



ASSAM VAISHNAVISM

Dr. Babul Barhoi,

Associate Professor,

Department of English,

Panigaon OPD College, North Lakhimpur, India

Abstract : Assam Vaiṣṇavism here is the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite cult preached by Śaṅkaradeva in the North East part of India. It is also named as *Mahāpuruṣīāism* or *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*. It may be noted here that the nomenclature 'Assam Vaiṣṇavism' is a recent one. Its region covers not only Assam, but also many North Eastern states like West Bengal, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya. It has also been spreading to Orissa, New Delhi, London etc. It may further be noted that during the time of Śaṅkaradeva, there was not any geographical place named as Assam or Axam. In his writings, Śaṅkaradeva seldom used the word Axam, and wherever it was used, it was used only to identify a community of Assam which is presently known as the Ahoms.

Index Items: Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, Assam Vaiṣṇavism, Śaṅkaradeva, Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma

1. Introduction:

Vaiṣṇavism is a Vedic or post-Vedic cult where Lord Viṣṇu was considered as a deity amongst the other deities and he was worshipped by erecting an idol of him. He was worshipped in the temple by the priests along with the other deities by performing almost the same kind of rituals of the other deities.

But, in the **Neo-Vaiṣṇavism**, which developed towards the medieval age as has already been discussed, the role of other deities has almost or altogether vanished. Lord Viṣṇu, or Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Rāma came to be worshipped in the temples with or without His female consort.

And in **Assam Vaiṣṇavism**, the deity is only Lord Kṛṣṇa as the representative of the Absolute or *Nirguṇa Brahma*. There is no idol, no priest, no temple of Lord Kṛṣṇa also in this cult. Instead of His idol, His names and activities are considered as the chief object of worship; instead of His idol, the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, the masterpiece of *Mahāpuruṣīāism*, or the *Guṇamālā*, a concise edition of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, is placed in the altar; Instead of the temple, there is *nāmghar* or *sattrā* where the devotees gather to worship Him. The intermediary class, the priests are completely abandoned in *Mahāpuruṣīāism*. The female consort of Lord Kṛṣṇa is given no importance as a deity in this cult.

The present chapter is divided into three parts. The Part-A differentiates Śaṅkaradeva with the prominent Neo-Vaiṣṇavites of India; Part-B differentiates the main tenets of Assam Vaiṣṇavism with Neo-Vaiṣṇavism and in Part-C there is an attempt to compare the three Movements viz., the Reformation of Europe, the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Medieval India and Assam Vaiṣṇavism propagated by Śaṅkaradeva in the North East of India.

2. Significance of the Study:

The significance of this chapter in this research work is felt to isolate the specific characteristics of Assam Vaiṣṇavism, that is, the religious cult as preached by Śaṅkaradeva because, Vaiṣṇavism, Neo-Vaiṣṇavism and Assam Vaiṣṇavism are not exactly the same. Therefore, the objective of comparing the trends like The Renaissance, the Reformation, Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, Assam Vaiṣṇavism etc. will not be clearly justified without this chapter.

3. Objectives of the study:

The objectives of the study are:

- a) Differentiate between Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, Assam Vaiṣṇavism and the Reformation Movement of Europe
- b) Find out the distinctive Characteristics of Assam Vaiṣṇavism

4. Methodology:

The research work is a qualitative research work on history of Bhakti Movement of India with particular emphasis on the study of the literature of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva (as Primary data) and the literature of the Bhakti Movement of India as secondary data. Internet surfing is also including in some places.

5. Literature Review

The following books have been consulted for the study of the Renaissance and Reformation of Europe:

- ☐ 1. *Europe and the Modern World* by Louis Gottschalk and Donald Lach published by Allied Pacific Pvt. Ltd, Bombay
- ☐ 2. *Address to the Nobility of German Nation* (1520) by Martin Luther (from Internet History Sourcebook Project and translated by C.A. Buchheim)
- ☐ 3. *A Prelude to the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* by Martin Luther (excerpted from Project Wittenberg Online Electronic Study Edition, translated by Elbert T.W. Steinhäuser)
- ☐ 4. *The Freedom of a Christian* by Martin Luther (Excerpted from the Internet History Sourcebook Project and Henry Wace and C.A. Buchheim, First Principles of the Reformation)
- ☐ 5. *History of Europe* (1450-1815) by B.V. Rao published by Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. (1988)
- ☐ 6. *History of the Western World* (Ancient Times to 1715) 2nd Ed. By Stepford B. Clough et. al. Published by D.C. Heath & Company, Lexington, Massachuttes
- ☐ 7. *Europe in Transition* (From Feudalism to Industrialisation) by Aravind Sinha, published by Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi
- ☐ 8. *Western Civilization* (Their History and Their Culture) By Edward Mc. Nall Burns (5th Ed.) Published by W.W. Norton & Company, INC, New York)

A detailed list of the books and the web searching is provided in the Bibliography.

The study of these books has helped the researcher to find out a vivid picture of the Renaissance and the Reformation of Europe and at the same time to find out the similarities and dissimilarities between the Vaiṣṇavite Movement of India and the Renaissance and the Reformation of Europe. It is to be noted here that to the knowledge of the researcher, no similar study in this particular area is available yet notwithstanding these two events being simultaneous.

The aforementioned works are found helpful to acquire knowledge in:

- ☐ 1. Origin of the Renaissance and the Reformation
- ☐ 2. Characteristics of the Renaissance and the Reformation
- ☐ 3. Factors responsible for the Renaissance and the Reformation
- ☐ 4. Comparison and Contrast of the Renaissance and the Reformation
- ☐ 5. Stalwarts of the Renaissance and the Reformation

(Erasmus, Wycliffe, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Loyala etc.)

- ☐ 6. Protestantism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, Zwinglianism, Presbyterianism, Puritanism, Lollards, Roman Catholic Religion, Orthodox Church, Anabaptism, Sacraments, Humanism, etc.; their comparison and contrast.
- ☐ The Dark inside of Papacy, the Borgias; their comparison with Brahmanism
- ☐ Catholic Counter Reformation

- Medieval Europe, her economy, religion, beliefs, politics and culture.

As the scope of the research was focused on comparison of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism with the Renaissance and the Reformation of Europe and with particular reference to Śaṅkaradeva, the present study on Part II covers only those literatures that are related to Neo-Vaiṣṇavism and those that are related to the life and the works of Śaṅkaradeva. And while making the notes also, more emphasis is given on the topics and the subjects that are required to fulfil the objectives of the research work. As has been already noted, the researcher has not found a single book, or any article yet, which has a direct comparison of Bhakti Movement of India with Assam Vaiṣṇavism from which something can be directly stated for this research work.

6. Findings and Discussion:

The findings of the research work are discussed and analysed separately in detail in the following ways:

6.1 Source Material is not the Brahmasūtra:

The philosophy of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism is based upon the *Brahmasūtra*. The *Brahmasūtra*, on the other hand, is a systematised synthesis of the Vedānta (or the *upaniṣads*¹. The six kinds (classes) of philosophy *Nyāya* (by Sage Gautama) *Vaiśeṣika* (by sage Kaṇāda), *Sāṅkhya* (by sage Kapila), *Yoga* (by sage Patañjali), *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* (by sage Jaimini) and *Uttara-mīmāṃsā* (by sage Bādarāyana) are the six different theories that evolved from the *Brahmasūtra* to defend the Vedanic tradition. Out of the six philosophies the first two (*Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika*) support *asatkāryavāda* or *ārambhavāda*² (which says that effect (*kārya*) is entirely separate from the cause (*kāraṇa*) and *kārya* does not exist before its occurrence³. The second two philosophies (*Sāṅkhya* and *Yoga*) support *pariṇāmavāda*⁴ (which say that effect exists before its existence (*satkāryavāda*)⁵. On the other hand, the *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā* and *Uttara-mīmāṃsā* support *Vivartavāda*⁶ which says that the world is a distortion of the Absolute; it has no separate existence.

Now, it can be said that the *Brahmasūtra* from which the different ‘-ism’s of the Neo- Vaiṣṇavism evolved is a subsequent development of the six classes of the oriental philosophies (*Ṣaḍadarśana*). The *Brahmasūtra* is again a kind of synthesis or systematization of the different traditions that evolve out of the *Ṣaḍadarśana* called the *sūtra* literature. *Vedantasūtra* (or the *Brahmasūtra*) is the chief of them which tries to define the Absolute⁷.

The different kinds of ‘-ism’s like the *Advaitavāda* or monism, *Dvaitavāda* or dualism, *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda* or qualified monism etc., are different kinds of interpretations of the *Brahmasūtra* itself. Śaṅkarācārya’s *Advaitavāda* or monism is the first annotation of the *Brahmasūtra*. *Advaitavāda* or monism is based upon *Vivartavāda*. It says: “*brahma satyaṁ jagat mithyā, jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ* (the Absolute is the only reality; the world is illusory and life is nothing but the Absolute). It says that salvation is possible only through knowledge. The world is nothing but a distorted appearance of the Absolute. It denies the role of devotion for salvation. His philosophy is also known as *Māyāvāda*. His interpretation (*bhāṣya*) on the *Brahmasūtra* is known as *Śāṅkarabhaṣya*⁸ or *Śārīrakabhaṣya*.

But the successive philosophies of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism that evolved out of the interpretation of the *Brahmasūtra* are supporters of the *pariṇāmavāda*. They are all influenced by the *bhakti* movement of the southern (Tamil) *Ālvārs* and all of them supported the role of *bhakti* (devotion) for salvation.

¹ Dr. Suresh Ch. Bora, “The Concept of Bondage and Liberation in Śaṅkaradeva’s Philosophy”, *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy*; Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Dr. Girish Barua et al p. 326.

² Dimbeswar Neog, *Yuganayak Sankaradeva*, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha (2017) p. 69

³ Dr. Amalendu Chakravarty, “Vivartavāda, Pariṇāmavāda and Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva’s Philosophy of Religion” *Prācyā Prajñā*; Vol. I; (1996); P. 36.

⁴ Dimbeswar Neog, *Yuganayak Sankaradeva*, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha (2017) p. 69

⁵ Dr. Amalendu Chakravarty, “Vivartavāda, Pariṇāmavāda and Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva’s Philosophy of Religion” *Prācyā Prajñā*; Vol. I; (1996); P. 36.

⁶ Dimbeswar Neog, *Yuganayak Sankaradeva*, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha (2017) p. 69

⁷ Loc cit.

⁸ Kailash Chandra Das, “Concept of Brahman, Īśvara, Jagat and Jīva in Śaṅkaradeva’s Philosophy”, *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy*; Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Dr. Girish Barua et al p.68.

For example:

Rāmānujāchārya's qualified monism or *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda* says that the Absolute (*Brahma*), the life (*jīva*) and the world (*jagat*) are not exactly the same (as said by *Advaitavāda*). It is right that the life and the world evolve out of the Absolute; but they are not false as said by Śaṅkarācārya⁹. They have separate real existence. The difference is like the fire and its sparks or the sun and its rays. His *bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtra* is known as the *Śrī-bhāṣya*¹⁰.

On the other hand, Nimbārkācārya propounded the philosophy of *Dvaitādvaitavāda* according to which the Absolute is both attributive and attribute-less at the same time because the whole universe evolves out of the Absolute and will again submerge into the same¹¹. His *bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtra* is known as the *Vedānta Pārijāta Saurabha*¹².

Madhvācārya has been said to have come to falsify the *Advaitavāda* or *Māyāvāda* of Śaṅkarācārya. His philosophy is, therefore, known as *Dvaitavāda*. He said that the Absolute and the life (*jīva*) are always different¹³. (never the same). The relation between them is like the relation between the master and the servant or the teacher and the pupil. His *bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtra* is known as the *Sūtra-bhāṣya*¹⁴.

Another Neo-Vaiṣṇavite philosopher Vallabhācārya propounded the doctrine of *Śuddhādvaitavāda*. According to this philosophy both the Absolute and the life are real entities. His *bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* is known as *Aṇu-bhāṣya*¹⁵.

The other two philosophers of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism were Bhāskara (who propounded *Bhedābheda* by interpreting that life and *Brahma* are the same from the end of the effect) and Valadeva (who propounded the *Acintābheda* saying that the life or soul cannot totally immerse into the Absolute even if it can attain salvation) Baladeva's *bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtra* is known as *Govinda-bhāṣya*¹⁶.

Now, if we come to the philosophy of Assam Vaiṣṇavism or the philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva it is seen that the source material itself is not the *Brahmasūtra*. Although it has its classical oriental origin from the Hindu scriptures, its source material is a successive development from the *Brahmasūtra* itself.

The philosophy of *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*, on the other hand, is derived from *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, *Śrīmadbhagadmahāpurāṇa* and *Sahasranāmavṛttānta* section of the *Padmapurāṇa*. The main tenets of his religious order *Eka Śaraṇa*, *Satsaṅga* and *Nāma* are derived from these books in the respective order.^{17, 18}

Hence, though it may be possible to show some similarities between Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy and with monism, qualified monism, dualism etc., as advocated by some prominent religio-philosophical thinkers, we should keep in mind that the similarities are only accidental. It cannot be said that Śaṅkaradeva had any influence upon the other Indian Neo-Vaiṣṇavites or vice-versa.

6.2. Eka Śaraṇa:

Assam Vaiṣṇavism is also known as *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*. It is called *Eka Śaraṇa* because the devotees of this religious order must strictly adhere to only one God, Lord Kṛṣṇa only. (However Lord Rāma's names are also given the equal importance in the sense of the Absolute). Allegiance of the devotee to any other deity but Lord Kṛṣṇa is strictly prohibited and such biasness is considered the most despicable of all the sins or crimes of the world.

⁹ Dimbeswar Neog, *Yuganayak Sankaradeva*, , Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha (2017) p. 80

¹⁰ Kailash Chandra Das, "Concept of Brahman, Īśvara, Jagat and Jīva in Śaṅkaradeva's Philosophy, *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy*; Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Dr, Girish Barua et al p.68 .

¹¹ Neog, (op. cit) , p. 81

¹² Das, "Concept (op. cit) , p. 68.

¹³ Neog, (op. cit) , p. 81

¹⁴ Das, (Op. cit) , p.69.

¹⁵ Loc. cit

¹⁶ Loc. cit.

¹⁷ Dr. M Neog, "Vaiṣṇava Renaissance in Assam" , *Śaṅkaradeva Sandipika* (ed.) Birendranath Dutta, P.304.

¹⁸ L. Bezbaruah, *The Religion of Love and Devotion*, (ed.) M. Neog. P.15

According to Śaṅkaradeva, one of the strictest tenets of this cult is:

anya devī deva nakaribā seva

*nakhāibā prasāda tāra/
mūrttikō nacāibā gṛho napaśibā
bhakti haiba vyabhicāra.¹⁹*

(Translation: Do not pray any other gods or goddesses. Do not accept any offerings made to them. Do not enter into their premises nor do look at their statues. It will vitiate your devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa.)

And,

*najāni loke āna deva pūjai/
siyo bidhihīne tomhāka yajai//
yehena nadī nada samudāya
aneka pathe sāgaraka yāya²⁰.*

(Translation: People worship the other deities because they do not know that worshipping the other deities is also worshipping Yourself by violation of the rules. It is like the water of the various rivers which travel through different regions and in different ways but ultimately, the whole water congregates in the same sea.)

And,

*bolanta śuke śunā nṛpavaryya/
bāḍhaya skandhara yi tātaparyya//
kṛṣṇa vine nāi apara deva /
jāniyā kṛṣṇaka kariyo seva²¹.*

(Translation: Sage Śuka said to the king, “Please hear the essence of all the twelve sections of the *Bhāgavata*. There is no other deity but Lord Kṛṣṇa. So, worship only Him.)

On the other hand, it has been said that the other Indian Vaiṣṇavite tenets like the monism, qualified monism, dualism etc. are not totally exclusive of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s devotion. Though Neo-Vaiṣṇavism is considered as a revolt against the sacerdotalism and the social evils of the Medieval India that were rampant in the name of religion, it was not monotheism in its strictest lexicographical meaning. It was more or less henotheism which did not ban the worship of the other deities, though devotion to Lord Viṣṇu or Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Rāma was given more prominence.

For Example:

- a. Śaṅkarācārya, the propounder of monism was himself a polytheist in his practical life. He also composed hymns of excellent grandeur to different gods and goddesses and worshipped the deities like Śiva, Gaṇeśa, Śakti, Sūrya etc. and also Lord Govinda²².
- b. The female consort of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Lord Rāma or Lord Viṣṇu etc. are also idolised in the Indian Neo-Vaiṣṇavite cult. For Example: Rāmānujācārya prescribed the worship of the couple Lakṣmī-Viṣṇu, and after him the worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in Caitanya’s cult, Gopī-Kṛṣṇa in Vallabhācārya’s cult, Rukmiṇī-Kṛṣṇa in Nāmadeva’s cult and Sītā-Rāma in Rāmānanda’s cult are also prescribed. It is not seen at all in the Mahāpuruṣāism^{23, 24}.
- c. The Rāmāt *sampradāya* of Rāmānanda worships Lord Śrī Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumān. They also worship the other statues of Lord Viṣṇu, basil tree, *Śālagrāma* stone etc. It is also known that there are two temples of this *sampradāya* in Kāśī where the statues of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa couple are also worshipped²⁵.

¹⁹ Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa, 2/124 Vide Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmantā Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmrta p. 255

²⁰ Kaṁsa Vadha, 1095, Kīrttana- ghoṣā. Vide Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmantā Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmrta p. 120

²¹ Bhāgavata Tātaparyya, 2024, Kīrttana- ghoṣā. Vide Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmantā Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmrta p. 192

²² Kailash Chandra Das, “Concept of Brahman, Īśvara, Jagat and Jīva in Śaṅkaradeva’s Philosophy, Śrīmantā Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy; Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Dr. Girish Barua et al p. 76

²³ L. Bezbaruah, *The Religion of Love and Devotion*, (ed.) M. Neog. P.15

²⁴ Dimbeswar Neog, *Yuganayak Sankaradeva*, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha (2017) p.86

²⁵ Ibid. p.87

But in the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*, polytheism and the worship of any other deity other than Lord Kṛṣṇa is considered as the vilest crime of all the sins in the world.

6.3. *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* are given more emphasis:

There are nine kinds of *bhakti* (devotion) prescribed in the *bhakti* cult: They are: 1. *Śravaṇa* (hearing the names and deeds of Lord Kṛṣṇa) 2. *Kīrtana* (chanting the names and deeds of God.) 3. *Smarana* (Remembering the image, names and works of God.) 4. *Arccana* (offering gifts, tokens etc, to God.) 5. *Pada Sevana* (supplicating to the feet of God.) 6. *Dāśya* (paying service to God considering oneself as a servant) 7. *Sakhitva* (considering oneself as a friend with God.) 8. *Vandana* (paying homage to God describing his attributes in odes or hymns etc.) and 9. *Deha-arpaṇa* (complete supplication to God by offering the body also at the altar. ²⁶ In the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* Śaṅkaradeva has given more importance to the *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* of the names, deeds, attributes and image of Lord Kṛṣṇa only.

He says:

*yadyapi bhakati navavidha mādhavara/
śravaṇa kīrtanna tāto mahā śreṣṭhatara//²⁷*

(Translation: Though there are nine kinds of devotion to Mādhava (Lord Kṛṣṇa), *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* are to be considered superior to them.)

And,

*dvādaśa skandhara tattva udhāri/
kahilanta śuke upasānhari//
jñānata karmmata kari samprati/
hari kīrttanese parama gati//²⁸*

(Translation: Sage Śuka has appended it by oozing the essence of the twelfth Canto (of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*). At present, *Hari- kīrtana* is regarded as the supreme way of salvation than that of knowledge or the Vedic rituals.

Emphasis on *nāma*, i.e. *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* out of the nine kinds a devotion is not found so emphatically set up in other kinds of Vaiṣṇavite cults. Nānaka and Kabir Das also gave more importance to *nāma*, but, they were not as distinct as Śaṅkaradeva.

Śaṅkaradeva is considered subtle enough while emphasising on *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* types of devotion to the Lord. It can be conceived that when there is *Kīrtana*, there is always *Śravaṇa*; because nobody can hear anything without chanting. *Smarana* and *Vandana* also take place through *Kīrtana* because the subject matter (content) of *Kīrtana* itself is nothing but names, attributes, images and deeds of Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. The saint advises the people to recite Kṛṣṇa's names, attributes etc. incessantly. Hence *Smarana* is indispensable to do so. The consideration of *dāśya-bhāva* is also greatly emphasised in his religious order. (It is discussed in a separate section). *Sakhitva* kind of devotion is not however given importance. On the other hand, *Pada-sevana* and *Deha-arpaṇa* though mentioned in the list of the nine kinds of *bhakti* are not found in his cult, because they require idols which were vehemently opposed in his religious philosophy²⁹.

There had been three kinds of Hindu religious traditions at the time of Śaṅkaradeva: *Karma-mārga*, where different kinds of occult practices (*tantra-manta*) were observed; *Jñāna-mārga*, where meditations, yogic practices etc. were observed and *Bhakti-mārga*, where *nāma-kīrtana* was observed. The former two *mārgas* were restricted to a privileged class, the Brahmins only. But Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti-mārga* is open to all. Hence *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* are prescribed by Śaṅkaradeva³⁰.

²⁶ *Prahlād Caritra*, 340, *Kīrtana- ghōṣā*, vide *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmrta*, p. 63

²⁷ *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa*, Part-I, 38 (A), vide *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmrta*, p. 215

²⁸ *Pāṣaṇḍa Marddana*, 102, *Kīrtana- ghōṣā*, vide *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmrta*, p. 44

²⁹ Dimbeswar Neog, *Yuganayak Sankaradeva*, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha (2017) p. 183`

³⁰ *loc. cit*

The ideals behind Śaṅkaradeva's giving more emphasis on *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrttana* have many foresights. Some of them can be described as:

- a. He wanted to unearth the original truth about Hinduism so that the religion can be established in its original pure form by freeing the dirt that has been engulfing it for ages.
- b. One of the real meanings of religion is self realization and self purification through which one can attain the highest goal of life, that is, salvation. But one class of people has been utilizing religion as a business for their personal benefit by befooling the common people and thereby distracting the people from real happiness of life. It has been done by this class of people by erecting different kinds of idols in the names of the imaginary gods and goddesses, placing them in the temples and setting up priests in them. They have also initiated different kinds of rituals to propitiate those gods and goddesses. Śaṅkaradeva could discern that setting up *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrttana* only out of the nine kinds of devotion is the only way to eradicate these evils from the society.
- c. Chanting the names of God wholeheartedly with full concentration of all—body, mind and word is a highly supported conception of all the major religions of the world. It is a recently established scientific truth that concentration is the key not only for success in life but also for attaining complete peace of mind³¹. But it is not yet uncovered that this truth has been formidably set by Śaṅkaradeva in Assam some five hundred years ago.

6.4. Devoid of Idol Worship, even that of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

It has already been discussed in a previous section of this chapter that in the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*, no other god or goddesses but Lord Kṛṣṇa is ever worshipped. It is well known to everybody that in Hinduism, all the gods or goddesses are worshipped by setting up their temples and erecting idols for them in an altar inside the temples. {In Vaiṣṇavism also, in its earlier phase, as it is already discussed in this chapter there was idol worship, there was temple and there was priest (*pūjārī*) also.}

And, when we have a look at the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of India we can say that Neo-Vaiṣṇavism (excluding Assam Vaiṣṇavism) is neither totally devoid of idol worship nor it is totally monotheism in its strict sense. Rather, Neo-Vaiṣṇavism can be called as henotheism because the believers of this faith do not deny the existence of other gods. Hence most of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite cults were idol worshipers or even if they did not worship other gods or goddesses but Lord Viṣṇu or Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Rāma, they set up idols of Lord Viṣṇu, or Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Rāma (except in Sikhism). Even Śaṅkarācārya who was a monist, believed in polytheism.

But Śaṅkaradeva, as he has denied the importance of *karma-mārga* and *jñāna-mārga* and set up *bhakti-mārga* as superior to them, and capable of providing salvation alone, (vide page no. 188), he totally denied the importance of idol worship, even that of Lord Kṛṣṇa. He has seen that an idol, even if it is of Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, requires a priest (*pūjārī*) to look after it; it also requires a temple to protect it. Therefore, it cannot remove the intermediary class, the sacerdotals, from the society. He saw that if the sacerdotals are not removed, his real aim of social reformation through establishing direct contact of God with every human being would remain far and far away.

This is the reason why Śaṅkaradeva considered *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrttana* as superior to the other seven kinds of devotion (*Smarana*, *Arccana*, *Bandana*, *Dāśya*, *Sakhitva*, *Pada-sevana* and *Deha-arpaṇa*) out of the nine kinds of devotion of *bhakti* cult.

³¹ *yō'ntaḥsukhō'ntarārāmastathāntarjyōtirēva yaḥ* □

sa yōgī brahmanirvāṇaṁ brahmabhūtō'dhigachChatī // Gītā V.24

What Śaṅkaradeva established by avoiding idol worship and by giving more importance to *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* is that one has to give more importance to the words of their masters, *gurus* or preceptors rather than to their body. If one worships his parents every day and night, but does never hear what they ask to do or forbid to do, the parents will never be satisfied and it will help him in no way. In the same way, if one worships only the idol but never pay heed to what God or the gods and the goddesses say, it will also help neither of them. It was the reason why Śaṅkaradeva prohibited the worship of the idols even that of Lord Kṛṣṇa. But to worship his words, that is, the *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa*—the word-like (*vāṇmaya*) image of God, gives more emphasis on *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* i.e. the names, attributes and deeds of God.

6.5.Dāsyabhakti:

The Neo-Vaiṣṇavites take recourse to different theories like *Advaitavāda*, *Viśaiṣṭādvaitavāda*, *Dvaitavāda*, *Dvaitādvaitavāda*, *Śuddhādvaitavāda* etc., to define the relations between God, soul and the world. As it is already discussed, Śaṅkaradeva derives his opinion from a different source. According to him, the relation between God and individual human soul is to be considered like the relation between the master and his servant, or the teacher and the taught or *guru* and *śiṣya* from the standpoint of the human being³². (Though a human soul may completely immerse into the Absolute in the *liṅa* kind of salvation.) Śaṅkaradeva differs from Caitanya wherein the *mādhurya* kind of devotion (love relation between lover and beloved) is preached³³. Caitanya's *mādhurya* kind of devotion gives more importance to illicit (*parakīyā*) relation than that to the pure relation of husband and wife. This kind of relation has much inclination towards eroticism. But Śaṅkaradeva's conception of *dāsyā* kind of devotion has its basis of pure God and soul relation which can transform even contemptible relations to the most sublime ones. (It is seen in the *rāsakriḍā* narrated by him in the tenth Canto of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*). Śaṅkaradeva defines himself as a servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa (*kṛṣṇara kiṅkara*) and writes about himself in almost all the concluding couplets of his poems and songs as '*kṛṣṇara kiṅkara śaṅkar*'.

6.6.No Caste-ism:

There is no caste feeling in the religious order preached by Śaṅkaradeva. It can also be considered as a distinct characteristic of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. The revolt against caste feeling is found in the *Ālvārs* also. But the subsequent Neo-Vaiṣṇavite preceptors are not found totally devoid of this feeling except a few. In Assam Vaiṣṇavism, it is found that Śaṅkaradeva did never thought of any discrimination between the different castes of this North East part of India. He did not see any discrimination even between male and female and men, animals, birds etc. He declared that even a *Cāṇḍāla*, a person of the lowest class of the class pyramid of Indian Caste System, can raise himself to the highest of all classes simply by becoming an ardent devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa³⁴. This opposition of caste system greatly contributed to nation-building as well as political amity during his time and it is now greatly felt in the political as well as ethnic turmoil that are rampant in this part of the country today. Even today, there seems no other way to assuage this situation and rebuild the greater Assam that covered the seven North East states if we do not follow his path. He had disciples from almost all the castes and tribes of north east India and even from the Mahmedans.

³² L. Bezbaruah, *The Religion of Love and Devotion*, (ed.) M. Neog. P.p. 15

³³ loc. cit

³⁴ Vide section 4.2.2.

A list of his disciples is given here to assert the point:

Sl. No.	Name of Caste/Community	Name of the Disciple
1	Yavana(Mahmedan)	Cāndsāi ^{35, 36} , Jayahari ³⁷
2	Gāro	Govinda ^{38, 39}
3	Kaivarta	Pūrṇānanda, Śrīrāma ⁴⁰ , Jayarāma ⁴¹
4	Missing	Paramānanda, Nārāyaṇa ⁴²
5	Jayantiyā, Hirā	Madhāi
6	Kachārī	Rāma ⁴³
7	Mikir	Bolāi ⁴⁴
8	Bhuṭiyā	Dāmodara ⁴⁵ , Jayānanda ⁴⁶
9	Nagā	Narottama
10	Baniā	Dāmodara ⁴⁷

6.7.Non-Ascetic, non-Celibate

Unlike most of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite preceptors who remained ascetic or who forsook married life or disapproved of married life, Śaṅkaradeva advised his disciples not to forsake the world to find God^{48, 49}. He married a second time and advised even Mādhavadeva, his chief disciple to get married. It was because he was well aware about the demerits of unmarried life which may harm a pious life. Moreover, his aim was to bring his religious order to the normal human families. According to him, family life is the best kind of human life and he thought that his religious creed must touch not only every human family but also to every human life.

He says:

*yiṭo jñānī jīvendriya ātmāta ramaya/
gr̥ha vāsa doṣe vā tāhāka ki karaya//*⁵⁰

(Translation: What harm can the offence of household life do to a person who is wise, continent and engaged in spiritual activities?)

6.8.Devoid of the worship of the female-counterpart of God.

It is already described that the female consort of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Lord Rāma or Lord Viṣṇu etc. are also idolised in the Indian Neo-Vaiṣṇavite cult. But it is never prescribed in the religious order of Śaṅkaradeva. Though Śaṅkaradeva can be considered as one of the earliest forerunners of the eminent feminists of the world and he never undermined the feminine class as inferior to the male, he did never support the installation of the idols of the female deities, even of the God's consorts in the altar of worship. This is because he had gained ample experience of the degeneration of the priests in India of the Medieval Age where different goddesses are worshipped. He also had the experience of the temples where God with His female consort are worshipped and being degenerating to whorehouses. In his religious order, Lord Kṛṣṇa is also not worshipped by erecting an idol, but He is worshipped on the basis of what He said to the people, what He had shown before the people and in His names and attributes. God is not considered by him as a human being or a simple deity, but as a

³⁵ Dr. P.B. Das, "Śaṅkaradeva's Philosophy of Culture", *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy*; Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Dr, Girish Barua et al p. 249

³⁶ Dr. M. Neog, "The Vaiṣṇava Renaissance in Assam" *Śaṅkaradeva Sandipika*, (ed.) Birendranath Dutta et.al. p. 311

³⁷ *Loc. cit.*

³⁸ Das, (*Op. cit*) p. 249

³⁹ Neog, (*Op. cit*) p. 311

⁴⁰ Das, (*Op. cit*) p. 249

⁴¹ Neog, (*Op. cit*) p. 311

⁴² Das, (*Op. cit*) p. 249

⁴³ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁴ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁵ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁶ Neog, (*Op. cit*) p. 311

⁴⁷ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁸ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁹ Dr. D. Chutia, "Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, An Introduction" *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy*; Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Dr, Girish Barua et al p 10-11

⁵⁰ Dr. D. Chutia, "Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, An Introduction" *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy*; Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Dr, Girish Barua et al p.11

representative of the Absolute, the Almighty, the *Nirguṇa Brahma*, the *Māyādhīśa*, the *Puruṣottama*, the *Parabrahma*, the God of all gods and goddesses. So the female consort cannot be thought of in Śaṅkaradeva's religious order.

6.9. Śaraṇa and Dīkṣā.

For admitting a person into a religious order, the first religious rite (sacrament) that a person has to undergo in Christianity is called baptism. The word that the Vaiṣṇava saints of Medieval India used for this activity was the term *Dīkṣā*. Śaṅkaradeva has used the term *Śaraṇa* for this initial activity.

But *Śaraṇa* and *Dīkṣā* are not the same. They have many points of differences. The word *Śaraṇa* is derived from the Sanskrit root *śr*, it means taking shelter or refuge. Hence, the word *ekaśaraṇa* of Assam Vaiṣṇavism means taking absolute shelter or refuge in one God, Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa⁵¹. In Assam Vaiṣṇavism, *Śaraṇa* is not just taking shelter, it is '*ekaśaraṇa*', that is, absolute shelter. It is best expressed in Lord Kṛṣṇa's appeal to his ardent devotee Arjuna, which runs as '*sarvadharmān parityajya māmekam śaraṇam vraja*' in the *Gītā* (Verse 66, Chapter 18). The interpretation of the same in Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's words is: "We should willingly yield to His pressure, completely surrender to His will and take shelter in His love. If we destroy confidence in our little self and replace it by perfect confidence in God, He will save us. God asks of us total self-giving and gives us in return the power of the spirit which changes every situation."⁵²

The procedure of *Śaraṇa* introduced in the Assam Vaiṣṇavism has a four-fold process called the four 'reals' (*cāri-vastu*): viz., *guru* (preceptor), *deva* (God, that is, Lord Kṛṣṇa), *nāma* (God's names, description of His activities and attributes) and *bhakata* (the devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa). (The first 'real' *guru* was added by Mādhavadeva and *guru* here refers to Śaṅkaradeva, the next three 'reals' are prescribed by Śaṅkaradeva.)⁵³

On the other hand, *Dīkṣā* is considered as a kind of *karma*, i.e., Brahmanic ritualism. A person who practices priesthood has to receive *Dīkṣā* from his *guru*. It is noticed in the Vaiṣṇavism propagated by Caitanya. In it, *jñāna* (knowledge) and *karma* (ritualism) are also accepted as a mode of worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa. During the time of Śaṅkaradeva, the *Dīkṣā* type of initiation was practiced in the Brahmin class, but those famous Brahmins who accepted Śaṅkaradeva's faith, rejected *Dīkṣā* as unnecessary after receiving *Śaraṇa*⁵⁴.

Ekaśaraṇa has some similarity with *prapatti* of Rāmānuja. But unlike *Śaraṇa* the word *prapatti* lexicographically means 'to fly away'. Rāmānuja, however, used the word to mean '*śaraṇāgati*' or 'absolute surrender'. But the aim of *prapatti* is salvation (*mokṣa*) by ritualistic worship. But *Śaraṇa* is, on the other hand, the essence in which love-full devotion (*sapremā bhakti*)⁵⁵ is considered more than salvation.

6.10. Nāmghars VS Temples.

We know about the temples in Neo- Vaiṣṇavism, because Neo-Vaiṣṇavites, (except a few, viz., Kabir Das, Nanaka, etc.) were not monotheists in the strict lexicographical meaning of the term, they believed in the existence of the other deities and did not ban the worship of other deities as Śaṅkaradeva did. That is why, the tradition of temple and priests were there with them. They were more or less supporters of priesthood. But Śaṅkaradeva, as a strict nonconformist of sacerdotalism replaced the temples and *nāmghars* were set by him for the followers of his faith. Unlike the temples, there are no priests in the *nāmghars* and no idols of any deity (even of Lord Kṛṣṇa) in the altar. The *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* or the *Guṇamālā* is placed in the altar as God's words or attributes.

These *nāmghars* play multifaceted role in the society. They serve not only as a place of worship but also scope for many socio-cultural activities. These were set up by Śaṅkaradeva to fulfil his dream of a perfect society⁵⁶. They can be equalled to modern Community Development Centres and Adult Education Centres⁵⁷.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.25

⁵² Dr. D. Chutia, "Eka-Śaraṇa in Śaṅkaradeva's Mahāpuruṣīyā Faith", *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy*; Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Dr, Girish Barua et al p. 106

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 108

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 106-112

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 111

⁵⁶ Dr. P.B. Das, "Śaṅkaradeva's Philosophy of Culture", *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy*; Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Dr, Girish Barua et al.255

⁵⁷ *Loc.cit.*

The *nāmghars* have been serving as the chief centres for cultural, religious, social, economic and political activities of Śaṅkaradeva's religious order. All the cultural trainings like teaching of dances, drama, singing, playing musical instruments and also of the performances of the same are still chiefly held in the *nāmghars* of Assamese society. They are used for preaching religious matters, organising religious meetings and holding religious village ceremonies. Moreover, these *nāmghars* are used for holding other secular meetings like social, ethical, economic or political kinds that may not be directly related to religion. People sometimes use these *nāmghars* also to settle a number of secular disputes which usually go to the police or to the courts.

6.11. Devotion is considered as greater than Salvation.

The Neo-Vaiṣṇavites' concept of *mukti* (liberation) is based on the interpretations of the *Brahmasūtra*. The first commentator on the *Brahmasūtra*, Śaṅkarācārya, opined that *jñānā* (knowledge) was the chief means of *mukti*. He did not place devotion (*bhakti*) as a means of liberation. The other commentators, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Ballavācārya etc., gave more importance to devotion rather than on knowledge for attainment of liberation. Yet, their conception of liberation is based on the *Brahmasūtra*. According to them, liberation is unification with God and disentanglement of the soul from the cycle of birth and death.

But Śaṅkaradeva has some conceptions different from them. Rather than the *Brahmasūtra*, the systematised Vedānta, he accepts his principles from the *upaniṣads* and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. According to Śaṅkaradeva, none but God is free from the bondage of *māyā*. Hence if liberation means emancipation from the bondage of *māyā*, *Śaraṇa* should be *eka-śaraṇa* —absolute surrender to the Absolute. Allegiance to any other kinds of deity makes liberation impossible, because they are not themselves free from the bondage of *māyā*. So, Śaṅkaradeva's conception of liberation is more crystalline than that of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavites (because Neo-Vaiṣṇavite saints were not purely monotheists).

Moreover, according to Śaṅkaradeva, *bhakti* (devotion) is superior to *mukti*. A true devotee of God does not aspire for liberation. That is, emancipation is not the highest or the ultimate goal of a devotee in Assam Vaiṣṇavism. The highest goal is *saprema-bhakti* (love-full devotion)⁵⁸. Herein, liberation (*mukti*) is a by-product of devotion (*bhakti*). A true devotee of God considers the importance of the chanting of God's name more than that of emancipation.

Śaṅkaradeva says:

yijane yāi hari nāma sevi/
pāchata phurai yata deva devi //
yateka tīrthe tāka tuti karai/
tāra vāyu pāpa samasta harai//
yi jane phurai nāma uccari/
tāra pāche pāche bhramanta hari//
vatsaka snehe yena dhenu dhāya/
bhajiyo jāni hena hari pāya//⁵⁹

(Translation: All the deities follow that person who goes uttering God's name piously; all the holy shrines also pray him with utmost reverence; the sound of the names of God also purifies the whole air. God also follow that person who goes uttering God's name like a cow follows its calf)

And,

mūrttimanta huvā pāñca prakāra mukuti/
moka laiyo buli bāpa karaya kākuti//⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Dr. Suresh Ch. Bora, "The Concept of Bondage and Liberation in Śaṅkaradeva's Philosophy", *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy*; Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Dr. Girish Barua et al p. 326

⁵⁹ *Bhāgavata-tātparyya*, 2027-28, *Kīrtana-ghoṣā*, vide *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmrta*, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); p. 192

⁶⁰ *Srimadbhāgata-purāṇa*, 11/194, vide *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmrta*, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); p. 639

(Translation: The five kinds of salvation, viz., *sālokyā*, *sāmīpyā*, *sārūpyā*, *sājuyyā*, and *liṅa* take human forms and follow him praying utmost solemnly for accepting them.) (But he does not pay any heed to them.)

6.12. Application of Morality:

It has already been discussed that morality or ethics is one of the most important tenets of the religious order of Śaṅkaradeva. Like Buddha, application of morality is laid more emphasis than that of formality in day-to-day life⁶¹. He has democratised his faith on universal brotherhood and fraternity⁶². According to him, man is to be considered as God.

These noble ethical ideals are found in Kṛṣṇa's advice to his devotee Uddhava:

He says:

*brāhmaṇara cāṇḍālara nibichāri kula/
dātāta corata yena dr̥ṣṭi ekatula//
nīcata sād̥huta yāra bhaila ekajñāna/
tāhākese paṇḍita buliya sarvvajana//
viśeṣata manuṣyagaṇata yīto nare/
viṣṇubuddhibhāve savvadāye mānya kare//
īriṣā asūyā tiraskāra ahaṁkāra/
saṁ naṣṭa hovai teve tāvakṣaṇe tāra//
.....
viṣṇumaya dekhai yīto samaste jagata/
jīvante mukuta hovai acira kālata//
sakala prāñika dekhiveka ātmasama/
upāya madhyata yīto āti mukhyatama⁶³//*

{Translation: O Uddhava, hear Me. Do not look for the castes of the Brahmins or the *Cāṇḍālas*. Consider the thieves and the donors equally. One who considers the meanest and the most honest persons equally is considered by all as a wise person (*paṇḍita*). Especially a person who regards the mass people (*manuṣyagaṇa*) as God can instantly destroy his all evil vices like selfishness, scandal, rebuking, pride etc. One, who sees God in the whole perceptible world, can attain liberation even in his or her vital life (before death, *jīvanmukta*). Consider all living beings as yourself, as your soul; it is the best way. (of liberation, of devotion.)}

So, God is not considered here as something far and far away from people. God is everywhere as the life of every living beings. He resides not only in the hearts of men, but also of all living beings. So, the best message of his religious order is 'service to men is service to God'. 'Śaṅkaradeva is perhaps the first practical initiator (*guru*) who has inserted the service of *bhakta* (devotee) in the religious faith'⁶⁴.

6.13. Divorced of the system of devotion by proxy.

This point has been greatly emphasised in Neo-Vaiṣṇavism also. But, as we have already discussed, Assam Vaiṣṇavism is totally devoid of sacerdotalism, idol worship and temple system. Śaṅkaradeva has established here that God resides within the heart of men and, therefore, there is no need of any intermediary class to find Him. What one needs most to find God are ardent devotion and chanting His names devoutly.

6.14. Integration of literary and cultural elements:

⁶¹ Dr. P.B. Das, "Śaṅkaradeva's Philosophy of Culture" *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy* Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Girish Barua et al p.113.

⁶² Dr. D. Chutia, "Eka-Śaraṇa in Śaṅkaradeva's Mahāpuruṣīyā Faith", *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy* (ed.) Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); Girish Barua et al p.100

⁶³ *Śrīkṛṣṇar Vaikuṇṭha Prayāṇa* 1820-1825, vide *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmr̥ta*, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); p. 178

⁶⁴ Dr. R. N. Choudhury, "Śaṅkaradeva's Philosophy of Religion" *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy*; Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha; (2011); (ed.) Dr. Girish Barua et al p 212

Śaṅkaradeva thought something distinctly from the other Vaiṣṇavite preceptors. The Neo-Vaiṣṇavites insisted on asceticism like John Calvin. They thought that as materialism is against spiritualism and as one requires turning against materialism to find God, things that are attractive to the sense organs like eye, ear, nose, mind etc. must be avoided for spiritual uplift. But Śaṅkaradeva opined that one cannot find God by simply making one's sense organs inactive. What one should do is to veer the inclinations of the sense organs. Without making them passive, one must engage them in such activities by which one can proceed towards the path of God. One should not reject the requests of one's sense organs; rather one should engage them also in the search of God. He invented songs to sing about God, poems and books etc. to know about God, plays to act like God, and dances to dance like and with God and musical instruments and their symphonies to make God dance with them. Rather than rejecting the world, he wanted to turn the world to a God's abode (*Vaikuṇṭha*)

6.15. A few Points for Comparison of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism and Assam Vaiṣṇavism with Reformation of Europe.

The researcher here looks at the Reformation of Europe again and then has a look at the two Movements of Medieval India viz., the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism and Assam Vaiṣṇavism. The objective here is to see which movement, whether Neo-Vaiṣṇavism or Assam Vaiṣṇavism, is closer to the Reformation Movement.

The salient points observed are as under:

1. Assam Vaiṣṇavism is found closer to the Reformation than to Neo-Vaiṣṇavism from the point of the multi-dimensional genius of the preceptor, i.e. Śaṅkaradeva. He can be considered as the true representative the Renaissance in Medieval India. He was a polymath like Leonardo de Vinci of Italy. He contributed to literature, culture, politics, social reform, religion, philosophy, economics, education etc., and in every field, his contribution is yet unsurpassable not only in Assam but also in India. But the other Neo-Vaiṣṇavites preceptors could not contribute so much to all these varied fields. His contributions have given a distinct characteristic to Assam Vaiṣṇavism from Neo-Vaiṣṇavism and brought Assam Vaiṣṇavism nearer to the Reformation and the Renaissance of Europe. Christianity is a monotheistic religion. There is no other deity but God in Christianity. Though they revere the Christ and Mary, they (the Christ or Mary) are not considered as equal to God and someone other than God. They are representatives of God only. The Neo-Vaiṣṇavites, on the other hand, were not totally monotheists; total monotheism is found only in Assam Vaiṣṇavism. Therefore, Assam Vaiṣṇavism is nearer to the Reformation.
2. Śaṅkaradeva, the preceptor of Assam Vaisnavism has much similarity with the preceptors of Reformation, viz., Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wycliffe, Ulrich Zwingli etc. than that of the other Neo-Vaiṣṇavite preachers. Therefore, Assam Vaisnavism is nearer to the Reformation.
3. The stern opposition of idol worship, greater emphasis on *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana*, giving priority to devotion (*bhakti*) than to knowledge and ritualism and laying emphasis on social reform and morality, opposition of sacerdotalism bring Assam Vaiṣṇvism nearer to the Reformation than that of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism.

7. Conclusion:

This chapter brings the essence of the humble attempt of the researcher. It is thought that he has already come to the conclusion where he wants to assert that Assam Vaiṣṇavism is more refined than that of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism and thus it brings Assam Vaiṣṇavism nearer to the Reformation of Europe. It has, therefore, placed Śaṅkaradeva in the global perspective of religio-social reformation which heralds the Modern Age to the human civilization.