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INTRODUCTION

Vendanta Philosophy is an astika system of Indian Philosophy and Advaitavada is a highly technical term in the realm of philosophy. The present work is an attempt to search the vedantic streak in Sankaradeva's Theology.

The Upanisads deal with the double voice of Philosophy and religion. They represent the highest reality as absolute and God, Brahman and Parameswara. Negative descriptions as well as positive characteristics of Brahman comes under the purview of the Upanisads, which are found in every great religious literature of India. All India Bhakti Movement can be included within the school of vedanta philosophy under the umbrella of Indian Philosophy. The basic religion behind the vedanta philosophy is Hinduism. Again, Neo-Vaisnavism is the basic religion behind the Vedanta-vaishnavite Philosophy of Ramanuja, Madhava, Nimbarka and Ballava. All the vaishnavite Philosophers are more or less influenced by the Upanisadic Philosophy.

Vaisnavism is one of the oldest Religious Cults of India which is a cult of bhakti or devotion and holds that God can be approached only through love. This religious belief claims that bhakti is the best way of attaining the highest salvation. With this cult grew up a new literary tradition not only in Sanskrit but in other languages also. Contributions of the
vaisnava have enriched Indian literature for hundreds of years. Vaisnavism, centred on the concept of Lord Visnu, has a glorious History in India. In the Rg.veda, Visnu is regarded as the God of benevolence and mercy. In the Mahabharata, Visnu is worshipped as a protector of humanity. There are numerous mythological stories in the upanisadic literature, where Visnu is described as the God of supremacy. Although, Vaisnavism or All India Bhakti Movement flourished from the vedic period yet it attained the due status during the Gupta era or the forth and fifth century of Christian era. King Samudragupta of Gupta Dynasty was the first king who elevated vaisnavism by providing it a royal status. (Sarma, Nilima (ed.) article by Goswami, N. 2008 : 1)

The religious movement of India during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries marked a growth of new religion founded on the liberal doctrine of bhakti as revealed in the Bhagavata purana. It was regarded as Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and several saints of great endowments appeared in various parts of India starting from the South to the North.

The period of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the heyday of Neo-Vaisnavite movement in India. This Bhakti Movement in South India enunciated by the Alwars in the seventh and eight centuries gradually expanded in the tenth and eleventh centuries and had its total flowering in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a new religious movements in entire India. The waves of this movement also surged over the Brahmaputra Valley through the Neo-Vaisnavite religion introduced by Sankaradeva. But,
Sankaradeva’s Philosophy was totally different from the philosophy of other vaisnavite Saints of Contemporary India. It was a unique movement in religion, where he came in contact with saints of various vaisnavite sects and studied different subjects. He had his own observations and analysis and arrived at a conclusion with which he introduced a lively and dynamic religious ideal. Of course, it is true that, it is very difficult to define the religious philosophy of Sankaradeva, because he never consciously enunciated any religious philosophy of his own. But it goes without saying that a particular philosophy worked behind his high spiritual conclusions and the writings of Sankaradeva and his disciple Madhavadeva also testify this observation.

Sankaradeva was a widely travelled saint. For nearly 12 years he toured many holy places in North India. His pilgrimage took him to Puri, Gaya, Sitakunda Vanaras, Prayag (Allahabad), Ayodhya, Vrindavan, Mathura, Dwaraka, Badarikashram and Varahakunda. “Sankaradeva’s pilgrimage enables him to discover the soul of India spread over the continent. It is also symbolic of the greatness of his mind.” (Sarma, N. (ed.) Introductory note by Chattopadhyya, D.P. : 2008).

There is a belief in almost all the religions in a super natural power who sends some messengers at different times in different forms as an avatar, a Nabi, a son of God. Religion believes in a personal God but philosophy could not find the God of religion as it is believed by the religious people. Philosophy is based on scientific reasoning and not in faith alone.
So, it is the duty of philosophy to study the religious-concept of God and many relevant points. In Indian Philosophy Advaitavada is logically tenable & hence philosophically or metaphysically acceptable. It is not a faith, but based on reasoning. Advaitavada or monism which believes in the primordial entity or substance as the ground of the whole universe and from which the universe has emerged. Sankaradeva’s Philosophy is Monotheism. Monotheism is a theory of God as the sole creator and moral Governor of the universe, especially of human kind. In Indian philosophy it is called Ekeswarvada. This is the difference between Monism and monotheism -- one regarding the ultimate substance and the other searching for one single God at the root of the universe.

“All the main teachings of Advaita Vedanta of Sankaracharyya are there in Sankaradeva’s system with the single difference as to the way of liberation. In other respects, Sankaradeva’s philosophy has a striking similarly to Advaitavada of the illustrious master Sankaracharya.” (Chetia, B. 1999 :71).

Philosophy is a quest for truth. Sankaradeva propagated practical Philosophy which inspired people to have a direct, immediate and intuitive vision of the highest truth which is also the supreme reality. Realisation of truth is the highest end of Indian Philosophy. Sankaradeva professed his Philosophy provided necessary instructions for the ways of its practical realisation.
The philosophical basis of Sankaradeva’s religion is the culmination of the Bhakti Movement of Northern India argumented by Ramannada and of Southern India. On the metaphysical plane Sankaradeva holds a non-dualistic standpoint, unlike many of his vaisnava counterparts in the rest of India. This explains the absence of dual images in his religion such as Radha-Krishna of Caitanya, Gopi-krishna of Vallabha-charya, Rukmini Krishna of Namadeva and Sita Rama of Ramananda. He gives an unambiguous expression of this faith.

prakrti purusa duiro niyanta Madhava
samastara atmahari parama bandhava

(Namghosa :405)

[Matter and soul (prakriti and purusa) are controlled by God Himself who is the soul of them].

The bhakti movement was first started in the Tamil province of Southern India. From there, it is spread to the Northern India and then to the Eastern region of India. In this way, the vaisnavite bhakti movement spread all over India.

AIMS OF THE STUDY:

The present work is an attempt to correlate and compare the view points of Vedanta Philosophy and the vaisnavism of Assam by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva and their predecessor and successors. However, so far
as Sankaradeva is concerned, though various eminent scholars of Assamese literature have attempted to understand the versatility of his creative genius, yet he is the least explored personality from the field of philosophical thought. At the national level, no effort has been made yet to focus on his philosophy from a proper perspective. R.K. Das Gupta in his article “Sankaradeva : the founder of Assamese Vaisnavism” rightly said that if any great religious leader and poet has received much less attention than he deserves he is Sankaradeva, the founder of Assamese Vaisnavism and one of the finest writers of devotional verse in literature. It is indeed very curious that J.N. Farquhar’s “An outline of the Religious Literature of India (1920), a work of 450 pages which is a source book of our sacred literature does not mention Sankaradeva either in the text or in its long descriptive bibliography of vaisnava writings.” (Goswami, R.D. (ed.) 1996:1). In the socio literary forum of Assam, the religious Philosophy of Sankaradeva has been often misinterpreted, giving rise to confusions among the people. The aim of this study is to clarify the misconception regarding the vaisnavism of Assam along with the monistic or metaphysical and monotheistic philosophy of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva and place it on a proper forum. So, along with an interest for an undertaking the society, an interest to know a religious philosophy, is what works as an inspiration for undertaking the present research work.

In the investigation, attempts has been made to analyse simply how far vedanta occupies in the realms of Vaisnavism is quite. Due to the unstable
condition of Assamese society at present scenario Sankaradeva’s spiritual guidance is a dire necessity which was deep rooted on humanism.

The influence of Vedanta in Assamese Vaisnavite literature and how far Vedanta and other Vaisnavite, thoughts influenced the Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva is unintelligible to most of the people of Assam. Since, our present society is not free from pre-judices like caste and creed system, there is no tolerance, no peace and harmony among people and for this reason a reformation of society is very much needed. With the advent of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva a new era started in the Religious history of Assam. The devotional mysticism of these two great thinkers showed a new way of life to the people of Assam. Prior to the introduction of Neo-vaisnavite thoughts of Sankaradeva, the people of Assam were the sad victims of blind faith, superstitions, dogmatic beliefs, immoral practices, magic, sorcery and all sorts of exploitations in the name of Religion. Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva had to choose the tough road of self-sacrifice in order to acquaint people with their new ideals. The road was full of obstacles from all sides. But the constant self-less preference of the two greats succeeded in removing the obstructions. Their life long contributions to the people of Assam proved to be immense and highly precious. The people of Assam even today have realised the relevance of the religio-philosophical thoughts of them. In the present study, the invaluable literary contributions with vedantic reflection of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva has been discussed. Their constructive outlook reshaped
and remoulded the nature and destiny of the people of Assam and thereby gave them opportunity to realise the dignity of 'human life.' The religion of bhakti showed the way to the spiritual realisation. The pragmatic teaching of their 'Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma' rescued the exploited masses and saved religion from blind beliefs and superstitions. Neo-vaisnavism of Assam established the liberty and rights of the people of Assam irrespective of caste and creed, high and low, rich and poor.

To complete the study the main source is the Assamese Vaisnava text, text book of Vedanta, Journals and periodicals on the subject. Apart from that, effort has been made for the study of M.Phil Dissertation and Doctorial thesis on the subject available in Gauhati University Library. All out efforts have been made to collect materials which are required to render proper justice to the subject investigated.

Every possible efforts has been made to maintain the method of treatment on the said subject. Mainly analytical method has been taken into account and to some extent comparative method has also been adopted according to the necessity of the work.