

CHAPTER –I

INTRODUCTION

0.1.1 *Bhakti* Movement in Medieval India and Śaṅkaradeva:

The medieval *Bhakti* movement had revolutionized the entire India and a cultural and social movement paved its way. Right from the 7th century to the 10th century A.D. the *Ālwār bhaktas* of *Tāmil* land composed songs and rhymes relating to *Kṛṣṇa* and to give up ritualistic rites by giving more emphasis on *Bhakti*. In the following centuries after the *Ālwārs*, different saint poets of India contributed enormously to the *Bhakti* movement. Among them *Rāmānujācārya*, *Yamunācārya*, *Nimbārkaācārya*, *Mādhavācārya*, *Jñānadeva*, *Nāmadeva*, *Rāmānanda*, *Kavīra*, *Ballabhācārya*, *Dādudayāla*, *Caitanyadeva* and Śaṅkaradeva are noteworthy.¹

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva introduced his own form of Vaiṣṇava faith known as *Eka-Śaraṇa-Harināma-Dharma* in the later part of the fifteenth century. During his times, the social life of Assam was darkened with superstitions, social evils, and tantric practices in *Tāmreśwarī* temple of *Śādiyā*² and *Kāmākhyā* of *Kāmarupa*.³ Thus the people were drifted away from *Sanātana Dharma*. Śaṅkaradeva observing the degenerated state of the society preached his *Eka-Śaraṇa-Harināma-Dharma* with humanistic ideals and scientific outlook, with the firm conviction that he would be able to save the people from the existing chaos. Śaṅkaradeva took the principle of *Eka Śaraṇa* from the *Gītā*, *Satsaṅga* (company of the saints) from the *Śrīmadbhāgavata Puraṇa* and *Nāma* from the *Sahasra Nāma Vṛttānta* of *Padmapurāṇa* and preached his faith.

1 Sarma, Satyendranath. (2011). *Asamīyā Sāhityar Samīkṣātmak Itibṛtta*. pp.82-84.

2 Neog, Maheswar. (2008). *Pavitra Asam*. pp.76-77.

3 Idem. (1999). *Puraṇi Asamīyā Samāj āru Saṅskṛti āru Satrīyā Nṛtya āru Nṛtyar Tāl*. pp.14-15

The *Bhakti Dharma* preached by Śaṅkaradeva is strictly monotheistic: One God, one shelter, none also but one. *Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa* is the only God to be worshipped.

Śaṅkaradeva says :

anya devī deva nakaribā seva
nakhāibā prasāda tāra /
mūrttiko nacāibā grho napaśibā
*bhakti haiba byabhicāra //*⁴

(Do not pay obeisance to other gods and goddesses. Do not have a part of the offerings made to them. Do not enter their premises and have a look on their idols. Otherwise *Bhakti* will be vitiated). The only worshipful deity in Śaṅkaradeva's faith is Lord *Kṛṣṇa* who is God incarnate as declared by the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Though the nine kinds of *Bhakti* are essential to attain proximity of the Supreme Being, Śaṅkaradeva gives emphasis on listening to (*śravaṇa*) and chanting (*kīrtana*) of his name. There is no gender discrimination in *Eka-Śaraṇa-Harināma-Dharma*. Right from the *Brāhmaṇa* to the *Cāṇḍāla* (untouchable) all people can practice this *Bhakti dharma*. Śaṅkaradeva says- A man born even in the so-called low caste can achieve high position in society through *Nāma-Dharma* :

cāṇḍālo hari nāma lave mātra |
*karibe ucita yajñara pātra ||*⁵

(A *Cāṇḍāla* is to chanting *Harināma* only; he will be a fitman to perform for sacrifice)

4 Chutia, Sonaram and et.al. (1998). *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmṛt*. p.255

5 Ibid, p. 45

It is needless to say that the time of Śaṅkaradeva's preaching of *Bhakti Dharma* was the golden age of Assamese literature. The general people did not know anything about religion, as the old scriptures were written in *Sanskrit*. The class of priests versed in *Sanskrit* was the chief protagonist for the people. But Śaṅkaradeva drove away the obstacles by translating the *Sanskrit* scriptures. As a result, the need of mediators like the priests ceased to exist. In this regard, it is mentionable that there was no any system of idol worship and priest in the very beginning stage of Vedic religion. B.N. Luniyā distinctly said that— *there is no priestly class. There were neither temples nor altars, neither images nor hereditary priests.*⁶ Similarly, S. Radhakrishnan also said that *prayer was the only offering made to gods.*⁷ Radhakrishnan again says : about the first stage of Vedic Society— *Man had direct Communion with gods without any mediation.*⁸ Śaṅkaradeva also wanted to establish a priestless society so that the devotees can direct communicate with God.

Many religion preachers and social reformers of India contributed in the aforesaid *Bhakti* movement. Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568 A.D.) was one of the greatest religious preachers and social reformer of Assam also happens to be the leader of a great literary and cultural renaissance. As a matter of fact, Assamese literature came into prominence with the rise of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite *Bhakti* movement initiated by the great Saint. There are many poets and composers, Saints, religious preachers, social reformers, musical masters, painters, architects, sculptors, but Śaṅkaradeva was a genius in whom all the qualities were rolled into one. Suniti Kumar Chatterji remarked to Śaṅkaradeva as follows: *The greatest name in early Assamese literature is that of Śaṅkaradeva, and he has left his stamp on Assamese literature and culture, on Assamese religion and way of life. He was a poet and saint, religious teacher and*

⁶ Luniya, B.N. (1982). *Life and Culture in Ancient India*. pp. 96-97

⁷ Radhakrishnan, S. (1989). *Indian philosophy*. vol-I, p.66

⁸ Ibid, p.108

social reformer all in one, and his influence on Assamese life and literature is comparable to that of Tulasīdāsa for the people of the Upper Gangetic Valley...”⁹ K. M. Pānikkar Summarised the identity of Śaṅkaradeva in this way– *He was the father of religious revival of Assam.*¹⁰

0.1.2 Significance of the Study:

Śaṅkaradeva was a versatile genius. It is obvious that though various works has been carried out from the aspect of philosophy on Śaṅkaradeva, a little work has been done on his ideology about humanism. A sound research on this topic may find out some important aspects which might give intellectual satisfaction. The investigation will reveal distinctly:

1. The real meaning and teaching of the concept of humanism taken by Śaṅkaradeva.
2. The concept of humanism has great social value. It plays a vital role to propagate harmony and integrity in the present unhappy and restless society.
3. This topic for the research of Ph. D is essential because the topic isn’t focused by other researchers.
4. This worthy topic will cover a full length research. The above mentioned circumstances clearly state the significance of the proposed study. Considering the need and urge of the day to highlight the concept of humanism the proposed work has been carried out.

⁹ Q.V. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar. (1998). “*The Eka-Śaraṇa Dharma of Śaṅkaradeva, The Greatest Expression of Assamese Spiritual Outlook*”, *Śaṅkaradeva Studies in Culture* (ed.) Bhaba Prasād Chaliḥā, p.1

¹⁰ Pānikkar, K.M. (1956). *A Survey of Indian Histor.* p.148

0.1.3 Research Problem :

Śaṅkaradeva was a distinguished humanitarian philosopher in medieval Assam. He was very much concerned with the concept of humanism and social problems during his time. He tried to reform and investigate the real nature of society and value of human being. As a conscious social reformer, Śaṅkaradeva simplified the modes of religious practices with great emphasis on *Bhakti* which was made accessible even to the lowest in the society by rendering the Holy Scriptures into the language of people. He set in the same footing irrespective of caste or status distinction from a *Brāhmaṇa* to a *Cāṇḍāla*, the scholar and the common man, rich and the poor. He declared that one need not be great scholar, or high birth to become a *Bhakta* :

nalāge deva dvija ṛṣi huibe /
nalāge sambhṛta Śāstra Jānibe //
micāte mare āna karma kari /
*huvanta bhakatite tuṣṭa Hari//*¹¹

In this way, Śaṅkaradeva gave a glorious explanation of the concept of humanism in his literature. From the above discussion it could be said that Śaṅkaradeva advocated a classless and stateless society through humanism.

The core problem of this present research is Humanism in Śaṅkaradeva's life and literature. Humanism is that 'ism' which emphasizes on human and general values of human being. The main concern of this 'ism' is the well-being of human beings rather than the animal beings. As opposed to the instinctive and the animal passion, it insists on the primacy of human being and its central position in the universe. But Śaṅkaradeva's humanism is such kind of humanism in which man and

¹¹ Chutia, Sonaram & et.al. (1998). *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmr̥t*. p.45

all the other creatures are of equal value, Parallely, both humanism and humanity are two sides of the same coin. Therefore the concept of humanism in Śaṅkaradeva's life and literature is a different one from that of traditional concept of humanism.

A human being is not merely a biological entity but also a cultural and intellectual entity. The humanists claim men's liberty, patience, self-respect, truthfulness and sympathy towards other human beings – these are the prime aims of humanism. It asserts that every effort of human being should be moral and sympathetic. It insists on having no distinction of any caste, creed and nationality, ensuring justice to everyone in the society. Kindness, forgiveness, benevolence, etc. are the guiding principle of humanism.

The concept of humanism as a general attitude to life is very old .As long as the ideals like truthfulness, forgiveness, benevolence, etc. are the guiding principle of human life and humanism is always associated with human beings. However, humanism has a long history. As a systematic philosophical movement, it only came into being with the advent of the European Renaissance. The Renaissance was an intellectual reaction against the authoritarianism and supernaturalism of the middle age. It marked the emergence of the new attitude towards life and the new conception of man. Renaissance must be considered as the great epoch in the humanist tradition, in which men started believing in its own potentialities and realized that art, morality, society were all human inventions designed for the enrichment of human life.

During the renaissance, the spirit of new awakening influenced all intellectuals, writers, and philosophers. It essentially established the fact that man is fundamentally good. As a result man started believing in his own potentialities and realized that knowledge, art, morality, society were all human inventions designed for enrichment of human life. Philosophers like *Protagoras*, *Socrates*, *Giordano Bruno*,

Montaigne, Hume, Francis Bacon, Baruch Spinoza, Rousseau etc. have expressed their humanistic views in their writings.

On the other hand, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century as a result of developments in science, the concept of human progress got a special impetus. Application of science had influenced the aspirations of mankind and helped to shift the interest of many European thinkers from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of man. Thus, it strengthened the humanitarian movement which encouraged formulating plans of a better social order. The philosophers had lost faith in the doctrine of the church and acquired a faith in the dignity and perfection of man. Thus, humanism emerged as the only dominating force in the nineteenth century.

0.1.4 Objectives of the Study:

Considering the importance and significance of the present study following objectives will take into account for smooth completion of the proposed research work:

1. To evaluate the concept of humanism in general.
2. To evaluate the concept of humanism in the life and literature of Śaṅkaradeva.
3. To bring out how Śaṅkaradeva tried to extend and establish the concept of humanism from individual to community level.
4. To bring out how he took *Kṛṣṇa* culture as the main basic to establish humanistic religion and philosophy in scientific way.

0.1.5 Hypothesis:

1. It is assumed that the concept of humanism of Śaṅkaradeva is differing from that of ancient Indian thought.

2. It is assumed that the concept of humanism of Śaṅkaradeva is not identical to the contemporary Indian thinkers.
3. Furthermore it is assumed that while in respect of certain points the concept of humanism of Śaṅkaradeva is identical but in respect of some points differences are found.

0.1.6 Research Methodology:

To carry out the proposed research work in a systematic manner the analytical method will be followed. The necessary information for the proposed research work has been collected from primary as well as from the secondary sources.

From the above discussion it seems to be clear that throughout his life and various kinds of literary works have been carried out on the philosophy of humanism of Śaṅkaradeva. But still the study of humanism isn't done. In this regard it should be noteworthy that it is the urge of the time to make study on the concept of humanism of Śaṅkaradeva. The studies on humanism will great benefit in different levels in the society. In academic level also it will generate the knowledge of humanistic philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva. This is really a big and interesting topic which has been analysed in this research work.