

CHAPTER- I

INTRODUCTION

The concept of social reconstruction promotes social recovery of conflict, sharing a vision of mutual respect, the reduction of prejudice, and increased understanding of human fragilities. Among those who attempted to promote social reconstruction of the Assamese society, Śaṅkaradeva (1449 - 1568) was one of the great pioneers. He was the man, who through his religious and philosophical school of Neo-vaiṣṇavism, tried to achieve the goal of social reconstruction of the Assamese society. As a social reformer and thinker, he initiated the process of social reconstruction through *Kṛṣṇa bhakti* or devotion to *Kṛṣṇa* and propagated it, thereby dreaming of a greater Assamese enriched with the principles of egalitarianism and humanitarianism. He kept no distinction between human beings and other creatures. His teaching was full of morality and spirituality. As a whole, Śaṅkaradeva was a profound scholar, a renowned philosopher, a pioneering reformer, a great social organizer, a true nation builder, a dedicated patriot, and a great humanist. He contributed a lot towards the Assamese society and ‘had a vision of a future society where all men would be equal’.¹ Under the shadow of religion and religious philosophy, Śaṅkaradeva tried to promote the culture of brotherhood, harmony, classlessness and equality which are ultimately the pre-requisites for an uplifted

¹ Barman, Sivanath. (2017). *Śaṅkaradeva: His Multidimensional Contribution* (keynote address) Sankaradeva Studies, MSSV: Nagaon, 23rd to 25th February.

society. Religion was used more as a transformative weapon of change by this progressive religious reformer.

At the time of Śaṅkaradeva, Assam was divided among the regimes of the Bhūñās, the Āhoms, the Kochs, the Kachārīs, the Jayantīyās, the Chutīyās, and the Nāgās. Among these, the Bhūñā's aristocracy was engaged in feuds and dissensions against one another and the ruling King. The period saw a large influx of *Shan* people to Assam. Though such communities gradually became a part of the larger native culture of Assam, still many of their customs, beliefs and practices retained with them. Simultaneously, there were repeated Muslim invasions from Bengal, which proved disastrous to the culture and progress of Assam. Similarly, the frequent Nara invasions from upper Burma retarded the growth of all-round prosperity of this region. The influence of *Tāntrism* was felt in the royal courts and human scarifies were offered to the tutelary Goddess *KecāiKhāity* of Śadiyā. Śaṅkaradeva emerged in such an environment of political chaos and religious diversity. It was a crucial time for the state which was in urgent need of a visionary leader who could direct it to the path of enlightenment. It was he who first brought the message of *bhakti* cult to the common people in a medium, which was their mother tongue. Śaṅkaradeva realized the evil consequences of the society and tried to lead men from the topmost heights of paradise i.e. love for mankind.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was one of the most influential social thinkers of the 19th century. 'He is known in the world as the architect of socialism and the champion of normal communism. He was a good organizer, a committed revolutionary, a voracious reader, and an effective writer. He was a German scholar, a historian, an

economist a political propagandist, a journalist a great humanitarian, and a philosopher. He committed himself to the cause of the exploited working class and declared a kind of an intellectual battle against the exploiting rich of the capitalist class'².

Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx were the two great social thinkers of two different times and places. Though their mission were different, they shared the commonality of a certain goal. Both of them were very much concerned with the concept of social reconstruction or social reorganization. Śaṅkaradeva in his lifetime did not fight for political emancipations of the common people. But, he was too much against religious superstitions, which prevented the common people from enjoying a better life. On the other hand, the works and ideologies of Karl Marx was originated in political and economic grounds. Karl Marx fought against the exploiting classes of society and believed in a self-regulated society, which would be ruled by the principle that each of the society would get their scope and space as per their ability and need. As a scientific social thinker, Marx hold the view that human behaviour is determined by the economic condition of society. On the other hand, Śaṅkaradeva believed that the same is determined by religious and social conditions. Indeed, the ways of the social change of these two social thinkers are different, but both wanted to establish a classless and egalitarian society for the greater interest of the common masses.

² Rao, C.N.Shankar. (2000). *Sociology: Primary Principles of Sociology with an Introduction to Social Thought*. p.650.

1.1: Statement of the Problem:

The proposed research work aims at addressing the issue of social reconstruction of society in general and the Social Reconstruction of Śaṅkaradeva- A Study in the light of Karl Marx in particular. Both Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx were distinguished social thinkers and philosophers. They were very much concerned with social problems during their times. So the proposed research aims at examining and analysing the philosophical and strategic mechanisms opted by them to achieve the goal of social reconstruction.

Śaṅkaradeva as a 'conscious reformist 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 and declared that one need not be a great scholar, or of high birth to become a *bhakta*'³. For restructuring the society, Śaṅkaradeva established a new liberal social order through the institution of the *Nāmgḥar* (the village congregation hall), which served as a community center of the villagers for spiritual, intellectual, and cultural activities. Regarding his contributions for social reconstruction of the society, one distinctive point is that 'Śaṅkaradeva was not only the most illustrious amongst the religious preachers of contemporary India but also the greatest revolutionary social reformer, he alone can be compared to the Buddha, Jesus Christ and Hazarat Muhammad and even Karl Marx,

³ Chutia, Dharmeswar (2013). *Śrīmaṇṭa Śaṅkaradeva and his Reformatory Movement*. Bora, Suresh Ch. & Kalita, Biswajit. (Ed.). *Mahāpuruṣa Jyoti*. p.7.

etc. , who were essentially revolutionary social reformers, raising their voice against social evil and religious bigotry at the risk of their own lives and raised a new hope with the message of faith in fraternity, equality, liberty and social justice.’⁴

On the other hand, Karl Marx put forward explanation of social change and development, emphasized on the privileges of the economic factor over religious or political factors. Specifically, Marx gave prime importance to the forces of production (the tools and instrument and relation of production) and the way , in which human beings organize themselves in order to use the production forces. Marx believe that ‘in the social production of life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or what is but a legal expression for the same thing-with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 9.

social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.’⁵.

Therefore, Marx and his friend Engels says that ‘the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle’⁶, and analyses the rise and fall of an economic system. In this context, Marx put forward a model of historical development through five stages or methods of production. They are- the Asiatic, the Ancient, the Feudal, the Bourgeois (Capitalist), and finally Communist stage. The most remarkable contribution of Marx, on social reconstruction, was that he applied the law of evolution to humanity as a whole, not to individual countries. Thus, Karl Marx’s social reconstruction philosophy advocated a classless and stateless society through a proletarian (worker) revolution and prescribed the need for ‘economic security, social or national development, and freedom for self-expression’⁷.

1.2: Conceptual Framework:

- **Social Reconstruction:** It defines a philosophy that promotes peaceful co-existence and unity within a population using non-violent ways to settle disputes. It aims to address past abuses through reconciliation and strengthen the appreciation of difference among people in a community. Śaṅkaradeva’s social reconstruction philosophy is based on spiritualism and faith in equality, liberty, fraternity and social justice through *bhakti* or devotion. On the other hand, Karl Marx’s social reconstruction philosophy is based on dialectical materialism and economic determinism. He advocated a classless and stateless

⁵ Roy, B.N (2009). *Foundation of Western Political Thoughts* .Vol-II. p. 858.

⁶ Marx, Karl & Engels, Friedrich. (1848). *The Communist Manifesto*. p. 3.

⁷ Roy, B.N. *op.cit.* p.963.

society through a proletarian (working class) revolution against bourgeois sections of society.

- **Egalitarianism:** Egalitarianism is a trend of thought that calls for equality for all people. Egalitarian doctrine maintains that all humans are equal in fundamental worth or social status. An egalitarian society is of the view that equality reflects the natural state of humanity. Śaṅkaradeva's egalitarian ideology is based on liberalism and tolerant spirit. His teaching was full of morals and ideals. His vision was that, all men would be equal and where there would be no repression of men by men. Therefore, throughout his literary works and artistic endeavours, Śaṅkaradeva disseminated the idea that everyone –from the meanest to the top most –is equal before God. There is no hierarchy in his concept of devotion in particular and religion in general. Karl Marx's egalitarian philosophy is based on economic security, social and national development, and freedom for self-expression. Marx believed that the economic relation of society is the means whereby, men and women proved for their sustenance, produce, and exchange and distribute the things that they regard necessary for the satisfaction of their needs.
- **Classless Society:** It refers to a society, in which no one is born into a social class. Such distinction of wealth, income, education, culture, or social network might arise and would only be determined by individual experience and achievement in such a society. Śaṅkaradeva dreamt of a classless society where there would not be any division based on one's profession and all of the

professionals would be identified equal. Pure devotion is the marker of their identity. Karl Marx's classless society was based on the principle of socialism where all workers are citizens.

- **Proletarian Revolution:** A proletarian revolution is a social revolution, in which the working class attempts to overthrow the bourgeois system of society. Śaṅkaradeva's Neo-vaiṣṇvite movement is not proletarian in nature but it is a movement aiming at reformation of the existing situation of the society. In this process, one's religious power and spiritual strength is considered to be the major force. With pure devotion to God and equal attitude to all creatures, evils of the society can be easily eradicated. He believed that society is to be restructured on the basis of spiritual values through *bhakti* or devotion. On the other hand, Karl Marx's social revolution was violent in spirit, i.e. the proletarian revolution.
- **Moral Collectivism:** It is a philosophical principle, which regards the individual as an end-in-itself, endowed with dignity. According to it, no human being can be treated as a means to serve an end, which lies beyond his consciousness existence; no worldly thing can be treated as more valuable than a human being and no human being can accept an obligation except at his own free will. Śaṅkaradeva's believed in the principle of equality and free will which was reflected in his creation of *Nāmghar*. On the other hand, Marx's moral collectivism was based on the principle of class struggle. He believed that class struggle is the driving force of social equality in establishing a classless society.

1.3: Research Questions :

- What is the meaning of the concept of social reconstruction in general?
- What are the philosophical thoughts of the social reconstruction of Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx?
- How Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx tried to extend and establish the concept of social reconstruction from individual to community level?
- What is the comparison of philosophical thoughts between Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx?

1.4: Research Methodology:

The proposed research works on –The Social Reconstruction of Śaṅkaradeva :A Study in the light of Karl Marx is based on both primary and secondary sources. To study the proposed topic, descriptive, and analytical method with critical analysis are primarily followed by the researcher. In addition to these above methods, a comparative method is also used in comparing the critical views of Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx vis-a-vis their philosophy of social reconstruction. The primary data of study on Śaṅkaradeva consists of his literary works like *Hariścandra-upākhyāna*, *Bhakti-pradīpa*, *Kīrtana-ghoṣā*, *Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa-kāvya*, *Bargītas* (Song devotional), *Ajāmilopākhyāna*, *Amṛta-mathana*, *Prahlāda Carita*, *Haramohana*, *Balichalana*, *Gajendra Upakhyāna*, *Guṇamālā*, *Patnī-prasāda-Nāṭa*, *Bali-Chalana*, *Anādi-pātana*, transcriptional works-*Bhāgavata Book X*, *Bhāgavata Book XI*, *BhāgavataBook XII*, *BhāgavataBook I*, *BhāgavataBook II*, *BhāgavataBook IX*, *Kurukṣetr-yātrā*, *Nimi-nava-siddha-saṁvāda*, *RāmāyaṇaUttara-kāṇḍa*, *Bhaṭimās* (eulogies), *Toṭaya* (a prayer song in Sanskrit in *Toṭakametre*), *Bhakti-Ratnākara*, Dramas-*Keli-gopāla-Nāṭaka*, *Kālī (ya*

- *damana-yātrā*, *Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa-Nāṭa*, *Pārijāta-Haraṇa-Nāṭa*, *ŚrīRāma-vijaya-Nāṭa*.

The secondary sources used are like hagiography, literary works, critical books, historical books, philosophical books, cultural books, research periodicals, research journal, and research articles.

In order to study the philosophy of the social reconstruction of Karl Marx, the researcher relies on both primary and secondary data. The primary data on Karl Marx includes his critical writings like- The Communist Manifesto, Capital Volume I,II, and III, The Holy Family, Economic and Philosophic Manuscript, Theses on Feuerbach, The German Ideology, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Critique of the Gotha Program, The Civil War in France, Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy, Address: Value, Price and Profit, Abolition of Landed Property, The Grundrisse, Wage –Labour and Capital, and Introduction to the Programme of the French Workers Party and many secondary sources like- biography, critical books, research paper, research articles, and research journals.

As a philosophy, Social Reconstruction emphasizes all the social questions of society and calls for an united effort for the establishment of a harmonious society. Śaṅkaradeva's concept of social reconstruction has been expressed in his literary works and reformative activities, while Karl Marx has expressed his stance on the concept of social reconstruction in the body of his critical works and writings. In studying their works, the researcher has followed the comparative method of analysis to find out their constructive views of social reconstruction.

Through the use of this research methodology, an attempt has been made by the researcher to answer the framed research questions in relation to the philosophy of the social reconstruction of Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx.

1.5: Objectives of the Study:

Considering the importance and significance of the present study, the following objectives will be taken into account for the smooth completion of the proposed research work. The objectives are as follows --

- To evaluate the concept of social reconstruction in general.
- To evaluate the concept of social reconstruction in the philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx in specific.
- To bring out how Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx tried to extend and establish the concept of social reconstruction from individual to community level.
- To bring out a comparative study in the thoughts of both Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx.

1.6: Need for the Study:

Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx were two versatile geniuses of two different places and in times. This investigation will reveal distinctly---

- The real meaning and nature of social reconstruction taken by them.
- The concept of social reconstruction has great social value. It plays a vital role in social progress and development, and
- Social, political, religious situation and ideology of the time of Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx.

These points stand for the need for the proposed study. Therefore, the proposed work has been carried out to highlight the concept of the social reconstruction of Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx considering the need and urge of the time and day.

1.7: Scope of the Study:

Various works have been carried out on the philosophy of social reconstruction of Śaṅkaradeva, but there has hardly been a comparative study on the 'Social Reconstruction philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx'. In this regard, it is noteworthy that it is the call of the time to carry out a study on the concept of social reconstruction of Śaṅkaradeva in the light of Karl Marx, so that their philosophy may transcend the limitations of the region. This study on the Social Reconstruction of Śaṅkaradeva-A Study in the light of Karl Marx will benefit the society at different levels. At the academic level, it will help generating the knowledge of Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy of social reconstruction in a wider level. Moreover it would help looking at his works, initiatives and ideologies from a non-conventional and modernist perspective. It will open up scope for more theoretical works on his works or philosophical ideas.

As an academic activity, the researcher has undertaken the aspects of the social reconstruction of Śaṅkaradeva and Karl Marx, although they belong to different societies and different times. Śaṅkaradeva is a multidimensional personality, with distinctive and different qualities. Karl Marx is one of the prominent social thinkers distinctively known for modern scientific socialism. In this study, the emphasis has been laid on the prime area of study- the philosophy of Social Reconstruction of both these stalwarts.