* system. In the case of *tāla* system, all those characteristics can be found by the study of its structure, formation, application, style of presentation, involved musical instruments etc. The classical characteristics of *Śaṅkarītāla* system may be summarized as follows:

#### i. **Ancientry:**

This unique music system which was created by Śaṅkaradeva by 550 years on the basis of Indian classical music conglomerated with the elements of local and traditional music of the region.

#### ii. **Intricated with religious activities:**

All the elements of *Śaṅkarī* music from its inception are practiced within different *nitya* and *naimittika prasaṅgas* as the integrated ritualistic services of *ekaśaraṇaharināmadharama* faith introduced by Śaṅkaradeva.

#### iii. **Based on śāstras:**

The *Vādyapradīpa*, which is written in old Assamese language, can be considered as a literary source for *Śaṅkarī tālas*, Yadupati mentions the names of some treatises on music like the *Harismṛti Sudhānkura*, the *Gautamīya Tantra*, the *Sanata Kumārīya Tantra*, the *Vādyapradīpa*, the *Gāndharva Sukavi Bhūṣaṇa*, the *Gāndharva Śāstra* etc. The terminologies and those used by Yadupati have the similarities with the names of *tālas* found in different treatises like the *Saṅgīt-ratnākara*, the *Saṅgīt-dāmodara* and the *Saṅgīt-amakaranda* etc. By the study of the theory of *tāla* formation it is found that the *Śaṅkarītāla* system considers the theories of *Nāṭya-śāstra*, *Bharatārṇava*, *Saṅgīt-ratnākara*, *Saṅgīt-amakaranda* etc. The multiple applications of *tālas* to single song at same time in *Śaṅkarī* music are quite in alignment with the theory of multiple *tāla* application in *āsārīta* song as referred to by the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

The music system has a unique *tāla* system with different class-based theories of *tāla* formation, theory of their application, fixed musical instruments and their qualities to produce different *rasa*, *bhāva* etc., specifically in case of *khol*, which belongs to *haritakī* class of *mṛdaṅga*, its process of preparation, techniques to produce different syllables and their types etc. show the classical behaviours found in different musical treatises of India of different times.

iv. **Own literary materials:**

The Śāṅkarī music system has a repertoire of vast literary materials in the nature of song, verse, dramas etc. authored by Śāṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and other successors of them with which the Śāṅkarī tālas and their other components are practiced within the purview of different *nitya* and *naimittika prasaṅgas*.

v. **Capability and application of specific tāla to produce specific bhāva and rasa:**

Bharata discusses on the application of different tālas to produce various dramatic sentiments and deliberates on how they should be applied to maintain and sustain the emotions in *nṛtya* and *nāṭya*. He also explains how the syllables of *avanaddha-vādyas* (leather instruments) are capable of evolving different *rasa*, *bhāva* and how specific syllables are distinguished for certain characters. As such the tālas of Śāṅkarī music are also capable of creating different dramatic sentiments and emotions. The different syllables of *khol* can be applied to evolve different kinds of *gati* or movements for various characters.

vi. **Vast repertoire of different tāla patterns:**

The Śāṅkarī music contains more than 50 different tāla patterns which are constituted by 6 *mātrās* to 44 *mātrās*. Some of them are considered as main tāla while some are as their derivatives. In Śāṅkarī music there are some tālas of mixed type also which contain certain combined tālas, while some of them behave as complex tālas. Among those tālas some of them are used with song, dance, drama, preliminary etc. in all the musical items, while some of them are only dance-oriented, whereas some others are preliminary or *gāṇikā*-oriented. Different tāla patterns prevailed the hundreds of *sattra* traditions preserve various styles of the same tāla pattern by which the variations come up in respect of their *bol* patterns (the *pātalakṣaṇa*) which leads them to the appearance of numerous such tālas.

vii. **Tālas have specific structural components:**

Śāṅkarī tālas have their three basic structural components viz. *gā-mān*, *ghāt* and *cok* which are identifying characters of a Śāṅkarītāla. Along with different kinds of *ghāts* and *coks* some other components of the tāla system are composed on the basis of its *gā-mān*, *gā-bājanā* or *mūl-bājanā*, viz. *sañcār*, *bhaṅgī*, *khāndī*, *dhumuhī*, *jāmān*, *thelā*, *cāhinī*, *dhemāli* etc. The *gā-mān* is the standard structural composition of tāla by which a tāla keeps its perfect structural behaviours, while all other components of a tāla are simply different kinds of elaboration (*tāla-prastāra*).

viii. **Attributes the theory of tāla formation:**

The Śāṅkarī tāla system attributes its own theory of tāla formation on the basis of *deśī tālas* of Indian classical music as discussed in different *śāstras*. Indian classical music considers the formation of *deśī tālas* which have originated from the *mārga tālas* (i.e., *trayasra* and *caturasra tālas*) viz. *śuddha*, *salaga* and *saṅkīrṇa*. These three types of tālas are known as *mūl-tāla*, *yugma-tāla* and *miśra-tāla* in Śāṅkarī music respectively. Apart from these three, Śāṅkarī music has introduced a new form of tāla as *upa-tāla* (as the derivatives of *mūl-tālas*).

ix. **Own method of teaching and performing technique:**

*Śaṅkarī tāla* system developed its own method of teaching and learning of different *tāla* patterns and also the method of playing the *khol* under the guidance and custody of various *sattra* institutions which have been practicing for several centuries. It has got its own techniques and style of presentation and performance of these *tāla* patterns along with other constituent elements of music, viz. song, dance, drama and other performing aspects of the art form.

x. **Reflection of *tāla-daśaprāṇalakṣaṇa*:**

*Śaṅkarī tāla* system bears different characteristics found in the *tāla-daśaprāṇa* of Indian classical music. The first *prāṇa*, the *kāla*, the measured time duration to complete one circle of a *tāla* which is constituted and determined by definite amount of standard time units is called as *mān* (i.e., *kalā* or *mātrā*) of a *Śaṅkarī tāla*. In *Śaṅkarī* music every *tāla* maintains the specific rule or the *mārga* to complete its one cycle and is shown by hand activities for helping one to understand the different *aṅgas* of the *tāla*. The hand activities i.e., the third *prāṇa kriyās* viz., *tāl*, *cāpari* or *bhari* as *saśabdakriyā* and *mān*, *hālī* or *śudā* as *niśabdakriyā* of a *tāla* are shown in own style and definite way of representation in this genre of music. The *bhāgas* i.e., the next *prāṇa aṅga* of *tāla* divide the *māns* (*kalā* or *mātrā*) of a *Śaṅkarī tāla* into different parts by which the specific metre and *kriyās* of the *tāla* can be maintained and shown properly. Application of the *graha* which is the fifth *prāṇa* of *tāla* is reflected very well in case of *Śaṅkarī tālas*. However, most of the *tālas* maintain the *sama-graha* (the *tāla*), the application of *viṣama-grahas* (the *bitāla*) *aṭṭa-graha* and *anāgata-graha* also are applied, viz., the *pari-tāla* shows the *aṭṭa-graha* (the *pratitāla*) and the *kharmān-tāla* and sometimes the *ek-tāla* shows the *anāgata-graha* (the *anutāla*). The *jāti* which is the sixth *prāṇa* of *tāla* and its five different kinds of *jātis* are reflected in different *tāla* patterns prevailed in *Śaṅkarī* music. As for example, the *ek-tāla*, *kharmān-tāla* and *māncok-tāla* show the *trayaśra-jāti*, while the *racak-tāla* (*rakta-tāla* or *raccha-ek-tāla*), *cuṭā-tāla*, *gañjal-tāla* etc. reflect the *catusra-jāti*. Thus, the *viṣam* (*saru-viṣam*)-*tāla*, *khan-yati-tāla* show the *khaṇḍa-jāti*, while the *pari-tāla*, *cuṭkalā-tāla*, *domānī-tāla* and *yati-tāla* maintain the *miśra-jāti* and the *brahma-tāla* shows the nature of *saṅkīrṇa-jāti*. As the next *prāṇa* of *tāla*, the *kalā* or *mātrā*, the *Śaṅkarī tālas* are also constituted by definite number of different kinds of *kalās* (i.e., *bol*, *bāṇī* or *cāpar*) and with the help of this *kalā-bheda* (arrangements of different types of *kalās*) the next *prāṇa* of *tāla* the *layas* (different *layas* viz., *vilambita*, *madhya*, *druta*) show their existence in *Śaṅkarī tālas*. The different *bājanās* or compositions on *khol* playing exhibit the five different kinds of *yatis* viz., *samyā*, *srotāgatā*, *mṛdangā*, *pipilikā* and *gopucchā* by the help of *kalā-bheda* within *aṅga* or *bhāgas*. The last or the tenth *prāṇa* of *tāla* the *prastāra* (the elaboration, expansion) is applied vigorously in *Śaṅkarī tāla* system. The vast musical compositions on *khol* playing with the help of ornamentation and elaboration of *bājanās* available in the nature of *ghāt*, *bhāṅganī-ghāt*, *cok*, *jāmān*, *thāk-tāl*, *sañcār*, *cāhinī*, *dhemāli*, *bhaṅgī-bājanā*, *rāmdāni*, *gītar-nāc*, *melā-nāc* etc. provide us the instances of massive use of *tāla-prastāra*.

xi. **Method and techniques of application of *tālas* into *rāga*:**

In the traditional performing style of *bargīt*, *aṅkīyā-gīt*, *gītar-nāc* and *nāma-kīrttana* there are certain performing rules, methods and techniques. The traditional performing style with *bargīt* reflects the rules for performing of *prabandha-saṅgīta* with the five

different dhatus, i.e., *udgrāha* (*zorani*), *melāpaka* (*rāg-tālani*), *dhruva* (*ghoṣā*), *antarā* (*pada*) and *ābhoga* (*thelā*). In *bargīts*, all the six different *aṅgas* or *bhāgas* (elements) of *prabandha-gīta* viz., *pada* (*pada*), *svara* (*svara*), *tāla* (*tāla*), *pāta* (*cāpar-ṭokar*), *tenaka* (*bhujāṅga*) and *birūda* (*vandan*) are present. However, in case of *an̄kīyā-gīts* three *dhātus*, i.e., *udgrāha*, *melāpaka* and *ābhoga* and one of the *angas*, i.e., *tenaka* are absent. Some *rāgas* show certain behavioural affinity to some specific *tālas* to make pairing. The *goṭ-nācs* especially the song parts, which are devoid of *abhinaya*, have the capacity to create immense *rasa* by different dance poses composed on the basis of *tāla-prastāras* with the help of their various *mūl-bājanās*, *bhaṅganis*, *sancāras*, *coks* etc. The *tāla* application and presentation in *nāma-kīrttana* also reflect the uses of different *layas* viz. *vilambita*, *madhya* and *druta*. Similarly, the application of *ati-vilambita* and *ati-drutalayas* are found in the regular practices. In the *nāma-kīrttana* also at the time of increasing the *laya*, the application of multiple *layas*, i.e., in the nature of *egun*, *dugun*, *cārigun* is a notable point.

xii. **Śaṅkarī tālas and rasa:**

*Śaṅkarī-tālas* have the quality to maintain the emotions intact in respect of different dramatic occasions and they are capable of creating respective *rasa* as demanded by the situation. As for instance, that in *śṛṅgāra* and *karuṇa* the *pari-tāla* and *yati-tāla*; in *vīra*, *raudra*, *hāsya* etc. the *pari-tāla* is employed very effectively. Just *Śaṅkarī-tālas* are employed create dramatic sentiments in different emotional phenomena, in the same way they are capable of delineating the *bhaktirasa* in the presentation of *bargīt* among different *prasaṅgas*.

xiii. **Śaṅkarī tālas and bhāvas** (emotions):

For the proper delineation of different dramatic situations through specific sentiments and emotions in front of the audience, the lyric, melody and rhythms have the most important role. So, in respect of rhythmic involvements in drama the relevant emotional event in *an̄kīyā-bhāonās* can be divided into six separate emotional events viz. *vilāpādi* (mourn etc.), *śṛṅgārādi* (romance etc.), *yuddhādi* (battle etc.), *vandanādi* (praise etc.), *varṇanādi* (illustrative etc.) and *prabodhādi* (consolation etc.).

**Discussion and Conclusion:**

*Śāstras* divide Indian music as *mārga* (for class people) and *deśī* (regional and for common people). Two most important elements are *rāga* and *tāla*. The scholars consider *rāga* as the soul of music and the *tāla* as its body. The *tāla* has the most significant role which is considered as the foundation of Indian music. With the help of *tāla* the linear motion of time can be measured by its circler nature. From Bharata to Śāraṅgadeva, many scholars have dealt with *tāla* with its gradual theoretical developments in different treatises. In this journey of almost two thousand years, the Indian classical music lost many of its theoretical elements and adopted some others also. From the *mārgatāla* and *deśītāla* concept to *śuddha*, *salaga* and *saṁkīrṇatāla* theory of *deśī-tāla* and the *tāla* has developed its theory from the rules of *āsārīta* songs to the rules of *prabandha-gīta*. Among the different trends of developmental phases of *tāla* theory, the evolution of the *tāladaśaprānalakṣaṇa* is important one. These developments from five kinds of *mārgatāla* to various types of *deśī tālas* in the field of *tāla* application give us numerous styles of *tālas* along with their names in their different developmental phases in Indian

classical music.

Among the elements inherent in the music form developed by Śaṅkaradeva, it is to be seen that the multiple use of different *tālas* with a *bargīt* in single string somehow reflects the rules of *āsārīta-gīta* prescribed by Bharata. Moreover, various *tāla* patterns are applied with various *prasaṅgas* like *bargīt*, *aṅkīyā-gīt*, *nāma-kīrttana*, dances etc. reflect the characteristics of *deśītāla* theories, the *śuddha-salaga-saṅkīrṇa* called as *mūl-yugma-mīśra* in *Śaṅkarī* music respectively. In this context, it is to be noted that the *Śaṅkarītāla* system is characterized by one more style of *tāla* i.e., *upa-tāla* (derived *tāla*) and the same can be given the *śāstra*-based term ‘*sāyāлага*’. So, considering this fourth variety of *tāla*, we can propose the theory of *deśī-tāla* as *śuddha-sāyāлага-salaga* and *saṅkīrṇa*.

The *tāla* system which originated and developed during Vedic age, assumed a proper form during the time of *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In ancient Indian music the songs were sung with the variation of *kalā*, *pāta* and *layas* of a *tāla*. The *tālas* have their different compositions, which are identified by single name. It can be assumed that such type of compositions created by the variation in their *kalā*, *pāta* and *laya* of specific *tāla* might have been named later on differently in case of *deśī tālas*, and in *Śaṅkarī tālas* also for that matter.

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<sup>2</sup>Vadya Pradīpa, verse no 2/ 62-63

<sup>3</sup>ibid, 1/ 20

<sup>4</sup>Rhythms in the Vaisnava Music of Assam. pp. 44

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## The History of Viṣṇu worship in Assam and Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva

Pragati Prasad Bora

### Introduction:

Vaiṣṇavism is a cult within Hinduism in which devotees worship Viṣṇu under the names of Nārāyaṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Vāsudeva, and more often Viṣṇu. Although Vaiṣṇavism got the shape of a movement in this region during the 13th and 14th centuries, the tradition of worshipping Viṣṇu in Assam has a long history. It had been practiced simultaneously with the other two major faiths, Śaivism and śāktism, since long ago, when the land was known as Kāmarūpa-Prāgjyotiṣa. It is interesting to see that in spite of the fact that Śaivism and śāktism were the dominant faiths, Viṣṇu worship was not only practiced but also was placed Viṣṇu above all deities. It is seen that since the days of Kāmarūpa kings and Gupta kings of the 4th and 6th centuries, Vaiṣṇavism has received impetus. However, in those days, Viṣṇu was worshipped in a tāntric way, and it is different from the latter day's Vaiṣṇavism in various ways, especially from the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva. It differed from the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva from a philosophical, sociological, and structural point of view.

### Objectives:

The objectives of this article are:

1. To trace the history of Viṣṇu worship in Assam.
2. To understand the differences between the old tradition of Viṣṇu worship and the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva.

### Methodology:

In preparing the article, both primary and secondary data have been collected from ancient literature and modern writings.

### Discussion:

The traces Vaiṣṇavism can be found in Assam at a time when Sun worship and Brahmanical culture made considerable progress<sup>1</sup>, and as the evidence shows, the worship of both Viṣṇu and his incarnations were prevalent in the land from early times. It was tāntric-Vaiṣṇavism, and various forms of Viṣṇu, such as Bāsudeva, Hayagrīva, Nārāyaṇa, etc., were worshipped according to tāntric rites.<sup>2</sup> The *Kālikā-purāṇa* and *Yoginī-tantra* mention the worship of Vāsudeva in Kāmarūpa, following by tāntric rites.<sup>3</sup>

The *Yoginī-tantra* writes:

*trailokya patīnaṃ patih pataye devdevāya/  
arghyeyaṃ hr̥ṣīkeśāya viṣṇuve ca namo namah/A*

*Kālikā-purāṇa* notes:

*tām samsthāpya surāgāre svayaṁ bā yatnatah kṛte/  
bāsudevasya bījena pūrvvokta bidhinā tathā//  
sarvopacārai bharktyā tu bāsudevaṁ prapūjayeta*<sup>5</sup>

Both the *purāṇas* provide a thorough account of how to worship Viṣṇu in a tāntric way. Intriguingly, the *Yoginī-tantra* declares that the *mantra Om namo nārāyanāya*<sup>6</sup> is superior to all others and that those who recite it do not need to utter any other perplexing *mantra* because it is *sarbārthasādhakaḥ*.<sup>7</sup> The *Yoginī-tantra* provides an account of the Hayagrīva-Mādhava temple of Kāmarūpa<sup>8</sup> and notes that it was situated between Barāha and Kāmarūpa<sup>9</sup> and over the mountain *maṇikūṭācal*<sup>10</sup>. This fact is also supported by the *Kālikā-purāṇa* in the following ways: *maṇiyakūṭācale viṣṇurhayagrīva svarūpadhṛka*.<sup>11</sup> Both the *Kālikā-purāṇa* and *Yoginī-tantra* provide detailed descriptions of the rituals of the worship of Hayagrīva.<sup>12</sup> The *Kālikā-purāṇa* mentions that Viṣṇu was worshipped in the form of *Matsya* in the region of the Matsyadhvaja mount to the east of Maṇikūṭa,<sup>13</sup> in the form of Bhairava known as Pāṇḍunātha over the hill Pāṇḍunātha,<sup>14</sup> in the form of Barāha over the Citrahara (Citrabaha) mountain,<sup>15</sup> in the form of *līṅga* over the hill Bhagavān-parvata in the east of river Lalitā,<sup>16</sup> and in the form of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in the Dikkarvāsīnī region.<sup>17</sup>

The earliest reference to Viṣṇu worship is found in the Bargaṅgā Rock Inscription of King Bhūtivarmā (a.d.553-54), and here the king is mentioned as *parama daivata parama bhāṭṭāraka mahārājā*.<sup>18</sup> Instead of mentioning the name of Śiva, the boar incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu has been eulogised in his own composed Puṣpabhadra-grant of Dharmapāla, the king of Kāmarūpa of the 12–13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> Besides, here it is mentioned that a *Brāhmaṇa* boy, namely Madhusudana, who had been granted land, was a worshipper of Viṣṇu. King Bhāskaravarmā is said to have been created by the holy lotus, issuing from the navel of Viṣṇu.<sup>20</sup> It can be presumed that during the rule of Kāmarūpa kings, Vaiṣṇavism was in practice, no doubt, in a mild form as the copper-plates mention the various incarnations of Viṣṇu like Varāha, Nara-simha, Rāma, etc., along with the names Nanda, Yaśodā, and a few names used for Brāhmaṇa such as Keśava, Janārdana, and Mādhava. Besides the literary sources, the archaeological sources like the remains of temples dedicated to Viṣṇu and his incarnations throughout Assam prove that the worship of Viṣṇu had been practiced in the land since early times. Among the contemporary sculptural remains, an image of Viṣṇu of the 9<sup>th</sup> century found near Deopānī of Golaghat, a bell-metal image of Viṣṇu of the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century collected from an old temple from a place adjacent to Dibrugarh, the 12<sup>th</sup> century's image of Viṣṇu in *Ananta Śayana* (eternal sleep) found in the Aśvakraṅta temple, the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century image of Śukreśvara at Śuklesvar, the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century's image of Veṇu-Gopāla carved in stone in the western entrance to the Kāmākhyā temple, etc. prove the existence of of Viṣṇu worship in Assam. On the other hand, the copperplate discovered in North Lakhimpur records the details of Vāsudeva worship during the period from the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the first year of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup>

The association of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa with Prāgjyotiṣa is well known. It is clear from the copper-plate inscriptions that the ancient king of Kāmarūpa starts with Naraka, who claimed their origin from Viṣṇu in his incarnation as a boar and goddess Dharitṛī (earth).

The discussion made above thus makes it clear that the Viṣṇu worship in ancient Assam was done more or less in a t̄antric way, which makes it different from the Vaiṣṇavism propagated by Śaṅkaradeva in the 15<sup>th</sup> century having its roots in the pan-Indian *Bhakti* Movement. Śaṅkaradeva emphasized *bhakti* (devotion to dissolve) and denied other costly ways of worship. He accepted Kṛṣṇa as the only deity to be worshipped, denying other gods and goddesses. His Neo-Vaiṣṇavism was a socio-religious movement targeting the removal of caste, class, community, and gender discrimination and the establishment of an egalitarian society. It was a cultural renaissance that resulted in the evolution of *Śaṅkarī* culture as the first ever common culture of North East India. This common culture linked the people of the northeastern part of India, who lived in hills and plains and had various ethnicities. This *Śaṅkarī* culture tied the people living in two separate political and geographical identities—Ahom land and Koch land—in such a way that there developed a feeling of oneness among the people, which ultimately resulted in the formation of a greater Assamese society, and Śaṅkaradeva gets the title of the father of the Assamese community.

Thus, it is seen that the old tradition of Viṣṇu worship in ancient Assam and the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva may not be compared in any way. The former tradition was just a religious practice among other practices. The people just worshipped the God Viṣṇu in a similar way as they worshipped other gods and goddesses. The best part of that Viṣṇu worship is that, in spite of the dominance of Śaivism and śāktism, Viṣṇu was placed above all deities. But Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva was a socio-religious and cultural movement having its roots in the *bhakti* movement of the 12th and 13th centuries. It was a way of life. It not only contributed to the formation of a greater Assamese society but also gave the Assamese Nation a new identity, a new way of life, a new perspective, a world-standard religion and culture and universality, a civility, and an egalitarian nature. As the Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva is incomparable ( *jākeri nāhike upāma* ), his creations and contributions to the Assamese community are beyond comparison.

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<sup>3</sup>*Kālikā-purāṇa*.(tr.)Bhattacharya, D.N.ch.88.vv.4-5

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<sup>11</sup>*Kālikā-purāṇa*.ch.78.v.80

<sup>12</sup>*Kālikā-purāṇa*.ch.78.vv.94-109 ; *Yoginī-tantra*.Part.II.ch.ix.vv.119-23

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*.ch.79.vv.53-54 *Yoginī-tantra*.Part.II.ch.ix.vv.119-23

<sup>14</sup>*Kālikā-purāṇa*.ch.79.vv.65-66

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*.ch.79.v.184

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<sup>18</sup>Baragaṅgā Rock Inscription.v.1.*Kāmarūpaśāsanāvalī* (ed.) Dimbeswar Sarma.2021.p.4

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<sup>20</sup>Nidhānpur-grant.v.34

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## Concept of Absolute in the light of Rāmānuja and Śāṅkaradeva : A Comparative Note

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### Abstract

Rāmānuja and Śāṅkaradeva are the two great philosophers in the domain of Indian philosophy. Rāmānuja the propounder of *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda*, belong to the Śrī Sampradāya sect of Vaiṣṇavism. On the other hand Śāṅkaradeva, was the propagator of Neo-Vaiṣṇava Sampradāya. Rāmānuja, one of the greatest philosophers of Vedānta schools of Indian Philosophy, calls his system as *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda* or Qualified Non-dualism. He preached his philosophical ideas with the aim of refuting the unqualified Non-dualism of Śāṅkarācārya. On the other hand Śāṅkaradeva, a saint poet of Assam also advocated Vaiṣṇava faith known as Neo-Vaisnavism or Mahapurusiyaism. It is completely a new *Sampradāya* propagating distinct religious and philosophical views. Śāṅkaradeva was one of the protagonists of the *bhakti* movement of India. Both Rāmānuja and Śāṅkaradeva believe that God is none other than Brahman or Absolute. In the view of Rāmānuja, Brahman or the Absolute is identical with *Īśvara* or God, the world Governor and that Brahman or *Īśvara* is Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa or Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Like Rāmānuja Śāṅkaradeva was also *Advaitavādin*. According to him Viṣṇu, or Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate Reality who is *ekamevādviṭyam*—one, without a second. In Śāṅkaradeva's philosophy God is identified with Brahman and that Brahman, the Supreme person is conceived as a concrete personality in the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Absolute Reality, *Parabrahman* and *Sacchidānandarūpa*. In Śāṅkaradeva's philosophy there is no difference between God and Brahman and that Brahman or God is *nirguṇa* and *nirvikāra*. In spite of certain differences between Rāmānuja and Śāṅkaradeva on the concept of Absolute or Brahman and in other philosophical outlooks, a close resemblance is noticed between these two scholars. Hence in this paper an attempt has been made to highlight a comparative analysis of the concept of Absolute from the Vaiṣṇava viewpoint of Rāmānuja and Śāṅkaradeva.

Key words: Absolute, Rāmānuja, Śāṅkaradeva, *Advaitavādin*, Vaiṣṇava

Both Rāmānuja and Śāṅkaradeva are the two great philosophers in the domain of Indian philosophy. Rāmānuja the propounder of *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda*, belong to the Śrī Sampradāya sect of Vaiṣṇavism. On the other hand Śāṅkaradeva, was the propagator of Neo-Vaiṣṇava Sampradāya . In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight a comparative analysis of the concept of Absolute from the Vaiṣṇava viewpoint of Rāmānuja and Śāṅkaradeva. Rāmānuja, one of the greatest philosophers of Vedānta schools of Indian Philosophy, calls his system as *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda* or Qualified Non-dualism. He preached his philosophical ideas with the aim of refuting the unqualified Non-dualism of Śāṅkarācārya. According to Śāṅkarācārya, Brahman or the Absolute is *advaita* or non-dual, i.e., devoid of any difference-- internal or external-- and of any form and quality the *jīva* is in complete identity with the Absolute and the world being a misrepresentation of Brahman has no Ultimate Reality.<sup>2</sup> In the view of Śāṅkarācārya, when one's ignorance is removed all multiplicity disappears and the identity of self and Brahman is realized.

However, Rāmānuja's philosophy is also, *advaitavāda* but it is *Viśiṣṭasya Advaita*—i.e., Qualified Non-dualism. Rāmānuja replaces the attributeless Brahman of Śaṅkara by Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa who is a personal God of theism. In Rāmānuja's view Brahman is the highest and is one. But that does not mean that there is nothing beside Him. It simply means that there is no second cause of the universe or there is no second being equal to Him. God is not inferior to Brahman. He is the real Creator of the world and *jīva*. Brahman is endowed with various attributes. Hence Brahman who is inherently free from all imperfections and is endowed with innumerable auspicious qualities is no other than theistic personal God. Rāmānuja's main objective was to establish a philosophical school which satisfies the religious fervour of the people as well as the intellectual urge of the philosophers. It may be mentioned here that traditionally there are four main sects or *Sampradāya* of Vaisnavism in India. These are *Śrī Sampradāya*, the *Brahma Sampradāya* or *Madhva Sampradāya*, the *Rudra Sampradāya* and the *Sanaka Sampradāya*. As a principal exponent, Rāmānuja belonged to the first sect, all the *Vaiṣṇava* saints and philosophers are supposed to belong to one or the other of these four sects. However, there are some sects which developed independently later on. On the other hand Śaṅkaradeva, a saint poet of Assam also advocated Vaiṣṇava faith known as Neo-Vaisnavism or Mahapurusiyaism. It is completely a new *Sampradāya* propagating distinct religious and philosophical views. Śaṅkaradeva was one of the protagonists of the *bhakti* movement of India. It may be mentioned here that a great spiritual awakening blossomed in the wake of the *bhakti* movement that pervaded almost the whole of India in the middle ages. This *bhakti* movement based on the liberal principles of equality and brotherhood of men played a very important role in inspiring the masses and shaping the spiritual and cultural life of the people of India. It was spearheaded by many great saints and devotees like Tukārām, Kabīr, Caitanya Mahāprabhu who carried the message of *bhakti* to the masses. In the north-eastern part of India, i.e., Assam or the then Kāmarūpa, the *bhakti* movement was initiated by the great saint Śaṅkaradeva. Being the original seat of *Śākta* cult, pre-Vaiṣṇava Assam had been for all practical purposes invincible for any other religious faith. It was therefore, not an easy task for Śaṅkaradeva to penetrate into it. But Śaṅkaradeva's towering personality coupled with deep study and immeasurable expedience earned through his long pilgrimage had made it possible for a break-through the impediment for generating the probity of Neo-Vaiṣnavism. With an all embracing religion of love he carved out a new way for religious and social upheaval in Assam. He initiated a great progressive and democratic movement which laid emphasis on the unity of Godhead, stood against excessive ritualism, preached a faith based on the liberal doctrine of *bhakti*, fought against caste prejudices and stressed on the equality and brotherhood of man. The Neo-Vaisnavism initiated by Śaṅkaradeva in Assam may, therefore be called a part of the all India Vaisnavite movement of the middle ages, although it had its own distinct features in the principles and tenets of the faith best suited to the nature of the people. Śaṅkaradeva's new doctrine came to be known as the *Ekaśaraṇa-Nāma-Dharma* i.e. the religion of supreme surrender to one God, viz., Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa. Śaṅkaradeva the great saint- poet of Assam is also a non-dualist. But non-dualism of Śaṅkaradeva differs distinctly from that of Śaṅkarācārya. Śaṅkaradeva's teachings are basically theistic and he nowhere unlike Śaṅkarācārya placed God on a lower plane.

Rāmānuja, the chief propounder of the doctrine of qualified Non-dualism, flourished

during the period 1017 to 1137AD. His father was Keśava Dikshit. He had his early education in scriptures under Yādavaprakāśa in Kancheepuram. Afterwards he migrated to Srirangam and for the whole of his long life he remained as a servant of Ranganatha. He was called the prince of ascetics (*Yatirāja*) by the admiring world. Both Rāmānuja and Śaṅkaradeva propagated their views through their writings. Like all other Vedantins, Rāmānuja also wrote a commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* known as *Śrībhāṣya* to explain his philosophical views. He also wrote commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, *Vedānta-sūtra*, *Vedānta-saṁgraha* and *Vedānta-dīpa*. Śaṅkaradeva the son of Kusumbar Bhuyan was born in the year 1449 AD in a leading Bhuyan family of Assam. The Bhuyans were the feudatory chiefs who ruled over twelve divisions of the northern part of upper Assam during the early part of Ahom rule. Śaṅkaradeva took over the charge of Bhuyanship but later on he showed disinterest in the office and engaged himself in spiritual reforms. Like Rāmānuja, Śaṅkaradeva also through his writings tried to establish his Mahapurusiya religion among the masses of the people of Assam. Śaṅkaradeva drew inspiration for his new faith from the Vedas, the *Upaniṣads*, and the *Purāṇas* and particularly from the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* which has been described as the sun among the *Purāṇas* (*Purāṇa-Sūrya*) comprising the quintessence of the Vedānta philosophy served as the inexhaustible source for Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva's literary genius found a way in his varied compositions. His literary output includes six long verse narration, six one act plays, three treatises on *bhakti* including one in Sanskrit, translation of seven *skandhas* of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the *Uttarakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, a few *Bhaṭimās* i.e., the eulogies of the God and the king, a good number of devotional songs known as *Bargītas* and a book of prayer with refrains titled *Kīrtanaghoṣā* consisting of 189 prayers meant for chanting the glory of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa either in solo or in chorus.

Both Rāmānuja and Śaṅkaradeva believe that God is none other than Brahman or Absolute. In the view of Rāmānuja, Brahman or the Absolute is identical with *Īśvara* or God, the world Governor and that Brahman or *Īśvara* is Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa or Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Thus the terms Brahman, *Īśvara*, Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa and Śrī Kṛṣṇa indicate the same Ultimate Reality or Absolute, according to Rāmānuja. Brahman, the Absolute is non-dual in the sense that it is the all-embracing reality, and that nothing remains apart from it. But non-dual Brahman is not *nirviśeṣa* or differenceless, as Śaṅkara holds. According to Rāmānuja, Absolute or Brahman or God is a synthetic whole admitting of internal difference or *swagata-bheda*. The individual souls and the matter form the body of the Brahman and are pervaded by it, just as the body is pervaded by the self. Again they are the attributes of Brahman and have no existence apart from it. They are inseparable from Him. The *cit* elements or the selves and *acit* elements or the material things are related to Brahman as modes or attributes—technically called *prakāras* or *śeṣas* or *viśeṣaṇas*. These elements have got distinct characteristics of their own and, as such, are different from the essential nature of Brahman. But yet they are non-different from Brahman since they have no existence apart from it. Just as the attributes have no existence apart from the substance, so the selves and matter have no separate existence apart from Brahman. Thus Rāmānuja's Brahman is non-dual (*advaita*) but is qualified (*viśiṣṭa*) by matter and self. That is why his view is called *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda*. Rāmānuja describes God as both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*. According to Rāmānuja God is *saguṇa* because he is endowed with infinite qualities.

Attributes forming his *swarūpa* or essence are existence, consciousness, bliss, infinitude and purity. As the creator of the world he possesses attributes like omniscience omnipotence and omnipresence. Īśvara is all pervading; he is not limited by space, time or any other object of the world. He is eternal and is therefore beyond all temporal changes. Being the ultimate refuge of all the *jīvas* he is endowed with qualities like *sausīlya* or gentleness, *saulabhya* or easiness in availability, *vātsalya* or affection, *kāruṇya* or compassion etc. The most prominent qualities of Īśvara are knowledge, power and love. Brahman is also described as *nirguṇa*. But according to Rāmānuja, *nirguṇa* does not mean devoid of all qualities and objectives, it only means that Brahman is devoid of all defects and inauspicious qualities. The defects, impurities, pains and sufferings of the empirical selves and matter however, do not affect the essence of Brahman. In its absolute nature as the inner controller, Brahman is eternally pure and perfect, and is quite different from matter and the self. Though possessed of a body, Brahman is *nirāvayava* or partless in the sense that it is all pervading. Though revealed as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world, it is devoid of any *karman* or action, since behind all its efforts, it has no purpose of its own. It is unchangeable in the sense that all the changes arise within its own being and there is nothing to exert influence on it from outside. It is self contained and self-sustained. It is not dependent upon nor influenced by anything beyond itself. Though God is one He manifests Himself in five forms, viz. *Antaryāmin*, *Para*, *Vyūha*, *Vibhava* and *Archavatāra*. He is *Antaryāmin* or the immanent soul of the universe. Again He is *Para* or Supreme who is the transcendental Lord. Brahman is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the Universe. For this purpose He reveals Himself through the four *Vyūhas*, viz., *Vāsudeva*, *Samkarṣaṇa*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruddha*. When God incarnates Himself taking the human or animal form for the purpose of protecting the good and punishing the wicked, He is called *Vibhava* or *Avatāra*. The last form of God is called *Archavatāra*. The different holy idols of the Lord enshrined in different temples are called *Archavatāras*.

Like Rāmānuja Śāṅkardeva was also *Advaitavādin*. According to him Viṣṇu, or Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate Reality who is *ekamevādviṭīyam*—one, without a second. In Śāṅkardeva's philosophy God is identified with Brahman and that Brahman, the Supreme person is conceived as a concrete personality in the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Absolute Reality, *Parabrahman*. He is *sacchidānandarūpa*. In Śāṅkardeva's philosophy there is no difference between God and Brahman and that Brahman or God is *nirguṇa* and *nirvikāra*. Moreover according to Śāṅkardeva God is not *nirākāra* (formless) but is a *Viśvamūrti* and as such His form is unlimited, eternal and immeasurable. Again Śāṅkardeva is of opinion that Supreme Being is both *sagūṇa* and *nirguṇa*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is endowed with all auspicious qualities like omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence etc. He is the cause of origination, sustenance and destruction of the world. In the view of Śāṅkardeva, *nirguṇa* aspect of Brahman does not mean the absence of all qualities rather it means the absence of all inferior qualities. He is *nirguṇo guṇī*. It may be mentioned here that Śāṅkardeva has never made the *sagūṇa* aspect of Īśvara inferior to the *nirguṇa* one. This concept of *nirguṇa* fully corresponds to Rāmānuja's concept of *nirguṇa*.

Both Rāmānuja and Śāṅkardeva do not consider Īśvara as an impersonal principle. In the opinion of Rāmānuja, Īśvara is a person. The qualities of power, knowledge and love make him reveal himself as a person. It is in the form of a person that he responds to the prayers of the devotees, approaches them as their dearest one and favours them with his

grace. He is called Puruṣottama or the highest Personality, because he is the resort of all the perfect qualities. Being a super personality he is endowed with a super natural form which however, is identical with his essence. This form is pure, real, conscious and full of bliss. It is called *saccidānanda-ghana* or a mass of existence, consciousness and bliss. It is composed of *śuddha* or pure *sattva*, i.e. *sattva* unmixed with *rajas* and *tamas*. In Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy also Īśvara is considered as a person. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is worshipped as Hari, Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa and Puruṣottama and so on. In Śaṅkaradeva's Mahapurusiyaism the epithets Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa, Hari, Bhagavanta, Keśava, Vāsudeva, Viṣṇu etc. all are used interchangeably, all of them refer to the same Ultimate Reality who is one without a second. Lord dwells as the *Paramātman* in the *jagat* as well as in the *jīvas*—constituting everything of the sentient and the insentient world.

The concept of Ultimate Reality as *Antayāmin* is also there both in Rāmānuja and āŚaṅkaradeva. In Śaṅkaradeva the Ultimate Reality is viewed in the three aspects of *Brahman*, *Paramātman*, and *Bhagavanta* or *Bhagavān* and here he strictly follows the teachings of the *Bhāgavata*. Of these aspects *Brahman* stands for the transcendental *nirguṇa*, *Paramatmān* for the indwelling *Brahman* (*Antaryāmin*) while the concept of *Bhagavān* synthesizes both the concepts of *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*. Śaṅkaradeva's concept of the *Antayāmin* has its strong basis in Rāmānuja's application of the self.—body analogy, where the world and the individual selves —*acit* and *cit* are conceived as the body of Brahman. In this context the *mahāvākya*, *Tat tvam asi* can be referred. Here the word *tat* refers to Brahman—the one, the cause of the world and *tvam* refers to that same Brahman as the individual soul. Just as the body is meaningless without the soul, so the individual soul is also meaningless without the inner soul—the Brahman. In the writings of Śaṅkaradeva also we find the use of this soul-body analogy between God and the world. Śaṅkaradeva says—

*yata jīva jangama  
kīta pataṅgama  
aga,naga, jaga teri kāyā*

It means that all the *jīvas*—the movable and the immovable, ants and insects, hills and mountains all are your body only.

Regarding the concept of the world Rāmānuja is of opinion that world is the manifestation of Brahman. According to Rāmānuja, Īśvara is the sole cause of the universe. He is not only the efficient cause but also the material cause of it. Īśvara associated with the subtle forms of the selves and matter is the material cause. Īśvara is regarded as the material cause of the world. For if he be not so, he will have to depend upon some material outside himself. In that case he will be limited by that material and will consequently cease to be infinite. It is however, to be noted that when Rāmānuja ascribes material causality to Īśvara, he makes a distinction between the *viśeṣyāmśa* or the essential aspect and the *viśeṣaṇāmśa* or the attributive aspect of Īśvara. According to Rāmānuja, *viśeṣyāmśa* or *swarūpa* i.e. the essential nature of Īśvara does not undergo any change, what under goes changes is the *viśeṣaṇāmśa* or the mode of Īśvara i.e. the selves and the matter. Like Rāmānuja, Śaṅkaradeva is of opinion that Īśvara is both the material(*upādāna-kāraṇa*) and efficient cause(*nimitta-kāraṇa*) of the world. According to Śaṅkaradeva, Brahman is the cause of the world. But this causality of the world does not bring about any change in the nature of Parameśvara. Moreover, Śaṅkaradeva points out that God is not only the cause

but He Himself is the effect, i.e. the world. Hence, He says ‘you are the cause and effect both’.<sup>21</sup> Śaṅkaradeva cites the example of gold and golden earrings, earth and the earthen pot etc. to clarify this point. Just as there is not real difference between gold and the earring or earth and pot similarly there is no real difference between God and the world. God manifests Himself as the world.<sup>22</sup> To be more specific it can be said that Śaṅkaradeva does not regard this world as a transformation or modification of Īśvara. In his view world is only a manifestation of the Supreme Reality. Unlike Śaṅkaradeva, Rāmānuja being a *pariṇāmavādin* upholds that world is a real transformation of the God. The world remains in a subtle form in Brahman. This is his *Kāraṇāvasthā* i.e. the causal state. At the time of creation this subtle world becomes manifested as *nāma* (name) and *rūpa* (form). This is His *Kāryāvasthā* i.e. the effect state. In the view of Rāmānuja there is no unfulfilled desire of God behind the creation of the world. He is of opinion that creation is merely a *līlā* or a play on the part of God. Hence according to Rāmānuja creation of God can not be false.

Like Rāmānuja, Śaṅkaradeva also is of opinion that this world is just a *līlā* of Īśvara.<sup>23</sup> In the opinion of Śaṅkaradeva the world is not ultimately false but it is *Kṛṣṇamāyā*. The world as we perceive is not the real world. To emphasise this idea, it seems, Śaṅkaradeva has employed the analogies of rope-snake and dream.<sup>24</sup> Śaṅkaradeva also points out that Īśvara has created this world with the help of his power *māyā*. This *māyā* is a real power of God which is a part of His body or *ardhakāyā* (one half of His body). Thus *māyā* is not imaginary as upheld by Śaṅkarācārya. It may be pointed out that in the system of Śaṅkaradeva, *māyāvada* persists and goes along with *bhakti*. The world is unreal (*asat*) and being connected with nescience (*avidyā*), it appears as real though it is born out of the real Brahman.<sup>25</sup> This is what is called *adhyāsa* by Śaṅkarācārya in the Vedānta. *Adhyāsa* means the appearance of a thing where it is not. The false appearances are made possible by *māyā* which is considered a power of God. Śaṅkaradeva also accepts this view. In the *Bhaktiratnākara*, Śaṅkaradeva is found to maintain a difference between God (Īśvara) and *jīva*. Īśvara is the controller of *māyā* through his power of consciousness and *jīva* is ever mortified under the pressure of *māyā*. *Jīva* can be released only when it attains knowledge through love of God.<sup>26</sup> Śaṅkaradeva regards God in the form of Brahman and as the cause of all the incarnations.

Rāmānuja is of opinion that the individual selves are also eternal like Brahman. They are like the sparks of fire which come out of Brahman. The size of the *jīva* is atomic. The *jīva* is the agent and enjoyer and not merely knowledge as held by Śaṅkarācārya. The finite self is related to God as a manifestation of His glory. In much conformity with the view of Rāmānuja, Śaṅkaradeva also regards the *jīva* as a part of Īśvara. In Śaṅkaradeva’s view *jīva* constitute the body of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The *jīvas* are never identical with Īśvara, they are only the part of God. In the *Bhaktiratnākara* he has quoted verses to show that the *jīvas* are different from Brahman.<sup>27</sup> But he has also maintained that the *jīvas* are not really different from God, the only difference lies between the parts and the whole. Parts are not totally different from the whole, nor are they non-different from it. Hence, Śaṅkaradeva has emphasized that the *jīvas* are dependent on God.

Both Rāmānuja and Śaṅkaradeva maintain that *bhakti-mārga* (the path of devotion) is the way to realize Absolute or God. It may be mentioned here that Rāmānuja is one of the main protagonists of the *bhakti* movement of India. In the opinion of Rāmānuja and Śaṅkaradeva the path of devotion is superior and also easier than the paths of knowledge (

*jñāna* ) and action (*karma*) for the attainment of liberation. However, Rāmānuja recommends various means for the attainment of intuitive knowledge to get liberation. These are -- devotion, complete self surrender to God and moral discipline. For attaining liberation Rāmānuja prescribes the combined effect of the three paths of *jñāna*, *karman* and *bhakti*. But *bhakti* is the ultimate means of liberation. According to him, *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga* lead to *bhakti-yoga*. Rāmānuja uses the term *bhakti* in a double sense— lower and higher. Lower *bhakti* known as *vaidhi* has been identified by him with *upāsana* or meditation. It is described as a ‘lovelful steady remembrance of which is unbroken like a stream of oil’. This type of *bhakti* is a step towards the higher *bhakti*, which has been identified by Rāmānuja with intuitive knowledge. The highest *bhakti* is a special kind of knowledge which can be attained only by the grace (*prasāda*) of God. The lower type of *bhakti* along with complete self surrender to Lord on the part of a devotee and the Divine grace on the part of the Lord are necessary pre-requisites for the attainment of this knowledge. Besides the three ways of *karma*, *jñāna* and *bhakti* Rāmānuja lays emphasis on *prapatti* or complete surrender to God as a means of liberation.

Like Rāmānuja *bhakti* is the central theme in Śaṅkaradeva’s teachings. In his view it is the best path for the attainment of liberation. He says that it is the absolute and unshakable dedication to Lord Kṛṣṇa that leads *jīvas* to attain liberation. The singular minded service towards Śrī Kṛṣṇa together with self surrender discarding the worship of all other deities is the best and easiest means to attain liberation. Moreover for Śaṅkaradeva, *bhakti* is not only the means, it is greater than liberation, nay it is the end in itself. A devotee never hankers after liberation; rather he takes delight in the service of God. The singular-minded service of Śrī Kṛṣṇa together with self surrender discarding the worship of all other deities is called *Eka-śaraṇa bhakti*. Śaṅkaradeva also like all the thinkers referred nine paths or means namely *śravaṇa* or hearing the scriptures , *kīrtana* or singing the name of the Lord, *smaraṇa* or remembering the qualities of the Lord, *pāda-sevā* or pursuance of devotional activities, *arcana* or worship, *vandana* or salutation, *dāsya* or servitude, *sakhya* or relationship and *ātmanivedana* or self surrender which are to be followed in the pursuit of devotion. However, Śaṅkaradeva has given the highest importance to the *śravaṇa* ( hearing) and *kīrtana* (chanting). He has said that God is pleased only through his singing of his praise by the devotees. Singing of the names of God is held by him as the best kind of *bhakti*. It may be mentioned here that *kīrtana* is not only a means but also an end in itself. According to Śaṅkaradeva *kīrtana* is both *sadhana* and *sadhya bhakti* and on this point Śaṅkaradeva differs from Rāmānuja.

Another important point of difference between Rāmānuja and Śaṅkaradeva consists in the recognition of idol worship .As a religious preacher Śaṅkaradeva was a monotheist. In his *Eka-śaraṇa-nāma-dharma* he prescribed the worship of only one deity, i.e. Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, the perfect incarnation of Nārāyaṇa and none else. All other gods and goddesses are His creation. Śaṅkaradeva has not suggested his followers to worship any other entity. Even Lakṣmī, the consort of Lord Viṣṇu is not worthy of being worshipped by the followers of *Eka-śaraṇa*. Of course Lakṣmī is considered as the personification of the attributes of the Lord. Thus she is necessarily inbedded in Him. But that does not mean that she is to be worshipped by the devotees of Kṛṣṇa. The concept of *Eka-śaraṇa* implies the acceptance of only one entity worth worshipping. Here Śaṅkaradeva differs with Śaṅkarācārya and other Vaisnava philosophers like Rāmānuja, Madhvācārya, Vallabhācārya and others who

however, worship or sing the glory of Lakṣmī.

It is evident from the above discussion that Śaṅkaradeva who was younger to Rāmānuja by a few centuries agrees with many views propagated by the later. Among the Vaiṣṇava philosophers regarding their religio –philosophical views, we find more accord than discord. It is to be noted here that all the Vaiṣṇava Vedānta schools of India arose as a revolt against the absolute non-dualism of Śaṅkarācārya. All of them criticized the Sankarite theories of Absolute. Śaṅkaradeva being a religio- philosopher also propagates the views which are very much similar to those of Vaiṣṇava Vedānta scholars. Hence, in spite of certain differences between Rāmānuja and Śaṅkaradeva on the concept of Absolute or Brahman and in other philosophical outlooks, a close resemblance is also noticed between these two scholars.

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## Manuscript Paintings of Assam: A Special Reference to Śaṅkaradeva's writings

Dr. Indira Saikia Bora

In the study of the history of any civilized region, manuscripts form an important class of source which cannot be ignored as a means of conserving art and transmitting culture and learning representing the artistic sensibilities of the people. They are the offshoots of the cultural upsurge. The manuscripts called 'puthi' in Assamese ensure for it a most venerable position in the minds of the people who worship them in place of any idol in the community prayer hall called *nāmghar* and also in domestic chapel. This grand spirit around the worship of manuscript in the altar led to phenomenal growth of numerous transcripts of devotional scriptures in the society. The *bhakti* movement inaugurated by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva stimulated an unprecedented intellectual awakening and a unique cultural efflorescence, which encompassed literature, art, architecture, sculpture, dance, drama, music and painting, devotional lyrics of classical order, *kāvya* etc. His apostles and followers took to his path and made the pace of literary and art activities. Manuscripts in terms of number and titles increased and the *sattras* emerged as one of the great repositories of such works.

The other repository was the archives of the Ahom and Koch kings. The Ahom kings preserved the Royal manuscripts, records and letters to the royal palace. The Koch king, Naranārāyaṇa, was said to have sent several cart loads of manuscript archives to Rāmsarasvatī whom he commissioned for the translation of the *Mahābhārata*. Prior to the rendering of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki was translated into Assamese verses by Mādhava Kandali as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It was the earliest of all translations of Vālmīki in the regional language of North and North-East India. The *Bhāgavata-purāna*, more specifically its tenth chapter of which *ādyā* portion was rendered by Śaṅkaradeva, the verse rendering of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* exercised tremendous impact on the Assamese society and the poets, composers and dramatists as well. Several other *purāṇas* such as the *Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa*, the *Harivaṁśa-purāṇa*, and the *Padma-purāṇa* got translated besides the *Śakuntalā* of Kālidāsa and *Gīta-govinda* of Jayadeva.

The manuscripts of all these works enlarged the corpus. But the preservation of manuscripts from the ravages of nature was a matter of great concern. Quite a large number of manuscripts have been lost or damaged. The little that has survived today may be calculated to several thousands, taking into account those preserved in some government and private institutions, private collections, *sattra* archives around the state and those worshipped and read in different community prayer halls and domestic chapels. So, in terms of numerical calculation, Assam can rightly boast of having a rich treasure of manuscripts distributed over a variety of subjects which embrace different branches of learning like *jyotiṣa*, *smiti*, *kāvya*, *kalā*, *purāṇa*, *saṅgīta*, etc. Most of the manuscripts are plain and without any decoration. But there are some transcripts which are illustrated in line and colour.

It has been observed above that the *sattras* took to the art of painting under the wings for cultivation along with other literary and artistic activities. The earliest available document of painting present in Assam was confined to manuscript illumination. The *Citra Bhāgavata* represents the earliest illustrated manuscripts of Assam. It was recovered from

a *sattra* named *Bāli-Sattra* in the district of Nagaon in 1539 A.D. The style marched to the royal palace of the Ahom kings Rudra Siṁha (1695-1713 A.D.) and Śiva Siṁha (1713-1744 A.D.). The *Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* executed (1767 A.D.) by Pūrnakāma is a remarkable piece of art in the entire domain of the illustrated manuscripts of Assam.

The outbreak of the *Moamariā* rebellion in 1769 usurped the throne and demolished the edifice of the earlier court. Some of the artists abandoned their profession and went in search of alternative rehabilitation while some others moved to different *sattras* for shelter. There are a few illustrated manuscripts executed after 1769 which exhibit the skill of two artists, one with superior brush work and the other, imitating the former. The *Udyoga-parva* of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (185 A.D. VI and VII) are two illustrated manuscripts.

Although the impact of the *Moamariā* upheaval was felt in the *sattra* circles, the pace of practices there did not dwindle till the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The notable one was the *Pārijāta-haraṇa*, a transcript of Śaṅkaradeva's drama of the same name. In 1836, the Ahom prince Purandar Siṁha, whom the British company placed on the throne for a very short period after the fall of the Ahom Kingdom during the Burmese aggression, commissioned the services of Durgārām Betha for an illumination work in the folios of the *Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa* (now in the British Library, London). It was also a masterpiece of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to J.P. Losty, "this is the last of the great ones, in which the native Assamese style has triumphantly reasserted itself over the desiccated Ahom court style."

*Hasṭīvidyārnava*, a manuscript on elephantology, is a work of high merit. The *Ānandalaharī* is another interesting manuscript. The Assam State Museum has six texts of manuscripts in the collection viz., (1) *Kīrtana I and Kīrtana II*, (2) *Anadī-pātana*, (3) *Rāmāyaṇa (Sundara Kāṇḍa)*, (4) *Śyamanta-haraṇa*, (5) *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* Chapter 8 and (6) *Gajendra-mokṣa*.

The following is a brief description of the texts:

**1) *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*:** The manuscript describes a sage explaining *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* to Devahuti, mother of Kapilamuni, while an attendant watches the whole situation.

Material: *Sāñcipāt*

Colours used: Red, yellow, off white, olive green and black

**2) *Grāha Gajendra Upākhyāna*:**

**Theme:** In the middle of the lake Khīrasāgara, there was a hill called Trikut Parvat. The flora and fauna of the place commanded a panoramic view. Once a herd of elephants led by Gajarāja, came to the lake to drink water. They entered the lake and started sporting. At that time a crocodile caught the rear leg of Gajarāja. The Gajarāja applied his entire force to take out the leg from the mouth of the crocodile. But the crocodile also applied its entire force to pull back the elephant Gajarāja. This fight between the two lasted for a very long period. The other elephants of the herd tried their best to pull out the Gajarāja with the help of their trunks, but they could not be successful. At last, the elephant was tired and he

pulled out a lotus from the lake, and raised his trunk to pray Lord Viṣṇu for his rescue. Viṣṇu heard the prayer of his *bhakta* and came down from heaven on the back of his *Garuḍa-vāhana* to rescue him. Viṣṇu killed the crocodile (*grāha*) and rescued the elephant.

The crocodile or the *grāha* was a *Gandharva*, who being cursed by a sage Deval had to take the form of the *grāha*. Similarly Gajendra was a king called Indradyumna, who at the curse of Agastya took the form of the elephant. Being pleased at the prayer of Gajendra, Viṣṇu took Gajendra along with Him to His heavenly abode.

### 3) *Syamantakamaṇi-haraṇa* (*Symanta-haraṇa*):

Material: *Sāñcipāt*

Colours used: Red, Olive green, yellow, and off-white

Provenance: Hajo

**Theme:** King Satrājita was an ardent devotee of the Sūrya, the Sun God. He presented a brilliant gem to Satrājita. It glittered like the Sun. The gem was called Syamantakamaṇi. It was said that if it is worn by someone, he would shine everywhere and would overcome any danger or difficulty. Wearing the gem, Satrājita met the king of Dvārakā, Kṛṣṇa who inquired about the brilliant gem. He said that it was gifted by Sūrya. Learning about the importance of the gem, Kṛṣṇa wanted to possess it. Satrājita refused to give it saying that it belonged to his brother Prasena and came back home. This extraordinary gem was given to Satrājit's beloved brother Prasena, for his own safety.

Wearing the gem, Prasena went to the forest for hunting on horseback. Its brilliance attracted the attention of a lion in the forest. The lion attacked Prasena, and after killing him and the horse, it took away the gem. Jāmbavanta, the king of the bears, being drawn by the brilliance of the gem, killed the lion and took the possession of it. After obtaining it, he entered the cozy entrance of a cave through which he went to his abode under the ground.

Meanwhile, Satrājita was quite worried about Prasena, his brother going out for hunting wearing the Syamantakamaṇi, who was very late in return. He reported the matter to Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa then went to the forest with Satrājita and a brigade of soldiers in search of Prasena following the foot-prints of horse. Ultimately they located the dead bodies of Prasena and the horse. They also found the dead lion, which had killed them and discovered that a bear had killed the lion also and snatched away the gem from it. Following foot-steps of the bear further, they found an opening leading to a cave. Kṛṣṇa entered into it in search of the Syamantakamaṇi leaving the king and soldiers at the entrance.

Jāmbavanta had given Syamantakamaṇi to his child playing in the lap of Jāmbavatī. Kṛṣṇa saw it and tried to acquire it. At this, the maid raised an alarm. Thereupon, Jāmbavanta came to the scene and charged at Kṛṣṇa. This led to a duel. After failing to defeat Kṛṣṇa, Jāmbavanta could realize that it was Kṛṣṇa, another incarnation of Viṣṇu. He then begged Kṛṣṇa to forgive him and narrated how he helped Hanumāna and Rāma in rescuing Sītā from Lañkā. He prostrated before Kṛṣṇa. Thereupon Kṛṣṇa pardoned him and embraced him as a devotee.

Kṛṣṇa then requested him to return the gem. Jāmbavanta returned the gem. He also wedded his daughter Jāmbavatī to Kṛṣṇa and the gem as dowry to him.

As Kṛṣṇa did not return from the unknown place for twelve days, Vāsudeva and Devakī

were extremely anxious. Rukmiṇi fainted and so did Devakī. People of Dvārakā prayed for the safe return of Kṛṣṇa.

But the residents of Dvārakā were surprised to see that in the next day, Kṛṣṇa was arriving with Jāmbavatī. The priests showered flowers on the newly wedded couple and welcomed them. Later on, Kṛṣṇa returned the Syamantakamaṇi to Satrājita. Satrājita repented of his folly of thinking about Kṛṣṇa as the thief of stolen gem. He was ashamed to see the benevolence of Kṛṣṇa. He received the Syamantakamaṇi with a feeling of guilt.

At home, Satrājita was feeling unhappy for unnecessarily blaming Kṛṣṇa. He decided, to re-establish his relation with Kṛṣṇa by giving his daughter Satyabhāmā in marriage to Kṛṣṇa. Accordingly, he formally handed over his beloved daughter Satyabhāmā along with the gem. Kṛṣṇa accepted her and their relationship was cordially restored.

#### 4)Anādi Pātana:

Material: *Tulāpāt* (Handmade cotton)

Provenance: Kuji Sattra (Marigaon District, Assam)

Colours used: Red, off-white, blue, olive green and black

**Theme:** *Anādi-pātana* is one of the best illustrated manuscripts of Assam, the text of which was composed by Śaṅkaradeva himself at Pātbausī. It is a philosophical work that deals with the destruction of the universe and also its creation with divinities by the Supreme Lord Īśvara Puruṣa, who is also called Parampuruṣa. *Anādi-pātana* is based on the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* mixed with *Vāmana-purāṇa* that deals with astronomy.

The introduction of the work has been given through the location of the earth. It is said that the heavy load of the earth is being borne by eight elephants in eight directions under a vast area of water. Below this, there is the Ananta-nāga and the tortoise (*kurma*) at the base (a form of Viṣṇu) who is supposed to carry the entire weight of the earth, eight elephants and the great Ananta-nāga. Whenever, these living beings under water move their bodies, it is presumed that an earthquake occurs.

At the second stage, the description of *mahāpralaya* (deluge) is given. Ananta-nāga burns the earth with its poisonous flames; Rudra (Śiva) assuming the form of *samhāra mūrti*, destroys all creatures, followed by incessant rains causing floods, that submerges the earth.

Next comes creation. At first the Supreme God, Bhagavanta, better known as Brahmapurūṣa was alone in a pensive mood. Then He, with the help of *prakṛiti* created *mahat-tattva* that begot three sons-Sattva, Raja and Tama. Tama was responsible for the birth of pride (*ahaṅkāra*), sound (*sabda*), sky (*akāśa*), touch (*sparśa*), wind (*vāyu*) and beauty (*rūpa*). Likewise Raja created eye, ear, nose, and mouth. Similarly Sattva created Aśvinikumāra, Varuna, Indra, Viṣṇu. Mitra and Prajāpati.

An account of the constitution of mind is given in detail. It is followed by the description of the 14 *bhuvanas* (earth) and 24 *tattvas* (knowledge)

An interesting description of seven heavens also follow: *bhūloka* of men, *bhubaloka* of the *gandharvas*, *suraloka* of the *dikpālas*, *mahāloka* of Dhruva, *Jñānaloka* of the *mahāmunis*, *tapaloka* of the *siddhas*, *satyaloka* of *Brahmā*, *Śivalok* of Śiva and *Viṣṇuloka* as the highest abode of the Bhagavanta or Brahmapurūṣa, the Supreme God. At the same time, the creation of *sapta pātāl* (seven hells) i.e. *tal*, *atal*, *sutal*, *talātal*, *mahātal* and *rasātal* is also portrayed. Simultaneously, the *sapta dvīpas* (seven islands) also came into

being. Thus, *svargas*, *pātāls* and *dvīpas* i.e. three *lokas* were created.

The creation of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara respectively for creation, maintenance and destruction of the world is narrated effectively. When these three gods prayed the Brahmapuruṣa, he explained them about their responsibilities. Different gods, goddesses, demons, four Vedas, *sāstras*, *purāṇas*, four *varṇas* and races were created at the direction of the Brahmapuruṣa or Paramapuruṣa,. After this, the description of the anatomical features of the human being is given.

In the last part of the work, the author gives more details about  *jyoticakra*, its meaning and the introduction of ten *dikpālas* (*diśapāls*), location of moving sun in twelve *rāśicakras* (zodiac), the location of other planets (*graha*) and *nakṣatras*. The description of the 84 hells (*narakas*) is given at the end of the manuscript as being customary in many manuscripts of Assam.

*Anādi-pātana* is an illustrated work on hand-made cotton. Of all the texts of manuscripts painting *Anādi-pātana* occupies the highest position considering the merits of the art of manuscript painting. Normally, Red colour is used for the background.

The scene of Saṁhārarūpa of Śīva is unique in terms of the depiction of the facial expression of Śīva. The manuscript *Anādi-pātana* is a highly philosophical work of Śāṅkaradeva. The philosophy of creation and destruction of the universe by the Supreme Lord is symbolically expressed through colours and forms. The style of *Anādi-pātana* was established in the lifetime of Śāṅkaradeva and later, the artists adopted this style while illustrating *Anādi-pātana*. Another copy of *Anādi-pātana* is discovered from Majuli. This great work of painting has enhanced the reputation and standard of Assamese manuscript painting at the national level. The artist of *Anādi-pātana* followed the basic styles of the *Citra-Bhāgavata*, which is considered the earliest manuscript painting of Assam dateable to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Kīrttana-I***

Material used: *Sāñcipāt*

Provenance: Gorhat

Colours used: Red, yellow, black and green

**Theme:** *Kīrttana-I* is a manuscript on the description of the *Caturvimśati avatār* of Viṣṇu. *Paramapuruṣa* or *Brahmapuruṣa* assumed the form of a great-*puruṣa* in order to create the universe, such as *mahat-tattva* (greatness) and *ahamkāra* (pride). This great *puruṣa* was the source of the creation of everything—animals, human beings, gods and goddesses. Whenever there was any problem he assumed several forms viz., incarnations to resolve them. These incarnations are necessary to put the society in order and to rescue his devotees from any danger.

The first scene contains the text and illustration showing the figures of six incarnations of Viṣṇu in six frames. The first two represent the seated figure of Brahmārūpī Saṅātana i.e. the manifestation of God conceived as Brahmā, the Supreme Divinity, who is eternal and the scene depicting the birth of Brahmā, the creator emerging out of the lotus from the navel of Viṣṇu, reclining of • diśesha. The rest of the frames carry the figures of Matsya, Kurma, Varāha and Narasimha *avatārs* of Viṣṇu.

The second scene shows the text and the illustrations of three incarnations of god distributed in three separate frames. The first frame depicts *Vāmana avatāra* reinstalling

Indra on the throne. The second contains the illustration of the total annihilation of the Kṣatriyas by Paraśurāma. The last scene depicts the fight between Rāma and Rāvaṇa. The reverse of the scene contains the text and illustrations of Balarāma, Buddha, Kalkī, Sanatkumāra, Nārada, and Naranārāyaṇa.

The third manuscript carries text and illustrations of the incarnation of Kapila, Dattatreya, Yañja, Prithu and Dhanvantarī, besides the story relating to the distribution of nectar (amṛta) by Lakṣmī among the *devas* in the obverse.

The fourth scene contains pictorial illustrations of Hayagrīva and Dhruva, besides Ādinārāyaṇa on Godhika. The reverse shows the figure of four *siddhas* explaining the greatness of *nāma* (name of God) to Nārada.

It shows the scene of punishment awarded to non-believers of *nāma* (name of God), distributed in the two registers in the hands of the Yamaduta.

The last picture portrays the scene of Vaikuṅṭha where Viṣṇu is seated flanked by his consorts and Jaya and Vijaya. The other side of the scene shows Śukamuni explaining the significance of Vedānta to King Parikṣita.

### ***Kīrtana-II (Rāsa-lilā)***

Materials used: Paper of recent times

Provenance: Gorhat

Colours used: Red, Yellow, blue and white

*Theme:* On a full moon night of the autumn season, Śrī Kṛṣṇa being inspired by the sweet flowers and the natural beauty in the Vṛndāvana, wanted to play *Rāsa-lilā* with the *gopikās*. He started playing his *vāṁśī* (flute) melodiously. After hearing the melodious tune of Kṛṣṇa, the *gopikās* could not resist the temptation of meeting. Leaving aside everything including their husbands and children, they rushed to the Vṛndāvan and met Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa, pretending, advised them to return home. But they would not listen to the advice of Kṛṣṇa at any cost. On the other hand, the *gopikās* requested him not to deprive them of his company and started weeping. This led Kṛṣṇa to console them and he granted their prayer and started sporting with them and they forgot everything around them. Thereupon, Kṛṣṇa vanished for a while creating a pathetic scene among the *gopikās* who started searching for Kṛṣṇa with tears in their eyes.

Kṛṣṇa again appeared on the sands of Jamunā after teasing the *gopikās* and through his magic power assumed several forms of the same person, played with each *gopikā* individually singing, dancing and embracing them. This scene was so attractive that gods came down from heaven to witness the sporting of Kṛṣṇa with the *gopikās*.

This folio shows the scene of *Rāsa-lilā* of Kṛṣṇa with the *gopikās*.

### ***Rāmāyaṇa Sundarakāṇḍa***

Materials used: *Saṅcipāt*

Provenance: Jorhat

Colours used: Red, olive green, off white, yellow, black etc.

**Theme:** The text and the paintings give a detailed description as to how Hanumāna reached the kingdom of Bāli and Sugrīva on the seashore i.e. Kiskindhā, and had discussion with the various leaders of monkeys including Sugrīva, Nala, Aṅgada and others seeking their help to defeat Rāvaṇa, the powerful king of Laṅkā, who abducted Sītā.

Nobody amongst them had the ability to cross over to Lañkā. However, they were sure, only Hanumāna could do it. Thereupon, Jāmbavanta started telling the past glory and powers of Hanumāna. After recalling his past, Hanumāna regained both his physical and mental strength and assured the leaders that he was prepared to cross Lañkā.

Accordingly, he jumped over to Lañkā from the seashore. In the sea, demon Surasā, mother of *nāgas*, swallowed Hanumāna. But Hanumāna tore her mouth off and kept on going. After Surasā was killed, she got herself redeemed from the earthly form and went to heaven. Next *Samudrarāja* in the anthropomorphic form, asked Maināka-parvata to emerge out of sea to facilitate flying Hanumāna to rest a while. Hanumāna flew and reached the Subalgiri Parvat in Lañkā at night.

Hanumāna could see different facets of life in Lañkā at night including Rāvaṇa's act of sex with the abducted women from different places. After a thorough search for Sītā in the palace of Rāvaṇa guarded by the demon soldiers, he reached Aśokavana, where Sītā was kept in captivity.

After locating her at Aśokavana, he heaved a sigh of relief. He observed the scene from the top of the trees. Rāvaṇa came with Mandodarī, his queen, to Sītā in a bid to convince her to submit to him by forgetting Rāma. First Rāvaṇa tried to please her by valuable gifts. But Sītā boldly refused the offer. Thereupon Rāvaṇa asked the demon guards to frighten her and compel her to surrender to him. But Sītā's mind could not be changed.

Hanumāna was watching all these scenes. When the demon guards at night were tired and slept, Hanumāna appeared before Sītā and revealed his identity by showing the ring of Rāma. He assured her that she would be very soon rescued after his return to Kiskindhā and asked her not to worry.

Hanumāna then ate the fruits of Aśokavana out of joy and hunger and plundered the garden. This led to a fight between him and the demon guards. Ultimately, it was reported to Rāvaṇa, who directed his senior army officer including his son Indrajit to defeat Hanumāna. He was caught through the *nāgapāśa* and taken to the court of Rāvaṇa. Rāvaṇa directed the soldiers tie clothes around the tail of Hanumāna and then set it on fire. Hanumāna with his tail set on fire, started jumping from the roof of one building to another, which caught fire on the whole city of Lañkā and destroyed it. Ultimately he jumped into the sea to save himself and put off the fire of his tail.

After this, Hanumāna left Lañkā and met Jambūvan, Aṅgada, Sugrīva and ultimately Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in Kiskindhā. Rāma was delighted to know about the news of Sītā through Hanumāna and was highly relieved. Then they collectively planned to rescue Sītā from Lañkā after defeating and killing Rāvaṇa. A bridge of floating stones was constructed with the help of monkeys to cross over the sea to reach Lañkā.

This is a sadly burnt manuscript which is not in good state of preservation. Showing Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, the face of Sītā bears less folk element like the faces of the female figures seen in *Syamantaka-haraṇa*. Abstraction to some extent is seen while depicting hill, sea and pond. When in discussion the faces of Jambūvana, Hanumāna and other monkeys were seen always as closed, but hands could be seen almost at *abhaya mudrā* showing that they were partaking in the discussion. But the *asurā's* mouth in some cases is seen open while talking. The clothes worn by female demon and gods appear to bear tribal design.

Design of the gates, buildings, birds and animals in Lañkā, as seen by Hanumāna, were

shown vividly. The figure of Hanumāna, while climbing the roof of the buildings in the guise of a mongoose looked like a cat. The style of trees looks like that of the *Gīta-Govinda*. The almost round face of Sītā in one scene shows the development of art of a later phase as seen in the *Syamantaka-haraṇa*.

Sītā's figure seen in Aśokavana with Hanumāna appears to be very crude and so also the figure of Hanumāna. Heavy folk elements are seen there. In certain cases, the painting seems to be half done sketches of pencil or pen.

The architectural units like the beams, rafter, roof post of Laṅkā is seen through the eye of Hanumāna, reflecting more of the local Assamese culture and not of Laṅkā.■

## **An Apostle of Love and Compassion Visited This Planet with a Purpose A Community or a Nation Needs More Than an Average Man**

Hembhai

True it is that we could assert our existence right to privacy by our birth, by our life, by the exuberance of the prime of life. True it is also that we can fashion a family by owning a speck of land, by having a free glancing of the azure sky or by momentary basking in the sunshine, the moon beam or by enjoying the ripples of the gentle sir with emotions—sometimes with sweat, sometimes with tears and blood.

After having all these above mentioned ingredients can we make us bold to say with confidence that we can make a community, as nation! But we could not and cannot.

No doubt, these ingredients are necessary for the sustenance of our brute-lives but these alone cannot claim to make a community or a nation. These are insufficient and impotent.

For this the human being needs a philosophy, an all-compassing thought, an innovative idea, a sweet and bearing language with aims and objectives—quite different from the animal kingdom. For, the animals have only three propensities—food, fear and self-propagation (and self-preservation). Beyond these, they die.

The language and culture of the North East of India gradually grew up for centuries silently but steadily with the exuberance of life, with the vocal and silent perseverance of the people living on both the banks of the Lauhitya—that is, the mighty Brahmaputra. It is known as Assamese language, Assamese tradition and Assamese culture.

But many nations with rich and flourishing languages also got their places only in the pages of ancient histories losing their vibrating identities. As an individual life needs a *somnum bonum*—the highest aim of life, to make it a living entity by giving a meaning in the struggle of life, so a firm determination of purpose is absolutely necessary for the life of a community, a nation. This purpose will be a logo, a declaration, a symbol, a motto, an emblem for the solidarity, the organic growth of a nation. The nation which will forget this stark truth will be blown away by the pride of sophisticated weapons, uncontrollable burden of power and pelf—and self-complacency; it shall have to pay the price of gradual extinction from the map of the world. There is no dearth of examples of this kind. History is replete with this sort of misfortunes.

A nation lives by the spiritual guidance of great saints and sages, seers and the scientists, literature, culture and civilizations. They draw out a road-map of progress and prosperity, strength and sustainability to her.

The message of such great men is for the people of the world but it comes through the language of his own—his mother tongue and the people of his own community or countrymen.

Dr. Radhakrishnan once said—“we need not cut down the tree to gather the fruit. In order to have a perfect human society, it is not necessary for us to destroy the family or the nation”<sup>1</sup>

The Assamese community (or nation) with her language, culture and civilization is thrice blessed for all the time to have a seer, a saint, a revolutionary *mahāpuruṣa* under whose leadership a continuous procession of multitudinous people have achieved an organic growth for the last five hundred years. It has not been necessitating to remind

anybody as to who is that blessed *mahāpuruṣa* with such divine distinctions. He is Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva.

To every Assamese person Śaṅkaradeva is the dearest word, the most revered sound, the most trusted refuge, the most vibrant source of inspiration and the most enlightening symbol of purity and the last bead of last breath.

Śaṅkara ( i.e., Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva) was born to a chieftain in the central Assam—Bardovā—Pātekibarai—in today’s Nagaon district of Assam in the fifteen century in 1449 and had his demise was in the sixteenth century in 1569. He lost his mother Satysandhyā Devi only after a few days of his birth and lost his father Kusumbar Bhūñā also at the early age of seven. Then the whole responsibility of nurturing Śaṅkara came upon the shoulder of his grandmother—Khersutī, which she did very aptly. Up to the age of twelve he did not go to school for his primary studies. It hurt the grandma Khersutī very much. After giving him a mild exhortation she took him to Mahendra Kandali’s *tol* (village primary Sanskrit medium school) who assured her to look after the boy with special care. Young Śaṅkara set out for serious learning. Within the first three days he mastered the consonants and composed a poem of deep spiritual meaning—without using any other vowel but a:

*karatala kamala kamaladala nayana  
bhava dava dahana gahana bana śayana*  
.....

This is a wonderful composition of four couplets with a deep meaning relevant and important to the people of all times and all climes.

The composition of a newcomer, young Śaṅkara, influenced his *guru* Mahendra Kandali deeply. Another strange thing happened a few days back! The boy Śaṅkara was deeply engrossed in studying the new found books. He used to stay back in the school after the end of the daily classes when nobody remains. One day, Śaṅkara fell asleep on the mat. *guru* Kandali found that he, by mistake, left valuable something back in the school which he must collect immediately. So, he ran back to school. He then saw a scene to his utter surprise. A big cobra was shadowing Śaṅkara in deep slumber with its hood against the strong sun-shine coming to his face through the holes of the reed wall—i.e. the cobra was protecting Śaṅkara from the scorching sun’s rays. This was not an ordinary accidental happening and the *guru* thought that there was something supernatural and divine. So he went back aghast and in the next day he convened a meeting of the citizens of the area and narrated story of what he saw the previous day about Śaṅkara and the serpent. The *guru* was of the belief that the boy was not an ordinary one but an extra-ordinary boy with divine endowments. The *guru* told the people in the open meeting that right from that day the boy would not be called simply as Śaṅkara but as Śaṅkaradeva. Following the declaration of *guru* Mahendra Kandali, people at large began to address him as Śaṅkaradeva and revered him as a great man.

Within a very short time, Śaṅkaradeva mastered over the Vedas, the *upaniṣadas* and the other religious books.

At the age of 14, he wrote a drama called *Hariścandra-upākhyāna*.———

At the early age, he swam across the mighty Brahmaputra when it was in full spate and came back swimming. In doing this he caught a river dolphin and showed it to the people and tenderly set the creature free.

Being a son of a chieftain, a king of a small kingdom, he could have been a king, a ruler but he did not, because he never aspired for power and pelf. Rather he declared to explore the vast realm of spirituality teemed with universal love for all creatures.

He chose the pen than the sword to change the society. In the book *Sufism*, Sadia Dehlvi said—“the ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of the martyr.” Śaṅkaradeva also thought in that way. The ‘ink’ is the love for God and the experience of the people—which young Śaṅkaradeva tried to emulate. For that he found out three means—self-study, going in the pilgrimage, having the company of wise men—the sages. He started his first pilgrimage after his first marriage and at the death of his first wife, daughter Manu mother. The company of the pilgrimage consisted of 120 devotees. It was a strenuous journey of long twelve years all over India—gathering knowledge and experience on the one hand and begging and accepting the blessings of enlightened sages and wise men—on the other. His dearest devotee Mādhavadeva also accompanied his master for the second time of his pilgrimage.

Thus he and his group gathered experience from the vast living Indian panorama and then he started his own spiritual and socio-cultural journey.

At the age of 119 he left for the heavenly abode.

### **Unique Philosophy of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva:**

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva’s philosophy of life is quite different from those of others in many respects. His philosophy is not of prattle but of practice, a living philosophy to live a life and walking up on the way. In the centre of the philosophy is the homo-sapiens, the living man, the spiritual man, the man of Kṛṣṇa—the Godhead, the homo-sapiens—the man that is the centre of all living things. Now, the man is on the cross road. He can elevate himself to the position of Nārāyaṇa, the God head or he can degrade himself to the position of a monkey or lesser than that. This human being has the powers of self determination. He can make as well as mar his own fate, he can choose his own destination and he can fashion his own fate.

If you throw a pebble in the centre of a pond of water it will first make a commotion of the water where the pebble falls. Gradually the commotion makes circles of waves and then goes round and round extending its circumference till it reaches the banks.

Likewise, in case of a human being, it can extend its existence to encompass all things, all animals, flora and fauna, from the demigods down to the minutest of the creation. According to Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, there is universal unity and no duality at all:

*yata dekhā śunā māne save svapna sama/  
harimaya dekhi dūra karā mati bhrama//*

Whatever duality you see or hear, it is only because of the illusion of the mind—a madness in understanding. This ignorance, duality or madness coming out of *māyā* can be dispelled by seeing Hari everywhere, in every creature.

Again, he says in the *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*:

“I am eminent in all creatures. So, realizing the existence of Viṣṇu in everything and everybody you shred the artificial difference between man and man, male and female, the so-called highest class *Brāhmaṇa* and the lowest class *Cāṇḍāla*, the donor and the thief. The mean and the enlightened are equal and one and the same. Oh my beloved Uddhava, do not differentiate between these at all and he says:

*kukura śṛgāla gaddarbhāro ātmā rāma/  
jāniyā savāko pari karibā praṇāma//*

‘In the core of the heart of a dog, an ass, a fox there sits only Rama. Knowing this, you prostrate to all of them in humility’.

This, the manifesting world is also God and the soul of everything is also God and the Absolute arbiter of the universe is also God. The centrally posited man is the decider as where to and how to proceed on. Thus Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva tries to spiritualize everything giving a no-dualistic idea of the whole system of the universe as its maker, the God.

### **Ācārya Śaṅkara and Śrīmanta Śaṅkara:**

Amongst the prominent twelve Ācāryas who wrote their commentaries on the *Brahma-sūtra* trying to establish their own tenets, Ācārya Śaṅkara was the prominent (A.D. 788-820) among them. Following the tradition of *Barāha Sahodara Vṛtti* and the *Māṇḍukya Kārikara* of Goudapada, Śaṅkaracārya started his commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra* by writing a book called *Śārīraka Mīmāṃsā*. The Ācārya was a great intellect with cutting argumentations. Propounding the theory of perfect monism or non-dualistic philosophy he declares –*Brahma satya jagat mithyā, jīvo Brahmaiva nāparam*—i.e. the Brahman is the truth, the world is nothing but an illusion and the *jīva* (or individual soul) is not at all different from the Brahman—*Nirviśeṣādvaita*. The difference of the Brahman and the world is seen because of *māyā*. There is nothing except the *Brahma*.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva also professes the non-dualistic (monistic) philosophy but with difference:

Though Ācārya Śaṅkara professes the non-dualistic philosophy of *Nirviśeṣādvaita* (not recognising any entity but Brahman) he introduced the *Pañcādevatā pūja* in the system of his philosophy. The *Pañcādevatās* are Śaṅkara, Nārāyaṇa, Ravi (the sun) Gaṇapati and Devi (Sannaragade) He not only recognised these five gods and goddesses, but also established a system of worship creating a school of thought.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is quite opposed to the worship of these demigods. His only worshipful deity is Nārāyaṇa who is one and the same with Kṛṣṇa the Godhead.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva had strong reason to do so. From the time immemorial to his birth in the Prāgjyotiṣpura there had been strong prevalence of idolatry, paganism, totemism, black magic mountebanks and what not. Most of the people were taking delight and solace in offering innocent animal sacrifices in front of the demigods, goddesses and to some subordinate evil spirits, ghosts, witches propelled by blind faith, black magic, spelling incantations etc. Human sacrifice was also rife here and there. Young Śaṅkaradeva avowedly declared war against these evils by bringing in not only one God Kṛṣṇa of the *Gītā* and the *Bhagavata-purāṇa*. Rama, Hari, Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa are only different manifestations of the same Kṛṣṇa in different times, in different epochs depending up on the necessities of the people and the societies. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva’s philosophy pursued the great ‘One’ of the Brahman of the *upaniṣads*, *Paramātmā* of the yoga system, *Paramesvara* of the *Gītā* and the *Bhagavata-purāṇa*. He is here, everywhere and beyond. His tested and beloved disciple Mādhavadeva in his book *Nāma-ghoṣā* aptly enunciates the position of Kṛṣṇa in the scheme of creation and beyond.

“O Kṛṣṇa, thou art the only conscious entity, eternal truth, most pure, source of all

knowledge and unbroken chain of continuity. Except this, all other forms are but your playful manifestations fashioned by *māyā* or delusion.”

*he kṛṣṇa tumi mātra                      caitanya svarūpa nitya*  
*satya śuddha jñāna akhaṇḍita/*  
*āvāra yateka iṭo                      tomāra vinoda rūpa*  
*carācara māyāra kalpita //*

So, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva put a strong restraint, a restriction or a taboo against worshipping these demigods who cannot emancipate themselves from the clutches of birth and death or the allurements of *māyā*. He forebode his disciples to bow and serve or enter into their temples, or to see their faces or worship them and accept their *prasādam*, because, that act will be tantamount to the blasphemy and infidelity to Kṛṣṇa the Godhead or Supreme Brahman. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva’s *dharma* does not subscribe to any idolatry, paganism, black magic or demigods eulogizing them in flowery language. His *dharma* is *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* —completely different from the Non-dualistic *Nirviśeṣādvaita* of Ācārya Śaṅkara. For that matter, it is also different from the philosophy of Bhāskarācārya’s (1000 A.D.) *Bhedābheda-vāda*, Rāmānujācārya’s (1140 AD) *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda*, Madhvācārya’s (1238 AD) *Dvaitavāda*, Nimbārkācārya’s (Later half of 13<sup>th</sup> Century AD) *Dvaitādvaitavāda* or Ballabhācārya’s (1479-1544 AD) *Śudhādvaitavāda* in many respects. It resembles to the Islamic religion of Md. Payagambar and Sikh religion propounded by Guru Nānaka.

### **A Catholicity of Humanity:**

As we have already mentioned that Śaṅkaradeva’s *dharma*’s main focus is man without any difference of caste, creed, community or language, sex and colour. His one of the main disciples was Cāndsāi. Some of the associates of Śaṅkaradeva were from different tribal communities. Many of them were illiterate, many were women. Because Śaṅkaradeva loved them and service to them was his supreme service, because he exhorted:

*viśeṣata manuṣya ganata yiṭo nare/*  
*viṣṇu buddhi kari sarvadāye mānya kare//*  
*īriṣā asuyā tiraskāra ahaṅkāra/*  
*save naṣṭa hove teve tāvakṣaṇe tāra// 39*  
*strī śūdrū karai yadi āmāta bhakati*  
*tāhāta kahibā iṭo jñāna mahāmati---43*

Śaṅkaradeva, *Kīrtana-ghoṣa*

Śrī Kṛṣṇa advises his devotee Uddhava:

‘Oh Uddhava, you learn to love all the creatures, but among them also, you specially love the human kind. Regard them to be very Viṣṇu, the Godhead itself. There shall be no bar to anybody in consideration of high birth, low-birth, sex or colour. Give this message of love and service to all. Then your enmity, jealousy, egoism, hatred —all will disappear from you—and you will be a perfect devotee, a real man.’

### **Life Affirmation and Life Negation:**

The philosophies of the world are divided into two camps: one is the camp of life

negation, the other is the camp of life affirmation.

Life negation opines that the world is illusive, fabulous and ensnaring. All attractions are but a forgery, deception and eye-wash. The more you abstain from these, the more you are safe and sound. So, renounce the world and worldly attractions, be a monk or ascetic, go to the hermitage and recluse and practice on pure God and things permanent. Impose all the rules of abstinence drastically to be able to enjoy in the after-world.

The second school of thought says that the things of the world are also true; the fascinating world has also a meaning. It is not for anything but for something, so eat, drink and make merriment, for, tomorrow you shall die. This discernible world is everything. So happiness to the greatest number to the greatest degree should be the way of life—so says the hedonists.

Both are extreme in their uncompromising ways. The world of life in it is neither good nor bad in its entirety. It depends up on how we look at it and how we use our body and the worldly things.

So a third force or a third camp gradually came into existence.

### **The Kṛṣṇa Cult or the Kṛṣṇa Culture:**

The Śrī Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* or the *Gītā*, of the *Harivaṁśa*, the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* and the *Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa* is the strong expounder and leader of the third force or the third camp—who never despised this world, this creation or this body as abominable something to be neglected and thrown away. The apparent body, the world has also its own utility as a means of higher realization. This tangible world is a step-ladder for higher out reach. The world with its happenings is a divine play to realize it in its truest form.

Again, a group of western thinkers pass libellous statements that Indian philosophy is a philosophy of life negation and world negation. They are (Indian philosophers) are escapists. Therefore, they prefer to go to the Himalayas or forests to escape from the world instead of facing it bravely. Even greater thinkers like Albert Switzer also hurled the same allegations. This is a serious allegation resulting out of superficial handling of a serious subject. Instead of bogging down in the mire of colour and flesh it is better to have adequate knowledge. Indian philosophy is a penetrating insight in to the real things sitting inside. At the same time, Indian philosophy does not throw away the outside things as trash or abominable dirt but regard it as a means to get into the real inside.

More than that, it is better to see the outward thing also as splendour of the spirit inside. The worldly things are not really worldly but spiritual in the scheme of things. It depends upon how we look at it.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa comes in these matters. Kṛṣṇa was born in the prison of atrocious demon Kaṁsa. His strong will to live and to do good to the world made him warrior and a lover. His readiness to serve all and love all made him more attractive and acceptable to all. Anybody could get his things done by Kṛṣṇa without any hesitation because Śrī Kṛṣṇa was very near and dear to everybody. There was no personal choice to any work. Any work was worship for Him. No sense of high or low. He was a cowherd, He was an errand, He was a singer, a dancer, He was a warrior to subdue the evil demons. He was a protector, a charioteer in the battle of *Mahābhārata*. He was the singer of the *Gītā* and an astute Statesman, an undefeated wrestler, an enticing orator known for his bewitching eloquence

beaconing the sages, seers and the wise with profound philosophy. He was endowed with all human and divine qualities. He embodied all goodness, all truth, all abilities to deliver. Finally, He was an incarnation of truth, love and compassion, a paragon of divine beauty who could attract everybody. His relation with men and men, birds and animals, trees and tendrils, mountains and rivers is matchless and unique. He came down to this planet to redeem the world by establishing the eternal principles.

### **Entrusted by Kṛṣṇa's Love and Compassion: Śaṅkaradeva Puts His Heart into Action:**

It was right that Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva came to this world after five thousand years. As we mentioned earlier that there were three canonical books which were called *Prasthāna Trayī*.

The *upaniṣads*, the *Brahma-sūtra* and the *Bhagavad-gītā* these three together are the proven and established tenets of *Prasthan Trayī*. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva chalked out another tenet consisting of *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma*, the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and the *Bhagavata-gītā*. The *Bhagavata-gītā* is common to both the canons. He took the essence, the *nāma* (the holy names of God) and from *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma*, the *Eka Śaraṇa* (surrender to only one God-Kṛṣṇa) from and from *Bhagavata-gītā* and from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* he took love, service, surrender to Kṛṣṇa, the Godhead. The company of the holy man is also one of the philosophies of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*.

The *Bhagavata-gītā* taught him the synthesis of *karma*—action, *jñāna*—knowledge, *yoga*—the unfaltering communion with the supreme, *bhakti*—unsheathing love for Kṛṣṇa, the supreme and *śradhhā*—the unwavering faith in His ability to save the devotee.

If the five qualities are put together then a sure and certain path is made to proceed on to the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa which is the fulfilment of all births, all lives. No more prattle but practice is the panacea. To know is to become.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Śrī Śrī Mādhavadeva lived their life in accordance with their philosophy as they designed and became successful in that also. But it was not a question of individual emancipation but a question of social upliftment through collective *sādhana*. Devotee Prahlāda had been the first propagator of collective ascendance. Lord Narasimha—the man-loin incarnate asked Prahlāda to lake liberation. Prahlāda politely asked the Lord, ‘My great Lord, I thank you for the liberation you have kindly granted to me. But my Lord, tell me if the same liberation will be available for my little demon friends with whom I used to frolic, make merriment, try to learn the lore of devotion.?’

“Dear son Prahlāda, they are not eligible to get this boon right now. They will have to do more to purify themselves” –said Lord Narasimha.

“Then, my Lord”, said Prahlāda, “I also do not want this boon because I do not want to leave them back to suffer here. I will accept liberation only after all these suffering creatures get liberation.”<sup>2</sup>

Spirituality demands a collective liberation of all the suffering people in this sorrowful world. Gautam Buddha was also in a fix as to what to do after achieving enlightenment at the age of forty. Whether to accept liberation right at that time or try to liberate the suffering people as long as they live. Finally, he decided to serve the people to make them fit to attain liberation.

Now, the same is the perplexing condition of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva also. Finally, he decided to go to the suffering people to assuage their sorrows and miseries.

### **Then, How to Start?**

American poet Daniel Webster wrote an interesting poem. The paraphrase of the poem goes like this:

“If you work upon marbles, time will efface it. If you work upon brass, one day it will break down. But if you write something in the heart of a man with true love for God, it will be a tablet which will last for eternity”.

Really, it is correct. Hundreds of years before Daniel Webster, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva also knew this truth. So, he did not go to the Himalayas, neither to the deep forest, nor to the deserts—the call of the suffering people did not allow him to remain somersaulting in the riches of his father. He came out of his ancestral properties directly going to the people. But he went to the mass people—the lowliest and the lost.

Now, with his companions, he became a man of life affirmation, loving his people, serving them to better their condition with a flame of Kṛṣṇa lore, unconditional surrender in the feet of God, chanting the holy name of God incessantly, first loudly and then with inaudible voice, and then gradually silent meditation of the soundless name. According to Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, the holy names of God are the most powerful means to redeem the debased and the denounced sinners and the heinous criminals. Because, the holy names of God will change the heart and clear one’s perception.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and his loyal devotee Śrī Śrī Mādhavadeva were masters of all the crafts required for a man to be successful in life. Their effort was to transfer the skills to the society in order to better social life. Their mission was not only to give them physical comfort but also to make them efficient in material skills of worldly nature and to take them to penetrate and transcend the physicality and discover the child hidden inside the body. For both of them it was an endeavour to transform the whole world in to the divine *līlā* which was so in reality—but because of the delusion we think differently from the self—Kṛṣṇa, the Godhead. The world is no other than God. The world is in God and God in transcendence is beyond the world. This is the inscrutability of God and his creation. This was the mission of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva to understand the mystery.

### **Application of Appropriate Technologies:**

The concept—appropriate technology is gaining ground all over the world now-a-days. Especially, the environmental scientists are very serious about it. In the very simple language, appropriate technology means—not using very sophisticated means and materials by bringing and applying arduously from distant places but using the materials available locally. These are free of pollution and exploitation. This is the demand of the day in the modern world. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was a visionary and a seer. He could distinctly foresee the future hazards of the environmental milieu and its evil effects in the coming human society. So, he experimented with locally available, eco-friendly materials. The *Prasāda* of the *nāmghar* was prepared from the locally produced, locally available green grams, banana, other local fruits, ginger, raw rice, orange etc. to make it healthy and more *sāttvic*.

Further, he taught the devotees how to grow more food and vegetable with less

effort by applying skilful techniques. He trained the devotees to keep one's health sound and sturdy, the rites of defecation, cleansing the lower part after bathing etc. He taught the men and women how to spin in distaff and weave clothes in hand-made looms. The *Vṛndāvanī-vastra* which was prepared at his behest and supervision is a glaring example of his love and dexterity in preparing clothes. The *Vṛndāvanī-vastra* is a rare example of his artistic acumen and perhaps the first and the last production of clothes that the world could see which is now preserved in the British Museum in London.

The *nāmghar* is a unique prayer hall only akin to the structural design of German architecture. This *nāmghar* is designed for a village assembly where the high and the low, old and young, male and female can sit with equal status, give their opinion without fear and favour, the village assembly will hear the cases, if occur in the village and pass unanimous decision. Śāṅkaradeva fought against untouchability and high and low caste concept. So, there was unrestricted entrance to all classes of people in the *nāmghar*. There was nothing like out-caste or high caste. Unlike the other religious leaders, Śāṅkaradeva did not sit on the pedestal higher than the others in the *nāmghar*. All were equal in status. Just in front of and attached to the *nāmghar*, there is the *maṅikūṭ* where a seven stepped *sanctum sanctorum* is erected one step above the other, each of the columns are supported by tortoises, elephants and lions, the latter above the former respectfully. The lion is not an ordinary lion of the jungle, but a special kind devoid of long hairs around its neck. It is *nām-simha*—scorning at the vanquished sins. In the *sanctum sanctorum*—at its apex of the ascendance there is kept no image or idol of any god or goddesses. There is a copy of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* or its essence—the *Guṇa-mālā*. What is the meaning of it? It means—not idol worship but worshipping the qualities and greatness of God—worship of knowledge, not the rituals and the ceremonies but the actual *sādhanā* through the meditation of God's qualities.

### **Politics is a Gospel of Demon:**

A new phenomenon shakes the entire world today. The world at large is on the crossroads as whether to take recourse to politics or go without it. The question is not one to dismiss at a flip of the fingers. The whole world is overpowered by politics today. But people say that politics is doing more harm than good. The root cause of all the evils is not other than politics.

Politics is an art of organising people and then splitting it into many fragments. It is an enemy of human unity. Histories are replete with the examples of evils done by politics and politicians. The rash competition for political supremacy by using lethal weapons—nuclear, bomb, hydrogen bomb, atom bomb, chemical weapons, biological weapons, bacterial weapons—through supersonic missiles is a threat to human existence and existence of the beautiful planet called the mother earth.

Śrīmanta Śāṅkaradeva visualised this danger five hundred years ago. So he professed social unity rather than crafty political adroitness and designs. He did it by narrating the firmness of devotee Prahlāda in refusing the dictates of his atrocious father demon Hiranyaśipu. The demon was very much vexed by his son's wise resolves. The king ordered the two teachers to cleverly ensnare his son with the noose of *varuṇa* i.e. the flowery and attractive language of politics. Again the father ordered the teachers to teach Prahlāda the gospel of demon, means political manoeuvring:

*varuṇara pāśe bāndhi thaiyo kata kāla/  
āpuni bayasa bhaile buddhi haiba bhāla//  
śikhāyuka āka rājanīti nirantar/*

*Kīrttana-ghoṣā p. 136*

Śaṅkaradeva never compromised with any political system or set up. So he had to face many displeasures and sometimes wraths of various kings all through his life. Not *rājanīti* but *lokanīti*—the collective decision by the village assembly in the *nāmghar* was his philosophy; that philosophy which is yet applied in a family—a village—or a state in Assam.

#### **A Matchless Prolific Writer of the North-East:**

Citing the observation of Sadia Dehlifer who wrote on Sufism at the very beginning of this article we submitted that the ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of the martyr—Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva wanted to educate the mass people as well as the intellectuals and the scholars—it was possible only by sensitizing the majority of people through writing lyrics, songs, dramas in a very lucid and heart throbbing language. He composed volumes of books in praise of Rama and Kṛṣṇa the Godhead. His writings have not been surpassed by any writers of the North East till today. These are read and got by heart by the common people from that time and still today. His loyal disciple Śrī Mādhavadeva formed the foundation of Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy of *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* by writing many important books on these subjects. Their aim was to glorify the Bhāratavarṣa by focussing the good in Indian culture and civilization. Their aim was to make one India and one world. So they did not speak of Assam but spoke of Bhāratavarṣa and of innumerable numbers of universes and cosmic worlds. So they wrote in mixed languages Maithili and *Vrajabuli*. They may be considered as greatest unifiers of India. Without reckoning and acknowledging them the concept and existence of North-East India would have been impossible.

#### **A Great Uplifter of Womankind:**

Unlike many ascetic and preachers Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva gave great respect to the womankind. For them, both the sexes were equal and honourable. Development of both of the groups should be enhanced. Āi Khersuti, Candarī Āi, Bārābāsī Āi, Rādhika Satī Āi, Āi Kaṇaklatā and a host of others were spiritual giants and were able to lead under the guidance Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Śrī Śrī Mādhavadeva and their immediate disciples. Because of this honour given to the womankind by great Śaṅkaradeva and his followers, there is the tradition of honouring the women in Assam even today; Assamese society is not unhappy if the family is gifted by only daughters and no sons.

In propagating the path of love, service, sacrifice, unity, kindness, human values, one God, one humanity—Śaṅkaradeva had to face fatal oppositions, sometimes even threats, to his life.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's Ashram was attacked and plundered eight times and Śrī Śrī Mādhavadeva's for twenty four times. It was not a road of vermilion and golden dusts of butterflies strewn with rose petals, but a road of thorns often stopped by precipices, jungles, and ferocious animals. But they continued their spiritual campaigns unstopped. When oppositions and oppressions became unbearable, they decided to leave Kāmarūpa,

the Prāgjyotiṣpura of Assam to escape from further damage. They, with their disciples, embarked up on boats, oared in down-stream Brahmaputra and arrived at Kochbihar where the great king Naranārāyaṇa was reigning over with his beloved brother Cilārāi. Both of them gave shelter to this group where they remained peacefully creating valuable literatures, spreading the philosophy of love, compassion and complete surrender to God.

### **With Ill-Will to None, Charity to All:**

Both of them lived for more than hundred years each; Śrī Śrī Mādhavadeva for 107 years and Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva for 119 years—with sound health. They were positive with life affirmation. Throughout their long life, they suffered from envious pedants or ruling potentates—which forced them to leave their mother land for ever. But their enlightened souls had no ill-will for anybody. They forgave everybody, showered blessings to all. Nowhere in their ocean like literature, had they used a single word expressing displeasure to anybody but showering blessings to all and sundry. Their way of life was to think good for all, do good for all. They professed non-violence and love in thought, words and deeds.

### **The Great Exit:**

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva could live the life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with His aims and objectives but in a human form and human limitation. Still he had a mind to live the years of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Śrī Kṛṣṇa lived for complete 125 years—with no disease and no symptoms of aging and no cessation of works—*Karma-yoga*. Śaṅkaradeva was also performing *Karma-yoga* incessantly.

King Naranārāyaṇa tested all the pundits who used to attend the royal court regularly guiding and appeasing the king in time of his need. Nobody stood up to the mark of being a *guru* (spiritual guide or preceptor) for him. But Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva rose above the mark; he was more than the expectations of the king. One day, the king Naranārāyaṇa came politely to Śaṅkaradeva and implored him to become the spiritual guide of the king by giving the king *Śaraṇa* (a new life in God for emancipation through religious and spiritual practice). Śaṅkaradeva vowed not to give *Śaraṇa* to any king. So, he first politely refused to do so but the indomitable insistence of king Naranārāyaṇa silenced the great soul Śaṅkaradeva. Finally, *guru* Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva agreed to bestow him *Śaraṇa* on the next day. He advised him to come early morning after ablution and fasting. King Naranārāyaṇa became very happy in the hope of becoming a disciple of a great *guru*. Satisfied, he went back to his palatial building.

### **A Very Heart-Breaking and Pathetic Situation:**

For Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, it was a devil the deep sea situation. He could not displease the king. For the king gave him shelter, love and respect on the one hand and—on the other hand, compromising with his own philosophy and own way of life that he garnered so sincerely so far, for 119 years. He was in a fix as what to decide. After much churning, the great *guru* decided to do a novel thing nobody could imagine even in a dream.

This uncompromising *guru* decided to immolate his own body in a novel way by sitting on the trance or concentrating meditation—*samādhi* (of the *Yogis*). Next day, he got

up before *brahma muhūrta*—i.e. before 3 a.m.—had his daily bath, chanted the holy names of lord Kṛṣṇa the Godhead, came out to the open space where an aromatic basil tree was standing steadfastly. One of his devotees lighted an earthen lamp and arranged the *guru*'s sitting near the basil. The great *guru* put his steps slowly towards the sitting arrangement. He sat down slowly and composedly. He chanted the divine names—Rama- Kṛṣṇa -Hari— took his long breathes for some times:

Sounds mingled in the soundless  
Everything was over by then  
The problem was solved  
No compromise, no displeasing  
A nocturnal bird flew past flapping  
The rest was bemoaning bewailing  
From king to laymen—  
Which can be heard in every heart even today.

By these words, a few things were also told—incomplete, inapt, inarticulate, and ineffable.

The premise with which we started our writing remains unanswered. This silence was wilful—deliberate. We concealed the logo or the motto, the emblem, the symbol—the philosophy of a community or a nation. After meandering through mountains, the lush green lands, the prairies of thoughts and ideas are arriving to the unfurling of the premise.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva engraves the immortal wisdom very boldly and wisely in the heart of men in his great *Kīrttana-ghoṣā* and in the 11<sup>th</sup> *skanḍha* of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*.

*Samasta bhūtake dekhibeka ātma sama.*

You discover your soul in every creature. See yourself in the heart of everybody.

A world without disparity, without war, without exploitation is possible only in the feeling of unity based on this principle of spirituality. This is the roadmap prepared by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva with multifarious agenda.—mentioned above.

### **Recapitulation:**

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was not only a man but a God with divine qualities, with a mission. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was not only a god, but a human being with every concern for humanity.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva did not believe in sword or throne but in the change of human heart.

He fought against caste and creed, high and outcaste, but believed in the unity of humanity. He liked to clean the stools or urines of his devotee all by his own hand.

For him politics is the gospel of demon, instead *lokanīti* was the way of life which he professed and nurtured.

He was uncompromising with his philosophy and life. He successfully went through the ordeal, sacrificed life for the cause.

He firmly believed in life affirmation; so he showed proficiency in almost all spheres of life—Arts, culture, literature, paintings, sculpture, social reform, drama, music, dance to the experiment in food. He was the first in the world to start open air drama enactment—only after his great demise William Shakespeare introduced open air drama in

his Standfort on Avon.

He was a great champion on unifying India—so he was speaking of Bhāratvarṣa and the universe.

He never fell ill in his long life of 119 years.

The most important thing, he never declared himself as a *guru*—but the humble servant of lord Kṛṣṇa.

He very humbly declared that he was a disciple of all worlds.

So the people of the world will understand his heart and his philosophy of love and compassion and appreciate his mission.

#### References

<sup>1</sup>Preface of the “Among Great’ by Dilip Kr. Roy

<sup>2</sup>*Bhāgavata-purāṇa -7*

## Physical Basis of Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka Śaraṇa Bhaktivāda*:

Dr. Anjana Chaliha

In the *Brahma satya jagat mithyā* dictum of Śaṅkarācārya, the world relegates to a non-entity where it is placed only in the practical reality (*vyavahārika sattā*) or empirical reality alone. The world is to be considered as real so far as we will remain confined within the boundary of bondage caused by *māyā*. The world is to be conceived as a reality by the perceiver, to the individual being, even God is also admitted to be the creator of the world. The three concepts *jagat*, *jīva* and *Īśvara* no longer exist in the *pāramārthika sattā*. In the true realm of reality in Śaṅkarācārya's philosophy, only featureless, attribute-less non-dual Brahma shines as the only reality. The world and its creator disappear for three periods of time being the products of *māyā*. The aspirant, the *jīvātmā* also becomes 'oned' with the only reality at that time.

Śaṅkarācārya teaches that the aim of this apparent individual self is to know its reality as Brahma which is possible only by *jñānamārga* (the way of knowledge). He is to be isolated from this world of multiplicity with *jñāna* and *vairāgya*. One attains liberation by realizing the truth of the illusions of the world, when the concept of the creator (God) also vanishes as meaningless and the aspirant loses its individual identity in the attributeless unique being. Thus we see that there cannot be *Eka Śaraṇa Bhaktivāda* in the *māyāvādī* philosophy of *Advaita* Vedānta, though it provides scope for devotion not only to Viṣṇu, but also to crores of deities in the *vyavahārika sattā*. Prayer, worship etc. are prescribed only as auxiliary to *jñānamārga*. In *jñānamārga*, one is to practise the methods of yogic meditations aiming at *cittavṛttinirodha*. Here *mukti* and *samsāra* remain in two opposed poles. With reference to this philosophy, Radhakrishnan remarks, "The ecstasy of divine union, the bliss of realisation tempts one to disregard the world with its loves and hates, with its wars and battles, with its jealousies and competitions as well as its unmasked helplessness, sustained intellectual effort. Intense moral struggle seems to be more than an un-substantiated dream, a phantasmagoria dancing on the fabric of pure being".<sup>1</sup>

It is true that in many passages of Śaṅkaradeva's writings, the world is implied to be non-real or seeming only. The following verses can be cited to illustrate the point:

*kṛṣṇara carita śuniyoka sarvajana/  
jala buda buda jena athira jīvana //  
dhana Jana bandhu yata putra prāṇa jāyā/  
samaste avastu yena indrajāla māyā //*<sup>2</sup>

Or

*dhana jana yata jīvana yauvana  
jānā save aśvāśata//*<sup>3</sup>

Here we see that the saint says that one's life, youth, riches and near and dear ones all are unsubstantive (*avastu*) and so can be compared with objects conjured by a magician. But here the word *māyā* never means the *māyāvāda* of Śaṅkarācārya. Śaṅkaradeva speaks

only of the transitoryness of these objects of our worldly attention. He does not mean illusion in the *Advaita* Vedānta sense. To cite another passage:

*tumi paramātmā jagatara īśa eka/  
eko vastu nuhike tomāta vyatireka||  
tumi kārya kāraṇa samasta carācara/  
suvarṇa kuṇḍale yena nuhike antara||  
tomārese māyāye mohita sarvajana/  
tumi ātmā tomāka najāne mūḍhajana||  
tumise kevale satya michā save āna/  
jāni jñānīgaṇe kare hṛdayate dhyāna||*<sup>4</sup>

This quotation is to be interpreted in the *pariṇāmvādī* meaning of Rāmānuja, not in the *vivartavādī* sense of Śaṅkarācārya. Brahma and the world are presented here in the cause-effect relation of gold and golden earring. Gold is compared with God/Brahma, who is the material cause of the universe. When the saint speaks, *tumise kevale satya michā save āna* it never means the *Brahma satya jagatmithyā* dictum of *māyāvāda*. Here the object of address is Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Bhagavān of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, who is conceived to be identical with the transcendental reality—the Paramabrahma; while in the *māyāvādī* statement *michā save āna* means even the non-reality of the Creator God, the *Saguṇa Brahma*. The saint's passage says that without God's presence as the inner soul, everything is to be regarded as false. *Māyā* in Śaṅkaradeva means only God's *māyā* (*Viṣṇumāyā*), His creative power, while in *māyāvāda* even Viṣṇu is subject to *māyā* and so God belongs only to the *vyavahārika sattā*. To Śaṅkaradeva, the world is a *pariṇāma* (real), not simply a *vivarta* (apparent) unlike Śaṅkarācārya. In Śaṅkaradeva, the relation of God and the world is not pantheistic, but is pane theistic; God is not only *viśvarūpa* but also is *viśveśvara*. Śaṅkaradeva is not a pantheist but a panentheist. It can be illustrated from his diverse writings. In the *Kīrtana (śiśulilā)*, the symbolic expression of Yaśodā's vision of the whole universe within Kṛṣṇa's mouth may be cited as an example. The saint reproduces the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* episode:

*cale hāmi tuli dekhāilā māvaka/  
mukhara bhitare āche samasta jagata||*<sup>5</sup>

Yaśodā sees everything of the world within Kṛṣṇa's mouth, not simply the gross objects like rivers and mountains, but also the subtle principles like the mind, intellect, *guṇas*, *kāla*, *karma* and all including herself.

Again the saint depicts nicely the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* episode of Yaśodā's vain attempt to bind her child. This points to the transcendental uniqueness of Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Lord. The finite measures (like joining of all the ropes found in Nanda's palace) can never encompass the immeasurable Infinite Brahma. The Lord of *Eka-śaraṇa* devotion must be greater than everything, as He is omnipotent and omnipresent. The latter part of the episode speaks also of the glory of devotion. The unconquered is conquered by love:

The *Nāma-ghoṣā* says,

*jiṭo nāma laya hari tāra haya  
i punu rahasya bare |*

So the story ends as:

*snehe laila āpuni bandhana||*

Kṛṣṇa fulfilled his mother's wish to bind her child due to His love for His devotee, Yaśodā.

As in the philosophy of the *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda* of Rāmānuja the world in Śāṅkaradeva is also conceived as the body of God, Nārāyaṇa is the indwelling spirit of the universe, who is there as the animating principle. The soul body analogy between God and the world is used by the saint too who writes:

*yata latā taru trina kahāko nedekhe bhinna  
harir sarir buli māne ||* <sup>6</sup>

Again he says in the same source:

*yāra śarirata āche tribhubana  
pṛthivī pātāla svarga||* <sup>7</sup>

In one of the *bargīts* also the saint says,

*yata jīva jaṅgama kīṭa pataṅgama  
aga naga jaga teri kāyā ||* <sup>8</sup>

This means: all the *jīvas*, the mobile and immobile, ants and insects, hills and mountains are “Thy body only”.

This admission of the soul-body analogy in the concepts of the *Brahma* and the universe also leads us to see saint's acceptance of *pariṇāmavāda* contrary to *vivartavāda*. The world is not illusory, it is only transitory or it possesses simply a relative existence, while God or *Brahma* is the Absolute Reality. The saint presents God's words from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*:

*āpunāte mai āpunāka srajo  
āpuni pālo sakale/  
āpunāke pāche āpuni saṁhāro  
āpuna māyāra bale//  
parama biśuddha guṇahina mai  
jñānarūpa ātmā eka/  
mote āche iṭo jagat mai punu  
jagatata vyatireka||* <sup>9</sup>

Translation: I create myself in myself and sustain everything by myself. Afterwards I destroy myself by virtue of my power of *māyā*. I am attribute-less and pure conscious self. The whole world is in me, but yet I am different from the world.”

The quoted lines say many things of the saint's philosophy: his causal doctrine of *pariṇāmavāda* as well as his adherence to *sarvadhareśvaravāda* (panentheism) contrary to

*sarveśvarvāda* (pantheism) etc. So when we find some passages like:

*kṛṣṇa vyatirika eko vastu nāhi jānā|  
samasta jagata kṛṣṇa hena mane mānā||*<sup>10</sup>

Translation: There is nothing else but Kṛṣṇa, think of the whole world to be Kṛṣṇa alone.

We should not interpret these as statements of world-negation. If ‘A’ cannot subsist apart from ‘B’ then ‘B’ must be the essence of “A”. God is the essence of the world as gold is the essence of golden ornaments. Definitely this does not mean non-reality of the ornaments or of the world. Only in this sense Śaṅkaradeva uses the simile of *jari-sarpa* (snake-rope) once in the Bhagavata book XII:

*buddhi mana indriya, mahata ahaṁkāra|  
brahmata pṛthaka nuhi yateka saṁsāra||  
brahma vyatireke yata dekhā michā āna|  
jarita upaji yena āche sarpa jñāna||*<sup>11</sup>

Translation: Intellect, mind senses, the great one, the ego and whatever there is in this world are not different from Brahma. Whatever you perceive other than Brahma, is false, as if, you are seeing a snake in a rope.

As the snake-rope analogy is the classic example of *māyāvāda*, so many Śaṅkaradeva readers hastily jump to call him to be a *māyāvādī* or a *jñāna-mārgī* like Śaṅkarācārya and thinks that Śaṅkaradeva also denies the reality of the world. We must consider the import of the passage viewing the whole perspective. This simile is used by the saint in explaining the state of absolute dissolution— *ātyantika laya*. He says that this *ātyantika laya* is nothing other than *mokṣa* or liberation where the knower of Brahma sees everything as Brahma. *Jagat prapañca* or the appearance of the world with all its elements of mind, senses etc. is converted into *Brahmajñāna* and the aspirant becomes totally absorbed in Brahma and so the world with all its pluralities disappear from his view, as if, the snake disappears at the very moment of the dismissal of the snake-rope illusion. The saint uses the simile only to convey the feeling of a *Brahmajñānī*, who sees only Brahma.

But that is not the import of the saint’s teaching. In the subsequent verses Śaṅkaradeva says:

*dehāko nedekhe jīva huyā brahmamoy|  
tāhāke buliya rājā ātyantika laya||*<sup>12</sup>

Translation: This type of *mukti* (as Śukamuni says to king Parikṣita) where the *jīva* does not see even his own body and sees Brahma and Brahma alone, is called, O’ king, the *atyantika laya* (absolute dissolution).

But to preach this *Brahmajñāna* is not the aim of the saint’s teachings. Being true to the *Bhāgavata-purāna*, where devotion is preferred to liberation, Śaṅkaradeva says in the subsequent lines:

*deo paricched kibā kahibo bahuta|*

*dekhe Brahmamay yiṭo jīvante mukuta||  
tathāpito siṭo kṛṣṇa kīrttanese tarai|  
bhakati nabhaile dunāi māyā āsi dharai||*<sup>13</sup>

The import of the quoted verse is: This *Brahmajñāna* is not to be regarded as the end of the endeavour. If this realization is not mixed with devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa, it becomes fruitless. In the absence of devotion, even the *Brahmajñānī* cannot get rid of *māyā*. He will be saved only by devotion, only by *Kṛṣṇa-kīrttana*. It is an established truth that for devotion the *jīva* must retain its *jīva* hood. The dual reality of both the worshipper and the worshipped—*bhakata* and *Bhagavān* must co-exist, and so the saint's use of the snake-rope simile cannot make him a *māyāvādī*. Śaṅkaradeva uses the *jari-sarpa-upamā* not only to preach his final truth of *muktito-nispr̥ha-bhakti* of *Ek-śarana* devotion, but he also describes the state of the *jñānamārgī* realization of the supreme goal. To him *puruṣārthas* do not end in the fourth (*caturtha*) aim of human life (liberation, *mukti*), there is the *pañcama puruṣārtha* of *sādhya bhakti*, to be reached by *sādhana bhakti*, for which the aspirant wishes *mukta avasthāto mora man / neroi yena tomara caraṇa||*

The aim is to be an attendant of the *Vaikuṅṭhapatī*—to remain as a devotee of Kṛṣṇa even after liberation like Nārada, Śukamuni and others.

So, the saint's use of analogies must be inspected to find out the truth from his basic teachings—his philosophy of *Eka-śaraṇa* devotion. It becomes clear that his non-dualism is theistic (*Īśvaravādī*), not absolutistic (*Brahmavādī*). He is a *bhaktimārgī*, and never a *jñānamārgī*.

The saint clearly teaches that it is an act of ignorance to regard the world and the worldly existence as final and ultimate. One is to remain in bondage unless this ignorance is removed. No finite can exist in and by itself. It exists only by and for the Infinite. *Māyā* means here only the failure to recognize the world as made by or as dependant on God. In the saint's philosophy *māyā* is God's maid and God is *māyādhiśa*. There is not any dichotomy of *vyavahārika* and *pāramārthika sattā*, Brahma can be conceived as both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* at the same time. *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* are only two aspects of the Lord who possesses so many different aspects, innumerable auspicious qualities. Creatorship is also a real attribute of the Lord who is the owner of innumerable worlds —*ananta koṭi brahmāṇḍar hari adhikārī* as Mādhhabdeva states in the *Nāma-ghoṣā*.

It is not unlikely that some passages may be interpreted in the *māyāvādī / vivartavādī / jñānamārgī* sense as the major portions of the saint's writings are translations. An honest aspirant should try to grasp the whole truth instead of relying in some partial, half passages. The concluding portions even of his translation works are filled with his own sermons (*bhaṇitā*), which will give us definitely his own views. These sermons repeatedly teach *bhakti* and *bhakti* alone. *Bhakti* is the primary truth which is never preached simply as auxiliary to *jñāna* as opposed to Śaṅkarācārya.

The world is not illusory, so our worldly existence is also meaningful. It is a field of education for the individual selves. Somewhere the saint says of himself as *āmi jagatāre śiṣya* (I am a disciple of the world). We should not try to flee away from the world like a *jñānamārgī sannyāsī*. To attain God there is no need of being a forest dweller. If one can practise non-attachment then *gṛhasthāśrama* cannot be an obstacle for God realization. So he utters.

*gṛhate thākiyā dekhilo taju caraṇa.*

Or teaches:

*āsanate thākā puruṣha uddhārā  
daki bolā rāma rāma||*

As the world serves as a field of education, so he could invite the devotees to face the challenges of this Iron Age. *Kaliyuga* gives us scope to march in moral and spiritual progress by fighting with the evils with a deep faith in God.

Śaṅkaradeva says in the *Bhakti-ratnākara*:

*karanta prakāśa hari cittata yāhāra|  
kaliyug satyayug bhailā āsi tāra||*<sup>14</sup>

Thus, in his philosophy of the world, Śaṅkaradeva preaches the ideal of *niṣkāma-karma* of the *Gītā* which has been elaborated with the illustration of persons like king Ambariṣa, Janaka and others who could make their *gṛhabāsa* like *banabāsa* by following the ideal of *Bhagavata* devotion of not renunciation of action but of renunciation in action. By practising *Kṛṣṇārpaṇa dharma* one can elevate the world to a *Vaikuṅṭhapurī*.

This world is beautiful, where we find ourselves. Our Bhāratavarṣa is also conducive to our spiritual progress and our human frame is also wonderfully the best medium to attain God. *Kaliyuga* is the best teacher. So Mādhavadeva sings in the *bargīt*:

*dhanya dhanya kalikāla dhanya nara tanu bhāla  
dhanya dhanya bhāratabariṣe.*

The author concludes by bowing to the *dujanā guru* - Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Śrī Śrī Madhabadeva who fill the minds and hearts with such optimistic utterances.

References:

- 1) S. Radhakrishnan - *The Principal Upanishads*, P. 78 (introduction).
- 2) Śaṅkaradeva : *Dasama*, verse 12968 H. Dutta Barhma ed. *Srimadhagavata (Sampurna) Gauhati, 1967, verse 12968*
- 3) *ibid*, Book XI, verse 17603
- 4) *ibid*, Book VIII, verse 8503-8506
- 5) Śaṅkaradeva - *Kirtana*, verse 655
- 6) Śaṅkaradeva - *Nimi-Naba-Siddha Samvada*, verse 67
- 7) *ibid*, Śaṅkaradeva, verse 241
- 8) *Bargīt - Narayana Kahe Bhakati Karo Tera, Narayana Kahe Bhakati Karo Tera,*
- 9) Śaṅkaradeva - *Bhagavata* book XI, *opcit* verse 13040
- 10) *ibid*, verse 12964
- 11) *ibid*, verse 18491
- 12) *ibid*, verse 18499
- 13) *ibid*, verse 18500
- 14) Śaṅkaradeva – *Bhakti-ratnākara*, verse 7

## Śaṅkarī Teaching: Its Unique Ways and Means

Golok Ch. Bora

**Introduction:** The life of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, born in 1449 A.D., has been discussed in different areas like religion, philosophy, social engineering, culture, literature, art, drama, leadership, management, women empowerment and so on. Śaṅkaradeva has been attributed as, a philosopher, a social reformer, a great litterateur, a poet, a dramatist, an artist and above all the initiator of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. He is considered as a saint or Mahāpuruṣa by the scholars in different times. Mādhavadeva, the main disciple of Śaṅkaradeva attributed his teacher (*guru*) as:

*jaya guru śaṅkara sarva-guṇākara*  
*yākeri nāhike upāma/*

.....  
*paṇḍita māni veda bakhāni*  
*garaba kayali sava cūra/*  
*gīta-kavitva guṇa śaṅkara devara*  
*kīriti gayo bahu dūra//*

Śaṅkaradeva has been evaluated in many areas and it has been tried to establish him as a great social reformer, the creator of Assamese culture and literature, a dramatist, an artist, a poet, a singer, an actor, a social engineer and so on. He has also been evaluated as the initiator of adult education, non-formal education and religious education through *nāmghar*, *thān* or *sattra*. But Śaṅkaradeva's teachings or the system of Śaṅkarī teaching has been least examined as a holistic life-oriented education and for its potentiality in the system of modern education.

Śaṅkarī teachings can be traced from the enactment of *Cihnayātrā* drama in 1468 A.D. Śaṅkaradeva introduced multidimensional skills like speaking dialogues, reciting verses (*ślokas*) and hymns (*bhaṭimās*), facial expressions, movements, motor skills in dancing, singing and playing instruments, drawing and painting, sculpting, making of musical instruments (*khola*, *tāla*), grotesques (*mukhās*) and other art forms like make-up, dress and costumes. All these are found in his later dramas—*Patnī-prasāda*, *Pārijāta-haraṇa*, *Kālīya-damana*, *Kelī-gopāla*, *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* and *Śrīrāma-vijaya*. Śaṅkaradeva wrote *Kīrtana-ghoṣā* to perform *kīrtanas* in front of the assembled people (disciples). But listening is the foremost target here to be appreciated by the receivers (listener disciples) in the communication process. The orator (speaker of *kīrtana*) is the source or the sender of the communication process. Speaking-listening (*śravaṇa-kīrtana*) is the main skill to learn in teaching–learning system. These two are considered as the foremost qualities among the nine kinds of *bhaktis* referred to in his *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* initiated by Śaṅkaradeva. The other forms of *navadhābhaktis* are—*smaraṇa*, *arcana*, *bandana*, *pada-sevana*, *ātma-nivedana*, *dāsyā* and *sakhitva*. The main objective of Śaṅkaradeva for adopting these communication techniques and other creative art forms was to preach his *Eka-śaraṇa* theory, which is the core of Śaṅkarī teaching system. Śaṅkarī teaching system was carried over by Mādhavadeva and other disciples and was transmitted through the *nāmghars*, *thāns* and *sattras*. This has been continuing up to the present.

In this study, it is tried to elucidate how Śaṅkaradeva used some media to educate

people in a scientific or logical way of monotheism in the midst of people's distortion grounded on polytheism and allied animism and superstitions.

### 1. Literature

Śaṅkaradeva started writing poetry at the age of twelve. It was a Sanskrit poem 'karatala kamala kamala dala nayana' while beginning school under his master Mahendra Kandali. After end of the school, he wrote at least two books named *Hariścandra-upākhyāna* and *Gopī-Uddhava sambāda* at the age of around nineteen. But it is well accepted that the *bhakti* movement got underway when Śaṅkaradeva returned from his first pilgrimage (1481-1493) in 1493 and when started writing the *Kīrtana-ghoṣā* and rendering *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and also composing drama and songs. From his profound experience of Veda, *upaniṣada*, the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and from enormous exposure to *bhakti* movement in India, he first chose to bring about an equality and integrity of the people by breaking the barriers of caste and class and then focussed on the Vedāntic *Ekam sat*, the single shade of God, so that people could be united under the same tree of wisdom with the simplest religion he preached. He utilised local language well, or in other words, he revived a new language 'Assamese' to propagate a new wave of goodness of life. It can be seen from the following verses how beautifully he presented those ideas:

*kṛṣṇara kathāta yiṭo rasika/  
brāhmaṇa janma tāka lāge kika//  
smaroka mātra hari dine rāti/  
nabāce bhakati jāti-ajāti//*

(*Kīrttan-ghoṣa*, 129)

*samaste prāṇika dekhībāhā mayñi sama/  
upāya madhyata iṭo āti mokshyatama//*

(*Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, XI, 261)

Śaṅkaradeva, an erudite Sanskrit scholar with his profound knowledge of the dialects, and *Prākṛt* forms, current in North India and with adequate religious experience, found it easy to produce works suited to the propagation of his cult.... Śaṅkara by his best output of scriptural and doctrinal writings making them universally appealing to the masses for which they were meant, raising in their heart the finer feelings of service to the God and to all living creatures in all humility, has remained unparalleled in the sphere of provincial languages.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Banikanta Kakati observes that "He (Śaṅkaradeva) held rightly that no great movement could subsist unless backed by a strong popular literature. And what he did in establishing a literature is simply colossal. He composed songs, hymns and dramas, translated the *Bhāgavata*, and composed narrative poems of exquisite taste and refinement, all bearing upon some aspect of Kṛṣṇa's life, and all this in the vernacular of the people."<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Banikanta Kakati in his article '*Śaṅkaradevar Ādhyātmik Dān*' states that the old Assamese poets realized the utility of literature as an instrument of teaching system. The old poets considered the preaching of the new religion (Neo-Vaiṣṇavism by Śaṅkaradeva), the new practice among all classes of people as a sacred duty (*mahābrata*) which was

<sup>1</sup>Choudhury, P.C., Jagadguru Śaṅkaradeva, p.24 (JGS), Lawers Book Stall,1996 (First Publication, 1972)

<sup>2</sup>Kakati Dr. Banikanta, Sankar Dev, 1920, Natesan & Co, Madras, annexed in Banikanta Kakati, the man and his works, PBA, 1988, p.194 (BKMW)

earlier confined in an intellectual literate class of people. He depicts the writing of *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* by Ananta Kandali as:

*śloka saṁskṛte āmi                      likhibāka bhāle jāni*  
*tathāpi karibo padabandha/*  
*strī sūdra ādi yata                      jānoka parama tattva*  
*śravaṇata milaya ānanda//*

(Ananta Kandali, *Bhāgavata-purāṇa X*, 3096).

‘Propagating the ‘supreme essence’ of unique devotion and of equality on one hand, and providing pleasure to the listener or reader on the other, were the dual ideal and objective of old literature. With this inspiration, poets imparted education and pleasure among the people with the help of the elements of popular literature like poetry, songs, drama, story etc... Those poets truly realized the utility of literature as a tool of teaching, and our old songs, dramas, poetry etc. are the outcome of this very realization.... The old poets became much vocal to preach social equality through their writings<sup>3</sup>. To support his opinion, Dr. Kakati mentions poetry of Mādhavadeva-

*varṇāśrama-dharma yata                      yāra yena bidhi āche*  
*tārese kevala adhikāra /*  
*harināma kīrtanata                      nāhike niyama eko*  
*etekese dharma māje sāra // (Nam-ghoṣā, 119)*

and, *parama nirmala dharma                      hari-nāma kīrtanata*  
*samasta praṇīra adhikāra / (Nam-ghoṣā, 118)*

and, *harināma kīrtanata                      nāhi kāla deśa pātra*  
*niyama saṁyama eko bidhi /*  
*harita śaraṇa laiṅyā                      kevale harira nāma*  
*kīrtana karante hove siddhi // (Nām-ghoṣā, 29)*

‘Sankara founded a vast religious literature in order to give a permanent basis to his teachings. He composed all his works in the vernacular of the people. His hand was not wanting in any department of literature. He translated the entire *Bhagavata* and presented some selected stories from the *Bhāgavata* and other *purāṇas* supplied with the proper moral frame-work of his own faith. The book called *Kīrtana-ghoṣā* contains all his opinions in a nutshell... He rendered the entire life story of Śrī Kṛṣṇa into music, poetry and drama. Mādhavadeva contributed his share to all these literary performances. In addition, Mādhavadeva translated the *Ratnāvalī* of Viṣṇupurī Sannyasī and composed another work called *Nāma-ghoṣā* which elucidates a work of the same import in Sanskrit called *Bhakti-ratnākar*. Subsequently under the influence of Damodara Deva, his renowned disciple Bhatta Deva also compiled another work in Sanskrit called *Bhakti-viveka*. Thus, this remarkable batch of scholars and thinkers brought the sublime ideas of the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata* in to the household of men.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Music/Songs

Śaṅkaradeva’s ancestors were skilled in music and art, briefly termed as *gandhava*. Śaṅkaradeva praises his father Kusumbara as a *gandharva* in his own poetry composition *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*:

<sup>3</sup>Kakati Dr. Banikanta, *Śaṅkaradevar ādhyātmik dān*, p.3-7, Banikanta Racanavali, Old Assamese Literature (BKR)

<sup>4</sup>Kakati Dr. Banikanta, Sankar Dev, 1920, G.A.Natesan & Co, Madras, p.213-214, (BKMW)

*tāhāne tanaya bhailā śubhanaya*  
*prasiddha kusuma nāma/*  
*sada karma yata sakale pārgata*  
*gunato nāhi upāma// 530*  
*baṁśate prakhyāta/ gandharva sākhyāta*  
*jagate bakhāne yāka/*  
*bhoumikate cūrā mani mahā baḍā*  
*daśodiśe yāra dāka// 531*

Having the blood of his *gandharva* ancestors, Śaṅkaradeva experienced some Indian music, despite the original musical flavor of *ojāpāli*, *vyāsa-saṁgīt*, *bharī gān* etc. in Assam at that time. With these potentialities Śaṅkaradeva could naturally compose songs and lyrics. ‘He composed popular religious songs all bearing upon the life and doings of Lord Kṛṣṇa and inculcating the purity of *bhakti*.’<sup>5</sup> Śaṅkaradeva’s marked contribution to devotional poetry in Assamese are his *bargīts*, meant for recitation with the accompaniment of musical instruments. This class of songs easily captivated the hearts of the devotees. Some of these portray the futility of worldly pleasures in human existence, the superiority of *bhakti* to *karma* and *jñāna* and utility of chanting the name of Hari.<sup>6</sup> Through the *bargīts* Śaṅkaradeva preached culture and philosophy of life. Śaṅkaradeva composed his first *bargīta* ‘*mana meri rāma caraṇahi lāgu*’ during the pilgrimage when he visited Badarikāśrama in 1488<sup>7</sup>.

‘In Vaiṣṇavamonasteries—*sattra* and *nāmghars*, there are practices of daily prayer. Daily prayer services are done in three, four, nine or fourteen units called *prasaṅga*. Each *prasaṅga* is started with one *bargīt*. *Bhaṭimā*, *kīrttana* and other items follow it. *Bargīts* are very selective to perform in the morning, noon, afternoon, evening or night as per their time cycle of *rāgas*. According to Dr. M. Neog, “with all their edifying contents, literary beauty and appealing music, the bargits attracted people to the new faith and became the solace of distressed hearts...There is a popular saying, *nom-negur-barjit*, *siyogāy bargīt*. (The most wretched person- he also sings *bargīts*!)”<sup>8</sup>

*Bargīts* involve skills like singing of *rāga*, *dhruṁ* and *pada* in classical steps like *udgrāha*, *melāpāk*, *dhruva* and *ābhoga*. It demands knowledge of beats, rhythm and singing resonantly. The beats and rhythm of *kholā* associated with *bargīts* seems to be very difficult in comparison to Indian classical instruments like *tāblā* or *pākhovāj*. But very fortunately the followers of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva could perform the *bargīts* very easily with too much difficult beats of *kholā*. This is a very noticeable quality of the system of Śaṅkarī teachings. *Bargīts* with all its qualities—lyrical beauty, poetic excellence, spiritual feelings, musical senses and skills and subjects related to teaching of life from birth to death has been a good mass-communication skill in modern times. This has been playing an important role in the life style of the people under Śaṅkarī or *Sattriyā* tradition. As a performing art form *bargīts* can be utilized well in modern educational pedagogy also.

### 3. Dramas

Śaṅkaradeva is the father of Assamese drama and theatre. Being a *gandharva* family

<sup>5</sup>Kakati Dr. Banikanta, Śaṅkaradevar ādhyātmik dān, p.3-7, BKR

<sup>6</sup>Choudhury, P.C., Jagadguru Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, p.27

<sup>7</sup>Neog, Dr. Maheswar, Śaṅkaradeva and His Times, p.179, 2021

<sup>8</sup>Neog, Dr. Maheswar, The Bhakti Cycle of Assamese Lyrics: Bargits and After’, Mahapurusa Jyoti, Vol II

member the saint poet was born and brought up in an environment of song and music. Secondly, Śaṅkaradeva might have also read the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata Muni at school of Mahendra Kandali. Thirdly, there were forms of culture like *putalā nāc* (puppet dance), *ojā-pāli*, *kuśān gān*, *deodhani* dance, *mahkhedā utsav* (purging of mosquitoes), *devadāsi* dance, *garakhīyāpūjā*, *dhuliyā bhāonā*, *khuliyā bhāonā* and some others<sup>9</sup>. These were some *yātrā*-like performances which were accompanied by dancing, singing, playing on instruments like drums, cymbals, flute and the like. With all these seeds, Śaṅkaradeva created a new form of drama, which he called *yātrā*, *nāṭa* or *nāṭaka*, which were called *aṅka* by the biographers and later on they were named as *aṅkiyā nāṭa* and the dramatic performance of *aṅkiyā nāṭa* was the most familiar *bhāonā* of the time.

Śaṅkaradeva composed six regular plays, viz., *Patnī-prasāda*, *Kālīya-damana*, *Keli-gopāla*, *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*, *Pārijāta-haraṇa* and *Rāma-vijaya* apart from his initial marvellous creation *Cihnayātrā*. As a unique institution, *aṅkiyā bhāonā* made a synthesis of elements from classical Sanskrit drama and folk *yātrā* or *bhāonās*. Śaṅkaradeva involved people irrespective of caste and creed by this innovative work. The plays paved the way for culture of other arts and crafts like dancing, singing songs of drama, playing of musical instruments, preparation of dress and costumes, make ups, accessories like bows, clubs, swords etc. used in drama, models and effigies, mask making, fire woks used at the entrance of the hero and other dramatic characters etc. The theme of *aṅkiyā* drama was mainly Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*. The aim was to evoke the sentiment of devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa or Rāma. According to codified rules, marriage, fighting, birth, death and eating etc. should not be shown in a classical drama. But Śaṅkaradeva and his successors have included such scenes in their dramatic compositions.

Though Śaṅkaradeva wrote a big volume of literature, these were not sufficient to propagate his doctrine to all people, because most of the people were illiterate in Kāmrūp at that time. Moreover, publication of literature was also not smooth, because the work of multiplying the scriptures on to the barks of tree (*sāñcī-pāṭ* or *tūlā-pāṭ*) demanded much manual labour. 'Therefore, it was not felt easy to fulfil the purpose of organization and publicity at the same time by pure literature. Keeping in view the folk-interest (*loka-ruci*) and folk-collection (*loka-saṅgraha*), fine arts like drama, songs, painting, musk (idol) making etc. were most emphasized.'<sup>10</sup> Being a skilled artisan Śaṅkaradeva did not spend much time to compose drama, which he felt a strong medium to carry on his thoughts to mass people.

'The first dramatic performance by Śaṅkaradeva, 1449-1569, the foremost Vaiṣṇava reformer of Assam, was known as the *Chihna-yātrā*, literally, a pageant in painted scenes. From the detailed descriptions available in the biographies, it appears that *Chihna-yātrā* was probably a pantomimic show with a scenic background to emphasize effects. The use of painted scenery so early as the fifteenth century is certainly a unique innovation for Assam. This pageant show was developed later into regular plays with music dance and dialogue and was known by the name *aṅkiyā nāṭa*. Its growth was influenced by the earlier practice of reciting *kāvya*s and *śāstra*s in social and religious congregations. Prior to the compositions of *aṅkiyā nāṭa*s, Śaṅkaradeva himself had written a set of *kāvya*s which were used in such recitals. He realized the effectiveness of the dramatic medium in propagating

<sup>9</sup>Deva Goswami, Dr. Keshavananda, Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva, p.68-70

<sup>10</sup>Mahanta, Bap Chandra, Mahapurush Sankardev, p.275

his cult rather than merely reciting the story as in the *kāvya*s whose appeal was oracular and not visual. On his return home, he immediately seized the opportunity of turning the *kāvya* type of entertainment into drama and put the stories of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* into action by living performances..... *Ojā-pāli* choral singing, and spectacular shows of other parts of India, might have jointly contributed to the rise of fully developed drama in Assamese.<sup>11</sup> He introduced a new feature into his movement by composing dramas in the performance of which he himself took some main parts. No Vaiṣṇavite reformer of the time seems to have attracted people by dramatic representations.<sup>12</sup> ‘The *guru*’s compositions of the *ankīyā nāṭas*(one-act plays) really dramatized his movement in giving it a stamp of permanent character. The *sūtradhāra* in the prelude to the drama and to each scene commences the stage work. He interprets the versions. Painted scenes and masks are there, a unique element in the history of the plays of the world...Four elements constitute the component parts of the plays, viz., song, dance, dialogue and musical appliances. These plays those like Mādhava still proclaim the glory of the two Vaiṣṇava reformers and are rare contributions to the Indian stage.’<sup>13</sup>

### ***The Institution of Learning - Thān / Satra***

After the great departure of Śaṅkaradeva, *thāna* and *sattra* institutions were established under Mādhavadeva and other disciples of the Vaiṣṇava cult. The main objective of these institutions was to continue the culture of *bhakti* movement led by Śaṅkaradeva. As the time passed the *sattras* became the only institution through which Vaiṣṇavism was propagated. Not only in the religious arena, these institutions influenced the life of people socially, morally and educationally and also contributed a great deal to the realm of literature and art. If we see deeply, it can be noticed that Śaṅkaradeva’s religion was based on art, culture and literature, i.e., people naturally acquired a rich culture in going to observe a religious life. Let us see the effects of the comprehensive teaching of Śaṅkaradeva.

**Social and moral Values:** It was the *bhakti* movement of Śaṅkaradeva, which could turn the land of Kāmrūpa, which was earlier famous as the strong hold of tāntricism and śaktism, in to a predominantly Vaiṣṇavite land. This the monotheistic devotional cult could cover up the polytheism, animism and tāntricism rampant over the region. As the people worship the same deity, read the same scriptures, observe the common practices and obey the same *guru*, they feel a sort of comradeship living under the same shade.

The universally accepted principles of right living and exalted virtues have been accepted and recognised to be criteria of virtuous life, while long recognised errors of conduct have been deprecated. The *sattras* acted more or less as the guardians of morality by keeping close vigilance over their disciples.<sup>14</sup> The existence of *nāmghar* in every village of Assam plays the role of the transporter of values transmitted by the *sattras*. Thus, the *sattras* played big role of preaching ethico-devotional codes and conducts and moral values among the people of Assam.

<sup>11</sup>Barua, Birinchikumar, M.A., B.L. (Cal.), Ph.D. (London.), Ankiya Nat, 1940, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam (D.H.A.S. Assam), p.i-iii, Introduction

<sup>12</sup>Kakati, B.K., 1920, Sankar Dev, p.214, BKMHW

<sup>13</sup>Choudhury, P.C. M.A., PH.D. (LOND.), Jagadguru Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, 1972, p.28, N.B Stall/ L.B.Stall, Guwahati

<sup>14</sup>Sarma, Dr. Satyendranath, The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam, Gauhati University, p.155

**Educational values:** In medieval times, education was run by some institutions named *ṭols* and *pāṭhśālās*, which were managed by some individual teachers mainly *Brahmin paṇḍits* acquainted with Sanskrit scriptures. These were not at all sufficient for mass people, because those limited *ṭols* or *pāṭhśālās* were also restricted for higher caste students. Even the *ṭols* of Mahendra Kandali was an example of students from mainly Brahmin castes, where Śaṅkaradeva, a *kāyasta* student got honourable access only due to his royal (*Bhūñā*) family background. At the advent of the British during 17<sup>th</sup> Century the indigenous education ran by the *ṭols* or *pāṭhśālās* was greatly diminished and the European education was gradually encouraged. *Sattra* institutions were also grown mostly during last part of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and first part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. While private *ṭols* were diminished and *sattras* emerged out, the *sattra* institution voluntarily took upon itself the noble responsibility of enlightening the people through their own *ṭols*. All the important *sattras* used to maintain and are still maintaining a regular band of scholars whose duty was to impart education, especially in respect of ancient lores and scriptures. The Vaiṣṇavite lores were, no doubt, studied but other branches of study such as *vyākaraṇa*, *nyāya* and *kāvya*s were not neglected. Many of the early Vaiṣṇavite reformers took upon themselves the task of educating the pupils. Mādhavadeva himself taught Rāmacaraṇa, his nephew, Haricaraṇa and Puruṣottama the youngest son and grandson of Śaṅkaradeva respectively. He also imparted education to Parmānanda, son of Nārāyaṇa Thākur, Acyuta Śarmā, Bāra-Viṣṇu Ātā and Lakṣmaṇa Ojā. Bhaṭṭadeva, the satrādhikāra of Pāṭḥausī Sattra and the father of Assamese prose literature, conducted a regular *ṭol* in the precincts of his *sattra* and it is narrated in the biography by Rāmāya Dvija that one thousand students received education from him. Rāmananda Dvija, a biographer of Vamśīgopāladeva, states that he received education from Vanamālīdeva, the founder of the Dakṣiṇapāṭ Sattra. There are many instances to show that the Vaiṣṇavite teachers were greatly responsible for imparting knowledge amongst the mass. We may refer particularly to one instance narrated in the *Kathā-gurucarita* where we find that an old couple arranged among themselves that the wife would manage the household duties and the husband would daily attend the congregational chanting of prayers held by Gopāla Ātā and his disciples during the day and would recite in the evening the verses learnt during the day. One evening the old man could not recite the verses learnt during the day and as a result he was refused food and drink by his wife. The old man then went back to the *sattra* and narrated his experience to the devotees, who thereupon taught the verses again and again till the old man could commit to his memory. Similar instances could be multiplied from the medieval biographies.<sup>15</sup>

**Nāmghar:** Apart from the main *sattras*, every Hindu dominated village contains one *nāmghar*, etymologically means a place where people gather to chant the name of God. Dr. B. Kakati observes, ‘On all festive occasions connected with the life and doings of Kṛṣṇa, the hymnic songs of Śaṅkara and Mādhava are recited in accompaniment to musical instruments. These *nāmghars* are something like village parliaments. Their affairs are conducted on a purely democratic principle, every household in the village having an equal voice in the management. The *nāmghars* are the court houses where the elders of the village sit in judgement on petty peccadilloes; moral or social delinquents are brought to trial and fined or excommunicated until the fine is paid up, the fine going to the common

<sup>15</sup>Sarma, S.N., NVMSIA, p161

fund of the village. On bigger ceremonial occasions, several villages combine and carry on the ceremony of recitation of the name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa from village to village by turns.’<sup>16</sup> ‘The artistic sculptures of Assamese *nāmghars* evince a creative urge and devoted aspect. Art has flourished over the centuries and continues to be quite vibrant. Religion has been the vehicle of creative urge and this aspect of its interaction with life should not be lost sight of.’<sup>17</sup> ‘The way of the *sattra* and *nāmghar* is conceived and indicates that Śaṅkaradeva wanted all men, irrespective of castes, colour or ethnicity to be on equal footing having the right to sit and pray together to the Almighty in the simplest possible way:’<sup>18</sup>

*kukura śṛgāla gardarbharo ātmārāma/  
janiyā savāko pari karibā praṇāma// (Kīrttan-ghoṣa, 1823)*

*Nāmghar*, thus, has been acting as a place of social education, art and culture from sixteenth century up till now.

### Conclusion

Śaṅkaradeva was by heart a man of democratic outlook and very naturally he maintained the order of the society, though he was emphatic to exalt a new face of the society through his principle of freedom of religion. When Śaṅkaradeva began to compose literary works to spread his new faith, some of the enlightened Brāhmiṇ scholars came forward and joined labours with him. In some works, he wrote only the first few sections and then gave them over to be continued by his Brahmin friends or followers. For example, Ananta Kandali, a Brāhmiṇ disciple of repute was assigned to render *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and he rendered canon IX and VII. This was his team spirit coming out from his democratic outlook and overall management policy to proceed to the movement.

Śaṅkaradeva, with deep realization of the antiquity and greatness of Indian civilization and culture emerged from Veda, Vedānta, the Gītā and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, could very confidently evolve a simple but Vedic (*sanātana*) faith called as *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* for the liberty of the people to live with knowledge, wisdom, art, culture and literature. He could install the performing art forms very efficiently like drama, song, poetry, hymn, instrument, painting, sculptures, dance etc. for preaching his doctrine. These all media and art forms were employed so that people feel free to live an enlightened life.

<sup>16</sup>Kakati, B., Sankar Dev, p.217-218, BKMHW

<sup>17</sup>Rastogi, Dr. T.C., Assam Vaisnavism, p.65, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1994

<sup>18</sup>Mahanta, Pona, Sankaradeva, p.69

## Bhakti Yoga of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva: An Analytical Approach

Dr. Priti Dekka

### 1.1 Introduction:

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva also known as Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva was a great Vaiṣṇava saint of Assam. He was a contemporary of Kabir, Guru Nānaka and Caitanya and his teachings too breathe the same *bhakti* spirit. The teachings of these saints are based on their respective *anubhava* i.e. the actual experience. They do not talk or say on the basis of the testimony and experience of others. He, therefore, taught what he actually saw and experienced. Like all saints, he felt that God is love; and He can be attained in the *Kali-yuga* or the Iron Age only through devotion (*bhakti*) and love. All his writings: the *Bhakti-ratanākar* (In Sanskrit), *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*, *Bhakti-pradīpa*, and the *bargīts* (written in *Vrajāvali* Language), and that of his devoted disciple and spiritual successor, Mādhavadeva's *Nāma-ghoṣā* speak of *Nāma Bhakti*, i.e., worship of *Nāma* as the most efficacious way for God-Realisation.

India is a *puṇya-bhūmi* sanctified by the existence of holy rivers and birth of saints and seers from time immemorial. Śrī Kṛṣṇa appeared in this land who symbolized Truth; Śrī Rama was born in India as the paragon of righteousness who typified ideal kingship; Gautama Buddha was another seer who preached the ideal of renunciation; Swami Vivekananda glorified India as a messenger of the country's culture and civilization and, in later years, Mahatma Gandhi's appearance as the apostle of non-violence and truth is widely acknowledged. It is significant that the mediaeval period in India was marked by the advent of a galaxy of saints and seers in various parts of the country to propagate the message of a new spiritual awakening. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa said:

“Where there is a decline of righteousness (that is, *dharma*) and a rise of unrighteousness, I incarnate myself; for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.”

### The Cultivation of Bhakti:

The Sanskrit word *bhakti* is derived from the verb root *bhaj*, which means “to adore or worship God”. *Bhakti-yoga* has been called “love for love's sake” and union through love and devotion”. *Bhakti-yoga*, like any other form of *yoga*, is a path to self realization, of having experience of oneness with everything. *Bhakti* is first advocated on the ground that since God is all pervading and inexpressible, He can neither be conceived nor worshipped directly. In order to be affected *bhakti* must be undeviating. The *bhaktā* (devotee) must surrender his body, mind and soul for the contemplation of the form, and the recitation of the name of Kṛṣṇa. He must possess the qualities of sympathy, forgiveness, softness of heart, and complete mastery over his passions. He must be sufficient to offer spiritual advice to people and have strong conviction in the truth of *bhakti-yoga* leading to final release of the soul from the bondage of desire.

### 1.2 Significance of the study:

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's physical strength and beauty was as praiseworthy as his intellectual stamina and manoeuvring excellence. As a versatile genius, he combined in himself many wonderful qualities. He was an administrator (as a *Śiromaṇi Bhūñā* and,

later, as a *gomastā* under Koch regime) a social reformer, a poet, a dramatist, a painter, a musician and an actor in dance drama. Wide and deep was his reading, and firm and persistent was his intellectual grasp. In religious disputation, he pushed his antagonist with sincere and persuasive arguments to the defeated corner. He often reverted the citations put forward by the opponents to his own advantage and made them move of themselves to his conclusions. His organizing capacity manifested itself in the way he placed the doctrines of his faith on a firm soil in the teeth of the bitterest opposition. Although he was “a menace to the heretics”, as Mādhavadeva has described him, he had a charming personality which attracted and pleased those who were near him. A householder, he resigned himself and his all to God, and remained detached from the pleasures and pains of the world. His weal and his woe depended on that of his followers. The culture of *bhakti* among his disciples in the proper manner was his delight.

Again Śaṅkaradeva said that *bhakti* is far superior to *jñāna*, *yoga*, and *karma*. In the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* (25<sup>th</sup> śloka) it is clearly stated that *bhakti* is far superior to knowledge, work and *yoga* or even meditation. Śaṅkaradeva’s entire work is designed towards instilling *bhakti* in people’s heart. *Bhakti* is not only a spiritual concept. It unites the society; it removes violence from society, creates a mutually loving society, and raises the mental, intellectual and spiritual standards of human society. It promotes the feeling of brotherhood and love amongst the members of the society. The problems that we see today in society are nothing but a manifestation of materialism and selfishness which remind us the spiritual dearth of humanity, that is, the dire need of *bhakti*.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva practiced *kuṇḍalinī-yoga* also. He aroused his *kuṇḍalin* and achieved tremendous power in the process. He became a master in *prānāyama*. He could hold his breath and remain under water for a long time. His body would not get wet even when he remained within water, which is possible only in case of expert *yogis*. He practiced levitation and could rest his entire body on the left thumb only. However, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva gave up all these *yogic* practices eventually as they were considered by him only as a means to develop him physically. He was more interested in the devotional path for reaching God.

*Bhakti-yoga* is considered the easiest *yogic* path to master and the most direct method to experience the unity of mind and spirit. While *haṭha-yoga* requires a strong and flexible body, *rāja-yoga* requires a disciplined and concentrated mind, and *jñāna-yoga* requires a keen intellect, but the only requirement for *bhakti-yoga* is an open and loving heart. *Bhakti-yogi* complements other paths of *yoga* well, and it is said that *jñāna* (knowledge or wisdom) will dawn by itself when you engage in the devotional practices of *bhakti-yoga*.

The study aims to focus *bhakti yoga* as described by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. It aims to study the uniqueness of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva’s *bhakti-yoga* or model of *bhakti* includes the concepts of *Nāma-kīrtana*. Song, *bhāona*, *dance*, *śravana-kīrtana*, *guru-asana*, devotional art, *sāñcipāta* (in which spiritual texts were written), musical instrument like *khol*, *tāl*, *ḍobā*. etc. were created by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva himself. From this we can see that Śaṅkaradeva was an ocean in himself. It is very difficult to express his contributions in simple words.

This study aims to highlight Śaṅkaradeva’s *bhakti-yoga* not only from a spiritual perspective but also from a social, cultural, economic and transformation point of view. It

aims to study the various facts of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti yoga*. It aims to explore Śaṅkaradeva's movement from the point of view of *yoga* which promotes mental, physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual well being.

The ultimate goal in the practice of *bhakti yoga* is to reach the state of *rasa* (essence), a feeling of pure bliss achieved in the devotional surrender to the divine. The three paths prescribed for the attainment of the Lord namely- *jñāna* (knowledge) *karma* (renunciation), and *bhakti* (devotion) in which the highest important has been attached to *bhakti* in the *Bhagavata-purāṇa*. Though all the three paths are mutually interlinked, only *bhakti* can free people from the worldly attachments by ridding them from all doubts. Without being assisted by *bhakti*, *jñāna* and *karma* cannot help attain salvation. Hence, Śaṅkaradeva suggests not to forsake the path of devotion to *Hari* even after being free from the cycle of re-birth.

It also aims to highlight Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement from scientific and rational point of view. Therefore, there is a need for the present study to find out the importance of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti yoga* and its benefit for the society.

Hence the need of the study has great importance.

### 1.3.Objectives of the study:

*The objectives of the study are decided as:*

- a. To find out how far the *bhakti yoga* is beneficial for society.
- b. To find out the essence of the *Eka Śaraṇa-Bhakti* of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva.

### 1.4 Methodology:

The present study is based on qualitative research. The exercise involves analytical reading and reviews of lots of written material on Śaṅkaradeva studies.

The study is based on two kinds of main sources:

Primary Sources: original scriptures, manuscripts, original paintings of Śaṅkaradeva.

Secondary Sources: books on Śaṅkaradeva written by various authors, theses, dissertations, articles, magazines, websites etc.

### 1.5 Statement of the Problem:

The main aim of the present investigator is to have a study on the *Bhakti* Movement of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and to prepare an analytical report. The measures adopted by Śaṅkaradeva may be regarded as successful measures in removing social discrepancies and establish a healthy society. *Yoga* is very beneficial for healthy mind.

### 1.6 Review of related literature:

The present study embodies a brief review of the researches done in the area related to this investigation.

They are:

Turner, V. (1974), Turner describes her how *bhakti yoga* operates a series of social transitions, because they keep alive the strength of the anti structural spirit of India and makes it universal.

Dowdle, H (2012), in his study, *bhakti yoga* is classically defined as the path of devotion, and it is often referred to as the *yoga* of love. *Bhakti* is one of the three primary paths to

enlightenment laid out by Kṛṣṇa in *Bhagavad-gītā*.

Sivananda, S (1957), in his study, the author describes the importance of *guru bhakti yoga*. Deka, Priti (2017): In her study the author gives a description of Śaṅkaradeva as an educationist and the urgent need for proper implementation of the educational philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva in the present society to uplift the moral, spiritual, value based thought, character building and personality development of the upcoming generation of the people.

### **Analysis of the first objective:**

1. To find out how far *bhakti yoga* is beneficial for society:

Bhakti or divine love of which Śrī Śaṅkaradeva and Śrī Mādhavadeva talks in such superlative terms, in fact begins when, one rising above the external and formal worship, starts searching the Lord from within and is prepared to put everything at stake. The path of *bhakti* is not a primrose path. One has to die while living and the devotee has to tread the path as sharp as that of the razor's edge. Some of the *bhakatas* have to eat live coals. Guru Nānak says at one place, "If you are of playing the game of love for the Lord, then come into His lane with your head on the palm of your hands."

*Bhāvanā*—the attitude of the devotee towards the Lord, plays a vital role in the path of devotion or *bhakti*. In fact, the spiritual progress of a devotee mainly depends upon his *bhāvanā*. Undeviating faith in the Lord's love and His mercy and compassion further provides confirmation to a *bhakat* (devotee). It is, therefore, that most of the great *Vaiṣṇava* writers have said, "*bhāva* itself is *Bhagavanta*." Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva advocated the *dāśya bhāva* (attitude of a servant) as opposed to *vatsalya bhava* (attitude of a parent) and *madhurya bhava*, (attitude of a consort) of *bhakti*. A *bhakata*, Śaṅkaradeva held, should have implicit sense of service to God, like a faithful servant, without hoping or asking for any reward in return.

A real *bhakata* (devotee) finds repose only in the presence of his beloved Lord or hearing His names or His attributes; otherwise, always feels something missing. Whenever this repose is disturbed, he suffers from acute pain, as beautifully expressed by lovelorn Mira in one or her popular songs.

*Rasamayi bhakati*—has a great inspiring effect on a *bhakata*. All the worldly attachments, desires and pleasures felt insipid (tasteless) to him. A devotee infatuated with passionate divine love cannot be distracted from his path by any ordinary sense pleasures. His sensitive sense organs like eyes, ears and the tongue (through which mind and *māyā* play a great havoc to those who remain distracted in the way of God-realisation) also undergo functional changes.

As regards to religious teachings of Śaṅkaradeva, it is to be noted that he advocated the cult of devotion as the *summum bonum* of life and it is considered even more desirable than liberation (*mukti*). Bhakti is the invaluable wealth (*vitta*) and the germ of liberation. It is the solace of life.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva inspired the Bhakti Movement in Assam and united people through his Neo-Vaishnavite movement of *Eka Śaraṇa. Hari Nāma Dharma*. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva created a new religion, *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*.—————

But he was not a religious preceptor alone. He had multi-faceted talent in the disciplines of dance, music, drama, verses etc. He also created a new social structure. He may be placed among the all time great masters in the world for his role in social reform

alone. The time in which he was born was a time of terror and tyranny. There was no guarantee of human lives in those trying times of medieval period. Different tantric practices like human sacrifice, *bhogi* etc. devastated the social life. Human sacrifices were made in several temples of that period. The people of Koch tribe also sacrificed human lives.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva introduced lots of systems or techniques which were aimed to inculcate *bhakti* towards the Lord. He could do them by removing untouchability, establishing equality, eradicating of caste system, removing of superstitions, religious and cultural taboos etc.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti yoga* affects our all five states (*pañca-koṣa*). His teachings or ways were aimed at raising the moral, economic, spiritual, intellectual cultural standards of society. At the same time, his teachings were designed for a healthy life style. For example: The *prasāda* system which he introduced includes banana, coconut, ginger, sprouts, gram, guava, cucumber, mangoes, locally found fruits etc. served in banana leaves. These are extremely nutritious, healthy, natural and organic. Another example could be Śaṅkaradeva's system of *Śaṅkarī* dance which is famous all over the world. The *Śaṅkarī* dance begins with this *māṭi-ākharās*. *Māṭi-ākharās* are the foundations for the learners to make a healthy, physical, mental and spiritual set-up which is extremely necessary for a classical dancer. It is worth mentioning that some of these *māṭi-ākharās* are similar to some of the yogic postures or *āsanas* (based on *yoga* texts) which help the learners to maintain a physical and mental discipline. Again, the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* introduced by Śaṅkaradeva uses the tools of songs, dance, *kīrtan*, drama etc. Such practices not only had effects on the life of individual but the entire society, culture, traditions etc. In this context, he can be called a spiritual entrepreneur, a spiritual scientist, a spiritual reformer. His spirituality had a broad-based objective and was not limited to spirituality itself. His concept was that of unity. He managed to unite the society with his work. His message is like the pulse of Assamese society and is deeply ingrained in the DNA of Assamese culture and society. But actually his message was for the people or humanity at large.

Again, Śaṅkaradeva was strictly against illogical, superficial, exhibitionist, and lavish spiritual or cultural practices. He was not only a spiritual leader but also a social reformer. His contribution to the world of spirituality is immense and unique. He had a tremendous influence on Assamese culture and society and the entire human race. The world at large can draw important and valuable lessons from his teachings.

Of the the nine-kinds of devotion that Śaṅkaradeva laid special emphasis was on chanting of and listening to the names of the Lord. Remembering the names (*nāma-smaraṇa*) is equally extolled. Thus, it appears that Śaṅkaradeva prescribed a simpler mode of religious worship which could be easily practised by all sections of people. The creed is absolutely free from ritualistic complexities and no scholarship or high pedigree of birth is necessary to proceed along the path of devotion prescribed by Śaṅkaradeva. According to him a *Cāṇḍāla* who remembers the Lord, heart and soul, is superior to a Brahmin devoid of faith and devotion. Because of this liberal view, a large number of people belonging to the tribal and backward classes embraced *Vaiṣṇavism* and the rigour of caste-distinction was considerably reduced. Therefore, Śaṅkaradeva's contribution to the integration of Assam nation is a glorious chapter in the cultural history of Assam.

Objective 2. To find out essence of the *Eka Śaraṇa-Bhakti* of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva:

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva had a vision about *Eka Śaraṇa-Bhakti* and through his work on the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* he analysed the depth of religion and single mindedness. In it one has experienced the romance of life in surrendering oneself. It is an ecstasy in the meeting of *ātmā* and *paramātmā*. Great, dauntless and fearless love stories have moved hearts and minds and have been creating turning points in the life of man. Śaṅkaradeva was a renowned scholar of the *bhakti* period and he put forward the concept of *Eka Śaraṇa-Bhakti*. He painted the love of the Lord through his poetry and plays so beautifully and with full of abundance that when it flows through the *ātmā* of a devotee, its divine grace guides his each and every act. In *bhakti* there is no fear and no bondage. It is independent of all forms of worships; man forgets the body and relates to the soul. The enigmatic adventure of self surrender inspired people to adopt *Eka Śaraṇa-Bhakti* as a way of life. The rich feeling that lies deeper than the ocean and in its intoxication, it makes way into many hearts and homes. The belief and faith in the supreme starts a scientific healing of the heart and mind. When the mind is sad, anxious, bedridden with fear, the hope generated through *bhakti* that the Supreme Lord will give one deliverance from these sufferings, is in itself a very big solace to the mind. Śaṅkaradeva was successful in imbibing this faith in the people. The verses he chose from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and the *Bhagavat-gītā* made people feel akin to the life of the Lord. He showed them such a path by narrating the various episodes of the Lord.

Albert Schweitzer, the author of *Indian Thought and its Development* at page 198 has said: “In Hindu mysticism something happens between man and the highest being. Man comes into living relationship with that being and can even manifest his relationship in action without giving up his natural existence.” It is true that when man identifies himself with the Supreme, he is inspired with His dauntless courage, and the intellect is nurtured with positive thoughts. This in itself gives one the strength to face the truth of life in the midst of darkness. The story of the elephant and the crocodile, popularly known as *Gajendra-upākhyān* in the *Kīrtana-ghoṣā*, leaves the motto that when one falls in his worst and remembers Hari, He will do His best to this unfortunate soul.

People started to experience the way of self surrender as an alternative to the tantric way of life. The non-violent way to tackle the self by avoiding the violent way of evoking the senses became the preference. *Bhakti* meant devotion in actions of a different kind. In the tantric rites no result was attained even after performing all those tantric rituals, but rather one had to shed repentance and the peace of mind was also eroded. On the other hand, Vaiṣṇavism was a steep contrast to ritual worships; it offered an evolution of the inner strength and peace of mind. By following the path of *Eka Śaraṇa-Bhakti* one develops the self, the individual intellect attains rich reasoning power without fear. Through the path of *Eka Śaraṇa-Bhakti* the mind regains its divine nature and it begins to understand and comprehend the Lord’s mind and grace. Positive thoughts from within get lighted up and awakened to the reality and the spirit is enlivened with strength. The victory of good over evil is then inevitable. Then a deep sense of self respect and positive feeling to do the right things in life begins to grow, when it begins to grow it leads to the growth of the self respect for other individuals simultaneously. When this positive feeling of the growth of self respect percolates, then only the strength is infused into the positive forces in society to bring about social transformation.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva reinforced *Eka Śaraṇa-Bhakti* with action as depicted in the *Bhagavat-gītā* and it had awakened the masses in an apt way. Very often the poet in him took rapturous delight in lingering over the description of the beauties of the river, oceans, groves, forests and mountain scenery. He portrayed them as they presented themselves to his eyes. In each he saw the glories of the manifestations of the Creator. He composed *ślokas* and *stotras* in Sanskrit about these feelings aslo. He thus infused and indoctrinated his thoughts. They flew passionately through his *kīrtana*, plays and preaching. They are kept alive through the *sattras* and *nāmghrs* till today. It was his mastery over the *Bhagavat-gītā*, *purāṇas*, *upaniṣads*, *Vedas*, etc. that channelled his communication of *Eka Śaraṇa-Bhakti* into the heart and homes of the people.

The seeds for peace were sown.

#### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, it may be stated that, Śaṅkaradeva was that human force who was able to challenge the powerful force in society and transform their minds into *Eka Śaraṇa-Bhakti*. The message of *bhakti* and devotion propogated by Śaṅkaradeva was based on love of the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa.

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**The *Rāsalīlā* of the *Ādidaśama* of Śaṅkaradeva and the  
*Bhāgavatabhāvārthadīpikā* Commentary on the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*:  
A Study**

**Prof. Manjula Devi**

The *Purāṇas*, forming an important part of the Indian literature, have been the fountainhead of Indian culture and civilization. They, indeed, embody most of the knowledge about Indian religion and mythology, history and ethnology, law, ethics, philosophy, statecraft, art of war, and so forth. The authors of the *Purāṇas* had deep knowledge of the Indian milieu, in all its aspects, and therefore, they have a perennial appeal to the humankind. They have exerted a tremendous influence on the life and culture of the people of India with the stories, legends, wise sayings, ethical notions and religious sermons, incorporated therein.

With the emergence and development of the modern Indian languages and subsequent religious revivalism, especially in the wake of Vaiṣṇavite renaissance, in the different parts of India, round about the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of the Christian era, the Epics and *Purāṇas*, received the priority in the hands of the vernacular poets for rendering them into local languages. Though, their main objective was to propagate religious views, as embodied in the scriptures, yet their prime aim was to educate the masses by inculcating moral, spiritual and social teachings, set forth in the Epics and *Purāṇas*.

Amongst the modern Indian languages, Assamese has a long literary tradition since the early centuries of the Christian era. The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement, headed by Śaṅkaradeva, created a band of poet-translators, who composed a great number of songs, dramas, verse-narratives and other types of literature. Śaṅkaradeva and his favourite disciple and chief apostle, Mādhavadeva, expounded and elaborated the teachings of faith, they wanted to propagate, through their literary output, which mainly centred round the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, besides the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* and the *Padmapurāṇa*. Their literary works are characterised by a rare power of rendering the spirit of the original in unimpeachable beauty, and by occasional entries of creative imagination. Śaṅkaradeva instructed his most efficient disciple Mādhavadeva, to follow the original, (*mūl rākhība pāriḷe saj*) while writing for propagation of his cult, and for the inculcation of the devotional attitude of mind.

The *Ādidaśama* of Śaṅkaradeva is a highly venerated work, which forms one of the cornerstones of Assam Vaiṣṇavism, along with his *Kīrtanagoṣā*, and Mādhavadeva's *Nāmaghoṣā* and the *Bhaktiratnāvalī*, the verse-rendering of the Sanskrit *Bhaktiratnāvalī* by Viṣṇupurī Sannyāsin. The *Kathāgurucarita*, a prose biographical work on the lives of the Vaiṣṇava saints, records that Mādhavadeva advised his disciples to regard *Kīrtana* and *Daśama* as representatives of Śaṅkaradeva, and the *Bhaktiratnāvalī* and the *Nāmaghoṣā*, as his own.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of such notions, perhaps, these texts have become the objects of special veneration, which are known as *cāriputhi*, forming the central part of the canonical literature of the cult.

The *Ādidaśama* is a literal translation of the tenth book of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which contains ninety chapters, of which Śaṅkaradeva translated forty-seven chapters from the beginning. The part deals with the narratives from the birth of Kṛṣṇa to the killing of Kāṁsa at Mathurā. The translation of the latter part, i.e. from the forty-eighth chapter to the end, i.e. ninetieth chapter, was rendered by one of his able disciples, Ananta Kandali.

The rendering of the *Ādidaśama* is generally faithful to the original, and the interpretation of the text is invariably laid on in the light of the oldest, extant, *Bhāgavatabhāvārthadīpikā* commentary on the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* by Śrīdharaśvāmin. Śaṅkaradeva's power of description and narration is, perhaps, at its best in the *Ādidaśama*, and the excellent versification of the Sanskrit original, always marks spontaneity in his rendering into Assamese. Keeping the Assamese life and society, constantly, in his view, he has added a few more striking metaphors or images in his translation.

That the *Ādidaśama* is translated after consulting the commentary of Śrīdharaśvāmin is known from his own words where he states :

*śuniyoka budhajana huyā sāvadhāna mana*  
*karayoḍe bolo tuti bāka/*  
*yebe ṭikā bhāṣya cāi dekhā iṭo kathā nāi*  
*nindā tebe karibā āmāka //<sup>2</sup>*

i.e. 'If you look up the commentaries and find anything in my work that is not in the commentaries, the blame can be put on me.'

Again he has defended himself thus :

*yibā kicho baḍhā dekhā iṭo aparādha erā*  
*byāso denta kathāta rañjana /*  
*āno mahā kabicaya kābyarasa nibandhaya*  
*tāka nindyai kona sādhujana //<sup>3</sup>*

i.e. 'If you can find any matter with added glean, you have not to censure me; even Vyāsa put additional colour on their subject matter. Other great poets also apply poetic sentiments in their verses, and the righteous persons never criticize it.' Śaṅkaradeva in his *Bhaktiratnākara* also cites largely from Śrīdharaśvāmin's *Bhāgavatabhāvārthadīpikā*, and the *Subodhinī* commentary on the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. In all his adaptations from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, there is distinct influence of the *Bhāgavatabhāvārthadīpikā* commentary.

In many a case, in the *Ādidaśama*, he sometimes takes the liberty of skipping over passages, or even whole chapters, or of rendering them to a few lines only, taking sometimes, the original Sanskrit text as well as Śrīdharaśvāmin's commentary that are rendered into Assamese.

The *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (10.29-33) opens with the following

verse :*bhagavānapi tā rātrīḥ śaradotphullamallikāḥ / vīkṣya rantum manaścakre yogamāyāmupāśritaḥ* //<sup>4</sup>, i.e. ‘Seeing those nights, which were most delightful with full-blown Jasmines of the autumnal season, the Lord Kṛṣṇa (*Bhagavat*) made up his mind to play *Rāsa* with the Gopīs, i.e. cowherd-women, taking recourse to Yogamāyā.’ *Rāsa* is described as a dance in which a number of female dancers dance, with their arms interlocked, in the company of men, who place their arms round the neck of the women partners.<sup>5</sup> Śrīdharasvāmin explains the term *rāsakrīḍā*, in the relevant context, thus: *rāsakrīḍām rāso nāma bahunartakīyukto nṛtyaviśeṣastām krīḍām ...*<sup>6</sup>

Thus, a circle of dancers was formed with Kṛṣṇa, between every two cowherd-women, with his arms placed around the neck of the adjacent cowherd-women, and thereby made each of the women consider to be nearest to him.<sup>7</sup> Kṛṣṇa assumed as many forms as there were the cowherd-women.<sup>8</sup> Here, Yogamāyā is the Divine Illusory Power of the Lord, through which multiplication of Kṛṣṇa, each per *Gopī*, has become possible, and it is established that *Rāsa* is possible only with the Divine Power.

The whole affair is spiritual and the canons of conduct of ordinary mortals are not conceived in the spiritual world. Lord Kṛṣṇa is called *sākṣānmanmathamanmatha*,<sup>9</sup> i.e. the subduer of the god of Love as his pride is humiliated by Kṛṣṇa in the *Rāsakrīḍā*. Śrīdharasvāmin explains the term *sākṣānmanmathamanmatha* as *sākṣānmanmathamanmatho jaganmohanasya kāmasyāpi manasyudbhūtaḥ kāmāḥ sākṣāntasyāpi mohaka ityārthaḥ* /. There is no worldly passion in this love of the cowherd-women towards Kṛṣṇa. There is no place for pride or elation. It is narrated that the moment, the cowherd-women were overwhelmed with pride and joy, and regarded themselves as superior to all other women on earth in beauty, then and there, for averting their pride and bestowing grace on them, Kṛṣṇa disappeared from their midst.<sup>10</sup> Kṛṣṇa was not enamoured of the cowherd-women. He was ever-revelling in his own self (*ātmārāma*), and he proceeded to delight the cowherd-women, out of mercy and grace.<sup>11</sup> It is clearly stated in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* that the Lord played with the beautiful women of Vraja, with amorous gestures, like a child playing with its reflection, i.e. *pratibimba*.<sup>12</sup> He maintained control over himself (*avaruddhasaurata*) in the company of Gopīs, even though he mixed up with them. And, due to this control over eros, it is termed *kāmavijaya* or *kāmajaya*.<sup>13</sup>

Śrīdharasvāmin raises the usual moral problem of playing with the Gopīs, married to others, and explains that Kṛṣṇa enjoyed himself in his natural essential bliss. It is due to metaphysical *Bhagavat* Kṛṣṇa, who resorted to Yogamāyā for the purpose of sport with the Gopīs. Śrīdharasvāmin, in the very beginning of his commentary on the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī*, elaborates the concept of *Rāsa* thus : *ūnatrimśe tu rāsārthamuktipratyuktayo hareḥ/gopibhī rāsasamrāmbhe tasya cāntardhikautukam/brahmādi jayasamrūḍhadarpakandarpadarpahā/jayati śrīpatirgopīrāsamaṇḍalamaṇḍanaḥ/nanu vīparītamidam, paradāravinodena kandarpavijetrpratīteḥ/maivam, ‘yogamāyāmupāśritaḥ’ ‘ātmārāmo’pyarīramat, ‘sākṣānmanmathamanmathaḥ’ ‘ātmānyavaruddhasaurataḥ’ ityādiṣu svātantryābhidhānāt/ tasmādrāsakrīḍāviḍambanam kāmavijayakhyāpanāyetyeva tattvam/kiñca śṛṅgārakathāpadeśena viśeṣato nivr̥tipareyam pañcādhyāyīti-*

*vyaktīkarīṣyāmaḥ* /<sup>14</sup>

Thus, under the false pretense of eroticism, the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* leads to the stage of spiritual emancipation and thereby one attains spiritual uplift and self-control, which is reiterated by Śrīdharaśvāmin in the commentary of the last verse of *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* thus : *bhagavataḥ kāmavijayrūparāsakrīḍāśravaṇādeḥ kāmavijayameva phalamāha-vikrīḍitamiti* /<sup>15</sup>

The intense purpose of *Rāsakrīḍā*, as explained in the commentary by Śrīdharaśvāmin, is thoroughly digested by Śaṅkaradeva, and thereafter, he has condensed the significance of *Rāsa* in his *Rāsalīlā*, depicted in some three hundred and forty two verses of the *Ādidaśama*.<sup>16</sup> Śaṅkaradeva, at the very outset of *Rāsalīlā*, cites thus:

*jaya jagannātha jagatara ādimūla  
goparūpa dhari hari tārilā gokula /  
vṛndāvane ānande kariyā rāsakrīḍā  
gucailā govinde gopikāra kāmapiḍā //  
śuniyoka buddhajana janama sāphali  
kāmajaya name iṭo keśavara keli /  
mokṣa yebe pāibā pāpa kariyā niryyāṇa  
kṛṣṇa kathāmṛta karā karṇa bhari pāna //*<sup>17</sup>

The following excerpt also speaks, eloquently, of his style of rendering the original text, where the imprint of his genius is best displayed. The passage runs as follows:

*ehimate sabe                      śarata kālara  
rātrita kariyā krīḍā /  
bhakata batsala                  gucailā sakala  
gopikār kāmapiḍā //  
gopī gopālara                      kāmakeli iṭo  
śunai bhaṇai yiṭo jane /  
kāmako jinibe                      alpate bāḍhibe  
bhakati kṛṣṇa-caraṇe //*<sup>18</sup>

Here, it is stated that one, who, reverentially, listens to and rehearses the account of the amorous sport of Kṛṣṇa, with the cowherdesses of Vraja, played in the autumnal nights, conceives intense devotion to the Almighty Lord, attains spiritual wisdom and self-control, and soon overcomes the lust and other passions.

The significance of *Rāsa* is, thus, rendered with a lucid language in the *Ādidaśama*, keeping in view the originality and purport of the Purāṇic passages, as explained by Śrīdharaśvāmin.



*guru bhāryā tārānāme //*  
*indre ahalyāka harilā hariṣe*  
*pāyā āti kāma pīḍā /*  
*biśvāmitra ṛṣi menāka apeśvarā*  
*sahite karilā krīḍā //*  
*tejasvīka kicho pātake napāwe*  
*āta kona doṣa ache /*  
*yena sarba bhakṣa bahni tathāpito*  
*tānka kona jane bāche //*<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Śaṅkaradeva has exhibited his penetration in recreating the poetry with his extensive study of the original texts as well. Śaṅkaradeva has profusely adhered to the commentary of Śrīdharasvāmin and rendered his views along with the original verses in the *Ādidaśama*. The present analysis, which is based on the *Rāsalīlā* part of the *Ādidaśama*, reflects the unparalleled genius of Śaṅkaradeva, in depicting the rich philosophy of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, as expounded in the commentary of Śrīdharasvāmin. Thus, Śaṅkaradeva's mastery over the great descriptive power is revealed in the lucid presentation of the *Rāsalīlā*, even more than in the original text.

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*nartakīnām bhaved rāso maṅḍalībhūya nartanam //*  
Quoted from Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* in G.V. Tagare (Trans.) : *The Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Part IV, included in J.L. Shastri (ed.) : *Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology*, Vol. 10, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1978, p. 1458, Note, 1.

Also vide, Bhā. P., 10.33.2–3; *Mahābhāgavata, Daśamaskandha, Rāsalīlā*, vv. 1462–63.

6. *Bhāgavatabhāvārthadīpikā*,

10.33.2.7. Bhā.P., 10.33.3.

8. *Ibid.*, 10.33.20.

9. *Ibid.*, 10.32.2.

10. *Ibid.*, 10.29.47–48.

11. *Ibid.*, 10.29.42.

12. *Ibid.*, 10.33.17.

13. *Ibid.*, 10.33.26.

Also vide, *Bhāgavatabhāvārthadīpikā, Ibid.*

14. *Bhāgavatabhāvārthadīpikā*, Bhā.P., 10.29.1.

15. *Ibid.*, Bhā.P., 10.33.40.

16. *Mahābhāgavata, Daśamaskandha, Rāsalīlā*, vv.1207–1549.

17. *Ibid.*, v.1207–8.

18. *Ibid.*, v.1548.

19. Bhā.P., 10.29.20–22.

20. *Ibid.*, 10.29.28–29.

21. *Bhāgavatabhāvārthadīpikā*, 10.29.23.

22. *Mahābhāgavata, Daśamaskandha, Rāsalīlā*, vv.1241–

42.23. Bhā.P., 10.33.30.

24. *Mahābhāgavata, Daśamaskandha, Rāsalīlā*, vv.1534–35.

## **A Study on Positive Psychology and Health, Its Impact on Nāmghar Institution**

Kabita Devi Kusre

### **Abstract**

Positive psychology is a relatively new area of psychology which emphasizes the impact of positive influences in a person's life. This field includes different visions of living a happy life; including pleasant, good and meaningful life. The goal of positive psychology is to minimize melancholic thoughts that may arise in a helpless mind set and, thereafter, it develops a sense of optimism towards life. Indian historical background has been significant for its unique cultural, historical, spiritual, moral, ethical, aesthetic and value based heritage. The undivided North-East India of medieval age had prominent attraction and attention for tourists, educationists, travelers and invaders for its skill based traditional practice. It was kind of tradition having no boundary of class, caste, creed, age, sex and communities. Surprisingly, this phenomenon, that flourished in the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Bhakti Movement in medieval Assam upheld by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, is searched by modern psychologists like Martin Saligman (1998), Abraham Maslow, William James, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and Christopher Peterson. This flow has been continuing from 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century till now through the contributions of *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* and the creativities of its introducer, its core-devotees and followers. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and his followers Mādhavadeva, Damodardeva, Gopal Ātā, Anirudhhadeva etc., led the *bhakti* movement in a socio-religio-cultural platform through an institution called village *nāmghar* or *sattriyā nāmghar* where various skill based art and culture with the help of the people are taught through their application of abilities. This process stimulated mass abilities, mass gatherings, mass-communication, mass-happiness with applied creativities for positive socio-religio-political development through activities of literature, art and culture. These are considered as parts of daily life and as a dynamic, skill based work culture. These contributions have directly influenced upon the total health of people and socio organizational development of the society.

### **Statement of the problem:**

Through this topic the writer is going to analyze that *nāmghar* culture is not only a religious platform but it is also a positive institution to practice positive mindfulness.

### **Significance of the study:**

These institutions of positive mindfulness called *nāmghar*, established by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva in the middle of 14<sup>th</sup> century, is a platform of stimulating positive psychological factors among mass people from medieval to modern age. They are

considered as a new field of psychology by positive psychologists of modern era. The researcher considers it essential to have a study on the positive impacts of the *nāmghar* institutions.

**Objective of the study:**

This write up tries to touch the creative contributions of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and his followers through various *nāmghar* institutions as well as its firm impact on total health of individuals and the society as well.

**Positive psychology: The Conception:**

Positive psychology is a relatively new form of psychology which emphasizes the positive influences human activities in a person's life. This might include characters, strengths, optimistic emotions, and constructive institutions. This concept is based on the belief that happiness is derived both from emotional and mental factors. Positive psychology focuses on practices that are associated with gratitude, interventions, social and emotional well-being. Functions of positive psychology include explorations of strengths and positive emotions like—awe or reverential fear, other qualities such as sense of meaning and purpose of life. This area of psychology always searches various virtues and strengths of individuals which are associated with gratitude, hope, humour etc. and analyze wisdom, knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence, mindfulness etc. According to Mindfulness-Awareness Research Centre at the University of California at Los Angeles, “mindfulness-awareness is the moment-by-moment process of activities openly observing one's physical, mental, and emotional experiences. It is awareness about our thoughts, feelings, bodily substances and surrounding environment”. Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present and aware about where we are and what we are doing and not overly being reactive or overwhelming about what's going on around us. Thus, positive psychology teaches us how to control our emotions, cultivate contentment and provide gratitude towards the surroundings from which individuals enjoy various needs and maintain total health.

**Health:**

According to WHO, the definition of health in its broader sense is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. It is extended from an individual or a group to realize their aspirations and satisfy needs, on the other hand, to change or cope with the environment. Following health aspects are also considered together in definition of total health:

- a. Mental health.
- b. Mindset or mentality,
- c. Physical health,

- d. Social health,
- e. Matrimonial health,
- f. Spiritual health
- g. Financial health,
- h. Emotional health.

The essential components of health are: physical, social, cognitive or mental, emotional, cultural, spiritual, moral etc. These all areas are stimulated, developed by the applied and creative multi-dimensional activities of the *nāmghar* institutions. As it is said that health is not just, about what we call, eating and sleeping, but it also includes human thinking, viewing, hearing, speaking etc. *Nāmghar* institutions are those places from where individuals acquire both physical and mental food.

### ***Nāmghar* Institutions:**

*Nāmghars* are the prayer halls where socio-religio-cultural, spiritual value based musical tunes are applied—in group and in an organizing way. They can be considered as a systematic aesthetic-moral-spiritual platform for the followers of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism and *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*. These institutions are first established by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva in his teen age in the middle of 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century AD at Bardovā, Nagaon, Assam for the social, moral, spiritual and cultural upliftment of the people of medieval Assam. These institutions have always been trying to uplift mass people from disasters of social degradation, discrimination, ignorance, illiteracy, superstitions, exploitation etc. by imparting socio-religio-cultural, moral, ethical, spiritual virtues to mass people irrespective of caste, creed, community, sex and age.

### **Discussion:**

Positive psychology, health, and *nāmghar* institutions can be considered and focused as interrelated area for social development of integrated society of North East India. *Nāmghar* institution is a democratic organization, a disciplined work place of skilled people with various abilities based on religio-cultural, moral-spiritual virtues. *Nāma* means the name of God, *ghar* means house, where the sacred scriptures related to Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa were placed in the *maṇikūṭ* (The house of the gems). These institutions are generally used for religious, social, educational, political, cultural, environmental purpose. The campus of the *nāmghar* institution has been known for eco-friendly environment and used for sustainable development of the society. A large number of permanent officials are usually found in the *nāmghars* who were named as: *nām-lagowā*, (hymen leader), *pāthaka* (scripture reader) *gāyana-bāyana* (singer, drummer and cymbal-player), *deurī* or *bilanīyā* (distributor), *dhan bharālī* (treasurer), *nāmgharīya* (keeper of the prayer hall). Women of nearby villages have also specific duties to perform; they carry the responsibilities of maintaining good health and hygiene and

leading devotional chanting of *nāmghar* irrespective of male devotees and followers.

Now-a-days, these multidimensional institutions are established at various places of the world for studying and extending, enjoying unique creations of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. This Vaiṣṇavite *bhakti* movement of North East India led by the multifaceted personality of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is considered as unparalleled in comparison to other leaders of *bhakti* movement in India. Because *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* and its various tasks of creativity is spilled over in an abundant flow into the fields of literature and art enriching Assamese culture with an invaluable treasury. These all are very simple, free from all ritualistic complexities, excessive rigours and banal formalities. All creative works and applications are based on positive psychological factors, mindfulness for mass people to display their abilities in a broad group activity for the development of society, health and environment. It also promotes sense of unity, community spirit by increasing and balancing social, emotional, physical, moral, psychological health among devotees. Thus *nāmghar* institutions cover and discuss all types of human knowledge like mythological, historical, religious, social, psychological, physical, emotional, political, economical, aesthetical, environmental, biological and moral value based subject matters. These knowledge, skill and wisdom provided for all around development of the associated people, communities, societies which have been bringing ethics (*sat cintā*), morals (*sadācār*) and cleanliness (*svachhatā*).

Śaṅkaradeva says:

*athira dhana jana                      jīvana yauvana*  
*athira ehu saṁsāra /*  
*putra parivāra                      savahi asāra*  
*karabo kaheri sāra //*

(Meaning: Wealth, friends are transient, life and youth too, transient is this life, son and wife, all are non-substantial, whom shall I take as substance?).

All aspects of mindfulness, satisfaction, gratitude, hope and contentment have been covered throughout the creative contributions of *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* and *nāmghar* institutions. These have been still flourishing even after 456 years of his demise by providing a firm impact on the ability based human resource development.

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