

Chapter -VI

COMPARISON OF THE SOCIO- ETHICAL THOUGHTS IN THE CULTURE OF ŚAṆKARADEVA AND KABĪR DĀS

The comparison of the Socio-Ethical Thoughts in the Culture of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās has been discussed under the following Sub-heads:

6.1. Performing Art

- i) *Bhāonā*
- ii) Cultural Activities of Kabīr Dās
- iii) Musical Performance of Śaṅkaradeva
- iv) Kabīr's Bhajans
- v) *Śaṅkarī* Dance/ *Satrīyā* Dance
- vi) Song and Dance of Kabīr Dās

6.2. Ethical Aspects of Cultural Institutions of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās

- i) Ethical Thoughts in *Nāmghar*, *Thān* and *Satra*
- ii) Ethical Aspects of Kabīr's Matha

The above points are discussed hereunder:

6.1. Performing Art :

6.1.1 *Bhāonā* :

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva introduced a new culture which could be termed as *Śaṅkarī* culture. He employed the media of music, dance and drama, painting etc., that is, all aspects of fine arts, in addition to the vast literary works, both original and

translation/transcreation for popularising his tenets to good effect. In fact, Śaṅkaradeva's faith is based on the philosophy of ethics (*sadācāra*) and culture.¹ The cultural aspects of the saint include music, dance and drama as mentioned above. Śaṅkarī culture has taken deep root in the Assamese society for the last 500 years. The dramas of Śaṅkaradeva are known as *Aṅkīyā nāṭs*, which are based on songs, dance and choreography. Performance of *Aṅkīyā nāṭ* is known as *Bhāonā* which is popular both in the rural and urban societies. The *Bhāonā* is generally performed in *Nāmghar* with profound devotion. Besides the six *Aṅkīyā nāṭs* of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva new plays in Assamese language are also seen composed by different persons based on mythological stories of *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, *Bhāgavata* and other *Purāṇas*. The language of *Aṅkīyā nāṭ* is *Brajāvalī*. The *Bhāonās* are performed in open stage. These are enjoyed by all sections of people of the society irrespective of religions, caste, gender and age etc. Generally *Nāmghars* are open without complete enclosures of walls except the *Maṇikūṭ* (the *Sanctum Santorum*). Large number of people are attracted by the performance of *Bhāonā*.

It has been seen that the Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* movement greatly contributed to the growth and development of art and literature in Assam. Thus, in an age when literacy was confined to the privileged and learning was essentially aristocratic, the *Bhāonā* served as a most powerful agency for disseminating religious and ethical ideas to the masses as it is in itself the greatest achievement of Śaṅkaradeva's dramatic representation.²

1. Chutia, Dharmeswar. (2011) *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophy*. P. 100.

2. Barua, Birinchi Kumar. (2009). *Śaṅkaradeva Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam*, P. 85.

The *Bhāonās* have great ethical and moral impact on the spectators and the society at large, because in every step of performance of *Bhāonās*, rituals are performed. These are based on devotion to God. The stories of *Bhāonās* spread messages of brotherhood, morality and spiritual feelings in the minds of the people. These are very positive socio-ethical aspects of *Bhāonās*, which were introduced by Śaṅkaradeva in the 15th and 16th centuries initially as *Aṅkīyā nāṭs*. The first play was named *Cihna-yātrā* which was staged for the first time in his birth place Bordowā in the 15th century. It has been recorded (*Carit puthis*) that around ten thousand people attended the function and it was staged continuously for seven days. This is a new kind of play based on stories on the *Bhāgavata*. After that Śaṅkaradeva had written six plays later known as *Aṅkīyā nāṭs*. Besides *Nāmghars*, *Bhāonās* are performed under temporary sheds (pandal) with great devotion and formalities. Some of the regular *Bhāonā* festivals now prevalent in Assam are—

1. *Bāre Chahariyā Bhāonā of Jāmuguri, Assam.*
2. *Annual Bhāonā Festival at Neharubāli, Nagaon, Assam etc.*

In some *Satras*, *Aṅkīyā nāṭ* festivals are also organized annually. Moreover, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha which is a great religio-cultural organization of N.E. India enact *Aṅkīyā nāṭs* in various places of Assam.

Such cultural activities related to Śaṅkaradeva have great positive impact on the Assamese society. The main impact of *Bhāonās* on the minds of the people are feeling of well being, togetherness, good behaviour, non-violence, fellow-feeling etc. All these lead to a strong socio-ethical foundation of the Assamese society. One can thus visualize a liberated and ideal society through development of their creativity in

the fields of art and culture. In this regard, the system of theatrical performance called *Bhāṇā* is an invention of Śaṅkaradeva in more than one way: it brought the morals from the scriptures to the mind of men; it gave them pleasure and creativity; and an opportunity to assemble and more importantly it infused within them a cultural spirit. Śaṅkaradeva developed music and dance and spread morality and religion among the common people.³

6.1.2 Cultural Activities of Kabīr Dās :

On the other hand, Kabīr Dās did not write any drama or one act play, but his *Sākhī*, *Sabad* and *Ramainī* reflect the dramatic image and like Śaṅkaradeva he effected social reform by his *Dohās*. In the age of Kabīr, some followers used to assemble under a big tree and sing Kabīr's *Sākhī* and *Dohā* through a lyrical mode accompanied by musical instruments play. Sizeable audience gathered there to watch and listen to songs. People enjoyed the real amusement of life. By the way of *Sākhī*, *Pad*, *Ramainī* Kabīr Dās tried to strengthen the socio-culture and ethical foundation of the Indian society just as Śaṅkaradeva disseminated the ethical and spiritual messages among the masses through his *Aṅkīyā Nāṭs*.

Kabīr Dās belonged to the weaving occupation and caste Julaha. His immense contribution towards the Bhakti Movement in India is considered as a pioneering one along with Farid, Ravidas and Namdev. He was a saint of combined mystical nature, which made him of a distinctive religion of his own.⁴

3. Nath, Dambarudhar. (2012). *Satra Society and Culture Pitambardeva Goswami and History of Garamura Satra*, P. 5.

4. [https://en.m. Wikipedia org> wiki.](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/) accessed at 12:15A.M. .11th Mar., 2020.

6.1.3 Musical Performance of Śaṅkaradeva :

Bargīt of Śaṅkaradeva :

The *Bargīts* are devotional songs endowed with spirituality, composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. They are classical songs which are essentially different from pan India classical songs. Every *Bargīt* is based on a definite *Rāga*, which is related to body and mind of the singer and listeners as well. There are certain formalities in presentation of a *Bargīt*. Generally the instruments like *Khol* and *Tāl* are played while singing a *Bargīt* following definite musical rules. Such *Bargīts* impart the feeling of morality and spirituality in the mind of the people.

In addition to *Bargīts*, other devotional songs like *Bhaṭimās*, *Toṭaya* and *Capaya* composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are also based on the ideas of high morality and spiritual teachings. These are presented with utmost devotion.

In addition to the above, different religious scriptures of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are recited on different occasions and on regular basis in the *Nāmghars* and some *Satras*. These are recited with melodious tunes. In the *Nām Prasāṅga*, *Tāl* like *Bhortāl* is played with definite *tāls*. In such case, one *ghoṣā* or refrain is proclaimed by the leader (*Nām lagoā*) followed by the *padas* or stanzas composed by Śaṅkaradeva in his great work the *Kīrttan-ghoṣā*. The devotees repeat the first *ghoṣā* after every *pada* and a definite musical rhythm is maintained althroughout. While doing so the minds of the devotees are absorbed in the devotion to the one God Kṛṣṇa. The impact of such congregational prayer lifts the minds of the devotees to high moral and aesthetic planes. This has great socio- ethical impact on the people of the society.

6.1.4 Kabīr's *Bhajan* :

In a broad sense, Kabīr Dās has not written any religious poetry, but his poems and songs are known as *Sākhī* and *Bhajan* which are his vocal literature. Through *Sākhī*, Kabīr Dās has expressed human culture, religious rules and regulations and he has negated the blind faiths in Indian society. All of Kabīr's recorded verses are in Hindi. His lyrics are characterized by a free use of the vernacular and are unfettered by the grammatical bonds of his day. It is this quality which has made his philosophy accessible to generations of Indian.⁵

Just like Śaṅkaradeva's *Bargīt*, Kabīr Dās tried to reflect on society with his *Bhajan*, *Sākhī* and *Dohās*. Kabīr's *Sākhī*, *Sabad* and *Ramainī* are milestones of society to reform the bad elements of our culture and religious rules. Kabīr tried to root out all types of illness from our society. Śaṅkaradeva writes—

*sava aparādhaka bādhaka tuvā nāma
tāhe śaraṇa lehu jāni //*⁶

All sins are pardoned if we purely devote our soul to God.

Like this, Kabīr Dās says —

*sava kṛt kārya hari hit sār /
khai kabīr taji jaga byāubahār //*⁷

All deeds are meaningless, only the name of God is meaningful. So, we should shun other paths and should only recite the name of God.

5. <https://all-poetry.com>> Kabīr. accessed at 12:20 A.M. .11th Mar., 2020

6. Borkakoti, S.Kr. (English rendering of *Bargīt*), (2012). *Great Songs*. No.4. P.7

7. Shashanka, Shatrughna Ray. (2012). *Kabīr ke Dharma Siddhānta kī prāsaṅgikatā*, P.104.

Bhajan is a kind of devotional song. *Kabīr ke Dohe* with lyrics is known as *Bhajan*. Kabīr's poetry has great quality, it does not stale. Kabīr tried to put his finger on the basic yearnings of man, the eternal quest for internal peace. Kabīr's poetry serves as a great inspiration where religions turn into bound ritualistic codes, where philosophies turn into mere verbal jugglery, where there is a crisis of conscience and the leadership is lame. His poetic world is not a vale of tears, not merely a dark night of separation, not an abyss which can never be crossed. He has the robust and rebellious spirit of a rustic. He has always a Hope Beyond. No doubt the springs of this Hope are spiritual and it may be argued that today in an age of 'no values', all that sounds unreal. But Kabīr has much left in his poetry, even when one does not agree with his theism and so to enjoy Kabīr one need not be a *Kabīr-Panthī*. Here in lies the secret of his ever continuing greatness as a poet; he transcends time and place. His poetic vision is larger and higher. He did not bother about what kind of political set-up was in Hindustan in the thirteenth or fourteenth century; he did not even care for the literary heresies or traditional tentacles of his times. He just did what Nietzsche would have said, his 'Yea-saying'. This requires great courage in any age. Kabīr had that daring to say the truth and the heroism to suffer its consequences. Kabīr's poetry therefore stands in a very different category, as it breaks through many conventional bondages. It is the poetry of a Free Spirit.⁸

Kabīr said in his *Bhajan* —

bhajan kab kariho janam sirān

garbhavās mein bhagti kabule

8. Machwe, Prabhakar. (1984). *Kabīr : Makers of Indian Literature*. P. 40.

bāhar āye bhulān
bālapan mein khoye gavāye
tarunāi mein abhimān
vruddha bhaye tānn thaakān lāge
sir dhuni dhuni pachchitān
kahe kabeer suno bhāi sādho
*jam ke hāth bikān.*⁹

It means one who doesn't chant God's name is leading a wasteful life.

Again Kabīr said —

moko kahan dhoondhe re bande
main to tere pās mein
nā teerath mein
nā moorat mein
nā ekanth niwas mein
nā mandir mein
nā masjid mein
nā kābe kailās mein
main to tere pās mein
moko kahan dhoondhe re bande
nā main jap mein,
nā main tap mein
nā main barat upās mein

9. Bhajan Kab Kariho with Lyrics & Meaning Kabir song / kahat...Rajshri Soul. accessed at 8:15 P.M. 24th May. 2020.

nā main kriya karama mein rahatā

nāhi jog sanyās mein

main to tere pās mein

khoji hoye turat mil jāon

ek pal ki taalāsh mein

kahat kabir suno bhāi sādho

main to hoon, vishwās mein

*mein to tere pās mein.*¹⁰

It means, where do you search for me my friend? I reside in you; neither in pilgrimage nor in idols, and not in solitude too. You won't find me in temples or mosques or in the mountain peaks. I reside in you. I am not in prayers or meditation, nor in fasts and *yogī* exercise, I do not reside in rituals nor in hermitage, I reside with you. Look for me and I'll be there in a moment's search. Says Kabīr, I reside nowhere else but in your faith, I reside with you.

6.1.5 Śaṅkarī Dance / Satrīyā Dance:

The Śaṅkarī dance which is recognized as Satrīyā dance (Śaṅkarī dance plus non-Śaṅkarī dance) introduced by *Satras*, by Sangit Natak Academy Govt. of India, is based on stories of Kṛṣṇa and His paraphernalia, which leads to high aesthetic pleasure and thus improves socio-ethical value of the society.

Moreover, entire Śaṅkarī culture has influenced the Assamese society at its grass root level. The lessons of Śaṅkarī culture is visible among the devotees in their

10. Moko Kahan Dhoonde Re Bande with Lyrics & Meaning-Kabir... Rajshri Soul 3years ago -214k views, 1. 46M Subscribers. accessed at 9:30 P.M. 28th May. 2020.

day to day life in such occasion as greeting an individual by another by his folded palms and pronouncing the work Kṛṣṇa. This means every individual is regarded as a part of God hence one *Ātman* (individual) greets the other with folded hands. Another example is that if unknowingly one touches another individual by foot, then one immediately begs pardon pronouncing the holy name Kṛṣṇa. It means the *Śaṅkarī* culture has taught the lessons of brotherhood and feeling of well-being to all. Non-violence is another great lesson of *Śaṅkarī* culture. This is an indication of high moral and ethical values, which inflect the minds of the people of the society.

The *Satra* institution of Assam is a product of the Vaiṣṇavite movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva. The centre of all religious activities of a *Satra* is the *Nāmghar*.¹¹ The first stage of the growth of the *Satra* institution began with Mādhavadeva and Dāmodardeva, disciples of Śaṅkaradeva. But during Śaṅkaradeva's life time, the religious institution organised by him did not take the shape of a regular institution like *Satra* as seen today. Śaṅkaradeva no doubt laid the foundation of the institution of the *Satras*, but the superstructure was raised during the succeeding generations. One of the most notable social contributions of the *Satra* institution is the introduction of *Bhakti* culture and moral principles in the lives of the people who were devotees of the *Satras*.

The religious order established by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva continued to sponsor the *Śaṅkarī* School of art form even after he passed away. Each residential unit maintained by his followers for proselytizing activities, which came to be known either as *Thān* or *Satra*, had its own artists called *Khanikar*. The *Śaṅkarī* art form has been

11. Sarma, Satyendra Nath. (1998). *The Satra Institution of Assam*. In Chaliha, B. P. (Ed.) (1998) *Śaṅkaradeva Studies in Culture*. P. 72-79.

preserved mostly by these *Khanikars*. Some *Thāns* or *Satras* even maintained art schools. The *Pāṭhāusī Thān*, originally established by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, was one such *Thāns*.¹²

6.1.6. Song and Dance of Kabīr Dās

Kabīr has not introduced any dance like *Śaṅkaī* and *Satrīyā*. But some *Bhajans* and *Dohās* of Kabīr are performed by singing and dancing. For example, Kabīr's followers performed *Bhajans* and *Dohās* in Kabīr's Jayanti by singing and dancing.

Kabīr Dās said that he was an illiterate person, he had no formal education, but his mind and spirit were so high that educated persons also failed to feel his thoughts. Although Kabīr Dās said that he was illiterate, he was actually not illiterate. He had so much practical knowledge about the society, that we can not consider him as illiterate. The impact of *Dohās* and *Sākhīs* of Kabīr Dās on the society is really very significant.

6.2. Ethical aspects of Cultural Institutions of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās :

6.2.1 Ethical Thoughts in *Nāmghar*, *Thān* and *Satra*

Every Hindu village of Assam has atleast one *Nāmghar* which is the centre of moral and spiritual education for the villagers. The people show great respect to *Nāmghar* which was established in 1469 A.D. for the first time by Śaṅkaradeva at Bordowā, Nagaon, Assam.¹³ These *Nāmghars* are imparting very high moral and ethical values to the society. People of other religious orders also attend cultural function organized in *Nāmghars*.

12. Borkakoti, Sanjib Kr. (2007). *Evolution of Śaṅkarī Art Form*. In Kalita, Biswajit (Ed.). *Mahāpuruṣa Jyoti*, Vol. No. IX.

13. Baruah, Madhurjya Mondita. (2009). *Srimanta Sankaradevar Janmasthan*. P. 55.

Thāns and *Satras* of Assam are the religious and pious places which are related to Vaiṣṇava Guru Śaṅkaradeva and his followers. Bardowā is the first *Thān* also known as *Kīrttanghar* and *Devagrha* established by Śaṅkaradeva, the great Assamese leader of *Bhakti* movement and the very cultural identity of Assamese people. Education is a process of all round development of life. *Thāns* and *Satras* are the centres of education. Through these institutions, people develop themselves spiritually, morally, socially and mentally. So these institutions have strong contribution to the society from the socio-ethical point of view.

The different cultural functions related to Śaṅkaradeva are organized in Assam and all of them are propagating the moral and ethical education among the people of the society.

6.2.2 Ethical Aspects of Kabīr's *Matha*

There is no any prayer hall introduced by Kabīr Dās like Śaṅkaradeva's *Nāmghar*. Kabīr taught his disciples under a big tree. His disciples sat down in an oval form and Kabīr Dās explained his sayings. Sometimes they sang devotional songs like *Bhajan* etc. with Kabīr Dās. The *Bhajan*, *Dohā*, *Sākhī*, *Sabad*, *Ramainī* are propagating the moral and ethical education for the society.

About Kabīr's *Matha* we know as follows –

Kabīr *Matha* is located at the Kabīr Chaura, Vārānasī and Lahartārā, Vārānasī in the back passageways. Nirutila was the house of his parents Niru and Nima. Now it has become the accommodation for students and scholars who study Kabīr's work. In Kabīr's *Matha*, devotees are found busy with singing *Kabīr Ke Dohe*. It is the place of

giving real education of life to the people. It is believed that Kabīr's family is still living in the Kabīr Chaura in Vārānasī.

Kabīr Chaura Matha Mulgadi is the home, historical work place and meditation place of the Saint-Shiromani Kabīr Dās. He was the only Saint of his type, known as the "Sab Santan Sartaj." It is considered that the history of humanity is worthless without Saint Kabīr. Kabīr Chaura Matha Mulgadi has its own affluent traditions and effective history. It is the home of Kabīr as well as a vidyapith for all the devotees of medieval times. The Indian Saints of the medieval India got their spiritual education from this place. It has been proved in the history of Indian religious tradition that it is not necessary to go to the Himalaya for the deep meditation; it can be done by living in the society. Kabīr Dās himself was the ideal indication of this. He is the embodiment of *Bhakti*, though leading the life of a normal human being. He showed the way of *Bhakti* in a relaxed manner to the people instead of worshipping stone.

The used things of Kabīr and other followers of his tradition are still kept safe and secure in the Kabīr Matha. The weaving machine, Khadau, rudraksh garland (got from his Guru Swami Ramanand), rust free trident and all the other things used by Kabīr are preserved at the Kabīr Matha.¹⁴ Now Kabīr Matha has become the accommodation for students and scholars who study Kabīr's work. Kabīr's family is believed to have lived in the locality of Kabīr Chaura in Vārānasī. Kabīr Matha located in the back alleys of Kabīr Chaura celebrates his life and times. Accompanying the property is a house named Nirutila which houses Niru and Nima's graves.¹⁵

14. <https://www.manifestias.com>> Kabīr. accessed at 12:22 A.M. .11th Mar.. 2020.

15. ICONIC CULTURA.....//Kiran365.wordpress.com. accessed at 12:30 A.M. .11th Mar.. 2020.

Thus, we can conclude that both Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās offered their outstanding contributions on the humanistic approaches through literature and culture to the people of the society, which have lasting values.