

WOMEN AS SPOKESPERSONS OF ŚAṆKARADEVA'S *BHAKTI* CULT

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the award of
the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy (Ph.D.)**



**Bandana Boruah
Department of Sankaradeva Studies
Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya
Nagaon, Assam
2018**

CHAPTER-VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, it is already discussed, how the women characters in the literary works of Śaṅkaradeva and the women mentioned in Śaṅkaradeva's hagiographical accounts have played their roles in different ways either directly or indirectly in the initiation, and in the preaching and spreading of his *bhakti* cult, the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. Śaṅkaradeva created his literature with a view to preaching his *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* among the common people, therefore, he portrayed his characters, especially the women characters, in the garb of devotees of Kṛṣṇa, and through them, he described the absolute state of *bhakti* in which living beings mingled with the Supreme Being. In most cases, women excelled their counterparts in terms of devotion to Kṛṣṇa, and this was revealed through different characters in his writings.

The introduction of the wives of the Bipras in the play *Patnīprasāda* is the proof that Śaṅkaradeva gave importance on women in preaching his *bhakti* cult. The wives of the Bipras overcame the barriers put by their husbands, and they rejecting all the mundane affairs, surrendered themselves to the feet of Kṛṣṇa in the hope to be merged with Him, the Supreme Being. They did not hesitate even to give up their sons and husbands to have the spiritual love of Kṛṣṇa. In this play, the wives of the Bipras patronized the path of *bhakti*, while the Bipras patronized the path of *karma* and *jñāna*, and they showed their detachment to Kṛṣṇa as much as their wives showed their

attachment to Him. The wife of one, Chandra Bhāratī, left her life in the grief of not getting the opportunity to see Kṛṣṇa, for the barrier from her husband. The love of the wives of the Bipras for Kṛṣṇa described in this play is transcended to matterless devotion. According to Nārada, absolute love for the most desired one is *Bhakti*, and such absolute love is possible only with the accompaniment of the Supreme Being in which the beloved gives up longing for all the worldly things and immerses only in spiritual attachment for the Supreme Being. Such spiritual attachment for the Supreme Being is revealed in the love of the wives of the Bipras for Kṛṣṇa. In this play, the wives of the Bipras excelled their counterparts in terms of *bhakti*, later on, the Bipras realized their folly, and sought refuge at the feet of Kṛṣṇa, and of course, it became possible only for the efforts of their wives.

Like the wives of the Bipras, the Gopīs in *Rāsalilā* also faced the same barriers from their husbands and they too could overcome the barriers on the path of their having kṛṣṇa as their loved. They got Kṛṣṇa, but for their pride and vanity Kṛṣṇa vanished amidst them, soon they became restless after having lost Kṛṣṇa. They began to perform the dalliance of Kṛṣṇa among themselves, and remembering Him, they lost their individual entities in Kṛṣṇa. This self-forgetting state of the Gopīs is the absolute state of *bhakti*. In this state, living beings become *Brahmamaya*, the all pervasive of *Brahman*. Mādhavadeva the chief disciple of Śaṅkaradeva, regarded this state of *bhakti* as *rasamayī bhakti*, the blissful state of devotion.

The same thing is revealed in the play *Kāliyadamana*. In this play, Kālī, the serpent King is produced as hostile to Kṛṣṇa while his wives are produced as the

devotees of Kṛṣṇa. It is discussed in the preceding chapter, how the might of Kṛṣṇa is revealed through the characters of the wives of Kālī.

Again, if Kunjī the attendant-maid of Kaṁsa, could have the complacency of getting the company of Kṛṣṇa, and attained *mokṣa* by simply serving Him, then the common *bhaktas* would definitely follow her path to attain their desired goal, the blissful state.

However, these women might be the characters of Śaṅkaradeva's literary works, but they showed the common people, the basic principles and the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult through their matterless devotion to Kṛṣṇa. They got the company of the Supreme the Being and achieved *mokṣa*, which is the ultimate desire of every living being. The same thing is revealed through the characters of the translated works of Śaṅkaradeva. Kuntī, Daivakī, Aditi, Uttarā, Satī Bindhyāvalī, alike surrendered to Kṛṣṇa at the time of their misfortunes, and they got relief from their misfortunes for the might of Kṛṣṇa. Each of these women expressed the might of devotion to Kṛṣṇa through their words. The path, they carved to get the blessings of Kṛṣṇa, attracted and inspired the common people to imitate the same path to get the blessings of Kṛṣṇa. In this way, these women, though they did not directly propagate the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult, yet they indirectly preached it through their words.

The complete surrendering of oneself at the feet of Kṛṣṇa with devotion, (*ātmanivedana*), and expressing of the mighty and glory of Kṛṣṇa, (*śravaṇa*, *kīrtana*), the modes of *bhakti*, which are prescribed in Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult, are manifested in these characters. Common people get lessons of *bhakti*, and become interested to

follow the path that have been followed by these women characters in the translated works of Śaṅkaradeva. These women indirectly provided lessons on *bhakti*, and their activities attracted ordinary *bhaktas* to follow their path. In this way, they preached and spread the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva, therefore, they are regarded as the spokespersons of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult.

In the *bhakti* cult of Śaṅkaradeva, there is no caste discrimination and class distinction. Everyone could enjoy the same status, could enter in *Nāma-ghara*, or *satra*, and could perform *śravaṇa-kīrttana* (chanting and listening to the names and glory of Kṛṣṇa). Śaṅkaradeva wanted to elevate the social status of the people of lower castes. Such attitude of Śaṅkaradeva towards the people of lower castes is reflected in the character of Satī Rādhikā, one of the women mentioned in the hagiographical accounts of Śaṅkaradeva, and in the character of Candālinī, one of the women of his literary works. Satī Radhikā, a woman from the lower stratum of the society, *Kaivarta*, was entrusted the charge to block the Tembuwānī rivulet. In the time of Śaṅkaradeva, caste discrimination and class distinction were strictly followed, and the Brāhmaṇas exhibited their pride of getting birth in the so-called higher caste of the society. In such a time, the effort of uplifting the social status of the lower class people, defying the prevalent tradition and defaming the pride of the birth of the Brāhmaṇas, were the examples of revolutionary tasks of Śaṅkaradeva. Satī Rādhikā is a symbol of Śaṅkaradeva's revolutionary thoughts. Satī Rādhikā, a woman from the lower stratum of the society, outdid the women of the upper stratum of the society, the Brāhmaṇa-women, in terms of purity of body and mind, and became successful in blocking the Tembuwānī rivulet. She set the example that, one need not to born in so-called upper

caste of the society nor should be a member of the privileged society, but should cultivate the purity of body and mind to be a true devotee. Moreover, she became successful in bringing her husband Purnānanda to the fold of Śaṅkaradeva's cult, who later got the post of the *Mahanta*. She vanquished the conceit of the people of the upper class of the society, and opened the door of *bhakti* for the people of lower strata of the society, especially for women, and showed equality and liberty in terms of *bhakti*. For these reasons, Satī Rādhikā is considered as a spokesperson of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult.

Women empowerment, the often-discussed subject matter of 21st century, got expression in the writings of Śaṅkaradeva in 15th and 16th century through the woman like Rukmiṇī. The character of Rukmiṇī is found in the *Rukmiṇīharaṇa kāvya*, and in both the plays *Rukmiṇīharaṇa* and *Pārijātaḥaraṇa*. She was produced as bold, resolute and literate woman in the *Rukmiṇīharaṇa kāvya*, and in the play *Rukmiṇīharaṇa*, while she was produced as an ideal devotee in the play *Pārijātaḥaraṇa*. As a literate woman, she wrote a letter, describing her misfortune, and sent it to Kṛṣṇa, as a courageous woman, she boldly faced every obstacles and misfortunes that came in her path of getting Kṛṣṇa as her husband, and as a resolute woman, she did overcome everything and triumphantly reached at her desired goal. Rukmiṇī showed that she got Śrī Kṛṣṇa as her husband by overcoming all the barriers and misfortunes and proved that if one could conceive true love with devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he or she would have succeeded at the long run.

Rukmiṇī is produced as an ideal devotee in the play *Pārijātaḥaraṇa*, who emphasizes on *bhakti* rather than worldly affairs. One of the religious teachings of

Śaṅkaradeva that one should insist on the pleasure derived from *bhakti* rather than striving for getting pleasure from mundane affairs is provided to the common people through the character of Rukmiṇī. The advices that Rukmiṇī gives to Satyabhāmā, addressing her as *bhaginī* (sister), are imitable to all the *bhaktas*. Rukmiṇī provided the teaching to the ordinary *bhaktas* that the four things – *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*, can be achieved through offering *nirguṇa bhakti* (matter less devotion) to Kṛṣṇa. She sends the message to the ordinary *bhaktas* through her advice to Satyabhāmā that one should have to be free from pride to be a true devotee, and when one can reach at this state; his or her *bhakti* will reach at the stage of *nirguṇa bhakti* (matter less devotion). On the other hand, Rukmiṇī says to Satyabhāmā that one cannot reach at the highest point of spirituality until one becomes free from the longings of worldly affairs. She therefore, explains to Satyabhāmā, what the use of mere a *Parijāta* flower is, if she could achieve the four things - *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *mokṣa*, by simply offering her devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Satyabhāmā still could not realize the might of devotion to Kṛṣṇa, and could not achieve the highest point of spirituality, in spite of her conceiving the inconceivable. Śaṅkaradeva showed the right path of devotion in the play *Pārijātaharaṇa* through the character of Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā. Rukmiṇī could achieve the highest point of spirituality for her *nirguṇa bhakti* (matter less devotion), but Satyabhāmā could not transcend her devotion to Kṛṣṇa into spirituality for her pride and longing for worldly things. The audience who enjoyed the enactment of the play would realize the differences between the paths that Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā accomplished to attain the blessings of Kṛṣṇa, and thereby they would follow the right path of devotion to Kṛṣṇa. From this point of view, both

Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā can be regarded as the spokespersons of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult. Rukmiṇī showed the path, which ought to be followed, while Satyabhāmā showed the wrong path which should be avoided in the path of devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

In a preceding chapter, Candālinī's *bhakti* is discussed in detail. Like Satī Rādhikā, Candālī too represented the downtrodden of the society and showed that one should not perform rites and rituals, but have to remember and meditate the names of Kṛṣṇa with unstinted devotion to attain *mokṣa* (salvation).

The character of Mohinī, (a charming and lascivious woman), is one of the outstanding characters of Śaṅkaradeva's literary works. Through this character, Śaṅkaradeva warned his disciples not to be entrapped in the deceptive charm of a lascivious woman. He wanted to provide them the teachings of morality and spirituality. Whenever a man is entrapped in the deceptive charm of a lascivious woman, he will be stupefied, and put in a drunken stupor, then he will lose all his better senses, and becoming ignoramus of morality and spirituality, he will deviate from the path of pursuing *bhakti*. Śaṅkaradeva showed the ordinary *bhakatas* through the character of Mohinī that if the great saint Mahādeva too lost his better sense, being intoxicated by the charm of Mohinī, what would have happened to an ordinary *bhakata*. A man, who immersed in sensuality could never accomplish the path of *bhakti*. The only path of getting rid of the illusion of this mundane world is the chanting and listening to the names and glory of Kṛṣṇa by surrendering oneself to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. In this episode too, woman is the pioneer in preaching the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult.

Śaṅkaradeva accorded equal status to women with their counterparts in terms of *bhakti* and wrote in the *Bhāgavata –strī bālyā vṛddha samastare adbhikāra*. The women mentioned in *Caritpūthis*—Candarī Āi, Barabāhi Āi, the wife of Jayanti Madhāi, Kālindī Āi, the wife of Ananta Kandalī, Bhubanesvarī Āi, Sumatī Āi, Padmapriyā Āi, alike carried forward the *bhakti* cult of Śaṅkaradeva. The devout Brāhmaṇa like Ananta Kandalī was also encouraged by his wife to accept the religious principles of Śaṅkaradeva. The housemaid like Candarī showed the pin-point of the *Kalpatarubr̥kṣa* to Śaṅkaradeva at the time of drawing the *Vaikuṇṭhapata*, and pointed out the breach of the chronology of the *Baṭakeśi Ghāṭa* in *Vṛndāvanī Vastra*. The wife of Jayanti Madhāi taught him morality and spirituality, and sent back him to Śaṅkaradeva to practise religion. Nārāyan Dās Thākura was advised by his wife to be interested to the *bhaktas* instead of being interested to her. In the same way, the role of Kālindī Āi was unique. She ignored her great economic hardship and the slender of different people, but carried forward Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult after the passing away of Śaṅkaradeva for his heavenly abode. "Kālindī Āi too initiated *bhaktas* after the final departure of Śaṅkaradeva to heavenly abode."¹

It was Āi Bhubanesvarī, for whom the Vaiṣṇavite religion of Śaṅkaradeva got prominence in Koch Behar. She carved the way for the royal patronage to *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* by enchanting Cīlārāi with the sweet melody of a *Bargīta*, the 'Songs-Celestial', and could create a politically conducive and socially sound atmosphere for Śaṅkaradeva in which *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* flourished with a huge literature. The literary genius of Śaṅkaradeva was fully flourished, having

¹ Borkoti, Sanjib Kumar. (2017). *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Kṛti Āru Darśan*. P 42.

such a conducive and sound atmosphere, and he composed most parts of the *Bhāgavata* – *Balicalana*, *Anādīpātana*, etc, most chapters of the *Kīrttana*, the *Kurukṣetra Kāvya*, the *Nimi-navasiddha-Sambāda*, the *Guṇa-Mālā*, the *Uttarākāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bar-gītas*, *Totayas*, *Bhaṭimās*, The *Bhakti-Ratnākara*, the *Kāliyadamana*, the *Keli-gopāla*, the *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*, the *Pārijāta-haraṇa*, and the *Rāmbijaya*. If Bhubaneswarī did not create such an atmosphere, the Neo-Vaisnavite religion of Śaṅkaradeva would not have become so popular.

The religion of Śaṅkaradeva was carried forward by both men and women *bhaktas* in the time of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Both Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva did not discriminate between men and women in practising *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. When Mādhavadeva preached *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* from Barpeta, people from different places came and accepted it. One, Govinda from *Dakṣiṇ Kula* came with his mother, and took initiation from Mādhavadeva. When Mādhavadeva instructed the mother of Govinda to perform *puwār prasaṅga* (Morning Prayer) at the *kīrttan-ghara* (the prayer hall) along with the mother of Balāi Ātai, she began to perform the *puwār prasaṅga* with the daughter of one, named Menā, and with the other women *bhaktanīs*. Thence, the tradition of performing *puwār prasaṅga* has been in vogue in the *Kīrttana-ghara* of *Barpeta Satra*.

² In addition to this, Sumatī Āi, the wife of Mathurādās Buḍhā Ātā, kept flaming the light of the *Kīrttana-ghara* in absence of her husband.³ When the *Kīrttana-ghara* was gutted into ashes, Sumati Āi kept flaming the never-ending sacred light of the

² Bezbaroa, Laksmīnath. (5th Edn., 2012). *Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva Āru Śrī Śrī Mādhavadeva*. P 162.

³ Neog, Maheswar. (ed.). (3rd Edn., 1991). *Pabitra Asam*. P 259.

Kīrttana-ghara, but it is a matter of sad that the entrance of women in the *Kīrttana-ghara* is restricted in the fear of sudden starting of monthly cycle of women inside the *Kīrttana-ghara*.⁴ This is a result of patriarchal societal norms of the later time of Śaṅkaradeva. The same thing was also happened in *Sundarīdiyā Satra*, where Kalindi Āi resided for some time and preached the religion.

Mādhavadeva initiated Ai Dāyāl the wife of Teli Kṛṣṇa Ātai along with 120 numbers of queens of the King Mahāraj Lakṣminārāyaṇa, and made her *Medhi*, (an officer of a *Satra*, in charge of the duty of collecting the annual contribution from disciples), above these queens. She taught them *Nāma-prasaṅga* (congregational prayer) sitting on the seat of the *Hari-grha* (prayer hall). Harideva nominated his eldest daughter Bhubaneswarī, a wise woman, as the chief attendant of the *Nāmerī Satra* before his death. Besides these women, Padmapriyā Āi, the daughter of Bhabanī purīyā Gopāl Ātā, composed devotional songs and poems with a view to preaching and spreading the teachings of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. Āi Kanaklatā rediscovered *Bardowā Thāna*, and taking charge of the *Satrādhikāra* (head of a *Satra* institution) preached the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva.

Feminism is one of the characteristics of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult. It is revealed in his *Uttarākāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa* through the character of Sītā. The Sītā of the *Uttarākāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa*, unlike the Sītā of Valmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* or the Sītā of the other vernacular *Ramāyānas*, is a bold and revolutionary woman. She was a devotee and the wife of Rāma, but not a blind follower. She boldly uttered her voice against the injustice of Rāma, when she was asked for the second test of her chastity.

⁴ Ibid. P 259.

Rāma, the incarnation of Viṣṇu, might be the King, and in his eyes, the utmost satisfaction of his subjects might get priority, but only to be acquitted from the slanders of his subjects, his abandonment of pregnant Sītā in the jungle to die along with the child in her womb is not justifiable in the eyes of Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva, as a religious preacher always advocates for justice, and he expresses his views through Sītā, but it does not imply that he is against *bhakti*. Sītā's devotion to Rāma is unquestionable, but she neither blindly follows Rāma nor does she accept his injustice, rather she boldly articulates her protest in the very eyes of the audience, because where is *bhakti* there is no question of impurity and injustice. Such protest of Sītā against the injustice of Rāma represents the feministic view of Śaṅkaradeva.

The *bhakti* cult of Śaṅkaradeva is quite different from the *Gauḍīya bhakti* tradition in the manner of worshipping Kṛṣṇa. The *Gauḍīya bhakti* poets showed the fulfilment of *bhakti* through eroticism. They patronized *Parakīyā Tattva* (the theory of infidelity). It is mentioned in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta –Parakīyā rase atibhāber ullās* (infidelity arouses extreme ecstasy). It is like purified gold, because it is beyond any decorum and free of restraint.”⁵ The *Gauḍīya bhakti* poets described love and copulation in different ways, so that the readers might immersed in to the depth of *bhakti* being complacent having been gone through such erotic descriptions. The erotic description of the love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, the main theme of the *Gauḍīya bhakti* poets, has no room in the writings of Śaṅkaradeva. Hence, Rādhā loses her prominence in Śaṅkaradeva's writings that she has enjoyed in the writings of *Gauḍīya bhakti* poets. Śaṅkaradeva, as he was a social reformer, rejected the *Parakīyā Tattva* in

⁵ Bhattacharya, Parag Kumar. (3rd Enlarged Edn., 1997). *Premadharma Āru Vaiṣṇava Kāvya*. P 26.

the fear of social anomalies, and accepted the *dāsyā* (*servitude*) aspects of *bhakti*. The women characters of Śaṅkaradeva's writings were also shown as the beloved of Kṛṣṇa, but they did not want to fulfill their love for Kṛṣṇa through erotic dalliances, rather they fulfilled their love surrendering themselves to the feet of Kṛṣṇa as servants being free from pride and prejudice. Their relation with Kṛṣṇa is like as the relation between a servant and a master, not like as the love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Thus, the women of Śaṅkaradeva's literary works preach the *dāsyā* aspect of *bhakti*, which is of one of the salient features of his *bhakti* cult.

Śaṅkaradeva is primarily a religious preacher, yet it is evident that social reformation is juxtaposed by his religious activities, which heightens the status of women in his times, but it is unfortunate that, in the post-Sankarite periods, the status of women is again gradually degrading due to the rise of the feudal patriarchal society. Kālindī Āi tried her best to keep in vogue the ideals of Śaṅkaradeva amidst different obstacles. She faced great pecuniary hardship after Śaṅkaradeva's passing away to his heavenly abode, even all the servants had left her company, yet she did not lose heart. She called on Mādhavadeva and asked him to manage her hardship, but for the malice and slanders of the relatives of Śaṅkaradeva, she had to send Mādhavadeva to reside at Sundarīdiyā. Mādhavadeva preached the religious principles of Śaṅkaradeva establishing a *Satra* at Sundarīdiyā. Like the *Barpeta Satra*, *Sundarīdiyā satra* has also been playing the pivotal role in the preaching of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* and the Assamese culture that is developed from the time of the initiation of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* in Assam. Kālindī Āi was behind the establishment of the *Sundarīdiyā Satra*. It is discussed in details in the fourth chapter. The disciples of

Sundarīdiyā Satra still humbly remember Kālindī Āi. Mādhavadeva along with his friends Mādhava Maral, Khīra Maral, Buḍha Bhakata and Thākur Ātā, had brought Kālindī to Sundarīdiyā and arranged everything for her convenience. However, some others are of the opinion that Rāmcaran Thākur earnestly entreated her to come to Sundarīdiyā, and with due regards, he brought her to Sundarīdiyā. She passed away on the eleventh day of the Lunar month in the Assamese month of *Āghoṇa* at the age about one hundred forty years. In *Sundarīdiyā Satra*, one piece of golden *keru*, (a kind of ear ornament worn horizontally in the ears), worn by Kālindī Āi, a *pāñji kaṭā pīrā*. (a low sitting stool for spinning cotton), used by her, two *khurās*, (the legs of a bedstead) of her bed, and the house in which she had been resided are still preserved, and her death anniversary is still observed with pomp and gaiety with the co-operation of her family members who have been residing at Bhakatpara coming from Pāṭhāusī.⁶

Śaṅkaradeva debarred Mādhavadeva to go to Sundarīdiyā in the fear that Mādhavadeva would be deviated from the path of *bhakti* by being allured with the charms of the beautiful women of Sundarīdiyā, but Mādhavadeva went to Sundarīdiyā on the behest of Kālindī Āi, and establishing a *Satra* institution, he transformed Sundarīdiyā into a centre of Vaiṣṇavite religion and culture. The beautiful women of Sundarīdiyā became spiritually beautiful with the company of Mādhavadeva. It is still in vogue the tradition of the performing of the *Puwār-prasaṅga* (the Morning Prayer) in the morning, and the *Nāma-prasaṅga* (the congregational chanting of the names of Kṛṣṇa) in the evening after the end of the *Nāma-psasaṅga* performed by the male *bhaktas* in *Sundarīdiyā Satra* like *Barpeta Satra*. However, it is a matter of concern

⁶ Pathak, Ratul. (ed.). (1st, Edn., 2008). *Sachitra Sundaridia Satra*. Pp 8, 9.

that women are debarred from entering in the *Kīrttana-ghara*, (the main prayer hall), of the both *Satras* except in the days of their initiation. The *Sundarīdiyā Satra* was established on the behest of Kālindī Āi, and she had passed the last part of her life till her death in this *Satra*. The never-ending sacred-flame of the *Barpeta Satra* was kept burning by a women named Sumatī Āi, and in the *Patbausi Satra* where Kālindī Āi had resided before her going to reside at *Sundarīdiyā Satra*, women were not debarred from their entry into the *Kīrttana-ghara*. It is therefore, beyond any reasonable doubt that women had enjoyed the free pass of entry into the *Kīrttana-ghara* of both of these *Satras* at that time. The cause shown against the prohibition of entry of women into the *Kīrttana-ghara* is not a reasonable one, because if a woman is restricted in the fear of sudden starting of her monthly cycle, then why the women who have reached at the stage of their menopause are not allowed entering the *Kīrttana-ghara*. However, this practice is not followed in any other *Nāma-gharas* of any village or city in Assam; rather the womenfolk are at liberty to enter and to take part in the chanting of *Nāmas* in the *Nāma-gharas*. It is obvious that the women folk are busy with *Nāma* in every *Nāma-gharas* situated in each nook and corners of Assam, especially in the Assamese month of *Bhādra*. The sweet sound of their chanting of *Nāmas* echoes in everywhere and makes the environment lively. Thus, the womenfolk have been preaching and spreading the *bhakti* cult of Śaṅkaradeva. In this respect, there are ample scopes of further research work in furthering the status of women in present day's prospect.

The Neo-Vaiṣṇvite movement has a far-reaching impact on the social lives of Assam, and it has brought a massive change to the religious belief, societal norms and

to the art, culture, literature and language of the heterogeneous people of Assam. It relieves the common people from the gamut of different extravagant rites and rituals of Brāhmaṇism, sacrificial rituals of Śāktaism, and different spells and talisman of Buddhism and Jainism, and abolishing the special privilege of the elite society in religious matters provides an easy and simple method of worshipping of God. The right and equality of women in religious matters is a revolutionary outcome of this movement, for which, the womenfolk not only get the opportunity to take part in religious matters, but also one or two of them could become the religious heads. The womenfolk, who were considered as private property, and sexually exploited in the name of religion by the *Bhogīs* and priestly class of Śāktaism and Tāntricism now got the equal status to their counterparts to practise religion, and they become free from such exploitations. It is discussed in details in the fourth chapter. In the same way, the women in the literary works of Śaṅkaradeva and their roles in the preaching and spreading of his *bhakti* cult have been discussed in details in the third chapter of this thesis. It is revealed from the discussion that the women characters delineated by Śaṅkaradeva have played the pivotal role in the preaching and spreading of his *bhakti* cult, and in some cases, they have excelled their counterparts, therefore, they are regarded as the spokespersons of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult. The elevated social status of women in *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* and the high regards of Śaṅkaradeva towards women have been shown, and their role as spokespersons of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult has been established through this thesis.

Findings:

Objective –I.

The first objective of the research work is the analysis of the role of women as spokespersons of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult as revealed in his writings. This objective is discussed in Chapter-III of this thesis, and at the end of the discussion, following findings have been found out.

0. Monotheism and Qualified-Monism of Śaṅkaradeva's is preached by the women characters of his writings.
- 0 Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Being, according to the religious belief of Śaṅkaradeva, and it is preached by all the women characters in his writings.
0. *Nīrupāya bhakti* (matterless devotion) is preached by Cāṇḍālīnī.
- 0 *Bhakti mārga*, the best way of *bhakti* among the three *mārgas*, - *Karmma mārga*, *Jñāna mārga*, and *Bhakti mārga*, is preached by the wives of the Brāhmaṇas and Candālīnī.
- 0 Non-dualism is preached by the Gopīs in the *Bastraharaṇa tattva* and *Rāsakṛīḍā* of the *Bhāgavata*.
- 0 Absolute state of devotional love, the mingling of living beings with the Supreme Being, is spread through the Gopīs in *Rāsakṛīḍā*.
- 0 The transmigration of soul, one of the characteristics Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult is preached by Sītā in the play *Rāmbijaya*.
- 0 The wives of the Brāhmaṇas and the wives of the Kālīnāga bring their respective husbands to the right path of *bhakti*, and that is showed by śaṅkaradeva.

- 0 Morality and spirituality of Śaṅkaradeva's religious faith are preached by the character of Mohinī.
- 0 Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* is completely free from casteism and class difference in terms of *bhakti*, and it is produced by Candalinī.
- 0 The wives of the Brāhmaṇas and the Gopīs showed that one should be free from worldly attachment to have the blessings of kṛṇa.
- 0 All the women characters of Śaṅkaradeva's writings showed that the absolute state of devotion could be achieved through matterless devotion.
- 0 Rukmiṇī showed that *Dharma, Artha, Kāma, Mokṣa* can be achieved through unique devotion to Kṛṣṇ.
- 0 God is always obliged to bless a true devotee, and it is preached by the women characters of Śaṅkaradeva's writings.
- 0 The Feministic view of Śaṅkaradeva is carried forward by Sītā in *Uttarākaṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa*.

Objective –II.

The second objective is the analysis of the modes of *bhakti* followed by the women of

Śaṅkaradeva's literary works. This objective is discussed in Chapter III.

- 0 *Śravaṇa-kīrtana*, one of the methods of Śaṅkaradeva's religious belief of worshipping God, is propagated by all the women of Śaṅkaradeva's writings.
- 0 *Ātmanivedana*, self-surrender unto Kṛṣṇa, is preached by the wives of the Brāhmaṇas, Rukmiṇī, the Gopīs and Kunji.

- 0 *Dāśya* mode of *bhakti* is preached by all the women characters of Śaṅkaradeva's writings.
- 0 *Nirguṇa bhakti* (matterless devotion) is propagated by the Gopīs, the wives of the Brāhmaṇa, Candālinī and Rukmiṇī.
- 0 *Bandana*, praising, of different qualities of Kṛṣṇa is preached by Daivakī, Uttarā, Aditi, Vindhāvalī, and the wives of the Kālināga.
- 0 *Smarana*, remembrance, another mode of *bhakti*, is preached by the Gopīs in *Gopī Urdhava Sambada* of the *Bhāgavata*.
- 0 *Bātsalya bhakti* is propagated by Yasodā and Daivakī.

Objective III.

The third objective is the analysis of the role of different women in different stages of Śaṅkaradeva's life and their consequences. It is discussed in Chapter IV.

- 0 Khersūtī inspired Śaṅkaradeva to become an educated one, and taking initiation from Śaṅkaradeva, she inspired others to accept *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*.
- 0 Candarī Āi pointed out the pinpoint of the *Batabr̥kṣa* in the *Vaikuṇṭha pata* and breach of chronology of *Baṭa-kesi-ghāta* in the *Vṛndavani vastra*, and she drove away the rival Brāhmaṇas of Śaṅkaradeva by explaining to them the essence of the *Gītā*.
- 0 Indifference to worldly things is one of the characteristics of Śaṅkaradeva's religious principles; Bārabāhī Āi followed this principle and asked her husband to accept it.

- 0 Kālindī Āi kept alive Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* cult amidst different misfortunes after the death of Śaṅkaradeva. Mādhavadeva went to Sundarīdiyā at the advice of Kālindī Āi, and there he established the *Sundarīdiyā Satra*. Āi Kanaklatā rediscovered *Bardowā Thāna* following the advice of Kālindī Āi.
- 0 The wife of Jayanti Madhāi converted her husband from a householder to a Vaiṣṇava.
- 0 The wife of Ananta Kandalī converted her husband from a Śākta to a Vaiṣṇava.
- 0 The wife of Jayanti Madhāi sent back her husband to Śaṅkaradeva providing him a lesson of morality and spirituality.
- 0 The wife of Telikṣṇa Ātai spread the *bhakti* cult of Śaṅkaradeva among the wives of the Koch King Lakṣmīnārāyana and other *bhakatas* through teaching them the songs of the *ghoṣā* and the *Kīrttana*.
- 0 Kamalāpriyā alias Āi Bhuvanesvari created an atmosphere conducive to entering the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* in the palace of the Koch Kingdom and in getting the royal patronage. The scripture *Janmarahasya* of Mādhavadeva is the outcome of the request of Kamalāpriyā to Śaṅkaradeva.
- 0 Harparbādāyāl, the wife of Kehu Hazara, and the wife of Jinai Buḍhā saved their respective husbands from being deviated from the path of *bhakti*. Both of them were involved in the preaching of Śaṅkaradeva's religious faith.
- 0 Āi Dhāi created a favourable atmosphere for Mādhavadeva to preach *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* in Koch Behar. She helped the votaries of *Eka-*

Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma in practising their religious belief by providing them their necessary things.

- 0 Sumati Āi kept flaming the ever-burning sacred lamp of *Barpeta Satra*. The performing of *Puwār Praṅga*, Morning Prayer, at *Barpeta Satra* has been started by Sumati Āi, and it is still in vogue in this *Satra*.
- 0 Āi Bhuvaneśvarī, the daughter of Harideva, was made the religious head of *Nameri Satra*. She was the first women who became the religious head of a *Satra* institution.
- 0 Sumalinī Buḍhī was an enthusiastic devotee of Kṛṣṇa. She inspired the common people to worship Kṛṣṇa as the sole Godhead. Mādhavadeva too, being inspired with her devotion to Kṛṣṇa, composed a *Ghoṣā* in honour of her devotion.
- 0 Āi Kanaklatā rediscovered *Bardowā Thāna* and made it a centre of Art, Culture and religious practice of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*.
- 0 Āi Kanaklatā, taking the charge of a religious head, organized a group of twelve *Bhakatas*, six Brāhmaṇas and six non-Brāhmaṇas, and preached Śaṅkaradeva's religious principles in upper Assam.
- 0 Āi Padmapriyā composed some devotional lyrics and preached the religious principles of Śaṅkaradeva.

Objective IV:

The fourth objective is the defining of the outlook of Śaṅkaradeva towards women: It is discussed in Chapter V.

- 0 Śaṅkaradeva strived for equality and liberty of women.

- 0 Śaṅkaradeva transformed sensuality to spirituality towards women.
- 0 Śaṅkaradeva opened the door of his *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* for the women folk to take part in religious matters.
- 0 Śaṅkaradeva projected women as spokespersons of his *bhakti* cult in his writings.
- 0 Śaṅkaradeva elevated the social status of women of the lower strata of the society.
- 0 Śaṅkaradeva created an atmosphere of non-formal education for women.
- 0 Śaṅkaradeva developed the spiritual-intellect of women.
- 0 Śaṅkaradeva empowered women to raise their voices against the injustice to them.

The research work on the topic, *Women as Spokespersons of Śaṅkaradeva's Bhakti cult* unveils ample scopes of further research works. - On the perspective of difference between the outlook of Sankaradeva's towards women and the other Vaisnavite poet's; The status of women in Neo-Vvaisnavite Movement and in all-Indian Vaisnavite Movement; The Role of the Male characters of Sankaradeva's writings in the preaching of his *Bhakti* cult; the Role of the Man folk mentioned in the Hagiographies in the preaching of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*; and The Women Characters of Sankaradeva's Plays and the Women Characters of Shakespeare's Plays; are some topics that enthusiastic scholars could undertake research works.