

CHAPTER-II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE, LIFE AND WORKS OF ŚAṆKARADEVA AND KABĪR DĀS

2.1 Review of Related Literature :

Review of related literature informs the researcher about what research has already been done and thus identifies possible gaps in the research. It is also the thorough checking and formal examination of all the findings of various research works, information published in different books etc. which have close connection with the area of investigation and the problem undertaken for research.

2.1.1 The Materials for a Comparative Study of the Socio-Ethical Thoughts of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās have been Received from the Following Sources:

2.1.1.1 About Ethics :

Sinha (1978) in his book *A Manual of Ethics* provided that ‘Ethics’ is derived from the Greek adjective ‘ethica’ which comes from ‘ethos’. ‘Ethos’ means customs or habits. Ethics is also called ‘Moral Philosophy’. ‘Moral’ comes from the Latin ‘mores’ which means also customs or habits. Ethics is the science of the habitual conduct of men. Habits are the expression of character. Thus Ethics is the science of character and conduct which evaluates the voluntary actions and habitual actions of persons and considers their rightness and wrongness and virtuousness or viciousness.

Mishra (2010) in his book *Mahatma Gandhi on Ethics* provides that the New Encyclopedia Britannica defines ethics as the branch of philosophy that is concerned

with what is morally good and bad, right and wrong, a synonym for it is moral philosophy. The Oxford English Dictionary defines ethics as the science of morals or moral principles very often used as a synonym or even an interchangeable expression for terms like values, norms, standards, morality etc.

Saikia Bora (2013) in her article ‘Concept of Morality – A Study’ in *Mahāpuruṣa Jyoti* Vol. XIII provides vital information on Ethics. She says that ‘Morality’ is known as ‘Ethics’, a science which analyses the human behaviour. Ethics is the science of rightness or wrongness, goodness or badness of human conduct.

Frankena (2015) in his book *Ethics* offers that the terms ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ are often used as equivalent to ‘right’ or ‘good’ and as opposed to ‘immoral’ and ‘unethical’. The world’s moral problems, moral judgments, moral codes, moral arguments, moral experiences, the moral consciousness or the moral point of view are also used with Ethical.

Mackenzie (2016) in his book *A Manual of Ethics* provides that Ethics is the science of conduct. It discusses men’s habits and customs or their characters, the principles on which they habitually act and consider what it is that constitutes the rightness or wrongness of these principles, the good or bad aspects of these habits.

2.1.1.2 On Śaṅkaradeva :

Bezbaroa was the pioneer of Śaṅkaradeva studies in modern time and he had took initiative to propagate the religion of Śaṅkaradeva outside of Assam. His two books i.e. *Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva* (1911) and *Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva and Śrī Śrī Mādhavadeva* (1914) were the first published biography of the saint in Assamese language. However, the *Charit-Puthis* (Hagiographies) have narrated life of

Śaṅkaradeva much earlier in the 17th and 18th centuries, but there are many exaggerations and imaginary descriptions.

Nath (1978) in his book entitled *The Background of Assamese Culture* has narrated cultural history of Assam including life and contributions of Śaṅkaradeva.

Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyaṃṛta (complete works of Śaṅkaradeva) (1995) published by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha contains all the literary works of Śaṅkaradeva. This book has been consulted as the basic source of Śaṅkaradeva's life, religion and literature.

Neog (1982) has discussed at great length about *Bhakti* in his edited book *The Bhakti Ratnākara of Śaṅkaradeva and History of the Concept of Bhakti*. Neog (1998) is the first person who has studied Śaṅkaradeva in a very systematic, scientific and scholarly way in his book *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times – Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam* which was based on his research work for his D. Phil. Degree in 1955. Here Neog has discussed all the aspects of Śaṅkaradeva – his life, literature, philosophy, social institutions, culture, social implications in all the twelve chapters of the book of about 400 pages. This scholarly work forms the main source of the present work. Neog

Smith (2003) in his book *Patterns in Indian Hagiography* commented that Vaiṣṇvism was introduced into Assam by Śaṅkaradeva, a prolific writer in Assamese, Sanskrit and Maithili, who founded the *Eka Śaraṇa Nāma Dharma* sect. The path of *bhakti mārga* was open to everyone: sūdras, women, outcastes, even yavana barbarians; caste status and learning were irrelevant, what was required was an

uncompromising, unconditional and total devotion to the Lord. From the ethical point of view this point is valuable.

The book written by Acharyya (2003) *The History of Medieval Assam* has described the geographical, social, religious, political and literary aspects of the period from thirteenth century to sixteenth century. He has described the religion preached by Śaṅkaradeva and its impact on the society.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's *The Kīrtana-Ghoṣā*, translated into English verses by Saikia (2005) has been used as a source book in English. *The Descriptive Bibliography of Śaṅkaradeva* (Vol. I) edited by Mazumdar, Bimal and published by the centre for Śaṅkaradeva studies, Gauhati University has been used as a source for literature published on Śaṅkaradeva and resource works carried out on different aspects of Śaṅkaradeva.

Borkakoti (2005) *Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva* and (2007) *Place of Srimanta Sankaradeva in All India Perspective* has described the life and works of Śaṅkaradeva in great detail.

Baruah (2009) in his book *Śaṅkaradeva Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam* has described the life, literature, culture, philosophy of the saint in addition to *Nāmghars* and *Satras*. In the Foreword, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India has commented that like Kabīr and Ramanand in Kashi, Chaitanya Mahāprabhu in Bengal and Orishya and Namadev in Maharastra, Śaṅkaradeva propagated the cult of Vaisnavism throughout Assam, which was then a conglomeration of several independent states.

Neog (2011) *Śaṅkaradeva the Great Integrator* has also been consulted in a piece of research work.

Choudhury (2011) in his article ‘Śaṅkaradeva’s Philosophy of Religion’ in the book *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy* has given a clear idea on ethics. He opined that religion is an integral part of life and it binds people together in a society. Śaṅkaradeva propounded a new religion known as *Eka-Śaraṇa-Harināma-Dharma*. Based on devotion and ethics this religion, which was above race, caste and creed played a vital role in making a new moral society.

The book *Religion and Society in North-East India* edited by Nath (2011) has discussed about the religion and culture propagated by Śaṅkaradeva.

The book *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy* edited by Barua and associates (2011) has presented the religious literature and philosophical aspects of Śaṅkaradeva.

Sharma (2011) in her article ‘The Secular Ethics of Śaṅkaradeva’ in the book *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy* has commented that Śaṅkaradeva’s secular ethics deals with the promotion of equality, fraternity and freedom. Freedom is treated as a significant problem of his ethics. Freedom has three stages. These are (i) Freedom felt as a psychological state, (ii) Freedom understood as an ideal concept, (iii) Freedom finally realized as a value. Rashadall also offers the same view on ethics and says that ethics is the theory of good and evil which has human well-being as its goal.

Borkakoti (2012) in his book *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva an epoch maker* has given a clear idea on relevance of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva’s teachings about socio-ethical thoughts. The most important example of sustained influence of the saint in the Assamese society is the continuation of the socio-cultural-religious institution called *Nāmghar*. This multi-faceted institution has given shape to the society and culture of

Assamese people. People gather in these *Nāmghars* to discuss different social issues and to take part in cultural activities. There are some rituals in *Nāmghar* which are the examples of socio-ethical thoughts. Besides these, Śaṅkaradeva brought the ethnic groups together and did away with the inter-ethnic conflicts. His conflict management was a unique act. It is also an example of socio-ethical thoughts.

Nath (2012) has discussed at length about the *Bhakti* movement and *Satra* institutions of Assam in his book *Satra Society and Culture Pitambardeva Goswami and History of Garamur Satra*.

Borah (2012) in her book *Growth and Development of the Satras in Historical Perspective* has discussed on the origin of *Satra* and *Nāmghar* and their contributions.

Borkakoti (2013) has reviewed all the *Charit puthis* of Śaṅkaradeva in his book *Purnanga Kathā Gurucharit. Gurucharit* by Ramcharan Thakur as edited by Basanta Kumar Bhattacharya (1985) has also been used in this research work to some extent.

The book *Śaṅkaradeva Studies* edited by Bora and Kalita (2013) has discussed different aspects of Śaṅkaradeva's contributions and its impact on the society.

Early History of Kamrupa by Barua (2014) has dealt with the history of Assam then called as Kamarupa from the early years of Christian era to sixteenth century.

Medhi (2017) in her book *The Plays of Śaṅkaradeva* commented that Śaṅkaradeva devised a popular and true philosophic religion with *ahimsā*, truth and equality which is based on the *Vedānta*, *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Against the gloomy socio-political scenario, fallen moral values and repeated ethnic clashes, Śaṅkaradeva turned the confused society to a disciplined condition with his new cult of devotion or *Viṣṇu-bhakti*. It is an example of ethical deed.

The book *Śaṅkaradeva Glimpses on His Contributions* edited by a board of editors (MSSV, Nagaon) (2018) has discussed the different aspects of Śaṅkaradeva.

2.1.1.3 On Kabīr Dās

Mishra (1969) in his book *Kabeer Granthawalee* has commented that Kabīr believed in equality and unity of human beings. He abhorred class difference and the feeling of high birth-low birth. The greatness of human being is not birth or caste, but ethics and morality. Kabīr believed penance, rituals, Namaz etc. as tools for satisfying class ego, not as tools of morality. So Kabīr believed in morality and love for God as important for welfare of human beings, According to Kabīr, this was the main element of humanity. Kabīr tried to uproot all evil customs from the society.

Machwe (1984) in his book *KABIR : Makers of Indian Literature* has provided a critical account of the essentials of Kabīr's teachings, Kabīr's life, his contribution to philosophic mysticism, evaluation of his poetry and his place in the development of Hindi language and literature. He said that as a social and ethical reformer Kabīr claims the attention of modern radicals, denounced the folly of social inequity and the injustice in the name of caste. He ridiculed the orthodoxy of both Hindus and Muslims. He was a bitter critic of sectarian and narrow creeds. According to Kabīr Dās, external rituals are meaningless.

Rai (1993) in her book *Kabeer Aur Tulsi ki Samajik Drishti Ka Tulnatmak Adhyayan* commented that Kabīr, worshipper of the attributeless supreme being, as well as other poets of this tradition represented the deprived and oppressed section of society. First he raised voice for religious rights. It was because social, economic and

political rights were not possible without it. He considered religious freedom as essential for socio-economic freedom. This freedom could be attained by liberating temple, mosque, idol-worship, *Rojā-Nāmāz*, Pilgrimage- fasting etc. from grandeurs. Kabīr and his *Nirguṇa* order denounced the middlemen like Pandit-Puruhit, Kaji-Molla in Hinduism and Islam respectively. He achieved the devotional right for the first line in the Indian society. Devotional poets and artists from this group became socially respectable for the first time. This was a great achievement of Kabīr and his *Nirguṇa* order. Kabīr's religious cult removed the evil practices from society and reformed it.

Jijnasu (2001) in his book *1008 Kabeer Banee Satya-Jnanamrit* maintains that the divine saint Kabīr awakened the creatures who were deviant and asleep because of ignorance. He enlightened both Hindu and Muslim and removed their communal tensions as well as hatred.

Dwivedi (2002) in his book *Kabeer* commented that Kabīr was a religious preceptor. But his contribution was no less as a social reformer, an integrator of all religions, achiever of unity among Hindu-Muslim, founder of an order and a philosopher explaining *Vedānta*.

Shashank (2012) in his book *Kabīr ke Dharma Siddhānta ke Prāsangikatā Ek Viślṣṇātmak Adhyayan* commented that Kabīr considered man only as man, not as Hindu or Muslim. There is no difference in the physical appearance or characteristics between Hindu and Muslim. He always condemned the evil practices and grandeurs in the name of religion. He termed *Japa*, penance, donation, pilgrimage, fast, abstinence

etc. as useless. Thus Kabīr's religious values are appropriate solutions for current social problems. In fact, the religious values of Kabīr like truth, non-violence, forgiveness, pity, liberalness, love, equality and contentment are very essential for all human lives. Therefore the religious conclusions of Kabīr are relevant for all times and places, because these are related to the main human inclinations.

Das (2015) edited in *Kabīr Granthavalī* noted that Kabīr used his sayings for social reforms. He saw people living a lonely life, being trapped by superstitions. So he tried to rescue them from it. He opposed casteism, untouchability, religious food habits, *Śrāddha*, *Ekādaśī*, pilgrimage, fast of Hindus and *Rojā*, *Nāmāz*, Haj, conversion to Islam, marrying own cousin of Muslims. He condemned rituals. He criticised both Hindus-Muslims for their external evil practices. He considered religion to be devoid of all grandeurs, without Hindu-Muslim division. He did not bind himself with any religious order and categorically said that was neither Hindu nor Muslim. The truth that he believed in was there in all religions. A religious reformer has to be essentially a social reformer. Kabīr is an example of this.

Singh (2016) in his book *Kabīr Granthavalī* commented that the sayings of Kabīr has elements of social changes like social reform, harmony among all religions, Hindu-Muslim unity, explanation of Vedānta etc. Kabīr not only reformed the society; but also he brought about radical change in people's character. Thus he created new human beings. There was the element of love behind this public welfare, always which transformed into love for God in the ultimate stage. There was an element of revolt in his sayings. He searched for means to uproot the evil customs from the society.

2.2 Life and Works of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās :

Both Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās were great social reformers of medieval India. Lives of both the saints were full of challenges which were overcome by the two great reformers. The life of Śaṅkaradeva was multifarious in nature while that of Kabīr was confined to limited life activities. To study the socio-ethical thoughts of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās, it is important to discuss the lives and works of the two saints. Therefore a brief outline of the lives and works of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās are given hereunder –

2.2.1 Life Sketch of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was born in a Bhūñā family of Bardowā Ālipukhurī in present Nagaon district of Assam in the year 1449 A.D. (September – October, *Āhin* month in 1371 *Śakābda*).¹ His father's name was Kusumbar Bhūñā and mother's name was Satyasandhā. The Bhūñās were traditional *Śakti* worshippers and there were many icons of the mother goddess in their locality.

Śaṅkaradeva lost his parents at his early age. His granny Khersutī looked after him after the death of his parents. When Śaṅkaradeva was twelve years old, his grandmother took him to a *Tol* (residential school) of Mahendra Kandalī, a renowned teacher and scholar of those times. Kandalī started giving lessons to Śaṅkaradeva on a Thursday of the *Bhāda* (August- September) month of 1383 *Śakābda* (1461 A.D.).

1. Neog, Maheswar (1965) *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times: Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam*. P. 98-100.

Śaṅkaradeva showed his extra – ordinary talent and merit from the beginning of his study. Kandali was very happy and satisfied with him.

Śaṅkaradeva studied the four Vedas, eighteen *Kāvya*s, fourteen *Vyākaraṇa*s, two Epics etc. in detail. Śaṅkaradeva composed a verse which had no vowel except “a” in the very beginning of his student life. The poem goes like this :

karatala kamala kamaladala nayana /
bhavadava dahana gahana vana śayana //
napara napara para satarata gamaya /
sabhaya mabhaya bhaya mamahara satataya //
kharatara varaśara hatadaśa vadana /
khagacara nagadhara phaṇadhara śayana //
jagadagha mapahara bhava bhaya taraṇa /
*parapada layakara kamalaja nayana //*²

The poem describes the attributes of Lord Viṣṇu in a beautiful language which impressed Mahendra Kandali immensely. During the student life Śaṅkaradeva authored his first book *Hariścandra Upākhyāna*³ which is based on a story from the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. Śaṅkaradeva completed his schooling in the year 1465 A.D. and Mahendra Kandali was satisfied that there was nothing more to teach him.

Śaṅkaradeva showed his extraordinary talent in the year 1468 A.D. when he was only nineteen years old.⁴ The saint decided to stage a play in order to satisfy the

2. *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Bākhyāmṛit*. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Sangha.

3. Neog, Maheswar (1965) *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times: Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam*. P. 102.

4. Borkakoti, Sanjib Kumar (2005) *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva*. P. 17.

wish of his elders in the family. Thus the play *Cihna-Yātrā* came to be staged. The story of Lord Kṛṣṇa comprised the subject matter of the play. Śaṅkaradeva portrayed the seven *Vaikuṇṭhas* as described in the scriptures and were shown in this play. All the settings were prepared by Śaṅkaradeva and the actors used masks, and designed *Khol*-a musical instrument to use in the play. Śaṅkaradeva directed the play and acted himself in it. The audience were dumbfounded by his great and matchless artistic talent. It was he who introduced the drop scene in drama. Śaṅkaradeva used it in the *Cihna-Yātrā* before it was used in Europe. His dramatic talent can be compared only to that of Shakespeare, who came 119 years later to the realm of theatre. Śaṅkaradeva was also the first director to use elevated stage for a play.

Śaṅkaradeva entered into wed-lock with *Sūryavatī*, when he became twenty one year old. In 1471 A.D. *Sūryavatī* gave birth to a daughter named Manu in 1472 A.D. But unfortunately *Sūryavatī* expired leaving her child who was only nine month old.

The water of Brahmaputra used to cause damages to the cultivation at *Ṭembuwānī* area. Śaṅkaradeva guided the people to construct a *dām* in *Ṭembuwānī* and the *dām* was completed. It is important to note that a fisherwoman named Rādhikā who belonged to so called lower caste was involved in initiating the work. This incident proves that Śaṅkaradeva gave equal status to women and respected the so-called lower caste people.

In 1481 A.D. Śaṅkaradeva handed over his administrative responsibilities to his grand uncle Jayanta and set out for pilgrimage which lasted for twelve years. He

visited Purī in the East to Dwārakā in the West, Badarikāśrama in the North to Rāmeswarama in the South. During his twelve years of long pilgrimage, Śaṅkaradeva preached his ideology among the people. Many people accepted him as Guru in different parts of the country.

Śaṅkaradeva met Mādhavadeva at Dhuwāhāta and the later became the most prominent disciple of the saint.

At the instance of Khersutī, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva gave consent for a second marriage with Kalindī in 1497 at the age of forty-eight.⁵ He shifted to *Ṭembuwānī* from Ālipukhurī where he built a *Thān* campus in 1509 A.D. and developed the houses on four sides of the *Kīrttanghar* (Debagṛha) later called *Nāmghar* for the devotees within the compound and on the four sides of the *Kīrttanghar*, later called *Nāmghar*. After the demise of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, many such residential campuses grew up and most of them came to be known as *Satra*.

2.2.1.1 Social Conditions at the Time of Śaṅkaradeva:

At the time of Śaṅkaradeva the people of different races and tribes of the society spoke different languages, followed various religious faiths and cults and observed different customs accordingly. Life in those days was conditioned by the unsettled times, political turmoil, racial fends, diseases and occasional famines following upon a state of warfare.⁶

5. Neog, Maheswar,(1965). *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*. P.106.

6. Ibid. P.80.

There were many professional castes in Assam and profession made an permanent mark on the caste or social positions among the people.⁷ Based on the professions, people of the society were divided into various castes. The *Brāhmaṇas* held an important position in the society.⁸ The common people were completely ignorant and helpless and lived in constant fear.

2.2.1.2 The Contributions of Śaṅkaradeva:

Śaṅkaradeva has great contributions towards the spiritual, social, cultural and literary fields of the Assamese society: These are summarized as follows:

2.3 Religion :

2.3.1. *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma:*

Śaṅkaradeva was a multifaceted genius who contributed towards religion, literature, culture, art and sculpture, music, dance-drama, painting etc. He was a social reformer and above all a humanist with universal outlook. His religion is most liberal and tolerant. It is the simplest and easiest way of attaining God. It may be called the religion of the common men. There is no rule for any hostility among different classes of people in the names of religion. Even the Saktism and Tantricism learnt the lesson of humanism from Śaṅkaradeva's faith and these decadent Hindu faiths were considerably modified. Śaṅkaradeva preached that the basis of their social and ethical thoughts was the alteristic love of men.⁹ At the time of Śaṅkaradeva, there was distinction of castes and classes among the people of the society and there was general

7. Ibid. P. 77.

8. Ibid. P.. P. 93.

9. MSSV (2018) *Śaṅkaradeva Glimpses on His Contribution*. P. 261-262.

ignorance and helplessness among the masses in religious matters.¹⁰ Assam was known as a land of magic and witchcraft for its tantric temple Kāmakhyā. The Śaktism and Tantricism mingled with pseudo-Buddhistic culture were the predominating religious orders of ancient Kāmrūpa (old name of Assam). Kāmakhyā was the centre of Tāntrik culture.¹¹ To bring all the indigenous people following various faiths under systematized religious codes with the extreme *tāntric*, observances with Śaivism and Śaktism, Śaṅkaradeva came forward with his Neo-Vaiṣṇavite faith or *Bhakti* movement. He endeavoured to change the mind of the common people from the religious and social thralldom.¹² He devised a popular and true philosophic religion, with ahimsā (non-violence), equality and truth, based on the *Vedānta*, *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.¹³ The Cult preached by Śaṅkaradeva among the people of Assam is called the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* where devotion is directed only to one God i.e. Lord Sri Kṛṣṇa or Lord Viṣṇu. It is also called *Māhapuruṣīyā Dharma*.

2.3.2 *Satra and Nāmghar :*

The *Satras* are the Vaiṣṇava establishments in Assam. The word *Satra* possibly meant an assembly of devotees where topics about Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa were discussed.¹⁴ A full fledged *Satra* included a *Nāmghar* or *Kīttanghar*, a *Maṇikuṭ* and Hātis. The central institute within a *Satra* is the *Nāmghar* or *Kīttanaghar*.¹⁵ The head of a *Satra* is called *Adhikāra* or *Satrādhikāra*. Disciples take *Śaraṇa* from *Satrādhikāra*. All people of the

10. Kakati, Banikanta. (2004). *Mother Goddess Kāmakhyā*. P. 33-62.

11. Acharyya, N.N. (2003). *The History of Medieval Assam*. P. 261.

12. Medhi, Yashodhara. (2017). *The Plays of Śaṅkaradeva*. P. 26.

13. Medhi, K. (Ed.), (1997). *Aṅkavali*. Introduction, P. XIVII.

14. Neog, Maheswar.(1998). *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*. P. 310.

15. Medhi, Yashodhara. (2017). *The Plays of Śaṅkaradeva*. P. 28.

society-rich or poor irrespective of their caste, creed and religion could get together in the *Satras* and *Nāmghars* to take part in the prayer i.e. *Nām-Prasaṅga*.

Śaṅkaradeva was a man of versatile genius. Through the *Thāns* (later *Satras*) and the *Nāmghars*, he brought about a thorough change in the set-up of society by removing untouchability. After the departure of Śaṅkaradeva to the heavenly abode, new kind of institution called *Satra* was established by his disciples, the chief of them being mainly Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva. However, all the *Satras* are not established on the basic principles of Śaṅkaradeva. Some *Satras* were established at the behest of Āhom Kings of Assam and these *Satras* got political patronage.

The *Satra* institution of Assam is a product of the Vaiṣṇavite movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva in the 15th–16th century. The word *Satra* comes from the Sanskrit word *Sattra*. The etymological meaning of the word is association or a sitting (√sad + tra) or an instrument which helps to liberate the noble (sat+tra) must have supplied addition weight to form the above notion about *Satra*. The word *Sattra* very naturally becomes *Satra* in Assamese.¹⁶

The first stage of the growth of the *Satra* institution began with Śaṅkaradeva. But during his life time the religious association organized by him did not take the shape of a regular institution of a permanent nature. Śaṅkaradeva no doubt laid the foundation of the institution, but the full structure was raised during the succeeding generations. It was in the time of Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva that the *Satra* institution attained the second phase of its growth.¹⁷ It was at Patbausi at the hands of

16. Sarma, S.N.. (1999). *The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam*. P. 143, 144.

17. Ibid. P. 146.

Dāmodaradeva and at Barpeta at the hands of Mādhavadeva that the institution of *Satra* as we see it today came into being.¹⁸

As a social institution, *Satra* contributed to the growth of the society. *Satra* institution may be classified into two categories. These are – (1) Primary and (2) Secondary.

2.3.3 Primary :

To develop the society and to maintain unity in the society are the primary duty of a *Satra*. Its primary functions are to propagate vaiṣṇavism, to initiate disciples into the fold Ekaśaraṇa, to provide ethico-devotional codes and rules of conduct for the neophytes and to hold religious festivals on different occasions.

2.3.4 Secondary :

The secondary functions of the *satras* are to see that good social relation is maintained amongst the villagers, to develop the spirit of co-operation, to provide adequate facilities for the dissemination of ancient learning and to dispense justice on all social and religious controversies. Before the introduction of the British system of administering justice, *satras* tried many cases relating to social matters.

2.3.5 Contributions of the *Satras* :

Besides religion, the *Satra* has enriched Assamese life socially and academically and has contributed a great deal to the realm of literature and art. One of

18. Nath, Dambarudhar. (2012). *Satra Society and Culture : Pitambardeva Goswami and History of Garmur Satra*. P. 9.

the most notable social contributions of the *satra* institution is the upliftment of the backward classes. The so-called untouchables and backward classes were freely taken into the fold of Vaiṣṇavism. The spiritual bond and fellow - feeling fostered by *Satras* reduced to a considerable extent, the rigour of caste - distinction in Assam. Another notable contribution is its services amongst some of the tribes of Assam. Non Aryan tribes like the Koch, the Morān, the Chutiya, the Āhom and the Kachārī were brought under the fold of Vaiṣṇavism and Vaiṣṇavite missionary activities were also conducted amongst tribes like the Miri (Missing), the Nāgā and the Aitoniya.

The *Nāmghar* originally established at Bordowā in 1468 AD by Śaṅkaradeva to discuss religious matter is a part of every Satra. However the name of such centre was initially *Deva-gr̥ha* and *Kīrttan-gr̥ha*. With the passage of time, the name was *Nāmghar* given to *Deva-gr̥ha* or *Kīrttan-gr̥ha* and other elements such *Bāṭchorā*, *Toraṇ*, *Cho-Ghar* etc. were added to a *Nāmghar*.¹⁹

Besides the *Satras*, every Hindu village in Assam has a *Nāmghar*. *Nāmghar* is not only a prayer hall but also religious discussions were held here regularly. Besides, *Nāmghars* also serve as village courts. They are the public institutions for all social, intellectual and cultural activities. Śaṅkaradeva gave the people a platform to maintain social unity, to observe religious practices to cultivate different forms of art and culture, social conduct, health and hygiene, cleanliness, purity of mind etc. Thus Śaṅkaradeva was not only a religious leader but also a great social reformer.

19. Borah, Ratul Ch. (2019) 'Nāmgharar Utpatti Dharmio Tātparyya āru Vivartan' in Diganta Mahanta (edited). *Nāmghar*. P.33.

The *Aṅkīyā* dramas created by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was a democratic tool for creation of equality, discipline, and morality. His extension of *Nāmghar* culture is too wide. He brought a revolution in the social system by creating *Nāmghar*. *Nāmghar* is also the centre of art and culture to Assamese society.

2.4 Literary works of Śaṅkaradeva :

“Śaṅkara’s literary career may be divided into three periods, corresponding to his stay in the Bāra Bhūyā, Ahom and Koc territories respectively :

A. Early period in the Bāra Bhūyā territories

This period is characterized by a youthful gaiety and exuberance and extends roughly up to the year 1516.

(i) Non-*Bhāgavata* group

1. *Hariścandra-upākhāna* (*Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa*)
2. *Bhakti-pradīpa* (*Garuḍa-purāṇa*)
3. *Kīrttana-ghoṣā* : ‘Ureṣā-varṇana’ section (*Brahma-purāṇa*)

(ii) Non-*Bhāgavata* material mixed with *Bhāgavata* elements, not influenced by Śrīdhara Svāmī –

4. *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa-kāvya* (*Harivaṁśa* and *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*)

(iii) Lyrics –

5. *Bargītas*

(iv) First group of *Bhāgavata* tales. Taken from outside Book X—

6. *Ajāmilopākhyāna* (Book VI)
7. *Amṛta-mathana* (Book VIII)

8. *Kīrttana-Ghoṣā*: ‘*Ajāmilopākhyāna*’ (Book VI), ‘*Prahlāda-caritra*’ (Books III,VII), ‘*Haramohana*’, ‘*Bali-chalana*’, ‘*Gajendropākhyāna*’ (Book VIII) and ‘*Dhyānavarṇana*’ sections.

(v) 8. *Guṇamālā*, ii-vi.

It will have been seen from the names of books (from *Ajāmilopākhyāna* to *Rāma-vijaya*) that since after Śaṅkaradeva had received a copy of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, furnished with Śrīdhara Svāmī’s commentary, from Puri, almost all the works of Śaṅkaradeva are based on this : The *Rāmāyaṇa*, Uttarā-kāṇḍa, was rendered into Assamese in order to supplement Mādhava Kandali’s version of the epic, and the *Rāma-vijaya* was written at the request of Cilārāya More than three-fourths of the *śloka*s cited in the *Bhakti-ratnākara* are from the *Bhāgavata*.

B. Middle period : in the Āhom Kingdom (c. 1516-c.1543)

This was a period of great unrest and obstruction, self-criticism, and then advance.

- (i) Presentation of arguments of meet the enemy of the bhakti cult –

3. *Kīrttana-Ghoṣā* : ‘*Pāṣaṇḍa-mardana*’ and ‘*Nāmāparādha*’ sections (*Bhāgavata*-, *Padma*- and *Bṛhan-nārādī-ya-purāṇas*. *Viṣṇu-dharmottara* and *Suta-saṁhitā*)

9. (Vipra-) *Patnī-prasāda-nāṭa* (*Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, X).

- (ii) Tales of Kṛṣṇa’s early life from the Pūrvārdha of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, X-

3. *Kīrtana-Ghoṣā* : ‘Śiśu-līlā’, ‘Rāsa-krīḍā’, ‘Kāṁsavadha’, ‘Gopī uddhava-saṁvadā’, ‘Kūjīr vāñchā-puraṇa’ and ‘Akrūrar vāñchā-purāṇa’ sections.

It may be added that during this period the composition of *Bargītas* must have continued.

C. Final period : in the Koc kingdom (c.1543-1568)

This period is marked by a comparative quiet in the life of Śaṅkaradeva and the career of his order, by the fullest development of Śaṅkaradeva’s mind and art and by the fulfillment of the mission of his life.

- (i) The second group of *Bhāgavata* tales, taken from outside Book X

10. *Bali-chalana* (Book VIII)

11. *Anādi-pātana* (Book III, *Vāmana-purāṇa*)

- (ii) *Bhāgavata* tales from Books X (Uttarardha), XI and XII

3. *Kīrtana-ghoṣā* : ‘Jarāsandha-yuddha’, ‘Kālayavana-vadha’, ‘Mucukunda-stuti’, ‘Syamanta-haraṇa’, ‘Nāradaḥ Kṛṣṇa-darśana’, ‘Vipra-puttra-ānayaṇa’, ‘Daivakī puttar-anayaṇa’, ‘Vedastuti’, ‘Līlāmālā’, ‘Rukmiṇī prema-kalaha’, ‘Bhṛgu-parīkṣā’, ‘Śrīkṛṣṇaḥ vaikuṇṭha-prayāṇa’, ‘Caturviṁśati-avatāra-varṇana’ and ‘Tātparya’ sections.

The sections ‘Rukmiṇī prema-kalaha’ and ‘Bhṛgu-parīkṣā’ are not generally included in manuscript copies and printed editions of the *Kīrtana-ghoṣā*. The ‘Śrīkṛṣṇaḥ vaikuṇṭha-prayāṇa’ embodies three sub-sections and includes matters from Book I and III besides Book XI of the *Bhāgavata*. This group of compositions (particularly in the ‘Vedastuti’, ‘Caturviṁśati-avatāra-varṇana’, ‘Śrīkṛṣṇaḥ vaikuṇṭha-

prayāṇa’ etc.) is characterized by occasional philosophical passages and may, therefore, be called ‘the philosophical group’.

(iii) Renderings of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* taken skandha by skandha or in the form of independent anecdotes.

12. *Bhāgavata*, X. *Adi*

13. *Bhāgavata*, XI (with materials from Books I and III)

14. *Bhāgavata*, XII

15. *Bhāgavata*, I

16. *Bhāgavata*, II

17. *Bhāgavata*, IX (not available)

18. *Kurukṣetra* (Book X, *Uttarādhya*)

19. *Nimi-nava-siddha-saṁvāda*.

8. *Guṇamālā*,

(iv) the tale of Rāma –

20. *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Uttara-kāṇḍa* (See also 27 below)

(v) Lyrics –

5. *Bhāgīta*

0. *Toṭaya*

21. *Bhāṭimā*

(vi) Doctrinal treatise –

22. *Bhakti-ratnākara*

(vii) Dramas –

23. *Kālī-damana*

24. *Keli-gopāla*

25. *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*

26. *Pārijāta-haraṇa*

27. *Rāma-vijaya* (written in 1490 Śaka/ 1568 A.D.)

The songs and dramas must have been distributed all over the period.

The above list of twenty-seven independent works seems to be more or less a complete one, including all the writings of Śaṅkaradeva so far brought to light. The *Bhāgavata*, IX, which is mentioned only in the *Kathā-guru-carita*, could not, however, be traced.”²⁰

2.5 Performing arts like Drama, Music, Dance-sculpture, Painting, Culture etc.

2.5.1 Drama: Performance of the stories of the dramas of Śaṅkaradeva is known as *Aṅkiyā Bhāonā*. This *Aṅkiyā Bhāonā* has a great impact on the life of the people of Assam. In a sense, it is a life force of the people of Assam pertaining to Vaiṣṇavite cult. *Aṅkiyā Bhāonā* is significant for its theme, language and music and indirectly for its characters and their dresses. The performance of *Aṅkiyā Bhāonā* in the *Nāmghar* was an effective method of propagating the religion of *Eka śaraṇa*. The *Bhāonā* is a unique blending of art and devotion. While providing instructions of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, the *Aṅkiyā Bhāonās* also act as an entertaining medium for the masses. It is conceived as a form of social art and as a medium of propagation of the *Bhakti* movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva. This highly stylized art form combining music, dance and drama, plays a pivotal role in the history of the dramatic art as well as in the socio-

20. Neog, M. (2018). *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*. P. 160-162.

cultural sphere of Assam. Śaṅkaradeva organized the society with the help of *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā*. The *Aṅkīyā nāṭs* are *Patnī Prasāda*, *Pārijāta Haraṇa*, *Kāliya Damana*, *Rukmiṇī Haraṇa*, *Kelī Gopāla* and *Rāma Vijaya*. The different subject matters treated in the *nāṭas* of Śaṅkaradeva are taken from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Harivaṁśa* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. *Aṅkīyā nāṭs* possesses all the essential characteristics of folk-drama viz dance, dialogue, song and gesture. All the characters of *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā* enter with dance movement and they deliver their dialogue in Brajāvalī language.

2.5.2. Music : Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva created a new classical school of music, known as Śaṅkarī music in the form of his *Bargīt*. These *Bargīt* songs are one of the main modes of conveying the principles of the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* founded by the saint.

Example

nārāyaṇa caraṇe karoḥo gohāri
biṣaya bilāsa pāśa *chāndi indriya mohi*
ohi luṭe bāṭovārī // ²¹

It means – I pray at the feet of the Lord Nārāyaṇa.

The arts of music and dance received considerable impetus from *satras*. *Satras* developed a school of classical dance and music in Assam.²²

The *Bargīt* and the songs of the *Aṅkīyā* plays of Śaṅkaradeva were the first compositions of Śaṅkarī music. The saint enacted his first play *Cihna Yātrā* in 1468 A.

21. *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmrta*. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Sangha. *Bargīt* no. 5. P. 26.

22. Chaliha, Bhaba Prasad (Ed.) (1998). *Sankaradeva : Studies in Culture*. P. 79.

D. at Ṭembuwanī. He used *Rāga* like Meghamaṇḍalī, Timira, Vāyumaṇḍalī etc. according to the hagiography *Kathā Guru Charita*.²³ Later Śaṅkaradeva created twenty five *Rāga* for his *Bargīt*, a unique group of devotional songs. There are some *Tālas* of *Bargīt* like *Rūpak*, *Yati*, *Kharmān*, *Ektāl*, *Paritāl*, *Biṣāma* etc.

One of the most important instruments of Assamese culture is *Khol*. It is a kind of drum which is related to *Śaṅkarī* music. The *Khol* is basically used during presentation of *Śaṅkarī* music, dance, drama etc. People consider *Khol* as a devotional instrument. Like this, *Tāl*, *Dabā*, *Kāh*, *Negerā* are also musical instruments of *Śaṅkarī* culture.

2.5.3. Dance : The *Śaṅkarī* dance which has been recognized as *Satrīyā* dance at Sangit Natak Academy, Govt. of India, are based on stories of Kṛṣṇa and His paraphernalia, which leads to high aesthetic pleasure and thus improves socio-ethical aspect of the society.

2.5.4. Sculpture : The sculptures are taken as means for philosophical illumination for the devotees in this religious order. Some of the *Kīrtanghars* have the dual images of the mythical characters Jay and Vijay or lion or elephant in front of the main door to remind the devotees about the necessity of earnestness in their devotion. However no sculpture is kept inside the prayer-hall as idol-worship is prohibited in this cult. Sometime an image of the mythical bird ‘Garuḍa’ is be carved out and kept for everyone to see. Such sculptures were used as visual aids for explaining religious myths and not as objects of worship. The heritage of Bardowā is the heritage of Assam

23. Borkakati, Sanjib Kr. (2006). *Unique Contributions of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva in Religion and Culture*. P. 91.

and its cultural resources are valuable resource of Assam. There is always a need for analysis of these resources. Bardowā became a great centre of religious culture once upon a time. The way high level culture and sacred religion developed at Bardowā in the 15th century will always remain life giving energy for the Assamese race in both good and bad times. Wooden sculpture, plaque, pillar and doors – these are the ancient art objects of Bardowā.²⁴ Animals or other objects were also made for use in the *Ankīyā* plays. These were called *Sañjīva*. These were made and painted just like the masks. Some popular *Sañjīva* were chariots, horses, monkeys, demons, elephants, bear etc. Actually all non-human characters of the *Ankīyā* plays were thus made in a stylized manner.²⁵

2.5.5. Paintings: Śaṅkaradeva believed to have been a painter himself. He is said to have painted on *tulāpāt* (paper made of cotton) all the scenes of the ‘Seven *Vaikuṇṭhas*’ for the presentation of the *Cihna-Yātrā* (drama on Painting). This was accomplished at the request of the seniors of his family. He also believed to have created *Puthi-citra*.²⁶ (scripture painting).

2.5.6. Vṛndāvanī Vastra: Śaṅkaradeva directed the preparation of a forty yard long and twenty yard breath piece of silk cloth woven under his guidance and regular supervision by the weavers of Tāntikuci (present Barpetā), depicting the entire life of Kṛṣṇa from his birth at the jail of Kāṁsa to the killing of Kāṁsa,²⁷ woven in with fibers of various colours. Śaṅkaradeva passed away on the second day of bright moon in the *Bhādra* (August –September) month of 1490 Śakābda or 1568 A.D.

24. Kalita, Naren. (1985). *Bardowār Silpavastu*, P. 9.

25. Das, Jugal. (1999 A.D). *Bhaonar Saj-Sajja aru Saranjam*. P. 52.

26. Neog, Maheswar.(1965). *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*. P. 304.

27. Ramananda, 1122-H., *Katha Guru Charit*. P. 210.

2.5.7. Culture : As the initiator of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, Śaṅkaradeva has ushered in a remarkable cultural renaissance in Assam. One distinctive institution established by him was the *Nāmghar*. The *Nāmghar* of Śaṅkaradeva was not merely a prayer-house but a cultural centre and panchayat hall where people gathered to discuss and solve many of their day to day problems. The *Nāmgharīyā* culture and tradition has been playing a great role in the spiritual upliftment of the Assamese society with the unification of various castes and creeds since its inception till the present day time. Through the community utterings of the names of Lord Kṛṣṇa and community chanting of the devotional verses of *Kīrttan-Ghoṣā*, *Nām-Ghoṣā* and other religious scriptures with the clappings of hands and playing of ‘*tāls*’ in the hundreds and thousands of ‘*Nāmgharas*’, it was quite natural that the hearts of the participant devotees and audiences were submerged in the spiritual feelings and enjoyment. The *Bargīts*, *Bhāonās* and *Satrīyā* Dances immensely contributed towards spiritual upliftment of people. Both *Nāmghar* and *Satra* are intimately associated with the socio-cultural and religious life of the Assamese society. The democratic institution *Nāmghar* provides a common forum for villagers to assemble not only to discuss religious matters, but also to enjoy various performing arts like drama, music and dance organized in the *Nāmghar*.

2.6 Śaṅkaradeva as a Social Reformer

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is one of the greatest poets and a social reformer of India. He was a versatile genius. He was at the same time a religious preacher, musician, dramatist, playwright, composer, singer, choreographer, dancer, painter,

instrumentalist and actor. He was born in a society where all sorts of evil practices resulting from Śaktism, Tāntricism and decadent Buddhism were rampant. Śaṅkaradeva as a social reformer advocated for equal recognition of man irrespective of caste, creed and status through the propagation of his Neo-Vaiṣṇavite faith. This is the greatest point of social reform ushered by the saint. The lower caste people got due recognition for the first time in the social history through the heart searching message of the Great-Guru. Śaṅkaradeva became the savior of the Masses. He inspired the *Bhakti* movement in Assam and united people through his Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*. He enriched Assamese language and literature through his poetry, dramas and songs. The central experience behind Śaṅkaradeva's poetry is the incarnation of Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa. His main objective was to reform the society from ignorance, violence, oppression, exploitation and vandalism in the name of religion. His objective was to propagate Vaiṣṇavism and humanism following democratic philosophy. The society of that time was led by the violent administrators; the people were exploited in the name of religion.²⁸ The society was discriminated by caste, class and religion. Śaṅkaradeva was the greatest reformer, who raised voice for equality and social justice.

Śaṅkaradeva started a revolutionary movement to reform and reconstruct the society. With this aim he established two powerful institutions i.e. *Nāmghar* and *Thān* which later came to be known as *Satra*. He was a great social reformer and a religious preacher who led the *Bhakti* movement in this part of the country. He dismantled the caste structure and laid the foundation of an egalitarian society. The saint provided the

28. Neog, Maheswar.(1965). *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*. P. 82-94.

much needed ideological orientation for the emergence of a casteless society. At that time, Assam faced various problems like violence, communal conflicts, exploitation by the powerful over the powerless, superstitions etc. In such a critical and crucial stage, Śaṅkaradeva succeeded in reforming the society through the medium of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*.²⁹ His endeavour was to preach religion through telling stories or tales. Through the medium of *Bhakti* he wanted to bring about social and spiritual development of people. Universality of religion that Śaṅkaradeva has taught us talks about accepting the people of other religions as brothers and sisters. Understanding universality of all religions is important to reduce conflict among men and communal tensions in the name of religion.

Śaṅkaradeva is the greatest pioneer of social change in Assamese society. His remarkable contributions in various fields and aspects of social lives have always been immensely felt. People can draw numerous lessons from his life and practices. It can be firmly said that, if the present and future generations accept him seriously and try to learn from his life and works, we would have a much better society.

2.7. Life Sketch of Kabīr Dās

Kabīr Dās a 15th century saint poet influenced *Bhakti* movement of medieval India. Kabīr was born in 1398 at Kāshi and departed from the world in 1518 at Maghar, Scholars have different opinions regarding marriage of Kabīr. Literature regarding the life of Kabīr is hazy. “The biography of Kabīr provides detailed

29. Acharyya, N. N. (2003). *The History of Medieval Assam*. P. 258-275.

information about his childhood, life, achievements, works and timeline.”³⁰ Kabīr’s verses are found in Sikhism’s scripture Guru Granth Sahib.

According to life story of Kabīr, Kabīr was a son of widow *Brāhmaṇī*. She left her son on Lahartārā pond in a basket out of fear from the society. A pair of Muslim weaver named Neeru and Neema looked after the baby and named him Kabīr, which means great. Thus Kabīr was picked up and then raised by a Muslim family. Rāmānanda was his Guru.

Kabīr Dās was one of the great reformers of the *Bhakti* movement. He taught Hindu Muslim unity. He believed that God is one and *Īsawar* and *Āllāh* are different names of one God. He taught devotion to God and preached brotherhood among people of the society.

Kabīr’s philosophical tenets were extremely simple. He was known as the guiding spirit of the *Bhakti* movement. He preached *Bhakti* or Devotion through the medium of his ‘*Dohās*’.

Kabīr Panth (Path of Kabīr) is a Sant Mat philosophy based on the teachings of Kabīr.³¹ It is based on devotion to him as one Guru as a means to salvation. Its adherents are from many religious backgrounds as Kabīr never advocated change of religions but highlighted their limitations.

Kabīr was the name given by a *Kāzi* who on opening the *Qurān* came upon this Arabic word which means ‘great’. Kabīr has said in one of his ‘*Dohās*’ or couplets;

30. Agarwal, Taraknath. (1951) *Kabīr Paricay*. P.

31. Gaud, Rajendrasinha. (1955). *Sant Kabīr Darśan*. P.

kabīrā tu hi kabīru tu tore nām kabīr
*rām ratan tab paiye jad pahile tajai sarir //*³²

(Thou art great, you are the same, your name is Kabīr. The jewel Rām is found only when bodily attachment is renounced.)

Kabīr has called himself *Jolāhā*; he has neither referred to himself as a Muslim nor Hindu, he is referring to a caste which was lower than the framework of the four castes. In one of his poems Kabīr says that *Jogī*, Hindus and Muslims were distinct and mutually exclusive groups—

jogī gorakh gorakh karai, hindu rām-uchcharāi
musalmān kahe ek khudai,
*kabīr ko swāmī ghat ghat rahyo samāi.*³³

(*Jogīs* call upon Gorakh, Hindus chant the name of Rām, Muslims say One Khudā, but the Lord of Kabīr pervades every being)

Kabīr was a devotee of *Nirguṇa* (attributeless) *Brahma* which is beyond the three attributes such as *Sattva* (Being), *Rajas* (Becoming), *Tamas* (Non-Being). According to Kabir, God is never born nor does it die. “As snow is caused by water and again snow melts into water, so whatever came to itself and now nothing more can be said.”³⁴

32. Dās, Syām Sondar. (Ed.) (1985), *Kabīr Granthāwalī*, P.262.

33. Ibid. P. 200.

34. Dās, Syām Sondar. (Ed.) (1985), *Kabīr Granthāwalī*, P. 13.

khālik khālak khālak mein khālik. sabghat rahya samāi. ³⁵

‘God is in the world and the world is in God and He permeates everything.’

Weaving was the profession of Kabīr. Gandhiji also gave much weight to spinning and weaving. In several matters there is great similarity in these two great men of India, though functioning was in different periods and in different circumstances.

2.7.1. God of Kabīr Dās:

Kabīr’s Guru Rāmānand has given him the name of Lord Rāma as a Guru mantra which he had interpreted in his own way. He was devoted to the *Nirguṇa Bhakti* and not to *Saguṇa Bhakti* like his Guru. His Rāma was an absolute pure *Satcidānanda*, not the son of Daśaratha or king of Ayodhyā as he said

*dasaratha ke ghar na janmey,
yee chal maya keenha.* ³⁶

He was greatly influenced by the Buddhas the Siddhas and other Islamic tradition. According to him,

*nirguṇa nāma japahn ney bhaiya,
avigati ki gati hakhi na jaiya.* ³⁷

He never differentiated between Allah and Rāma; he always preached to the people that these are only different names of one God. He said that there should be a religion of love and brotherhood among the people without any difference between

35. Ibid. P. 104.

36. Kabir –MANIFEST IAS, <https://www.manifestias.com>> kabir, accessed at 9:30 A.M. 24th June. 2020.

37. Ibid.

high and low class or high caste and low caste. He advocated devotion and surrendering oneself to the God who has no religion or caste. He always believed in the principle of Karma.

2.7.2. Kabīr Dās : A Hindu or A Muslim :

Both Hindus and Muslims claimed the body of Kabīr Dās after his death for cremation according to their own customs and traditions. As per the story described in the literature, when the people removed the cover of the dead body of Kabīr, they found only some flowers which were distributed between the two communities and then they accomplished the funeral according to their own customs and traditions. In fact, Kabir did not identify himself as a Hindu or as a Muslim and he declared that he belonged to both the communities. “I discern God in both. There is no Hindu and no Mussalman. Hindu and Mussalman are the same. Remove the shroud and behold the miracle!”³⁸

Kabīr was perhaps one of those people who went beyond religion. People have been trying since ages, to make others believe that he was a Muslim or a Hindu and have come up with all sorts of logic from scriptures and other sources, but have hardly ever tried to understand the message that he delivered. Quite a lot of his work is adulterated with works of other unknown poets of that time and their authenticity is doubted. Whether he was a Muslim or Hindu it does not matter. Indeed, he was born in a Muslim family, but he went beyond traditional confines of religion and taught conduct. He took the good things from every place and spread it to everyone alike. His mission was to tell us how to be Humans; he wasn't trying to make us Hindus or

38. <https://www.pinterest.com/Kabir>, accessed at 2:25 P.M. 24th June, 2020.

Muslims. So let us put this question aside and see him for what he really was; a man beyond religion.³⁹

2.7.3. Religion of Kabīr Dās

According to Kabīr, the work is the worship and responsibility is like religion. He said — live your life, take responsibilities and do hard work to make your life eternal. Never go away from the responsibilities of the life like accepting *Sannyāsa*. He appreciated and valued the family life which is the real meaning of life.

It has been proved in the history of human tradition that it is not necessary to go to the Himalayas for deep meditation, the result of which can be owned by living in the society itself. Kabīr Dās himself was the ideal indication of this. He beyond practised *Bhakti*, living together with the normal human being. He showed to people *Bhakti* the way of practicing instead of worshipping stones.

The things used by Kabīr as well as other saints of his tradition are still kept safe and secured in the Kabīr Math. The weaving machine, khadav, rudraksh garland (got from his Guru Swami Rāmānanda), rust free trident and all the other things used by Kabīr someday are available at the Kabīr Math.

The social and practical manifestation of Kabīr's philosophy has run through the ages. It has been representing a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim concepts. From Hinduism, Kabīr accepts the concept of reincarnation and the law of Karma. From Islam, he takes the affirmation of the single god and the rejection of caste system and idolatry. The basic religious principles he espouses are simple. According to Kabīr, life is an interplay of two spiritual principles. One is the personal soul (Jivātmā) and

39. <https://www.quora.com>. accessed at 9:20 P.M., 10th Mar., 2020.

the other is God (Paramātmā). It is Kabīr's view that salvation is the process of bringing into union these two divine principles.

Kabīr is a very important figure in Indian history. He is unusual in that he is spiritually significant to Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims alike. Kabīr openly criticized all sects and gave a new direction to the Indian philosophy. Kabīr touched the soul, the conscience, the sense of awareness and the vitality of existence in a manner that is unequal in both simplicity and style.⁴⁰

2.7.4. Literature of Kabīr Dās

It is for this reason that Kabīr is held in high esteem all over the world. Another beauty of Kabīr's poetry is that he picks up situations that surround our daily lives. Thus, even today, Kabīr's poetry is relevant and helpful in both social and spiritual context. Following Kabīr means understanding one's inner self, realizing oneself, accepting oneself as oneself is, and becoming harmonious with one's surroundings.

Kabīr has to his credit much poetry and songs. All of Kabīr's recorded verses are available in Hindi. His lyrics are characterized by a free use of the vernacular and is unfettered by the grammatical bonds of his day. It is this quality which has made his philosophy accessible to generations of Indians.

All the poems and songs credited to the Sant Kabīr are existant in several languages. Kabīr and his poetic response such as banis are his utterances. The poems are called variously as *Dohā*, *Saloka* and *Sākhī*. *Sākhī* means to be memorized and to

40. Iconic Cultural Figure : Kabīr Dās. <https://Kiran365.wordpress.com>>ic. accessed at 9:32 P.M., 10th Mar., 2020.

remind the highest Truth. The memorizing, performing and pondering over these utterances provide for Kabīr and all his followers a way to the spiritual awakening.⁴¹

Some *Dohās* of Kabīr Dās are as follows –

dukh mein sumiran sab kare

sukh mein kare nā koi

jo sukh mein sumiran kare,

*to dukh kāhe ko hoi.*⁴²

“All pray to God in their miserable time. But nobody prays to God in his good time. If everybody pray to God in their good time also, then there will not be any misery.”

Again he says –

nindak nihare rakhiye

āṅgan kuti badhāi,

bin pānī cābun binā

*nirmal kare subhai*⁴³

2.7.5. Literary works of Kabīr Dās

Kabīr was illiterate. His disciples wrote his *Bānīs*. The literature of Kabīr Dās has three parts. These are –

- 1) *Sākhī*

41. <https://www.manifestias.com>> Kabīr. accessed at 9:35 P.M. 10th Mar., 2020.

42. Jijnaso, Lalchanda Dūhan. (2001). *1008 Kabīr Bānī : Satya-Jñānāmṛt*. V. (*Sākhī*)52. P.116.

43. Das, Syamsundar (Ed.) (2015). *Kabīr Ganthāvalī*, V. 3. P117.

2) *Sabada*

3) *Ramainī*

Kabīr, who flourished in the fifteenth century, was probably the greatest lyric poet and mystic of early Hindi literature. His poetry and philosophy left a deep impression in centuries to follow not only in Hindi literature but also in the common man of northern India. He brought Hinduism and Islamism nearer by criticizing and attacking the meaningless rituals and customs in both the religions and by preaching that the ultimate goal of both the religions is identical.⁴⁴

44. Machwe, Prabhakar. (1984). *Kabīr, Makers of Indian Literature*. (Foreword).