

Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION

The North-East India, basically the Brahmaputra Valley witnessed various ups and downs throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. In these centuries, many saints were born in India and they wanted to reform the society. In medieval India Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568 A.D.) of the North-East India and Saint Kabīr Dās (1398-1518 A.D.) of the Northern India tried their best to reform the society.

In the medieval period of India most serious problems cropped up. For example, illiteracy and casticism, religious and economic problems engulfed the society to a great extent. Some great saints tried to reform the society and to uplift the downtrodden people. Among the great saints and reformers who brought social and religious transformations in medieval India, Śaṅkaradeva occupied the most remarkable position. Śaṅkaradeva, the shining star of the North-Eastern India propagated some fundamental beliefs and concepts which are comparable to those of Guru Nānaka, Rāmānanda, Kabīr Dās etc. Kabīr Dās was the disciple of Rāmānanda. Kabīr openly criticized all sects and gave a new direction to the Indian philosophy. This is due to his straight forward approach that has an universal appeal. It is for this reason that Kabīr is held in high esteem all over the world.¹ An attempt has been made here to give a brief contemporary and comparative account on the reformatory works of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās. Both the saints tried to reform the society according to

1. ICONIC CULTURAL FIGURES : KABIR DAS. <https://kiran365.wordpress.com>ic>, accessed at 9:30 P.M. , 25th , Dec. .2019.

their own way of thinking. Both of them showed the right path and guided the society so that the people could progress through right path. They declared that God is one who is eternal, unchanging, omnipotent, omniscient, and that God alone is truth. Both Kabīr Dās and Śaṅkaradeva preached religion of love, devotion and universal brotherhood. Both of them renounced worship of idols, stone images and preached the unalloyed devotion to the supreme God who pervades the universe.

It is on the above background that the present topic has been selected for study. It will be attempted to see whether similarities and dissimilarities are there from the socio-ethical point of view in the lives and works of Kabīr Dās and Śaṅkaradeva. It will also be studied how they dedicated their lives to enlighten the society and organized the ethnic culture of India. Both advocated a classless society as there is no differentiation of soul. Śaṅkaradeva says –

*kukura śṛgāla gardabharo ātmā rāma /
jāniyā savāko pari karibā praṇāma //*²

It means, “the soul of all creatures are the same. Knowing this, pay reverence to all living creatures.”³

Kabīr also considers that all are equal in the eyes of the Almighty irrespective of their being high and low. He says –

ek hi maṭi kī sab kāyā unca nic jau nāhi

2. Saikia, Purnananda. (2006). *Śrīmanā Śaṅkaradeva's The Kīrtana-Ghoṣā*. V. 1823

3. Chakrabarty, Amalendu. (Ed.), (2000). *Prācyā-Prajñā*, Vol-III. P. 65. (Eng. Tr. By G.N. Dās)

ek hi jyoti bare kabīrā sabki antar manhi ⁴

It means, “all are made of same elements, no high no low when born, the same glow shines in every one, in the heart of every man.”⁵

1.1. DEFINITION OF THE TOPIC :

1.1.1. What is meant by Socio-Ethical Thoughts?

Socio-ethics means a set of rules or guidelines, based on ethical choices and values that society adheres to. Ethics is the study of moral issues. Many of these rules are unspoken, but are expected to be followed. As the phrase suggests, “Social ethics” in its largest sense deals with what is right (good) and wrong (bad) in a social unit. The social body can be broken down into simpler social units such as a person, a group, an institution, a country or the global community as a whole.⁶

Social responsibility is an ethical theory in which individuals are accountable for fulfilling their civic duty, the actions of an individual must benefit the whole of society.

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. Traditionally, ethics have undertaken to analyze, evaluate and develop normative moral criteria for dealing with moral problems.” “Ethics” and “ethical” are often used synonymously with “morals” (or morality) and “moral” and

4. Chakrabarty, Amalendu. (Ed.), (2000). *Prācyā-Prajñā*, Vol-III. P. 65 (Eng Tr by G.N.Das).

5. Ibid. Vol- III.

6. https://www.quora.com/what_is_social_ethics? .accessed at 10:20 P.M.. 6th Mar. .2020.

when reference is made indifferently to the ethics or to the morality of a person or a group, it indicates their ethical or moral virtues or qualities. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines ethics as the science of morals or moral principles. It is very often used as a synonym or even an interchangeable expression for terms like values, norms, standards, morality etc. The word ‘ethics’ is defined as “the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with normal duty and obligations.” Thus, personal ethics has been referred to as “the rules by which an individual lives his or her personal life”, and accounting ethics pertains to “the code that guides the professional conduct” of persons engaged in various activities. Business ethics is concerned with truth and justice and has a variety of aspects; market, society, corporate behaviour etc. All the three types of ethics are interrelated and each one is the manifestation of other in Gandhian perspective.⁷

Ethics or moral philosophy is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct. As a field of intellectual enquiry, moral philosophy also is related to the fields of moral psychology, descriptive ethics and value theory.

There are several major theories of ethics such as Virtue Ethics, Natural Law Ethics, Social Contract Ethics and Deontological Ethics etc.

Socio-ethical thought is the branch of ethics that investigates the set of questions that arise when considering how one ought to act, morally speaking. These theories offered an overarching moral principle one could appeal to in resolving

7. Mishra, Anil Dutta. (2010). *Mahatma Gandhi on Ethics*. P. 16.

difficult moral decisions. Ethics is a system of moral principles and a branch of philosophy which defines what is good for the individuals and the society.

Social contract theory says that people live together in a society in accordance with an agreement that establishes moral and political rules. Social contract theory, nearly as old as philosophy itself, is the view that a person's moral and political obligations are dependent upon a contract or agreement among them to form the society in which they live.⁸

1.1.2. The Theories of Ethics

The field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong behaviours. Philosophers today usually divide ethical theories into three general subject areas. These are meta ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics.

According to Vanaye Hamilton, ethical theories often provide direction and influence on what is considered right.

Ethics has been divided into the following types:

1. Virtue Ethics (or aretaic ethics): Taken from Greek 'ἀρετή' (arete) are normative ethical theories which emphasize virtues of mind, character and sense of honesty. Virtue ethicists discuss the nature and definition of virtues and other related problems which focus on the consequences of an action.⁹ These include how

8. <https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/Social-Contract-Theory-Ethics-Unwrapped>. accessed at 10:40P.M., 6th Mar., 2020.

9. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtue_ethics. accessed at 1:55P.M., 8th Mar., 2020.

virtues are acquired, how they are applied in various real life contexts, and whether they are rooted in an universal human nature or in a plurality of cultures.

- 1.1 Stoicism : Stoicism is similar with Patience or Virulence. Stoicism is a school of Hellenistic Philosophy which was founded by zeno of citium, in Athens, in the early 3rd century BC. Stoicism is a philosophy of personal ethics informed by its system of logic and its views on the natural world.¹⁰
- 1.2 Contemporary Virtue Ethics : Many defenders of contemporary virtue ethics contend that they directly compete with modern ethical theories such as consequentialism and deontology.¹¹ They are based on moral dilemmas, indeterminacy, knowledge and reasonable judgment.
2. Hedonism : Hedonism is a school of thought that argues that seeking pleasure and avoiding suffering are the only components of well-being. Ethical hedonism is the view that combines hedonism with welfarist ethics, which claims that what we should do depends exclusively on what affects the well-being individuals have.¹²
 - 2.1 Cyrenaic Hedonism : The cyrenaics were hedonists who held that pleasure especially physical was the supreme good in life, one which they thought more intense and more desirable than mental pleasures. Pleasure is the only good and pain is the only evil in life.¹³

10. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/>, accessed at 2:15 P.M., 8th Mar., 2020.

11. <https://www.tandfonline.com/abs>, contemporary virtue ethics, accessed at 2:25P.M., 8th Mar., 2020.

12. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/>, Hedonism-Wikipedia, accessed at 2:30 P.M., 8th Mar., 2020.

13. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/>, Cyrenaics-Wikipedia, accessed at 3:00 P.M., 8th Mar., 2020.

- 2.2 Epicureanism : Epicureanism is a system of philosophy based upon the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, founded around 307BC. Epicurus was an atomic materialist who followed the steps of Democritus. His materialism led him to a general attack on superstition and divine intervention.¹⁴
- 2.3 State Consequentialism : State consequentialism, also known as mohist consequentialism, is a consequentialist ethical theory which evaluates the moral worth of an action based on how it contributes to the basic well-beings of a state, through social order, material wealth and population growth.¹⁵
- 2.4 Consequentialism Teleology : Consequentialism is the class of normative ethical theories holding that the consequences of one's conduct are the ultimate basis for any judgment about the rightness or wrongness of that conduct. Consequentialist theories differ in how they define moral goods.¹⁶
- 2.4.1 Utilitarianism : Utilitarianism is a moral theory that advocates actions that promote overall happiness or pleasure and rejects actions that cause unhappiness or harm. An utilitarian philosophy, when directed to making social, economic or political decisions, aims for the betterment of the society.¹⁷
- 2.5 Deontology : In moral Philosophy, deontological ethics or deontology (from Greek deon, "obligation, duty") is the normative ethical theory that the

14. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epicureanism>-Wikipedia. accessed at 9:50 P.M.. 8th Mar.. 2020.

15. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Consequentialism-Wikipedia. accessed at 1:20 P.M.. 10th Mar.. 2020.

16. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consequentialism>. accessed at 2:08 P.M.. 10th Mar.. 2020.

17. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/U/utilitarianism-defined/>. accessed at 8:52 P.M.. 10th Mar.. 2020.

morality of an action should be based on whether that action itself is right or wrong under a series of rules, rather than based on the consequences of the action.¹⁸

2.6 Pragmatic Ethics: Pragmatic Ethics is a theory of normative philosophical ethics. Ethical pragmatists such as John Dewey believes that some societies have progressed morally in much the same way they have attained progress in science. Ethical pragmatists think that norms, principles and moral criteria are likely to be improved as a result of inquiry.¹⁹

2.7 Ethics of Care: The ethics of care is a normative ethical theory that holds that moral action centers on inter-personal relationships and care or benevolence as a virtue. Eoc is one of a cluster of normative ethical theories that were developed by feminists in the second half of the twentieth century.²⁰

2.8 Role Ethics : Role ethics is an ethical theory based on family roles. Unlike virtue ethics, role ethics is not individualistic. Morality is derived from a person's relationship with their community. The ethics of Confucianism is an example of role ethics.²¹

18. [https:// en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki, Deontological ethics-Wikipedia](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deontological_ethics). accessed at 8:55 P.M.. 10th Mar., 2020.

19. [https:// en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki, Pragmatic ethics-Wikipedia](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pragmatic_ethics). accessed at 9:10 P.M.. 10th Mar., 2020.

20. [https:// en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki, Ethics of care-Wikipedia](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics_of_care). accessed at 9:12 P.M.. 10th Mar., 2020.

21. [https:// en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki, Role ethics-Wikipedia](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role_ethics). accessed at 9:14 P.M.. 10th Mar., 2020.

1.1.3. Social Duty of Ethics:

Ethics is the study which deals with human conduct. Man, as a social being must have some principles for orderly social life. Ethics as a moral science, studies some principles which make our social life most worthwhile.²²

Social responsibility is an ethical theory, in which individuals are accountable for fulfilling their civic duty, the actions of an individual must benefit the whole of society. In this way, there must be a balance between economic growth and the welfare of society.

1.1.4. What is the Meaning of Social Responsibility?

Social responsibility is an ethical framework which suggests that an entity, be it an organization or individual, has an obligation to act for the benefit of society at large. Social responsibility is a duty of every individual. Every individual has to perform so as to maintain a balance between the economy and the ecosystems.

1.1.5. Morality of Ethics:

Ethics and morals relate to 'right' and 'wrong' conducts. While these two are sometimes used interchangeably, they are different. Ethics refers to rules provided by an external source, e.g, codes of conduct in work places or principle in religions. Morals on the other hand, refer to an individual's own principles regarding what is right and what is wrong.

1.2. Aims and Objectives of the Study :

Both Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās were leading lights of medieval *Bhakti* movement in *Bhāratvarṣa*. They left permanent marks on the society

22. Sharma, Nilima. (Ed.) (2008). *The Philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva An Appraisal*. Vol. 1. P. 262.

in the sub-continent in both religious and cultural spheres. There are many similarities in the religious principles preached by these two great social reformers. They showed the right path to the society. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was an extra-ordinary person in every sense of the term. His talent was enormous and extensive. He was in fact, a pioneer in several areas. On the other hand, Kabīr was also an extra-ordinary person in his own sense. Although he was illiterate, his knowledge was incomparable with anybody of the society in his times. His ‘Dohās’ cannot be underestimated with any arguments. About his illiteracy he has written thus –

mashi kāgad sua nahi,

kalam gahi nahi hāth ²³

It means “I have not touched paper, ink and not handled pen with hand”

Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās were the epitome of love and universal brotherhood. They were preaching devotion to God and love for all creatures. Both were social reformers and leading lights for the society.

1.3 Objectives of the Study :

There are four objectives of the present study. These are as follows –

1. To compare the doctrines of the religions as propagated by Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās.
2. To compare the socio-ethical thoughts in the religions of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās.

23. Nagendra, (Ed.), (1989). *Hindi Sahitya kā Itihas*. P. 144

3. To compare the socio-ethical thoughts in the literature of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās.
4. To compare the socio-ethical thoughts in the culture of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās.

1.4 Significance of the Study :

Both Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās had extra-ordinary personalities with innumerable dimensions. Their multifaceted activities left indelible marks on the Indian society. They launched a strong trend of literature and culture. Further, their followers created a great mass of literary works in Assamese and Hindi languages respectively. Śaṅkaradeva tried to disseminate knowledge of human life and society by writing some devotional songs later called as *Borgīts*. Kabīr Dās also composed some important ‘Dohās’ and ‘Ulatbasiya’s. Both the saints tried to unite all the people belonging to different castes and creeds of the society on one platform. But subsequently the society was again engulfed with caste divisions on the basis of Brahmanical doctrines of Hinduism. Both the saints announced that God is one and all the creatures are his children. So all of us are brothers and sisters on the same boat, sailing the life boat in this world. Śaṅkaradeva’s disciple Mādhavadeva has written –

kṛṣṇa eka deva dukhahārī *kālamāyādiro adhikārī*
kṛṣṇa bine śrestha deva nāhi nāhi āra,
sṛṣṭi sthiti antakārī deva *tānta bine āna nāhi keva*
*jānibā viṣṇuse samaṣṭa jagate sāra*²⁴

24. *Nām-Ghoṣā*. V. 586.

It means, “Lord Kṛṣṇa is the almighty God, Kṛṣṇa is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is the chief cause of all.”

Kabīr Dās also said –

jhāl bāoi jhāl dāhine, jhālahi mahi biwhar

*āgoi pichoi jhālmoi rakhoi sirjanhār.*²⁵

It means, “Only one God can save us from the fire of the world, so we must bow down our head to that one God.”

Thus, the study is expected to throw some new lights on the life and works of the two great saints of medieval India from the socio-ethical points of view.

1.5 The Research Problem :

Both Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās were leading lights of medieval *Bhakti* movement in Bhāratavarṣa and there are many similarities and dissimilarities in the religious principles preached by these two great social reformers.

The Main Problems of Study are as Follows :

- i) What were the religious doctrines of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās ?
- ii) What were the impacts of the religion and culture of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās on the society?
- iii) What were the impacts of socio-ethical thoughts of Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās on society?
- iv) What was the concept about gods and goddesses and the Almighty?

25. Singh, Puspapal. (1988). *Kabīr Granthāvalī Satīk*. P. 232.

v) What are the places of India visited by the two great saints?

1.6 Hypotheses :

- 1.6.1 Both Śaṅkaradeva and Kabīr Dās were leading lights for the society.
- 1.6.2 Both advocated a classless society as there is no differentiation of the soul of each individual.
- 1.6.3 Both of them believed in one God.
- 1.6.4 Kabīr Dās believed 'Nirguṇ-mārg', Śaṅkaradeva believed in Nirguṇa state through Saguṇa aspect of lord Kṛṣṇa.
- 1.6.5 Both of them introduced novel thoughts which left a socio-ethical order in the society.

1.7 Methodology of the Study :

Towards attainment of the objectives and to prove the hypotheses, both historical and literary studies methods will be used and attempt will be made to review their motto in the present environment.

1.8 Types of Data :

Data will be collected from the primary sources and we will also use secondary information wherever available.

i) Primary Data (for analytical method)

- a) *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanṭa Śaṅkaradeva Vākyaṃṛta*
- b) *Kīrtana-Ghoṣā* of Śaṅkaradeva and *Nāma-Ghoṣā* of Mādhavadeva.
- c) *Chārit Puthis* by different hagiographers

- d) *Pūrnāṅga Kathāguru Charit* of Sanjib Kumar Borkakati and different hagiographers
- e) *Bordowā Thān*, Musium & Library.
- f) Life history of Śaṅkaradeva and other books of Śaṅkaradeva written by scholars.
- g) Life history of *Kabīr Dās*
- h) *Kabīr Granthāvalī Satīk*
- i) *Kabīr Bānī Pīush*
- j) *Sant Kavi Kabīr*.
- k) *Kabīr Granthāvalī*

ii) Literature Study :

Primary data will be collected from the following sources –

Literary materials like books, journals etc. will be consulted from different libraries, Sankarite scholars etc..

1.9 Presentation of Information:

- i) The collected information will be presented in different chapters divided on the basis of the objectives of study.
- ii) Secondary sources like books, magazines, websites and other related documents will be used wherever available.