CHAPTER-4

VEDANTA REPRESENTED IN THE LITERATURE OF SANKARADEVA AND MADHAVADEVA

A. SANKARADEVA:

The cult of Sankaradeva carries the message of Bhagavata and Vedanta. The foremost message of the religion through his literary works is to make people understand the value of human birth. There is considerable amount of expressions in his writings through which the saint has tried to establish the same concept to instigate man to be involved in works endowed with spirituality. The deepest influence upon Sankaradeva’s literature is obviously of ancient Indian Philosophy especially Vedanta philosophy. At the crest of the medieval Pan-Indian Bhakti Movement, Sankaradeva propagated his own form of Bhakti faith known as Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma in the North-Eastern part of India. A leading religious system needs to have a sound philosophy. The religious faith of Sankaradeva based on the fundamental principles of the Vedanta, the paragon of the monistic system of the world. The word “Vedanta” occurs innumerable times in the large corpus of the writings of Sankaradeva and his ardent follower and successor Madhavadeva. Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, by Vedanta, sought to mean the unsystematized thoughts of the upanisads---the poetic visions and mystic intuitions of the enlightened seers, not to the fully systematized philosophy of the Vedanta-Sutra or the later schools of Vedanta. As, propagators of the Bhakti-faith, they did not
like the intellectual disputation inherent in the later Vedanta. It is evident in
a verse composed by Madhavadeva -

tarka sastra mahabyaghri   tahana nipuna pati
    tara sisyas bhaila putrapraya /
samsara banata pasi   patiputra samanvite
    upanisad dhenu dhari khaya //

(Namghosa :43)

[Logic is a terrible tigress and the logician is her spouse, while the
logician’s disciple is her cub. Entering the jungle of the world she, along
with her spouse and her cub, devours the Upanishads, the milch cow].

Sankaradeva’s literary works can chronologically be arranged as follows:

A) Early Period

i) Non-Bhagavata Group:
   1) Harichandra Upakhyana
   2) Bhakti-pradipa (Garuda-purana)
   3) Kirtanghosa: (Uresa Varnana section)

ii) Non-Bhagavata material mixed with Bhagavata elements:
   4) Rukmini-Harana Kavya. (Harivamsa and Bhagavata-purana).

iii) Lyrics:
   5) Bargitas

iv) First Group of Bhagavata tales:
   6) Ajamilopakhyana (Book VI of the Bhagavata-purana)
   7) Amrita-manthana (Book VIII of the Bhagavata-purana)
Kirtana-ghosa: Ajamilopakhyana, Prahladacharita. (Book III, VII), Haramohana, Balichalana, Gajendra-upakhyana (Book VIII) and Dhyana-varnana sections)

8) Gunamala.

B) Middle Period

9) Patni-prasada-nata (Bhagavata-purana X)

Some stories of Krishna’s early life from Bhagavata-Purana X.

C) Middle Period

10) Bali chalana (Book VIII)

11) Anadi patana (Book III; Vamana purana)


12) Bhagavata X Adi

13) Bhagavata, XI (with materials from Book I and III)

14) Bhagavata, XII

15) Bhagavata, I

16) Bhagavata, II

17) Bhagavata, IX (not available)

18) Kuruksetra (Book X, Uttarardha)

19) Niminava-Siddha-Samvada.

The Tale of Rama

20) Ramayana

21) Bhatima (lyrics)
22) Bhakti-Ratnakara (Select slokas from vaisnavite scriptures)

Dramas

23) Kaliyadamana
24) Keligopala
25) Rukmini-Harana
26) Parijata-Harana
27) Rama-Vijaya

The Bhagavata was an inexhaustible source from which Sankaradeva drew again and again. “It is an attempt to show in brief that Assam vaisnavism of Srimanta Sankaradeva covers the main tenets of the major upanisads and the teachings of the Bhagavata-purana and few other vedantic texts. The Bhagavadgita is the essence of the upanisads.” (Chaliha, B. P. (ed) : 1998 :106 (article by Das K.). The Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva, the Bhagavata-Purana has been acknowledged as the supreme scripture under various contexts. Sankaradeva says as-
cari veda astadasha purana yateka sastra
parama vedanta Bhagavata,
sanake sananda muni yoga jnana vicariya
uddharila tara sara tattva

(Kirtanaghosa: Vedastuti :1673)

[The Bhagavata is the supreme vedanta among the four vedas, eighteen puranas and other sastras. Sages Sanaka and Sananda in quest of yoga and knowledge discovered in it the essential truth. The Bhagavata-purana is the
essence of all the vedantas. It was also called Crown-Jewel of all religious scriptures. (Sarva-Sruti-Siro-Ratnas).

Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva regarded the Bhagavadgita as the essence of the upanishads. Thus, the religious system as well as the philosophical thoughts of both of them are rest mainly on the Bhagavata-Purana and the Bhagavadgita which they took as the essence of the Upanisadic Vedanta. “It is interesting to note that all higher religions are based upon different schools of philosophy.” (Murthy, H.V.S.: 1973: 74). In the same way, all types of vedic religions are based on the Vedanta philosophy. The Vaisnavism, a significant branch of vedic religion is also specially based on this system of philosophy. Sankaradeva in his Bhaktiratnakara and Bhattadeva in his Bhakti viveka quoted a sloka from the Bhagavata-purana stating that this Purana is the essence of all vedanta. Madhavadeva also translates the same into Assamese in his Namghosa as-

\[
\text{samasta vedanta sara mahabhagavata sastra} \\
\text{ihara amrita rasa pai/} \\
\text{parame santose pana karile yijane tara} \\
\text{anyatra rasata rati nai. //} \\
\]  

(Namghosa: 18)

[Whoever has drunk to his heart’s content the nectarine pleasure of the scripture, the Great Bhagavata, which is the essence of the whole gamut of the Vedanta, must have lost attachment to all other pleasures found in other things].
Jiva Goswami, the philosophical apologist of Caitanyaism declares that “The Bhagavata itself is Vyasa's own commentary on the Vedanta-Sutra.” (Dey, S. K.: 1961:199). Sankaradeva relied solely upon the Puranas and on the Bhagavata, and the tenets of his faith are firmly based on the Bhagavata and the Bhagavadgita. J. N. Farquhar points out the philosophical teaching of the Bhagavata-purana as “Stands nearer to Sankara's system than to the theistic Samkhya which dominates earlier Puranic works.” (Farquhar, J. N.: 1920:231).

It is noteworthy that Sankaradeva in his literary works, in most cases, took the help of Sridharasvami’s commentary on the Bhagavata-purana which the latter wrote at the request of the Sva-sampradaya. He referred by the Sva-sampradaya to the Visnusvami sect. Visnusvami was basically a dualist. Later on, his philosophy was developed into Suddhadvaita by Ballabhacharya. Sankaradeva accepted the commentary of Sridhara with great respect and made the best use of it while interpreting the Bhagavata-purana. Sridhara-svami who has synthesized the advaitic philosophy with Bhaktivada, i.e. theory of love and devotion and the admixture of Advaitavada was the main centre of Sankaradeva’s philosophy. But, he was not a philosopher in the real sense of the term and he did not try to build a new system of philosophy. “Moreover, he could clearly and rightly perceive that the society was more in need of reformation than a system of philosophy (Sharma, S.N.: 1996:34). Sankaradeva diverted his attention solely towards the propagation of the new faith without caring whether the religion propagated by him was based on a systematic philosophy or not.
“Some critics are of the opinion that Sankaradeva’s philosophy belongs to the Visistadvaitavada school of Ramanuja (1037-1137) and others that it belongs to the Suddhadvaitavada school of Sankaracharya (788-820). (Chaliha, B. P. (ed) :1998 :170 (article by Hazarika. B). S. C. Goswami in his article “A study of the philosophical background of Sankaradeva” has written that “but from the spirit of his writings taken as a whole and not merely from the passages taken out of context, Sankaradeva is to be interpreted as a follower of the theistic vedantins and specially of Ramanuja” (1953 :68). “The philosophy of Sankaradeva presents strong resemblance with the system of Ramanuja.” (Murthy, H.V.S.:1973 :128). On the otherhand, Maheswar Neog in his “Sankaradeva And His Times’ opines that : “On the philosophical or theoretical side there is scarcely any difference between the two sankaras.” (1998 :244). Sankaradeva’s acceptance of the commentary of Sridharasvami and the act of following and using Bisnupuri’s Kantimala will be enough to produce him to be a like minded of the advaitins. He neither referred it nor thought it necessary to mention it anywhere in his writings. From the foregoing discussion, the most important philosophical tendency that could be discerned in Assamese Vaisnavism is its inclination towards Advaitism.” Again, S. C. Goswami in his book “Mahapurush Sri Sankaradeva and Vaisnavism” has revised his opinion as “Thus, it may be said that Sankaradeva has leaned to Advaitavada or non-dualistic monism and he was very much influenced by the writings of Sridharasvami and Visnupurisvami who were theistic vedantins and the followers of the Advaitavada of
Sankaradeva draws heavily from Sridhara’s Dipika while interpreting the Bhagavata-purana. In Bhakti-ratnakara, he quotes rather verbatim from the Dipika and the Subodhini, the commentary on the Gita by Sridhara. Thus, it is natural that Sankaradeva’s philosophy leads towards the Advaitavada of Sankaracharya, as revealed in the Bhagavata-purana and the Dipika.

Ashok Kr. Goswami in his article “Srimanta Sankaradeva and His Vedantic Leanings” opines that “A study of the works of Srimanta Sankaradeva reveals that the Vaisnava saint of Assam agrees and disagrees as well with the aforesaid leading Vedantic thinkers Sankaracharya and Ramanujacharya. This leads to a long continued discord among the critics with regard to Sankaradeva’s Vedantic outlook” (Chutia, D. (ed): 1997 :2). While some scholars stamp him as a follower of Sankara’s Advaitavada and some again find Sankaradeva an adherent of Ramanujacharya in respect of his Visistadvaitavada. Anima Dutta strongly admitted that Sankaradeva’s writings are completely Advaitic (2003:4). “Sankaradeva admits the Nirguna Brahman to be the ultimate reality and jiva to be one with Brahman. To him Brahman is indeterminate (nirvisesa), changeless (avikari), and eternal (nitya). With these monistic views, Sankaradeva seeks to combine the theistic or religious idea of a determinate personal God, which is the pivot of his creed.” (Neog, M: 1998 : 244).

Sankaracharya’s Advaitavada is a purely philosophical scheme. But, Ramanuja’s Visistadvaitavada is the basis of his Vaisnava faith. So it is very
difficult to resist the inference that Sankaradeva, the founder of Vaisnava faith in Assam, is very nearer to Ramanuja than to Sankara. Banikanta Kakati, even observe the similarities of several principles of the two saints. These include the strict monotheism, servitude to God, part and whole relationship between individual self and absolute self, etc. (Neog, M. (ed) 1991 : 29). But Neog is of the opinion that there is no evidence in reality to establish any relation between the two systems. (ibid). Ramanuja’s Vedanta is a ritual-ridden system “such a ritual-ridden system totally absent in Sankaradeva’s Nama-dharma (Neog, D. : 1996 : 95). Further, Ramanuja advises to study the Purva-mimamsa and perform the sacrificial rituals for realising the Absolute. Such things are unthinkable in Sankaradeva’s faith. It has been already shown that the Bhagavata-purana is the canonical scripture for Sankaradeva. But it is not so with Ramanuja. S.N. Dasgupta has remarked in the “History of Indian Philosophy” that Ramanuja had not mentioned the name of Bhagavata-purana or made any quotations from it. (V-IV :1991:1). J. N. Farquhar maintains that the doctrine of Ramanuja is very different from the bhakti of the Bhagavata-purana. (1920 : 243). The religious doctrine of Ramanuja is in fact based on a Tantric Vaisnavite doctrine named ‘Pancharatra’. Therefore, it is conservative and multi-ritualistic. “His (Ramanuja) Vaisnavism is Vasudevism of the Pancaratra system combined with the Narayana and vishnu elements.”(Bhandarkar, R.G : 1928 : 37). Thus, the apparent similarities between Ramanuja and Sankaradeva melt away. Actually, Sankaradeva must have come across the religious faith of Ramanuja,
during the long stay at Puri, but he did not find anything acceptable to him. On the contrary, Sankaradeva must have come across and made friendship with the followers of the Bhagavata-purana with Sridhara's commentary. Sankaradeva tried to preserve the original monist interpretation without making any fabrication in his own translations. In his literary works wherever he saw ambiguity or equivocation, the great saint took the help of Sridharasvami who is a follower of Sankaracharya and the Bhagavata itself tends to be monist. In matters of translation, Sankaradeva thought that it is very essential to take the help of particular interpretation. That is why, we see simple and lovely interpretation of his literary works.

Both Sankara and Ramanuja assert the Upanisadic view that All is Brahman and therefore, believes in one Absolute, Independent Reality pervading the world of multiple selves and objects. But they differ in their views regarding the nature of this Absolute Reality and its relation with the world and selves. Sankaracharya begins his philosophy with Nirguna-Brahman and Ramanuja starts from Saguna-Brahman or God. According to Sankara, Ultimate Reality is Atman or Brahman which is Pure Consciousness (jnana svarupa) or Consciousness of the Pure Self (svarupa-jnana) which is devoid of all attributes (Nirguna) and all categories of the intellect (nirvishesa). Brahman associated with its potency maya appears as the qualified Brahman or Saguna Brahman or the Lord (Ishvara) who is the creator, preserver and destroyer of this world which is His appearance. This Brahman, reflected in or conditioned by Maya is called Ishvara. “Ramanujacharya attempts a
harmonious combination of absolutism with personal theism. The attempt is not new. We find it in the Gita, in the Mahabharata, particularly in the section called Narayaniya, and in the Puranas, notably in the Visnu and the Bhagavata.” (Sarma. C. D. 1987 : 335). To Ramanuja, qualityless Brahman can not be known by any means. It is a void, a blank. Acarya Ramanuja understands from the word Brahman directly the Purusottama, free from all defects and possessed of innumerable benevolent qualities. The Godhood (Ishvara) of Sankara is not an Absolute Reality as he asserts that Ishvara exists so long as the Ignorance or Avidya exists. But Sankaracharya holds that Brahman is qualityless and there is no difference in Brahman and the Brahman is to be known only as the Attributes, devoid of all specifications. He believes in one Absolute Being which is not God or Ishvara and it is qualityless or Nirguna. Like Brahman, Maya is also a fundamental Upanisadic concept inherited by the vedantic philosophers. Both Sankara and Ramanuja speak of Maya yet they differ from each other in its treatment. According to Sankara, Maya is a magical power of God which creates an illusory world. To Ramanuja, Maya is God’s energy and it creates a real world. Again, Sankara holds that Brahman has no difference or bheda. The whole and part relation is not applicable to Brahman. Because, Brahman is unconditional, it is Absolute and therefore partless. Ramanuja admits Svagata bheda by which he means the Brahman or God has whole-part relation. God is saririn and possessed of jivas and the Universe. Therefore, it is called Visista-Advaita and God possesses parts which is real.
Thus, the sole aim of Sankaradeva was to spread his humanistic faith among the common masses. The philosophical views of Sankaradeva, specially the vedantic representation are scattered in his different literary works here and there. To have a comprehensive philosophy which is the ultimate bedrock of his Neo-Vaisnavism, a study is indispensable. Hence, in this chapter, Sankaradeva’s philosophical views, the vedantic representation will be specially dealt with. For systematic treatment of the subject matter through Sankaradeva’s literature, this chapter has been analysed as ---The conception of God, The conception of the World and Maya and The Bhakti and Liberation. The philosophical doctrines permeating through the literary works are as follows:

THE CONCEPTION OF GOD:

According to Sankaradeva’s Metaphysics, the Supreme Reality is Brahman. He is Purusottaman. Brahman is also called Narayana or Vishnu, the highest God. Thus, Sankaradeva identified Brahman with Vishnu or Bhagavan, the highest God of the Bhagavata-purana and Gita. He is sat (Existence), cit (Knowledge or Consciousness) and ananda (Bliss). Sankaradeva stated clearly this in the very beginning of the Kirtana-ghosa as follows -

prathame pranamo brahmarupi sanatana
sarva avatarar karana Narayana.

(V: 1)
[At first I pray the Supreme Reality in the guise of Brahman who is the cause of all things and beings. He is also Narayana].

Sankaradeva distinctly expressed this concept of identity of Brahman and Bhagavan in the Nimi-naba-siddha-samvada as follows -

\[
\text{brahma paramatma bhagavanta eke tattva} \\
\text{eke rese tini nama laksana bhedata}
\]  
\quad (V-182)

[Brahman, Paramatman and Bhagavan are the one and the same truth, the same truth manifests in the three names].

Sankaradeva accepted the Bhagavata-purana and the Gita. So, his conception of God is based on these holy scriptures. According to him, both Brahman and Ishvara are Absolute truth. Though, Sankaradeva does not take Ishvara as the denoted sense of the word Brahman, he accepts the same entity. To him, God is in the heart of everybody as the antaryamin. He said as:

\[
\text{samasta bhutara hrdayata acho ami} \\
\text{parama sundara manohara antaryami}
\]  
\quad (Bhakti Pradipa V-146)

Similarly, in the Bhagavata:

\[
\text{bahire bhitare jana ito jagatara} \\
\text{paripurnarupe acho parama isvara}
\]  
\quad (Bhagavata-XI, V-254)
Like Sankara and Ramanuja, Sankaradeva believes that 'All is Brahman', because the world of multiplicity is born out of Brahman and dissipates into it at dissolution. He writes -

dasa digapala same jagata Samasta

tohmatese upaje tohmate yaya asta /

atese samaste brahma mantragane radai

yena yaithe bhari dile prithivite padai //

(Kirtanaghosa: Vedastuti-V-1651)

[The whole world with ten Digapalas (deities) is born out of Thee and dissolves into Thee. So, the vedic verses sing that all is Brahman as wherever one sets his foot, it falls on the earth. Thus, the vedas assert that the Reality is essentially one, i.e. Brahman].

Sankaradeva who was greatly influenced by the teachings of the Bhagavata-purana, places Lord Krishna as the highest worshipful deity Who is himself God incarnate as declared by the Bhagavata-purana. So, Lord Krishna has been described both as determinate and indeterminate, as immanent and transcendent. The distinction between indeterminate and determinate Brahman of Advaita Vedanta is reflected in the philosophy of Sankaradeva. The former is unconditioned and attributeless while the latter is conditioned and possesses attributes. The ultimate reality is Nirguna Nirakara. Brahman conditioned by maya is God. He is the personal God:
chaitanya swarupa vyapi eka niranjana
tomaka bulibe dvaita kona ajnajana
nicchala nirmala suksma rupa jito swami
deve najananta yaka kene jano ami
apara tomara rupa jara bhuja chari
pit bastre sobhe sankha chakra gadadhari
pindhi acha ratnar mukatara hara
hiyate sribatsya gale banamala jara

(Kirtanaghosa: 83-85)

The term Krishna is used in Sankaradeva’s faith indiscriminately. Ordinarily, the name is associated with the human form, the son of Devaki and Vasudeva. From the study of all literary works of Sankaradeva three points of view regarding God can be made out. These three concepts of God are only three modes of realising God. These are - God as the ultimate Reality or Absolute, concept of personal God and God in human form.

God as the Absolute is one without a second and it can not be known by any source of knowledge like perception, inference and testimony. It is eternal, self-illuminating and one, but appears as many only for the adjunct of maya. Sankaradeva conceived God as the Purusottama which is mentioned in the Purusasukta of Rgveda. According to Sankaradeva God is Eternal, Omnipresent and Omniscient. He is immanent in all things and beings of the Universe. He is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the Universe. Sankaradeva holds that the world with all things and beings is the
manifestation of God Himself. God is the truth behind all creations. In the Kirtanaghosa Sankaradeva prays as-

namo namo madhava vidhir vidhidata
tumi jagatara gati mati pita mata /
tumi paramatma jagatara isha eka
eko vastu nahike tohmata vyatireka //
tumi karya karana samasta carasara
suvarna kundale yena nahike antara /
tumi pasupaksi surasura tarn tma
ajnanata mudhajane dekhe bhinna bhinna //</n

(O, Madhava, the creator of the creator, Thee I bow, Thou art Saviour, Intellect, Parents of the World. O’ Lord, you are the Supreme Soul, you are the only God of the world. Nothing in the world remains outside you. You are the cause and effect of all things and beings of the universe, just like gold and golden ornaments which have no difference in reality, but due to ignorance, people look at their differences).

Here, we find that Sankaradeva’s metaphysical concepts regarding the nature of God and the world have similarity with the Advaita vedanta of Sankaracharya. In some context, Sankaradeva upholds the view that the world is an illusion, not real. Due to ignorance we see the world to be real. According to Sankaradeva, the only truth about this universe is Brahma or Supreme Being. The universe is created from the Brahma and it gets dissolved into
the Brahma. In fact, Brahman or Bhagavan is the ultimate truth in the universe.

God is free from all imperfections and God is infinite Reality by nature and qualities. There is no other Supreme Reality. He is One and the Ultimate Truth. He is Advaita or non second. Sankaradeva’s great respect towards advaitism and its propounder is focussed in different context throughout his writings. It is to be regarded as an indirect proof of his being an advaitin that Sankaradeva not mentioning the names of other schools of Vedanta with so much respect He said as- 

\[ \text{tomara advaita rupa \quad parama anandapada} \]

\[ \text{tate mor magna hoka citta} \]

\( (Kirtanghosa: \text{Vedastuti: 1669}) \)

[Thine Monistic Form is Seat of Supreme Bliss, Let my mind get involved there].

Sankaradeva maintains that God manifests Himself as many by His will or sport. His manifestations as souls or matter are neither unreal nor illusion. God is the material and efficient cause of the Universe. It is unambiguously expressed in the Anadi-patana as follows-

\[ \text{sristi sthiti laya madhavara moksa lila} \]

\[ \text{krsnar kinkare pade sankare rasila} \]

\( (V-5) \)

[Creation, preservation and destruction are the sport of Madhava or Lord Krishna and this is written in the verse by Sankaradeva, the servant of Lord Krishna].
If we notice the "Vedastuti" chapter of the 'Kirtanghosa', we find that the universe is unreal, but since it is manifested through the Brahman, it is supposed to be real. In the enormous writings of Sankaradeva centering round of Bhagavata, there is mention of illusion as a power of God. He said in the 'Graha-Gajendra Yuddha' chapter of the Kirtanghosa as-

\[
\text{jata dekha dhana-jana save visnu-maya} \\
\text{akasate sancare meghara yena chaya /}
\]

\(V: 509\)

[All forms of life and property are only illusion of Lord Visnu. These are as transient as the clouds of the sky].

Again, Sankaradeva said about God as the true Reality, the world manifests in You and You manifest in the world-O' Antaryamin;

\[
\text{tumi satya brahma tohmata prakase} \\
\text{jagata ito asanta /} \\
\text{jagatate sada tumio prakasa} \\
\text{antaryamin bhagavanta //}
\]

\(Kirtanghosa : 1662\)

[Brahman, who alone is the truth, in Thee is manifested this false world. Thou, art alone always manifested in the world as the inner controller, the possessor of power].

The individual being or jiva and the jagata or the world are not different from the Brahman or Paramatma as Sankaradeva holds in his Bargeet-
[All the creatures and movables, the insects and flies- the ocean and mountains and the world are but the body of Thee].

The Bhagavata-purana fixes God as the ultimate essence of the Universe and calls Him Brahman. In the chapter named ‘Gopi Uddhava Sambad’ of Adi-Dasam regarding the all pervading nature of God-Sankaradeva said:

\[
\text{parama bisuddha gunahin moi} \\
\text{jnanarupa atma eka} \\
\text{mote ase ito jagatamoi punu} \\
\text{jagatara vyatireka} \\
\text{(Bhagavata-X :2389)}
\]

[I am pure, indeterminate (Nirguna), atman having consciousness as my essence. (Jnanarupa). The world exists in Me, but I transcend this world. (jagata vyatireka).

Here, we found that like Advaita Vedanta, Sankaradeva holds that the world is unreal, but has the ultimate reality of Brahman as its basis. There, it looks like real. Thus, the world has an empirical existence and Brahman can be called its efficient or material cause only in the empirical sense. Both Sankaracharya and Sankaradeva say that Absolute or Brahman is in essence qualityless or Nirguna. It reflects in Bhagavata-X skandha’s and Bhakti-ratnakara.
nirguna rupaka ave janive kimate /
jarah vastu ekove najanai apunaka //

(Bhagavata-X:1832)

[Nothing can be predicted or ascribed to it. Hence, it is said to be
qualityless or devoid of qualities (Nirguna)].

tumisi nirguna hari ananda svarupa /
nedekhohe maya atapare anarupa //
bilibaha anarupa nahi ke adyapi /
upadhi-yuguta ito hovai tathapi.

(Bhakti-ratnakara:118-119)

[To predicate qualities is to make it determinate. Those who pretend to
know, actually nothing of it. Those who think of it as possessing some
qualities, do not know the actual nature].

Radhakrishnan in his Indian Philosophy, vol-II, said that the famous
expression like “Saccidananda” too is not competent to define Brahman.
(Sankaracharya). (1989: 539). Sankaradeva also write as -

brahmayo napanta anta      tomarka najanta vede
apuniyo najana samuli //

(Kirtanghosa, Vedastuti:1672)

[Brahman is not even known by Brahma, nor even by the vedas and what
is more, Brahman itself does not know it].

The concept of Brahman as Nirguna and Saguna, Ramanuja accepts
Saguna Brahman. But, Sankaradeva, like Sankaracharya, accepts Brahman as
Nirguna. Ramanuja’s God is visista or possessed of qualities and parts for which his philosophy has come to be known as Visista-Advaita. His God, thus, is saguna with metaphysical, moral and aesthetic perfection. Sankaradeva’s concept of Absolute differs from that of Ramanuja. It is Advaita of Sankaracharya’s type. According to Sankaradeva, Brahman or Absolute is the only truth and other things are adjunct with maya. His writings represented as-

\[
\text{tumise kevala satya sabe mayamaya} / \\
\text{tumi bine satya ana vastu nahi koi.} //
\]

(\text{Bhakti-ratnakara:111})

Sankaracharya holds that the principle of non-contradiction is the test of truth. The self or Atman is not contradicted in all the four stages of the self. Atman is Brahman. It is the Supreme Reality and only Ontological Reality. Brahman is Pure identity. But from the religious point of view, it is very difficult to think of such a Reality. When we try to know the Supreme Reality by our limited thinking, we attribute some qualities to that Reality and it becomes qualified and loses its identity. Sankaradeva brings out clearly this point of Advaita Vedanta in the Kirtanaghosa:

\[
\text{michha tarka vade bhailla andhakara} \\
\text{tate bhramo manda mati/} \\
\text{taju jnana-pantha khujia napao} \\
\text{kara hari mora gati //}
\]

(\text{Vedastuti:1661})
[False logic of arguments has enveloped us in darkness, wherein we fools move about, we fail to find out Thine path of knowledge, O, Hari save us from it].

Sankaradeva describes the concept of personal God more or less in human form. He calls this God as Narayana, Visnu or Hari. When Nirguna Brahman conditioned by maya appears as Saguna Brahman or Personal God, who is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe. This personal God is the moral governor and giver of reward and punishment He is the soul of the universe and possesses infinite number of qualities. Nirguna Brahman assumes this form in order to please His devotees. In his Anadipatana, Sankaradeva says that at the time of dissolution or Mahapralaya everything including the jivas get merged in Him. (V-146-154). Sankaradeva explains God as all pervading entity. In his Kirtanaghosa, Chapter- Prahlada charita, said as-

```
harise jadi jagatara isa
kaita ache tara kaha uddisa
suniya prahlada bolaya vani
vyapaka visnu prabhu chakrapani
savato achanta jagata svami
sphatikara stambhe dekhoho ami
```

(V:395-396)

[When Hiranyakasipu, father of Prahlada opposed his Hari-bhakti and said if Hari is only God of the universe, tell me where-about His existence.]
Hearing it Prahlada said as that Lord God Chakrapani is all pervading. Lord of the universe exists everywhere. Prahlada see him in the marble pillar there.

It is noteworthy that, “like Sankaracharya Sankaradeva too admits that the personal God is the material as well as the efficient cause of the world” (Radhakrishnan S., Vol-II : 1989 : 552). S. N. Dasgupta, in his History of Indian Philosophy, Vol-II said that some followers of Sankaracharya also believe that the phenomenal world is an evolution or parinama of the Maya and a creation of personal God (1991 : 552).

The concept of God as the Absolute is beyond the grasp of ordinary understanding. The concept of personal God too is not easily accessible to the common people. Some devotees like Prahlada, Dhruba, Arjuna, Uddhava and Ankura, had the opportunity of realising or seeing this personal God. To the common people the scriptures provide a God of flesh and blood who shares the pleasure and pain of the masses. Krishna, the son of Vasudeva and Devaki, is such a God who is a central figure of Bhagavatism. B. Chetiar rightly opines that from religious point of view Sankaradeva speaks of Krishna worshipa, and from metaphysical point of view He is an Absolutist or Advaitavadin. (1999 : 20).

**THE CONCEPTION OF WORLD AND MAYA:**

The central theme or topic of Advaitic philosophy is Maya. The doctrine of Maya is the pivot of the Advaita Philosophy of Sankaracharya. Like.
Advaita-Vedanta, Sankaradeva has also accepted that the origin of the world lies in the magical power of God. ‘Maya’ as the explanation of the visible universe is not a modern concept. The primitive meaning of ‘Maya’ is found in the Rg. Veda. According to Sankaracharya, Maya denotes both ‘illusion’ and the power of the Lord. The world is created by Maya. Thus, Sankaracharya’s philosophy is that Maya is a magical power of God which creates an illusory world. But to Ramanuja, Maya is God’s energy and it creates real world. Here, Sankaradeva disagrees with Ramanuja and gave much importance to Sankaracharya’s Advaitavada. The different aspect of Maya as brought by Sankara are found in Sankaradeva’s writings. In this context it will be proper to refer to the main principle of Advaitavada, i.e.

\[
\text{brahma satyam jagat mithya} \\
\text{jivo brahmaiva naparah}
\]


[Brahman is the ultimate Truth. Jagat is false, Jiva and Brahman are non different].

The main philosophical basis of Sankaradeva is also the same. According to Sankaradeva also Brahman is the ultimate Reality, Jagat is unreal and under the spell of Maya the Jiva believes in the illusion of this world of multiplicity and take the illusory world as real. Sankaradeva has ascribed the name ‘Mohini’ to Maya. Sankaradeva explains the same advaitic view through his literature as-

106

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and take the illusory world as real. Sankaradeva has ascribed the name ‘Mohini’ 
to Maya. Sankaradeva explains the same advaitic view through his literature as-
dekhi suni mane ito jagata yateka
mayara racana jana //

(Nimi-Nava-Siddha Sambada :132)

[The entire world seen and heard is but a creation of Maya, indeed of jugglery].

Like Sankaracharya, Sankaradeva defines Maya as a condition (upadhi) by which the phenomenal world of appearance is explained. Maya is the adjunct of God and is responsible for this manifold universe of appearance. (Kuruksetra :V-511). Maya is not separable from God and is eternally with Him. It is subordinate to God only in one sense that it has no independent existence and at the time of dissolution the latter gets merged in the former. (Anadi-patana :V-50). Sankaradeva considered Brahman to be an active Purusa, controller of both Purusa and Prakrti. He calls purusa a part of God and Maya is a part of purusa. The Bhagavata preaches the doctrine of Maya as the eternal power of God. Prakrti has no independent existence of its own but an inseparable energy or sakti of God. Thus, Sankaradeva describes Maya as a part or ansa of God, and all living beings are, but parts. For him, the individual soul is the part and parcel of God. He writes-

tomarese amsa ami jata jiva jaka /
tomara mayaye prabhu bandhile amaka //

(Kirtanghosa :444)

The concept of Maya is the key to the problem of ‘One’ becoming ‘Many’. The relation between the finite and infinite is better explained with this
concept. As such, it is the highest category. S. N. Dasgupta in his History Of Indian Philosophy, Vol.-IV, maintains that there are two fundamental categories, God and His Maya, the Prakrti. (1991 : 26). Sankaradeva tries to solve the problem of One and Many. To explain the relation between ‘Part’ and the ‘Whole’ says in his Kirtanghosa:

\[
\text{mukuta kundale yena suvarnara bhinna nuhi} \\
\text{micha matra nama rupa jata} \\
\text{ahankara panchabhuta tomata prithaka nuhi} \\
\text{prabhu paramartha vicharata.}
\]

\( (V: 1670) \)

[The crown and the ear-ring are not different from gold. The names and forms are unreal. From the metaphysical point of view, the ego and the five gross elements are not distinct from the Thee, O’ Lord].

The similes of the part and the whole, the clay and the pot, the gold and the gold ornaments which mean that ultimate reality is one and the many like pots and ornaments are, but illusory forms and names. The above simile of the Part and the Whole has created confusion amongst scholars. If the Whole is real so is the Part. In this point, some scholars think that Sankaradeva comes close to Ramanuja. But Sankaradeva’s strong assertion on the illusoriness of the manifold universe does not allow us to accept such a view. The seven fold criticism of Advaita doctrine of Maya by Ramanuja and his recognition of the reality of the world appearance are the basic points in which he differs from Sankaracharya.
Sankaradeva believes in the Brahman from the transcendental standpoint which is devoid of all distinctions -

mayatese dekhaya bibidha parichcheda /
svarupata tohmara nahike kichu bheda //
caitanya svarupa vyapi eka niranjana /
tohmaka bulibe dvaita kona ajnajana. //
nichhala nirmala suksmarupa jito swami/
deve nahananta taka kene jano ami //

(Kirtanghosa :2122-2123)

[Thou dost appear in the diverse forms for illusion. In Reality, Thou dost bear no differentiation. O, Niranjana, Thou art One Supra-Consciousness, all pervading, only the ignorant finds duality in Thy becoming. O Niranjana, Thou art motionless, pure and in form subtle, when devas fail to know, how for us possible?]

Maya is the cause of that various distinctions seen by us. In truth, Brahman have no distinction at all. Like, Sankara, Sankaradeva also speaks of two functions of Maya-Avarana, to cover the real and Viksepana, project the unreal upon the real. In the enormous writings of Sankaradeva centering round the Bhagavata, there is mention of illusion. He has shown this illusion as a power of concealment and projection. Illusion hides the reality and shows itself as birth. In the second chapter of Bhagavata, Sankaradeva said:
Avastuka dekhaye vastuka avari
Ehise mohora maya jana nistha kari.

(Bhagavata-II:229)

[Unreality is being projected and reality being covered, know this surely
to be My Maya].

Again, Sankaradeva says that though the world is unreal or false, is not
totally blank or void. Advaita Vedanta accepts the theory of Vivartavada and
Ramanuja accepts the theory of Parinamavada. The term ‘Vivarta’ is very
peculiar. It is neither transformation nor non-transformation. The effect is
the appearance of the cause. The change is only apparent. When we perceive
a snake in a rope, the rope does not really transformed into snake. The basis
of Vivartavada is Satkaryavada which means that the effect is existent in the
material cause and is not a new thing. The effect may change in form or state
from the cause, but not in essence. It is vivarta when gold changes to a ring or
clay to a pot. There is no essential difference between gold and a ring. Or
clay and a pot. Sankaradeva’s concept of the world conforms to that of
Sankaracharya. His theory of creation is Vivarta-vada. Sankaradeva illustrate
the same example of rope-snake illusion to explain the relation between the
ultimate reality and the world.

brahma vyatireka jata dekha michha ana
jarita upaji ache jena sarpa jnana.

(Bhagavata-XII:172)
Ill
[Except Brahman, others are unreal like the knowledge of snake come out of rope due to lake of light].

Sankaradeva clearly explains the power of Maya through the unreality of the universe. He said that like clouds appearing and disappearing in the sky, the universe appears and again disappears in Brahman. The unreal universe like the work of the magician appears for a moment and soon after vanishes into air. He writes -

\[
\text{surya rasmi hovai yena maha megha gana} \\
\text{surya anga chaksuka tathapi kare channa}
\]

\text{(Bhagavata XII: 176)}

Ill
[Big clouds are produced by the rays of the sun. Even then it covers the eyes which are only parts of the sun].

Like Advaita philosophy, Sankaradeva too speaks of ignorance as the root cause of the 'many'. Due to ignorance we see the unreal world to be real. Individual self takes the world as real and suffers a lot. Sankaradeva explains the life of human beings as full of sufferings caused by Maya as:

\[
\text{ebhava gahana vana ati moha pase channa} \\
\text{tahe hamu harina berhai /} \\
\text{phandila mayara pase kala vyadha dhaya ase} \\
\text{kama krodha kutta khedi khaya //}
\]

\text{(Bargeeta: 16)}
This world is a dense forest strung with the rope of infatuation. I, a humble deer, move about it. I get trapped by the fetters of Maya. The hunter kala runs at me and his dogs of lust and anger devour me up. Again, he said in the Kirtanghosa:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sansara gartte pari achai loka /} \\
\text{mohata andha nedaya duhkha soka //} \\
\text{kala bhujange damsi lavai prana /} \\
\text{krnna vine kone karibe trana //}
\end{align*}
\]

\textit{(Bhagavata Tatparya :2031)}

[People are entrapped in the pit of worldliness, blind with delusions, they suffer from sorrows. The Serpent of Time bites and takes their lives, Who, except Krsna, would rescue them thence?]

With the dawn of true knowledge of Brahman or Atman, the world of appearance will vanish. From that moment a man will realize that Brahman is the only Reality. The material world is only because of our wrong knowledge or buddhi-bhrama. He stated as follows:-

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{jata dekha jata suna} & \quad \text{jateka manat guna} \\
\text{sabe mayamaya savpna sama} \\
\text{samasta jagat hari} & \quad \text{janiba nischaya kari} \\
\text{guchao budhir ito bhrama.}
\end{align*}
\]

\textit{(Kirtanghosa :1815)}

[All that we see, hear or think are illusory like dream. In fact, the world is nothing but Hari or God. We should remove our wrong Knowledge].
Sankaradeva maintained that the one and the same Brahman manifests itself in everything of the universe. Thus, it seems that he agreed to the Pratibimbavada and Abassedakavada of Advaita Vedanta when Sankaradeva stated that -

\[
\text{eka brahma aca sarva deha prakate/}
\text{jena eka akasa pratyek ghate ghate //}
\text{jalata suryaka dehi bhinna bhinna/}
\text{sehimate janiba brahmaro bheda hina //}
\text{kankana kundala ghata mani hemahara/}
\text{eka subarnaka dehi aneka akara //}
\]

(\text{Bhagavata - XII : 174})

[The one and the same Brahman is present in each thing as the one and the same space (akasa) is present in each pitcher. Brahman is one and the same. Only because of illusion it is seen as different just as we see the sun as different in the water of different places. Like, gold produced different types of ornaments of different shape and size].

Again he said as-

\[
\text{dehate achaha matra tumi dehahina/}
\text{yena agni thakante kasthato kari bhinna //}
\text{yena ghata bhangi gaile ghatara akasa/}
\text{akasate line hovavi nahi tara nasha //}
\]

(\text{Bhagavata-XII : 205})
[Only Thou, without form, is in the body of the jiva, as fire residing in the fire-wood is different from the latter, as the space in a pot is not lost, it mingles with the wider space when the pot is broken].

In the Bargeeta also we found:

\[
\text{isa svarupa hari \quad sava ghate baithaha}
\]
\[
yaisana gagana biyapi /
\]

(Sankaradeva Bargeet : 4)

[As the wider space resides different pots, so, Hari, as 'Isa' resides in different jivas].

The metaphors of 'Prativimbavada' and 'Avacchedavada' have been used frequently by Sankaradeva to explain and prove the identity between Brahman and Jiva. Sankaradeva believes that the apparent difference between Brahman and Jiva is due to Maya or Avidya. He deals with this in the 22nd chapter, Jiva-Paramatma-bheda of Bhakti-ratnakara. Sankaradeva quoted two slokas of Visnusvamin, cited by Sridhara in his Dipika as follows -

The doctrine of Inner Controller (Antaryami) is a prominent feature of Sankaradeva's Philosophy. According to him, God has created the jivas and the world and entered into them as the Inner-Controller. Thus, he makes the jivas experience pleasure and pain and also guides and protects them and the world. Sankaradeva writes as-
[Thou has created all the jivas moving and non-moving and are present with all greatness in everyone. Thou has entered as souls into all bodied forms. Hence, we worship Thee by all means].

R.G. Bhandarkar opines that the doctrine of Inner Controller belongs to Visistadvaitavada of Ramanuja. (1928 : 7). Maheswar Neog in his ‘Sankaradeva and His Times’ said that the doctrine of Inner Controller is a dualistic trait, distinguishing between the world and Brahman as its controller and no attempt is made to reconcile it to the assertions made elsewhere that the world is an apparent totality of names and forms and that Brahman alone is real (1998 : 229). Actually, the doctrine of Inner Controller is not admit of duality. Sankaradeva’s Ishvara is both immanent and transcendent. So, in the higher plane two question of duality does not arise.

Even, Sankaradeva endorses the view of the world-illusoriness in the Bargeetas where he speaks of the part and the whole relation.

\[
\text{athira dhana jana jivana jauvana} \\
\text{athira ehu sansara/} \\
\text{putra paribara savahi asara} \\
\text{karabo kaheri sara //}
\]

\text{(Bargeet :17)}
[Wealth and people, life and youth, the son and the family, even the world is not real. Whom shall we take as real?]

Thus, Sankaradeva’s view of the world and Maya is not different from the advaita-vedanta of Sankaracharya. Sankaradeva’s Mayavada heads him to the doctrine of Absolute unqualified Monism or Advaitavada. His literary works reflects as -

\[
\begin{align*}
yateka \text{ akriti mane mayamaya sristi} \\
hena jani kevala brahmata diyo dristi \\
swarupata eke matra mrittika akara \\
ghata patra bhede dekhi aneka prakara \\
chimate aneka advaita atmabuddha \\
maya upadhira pade dekhi bahuvidha \\
mayamaya nama-rupa savako upeksa \\
antaryami mai isvaraka matra dekha
\end{align*}
\]

(Kuruksetra:511-513)

[All forms are illusory creation, so, keep your eyes focussed in Brahman alone. Basically, it is one and the same earth, owing to difference in size and form we see them as many. In the like manner, the one, non-dual self due to Maya appears as many. Reject all these names and forms as illusory see Me, alone, who is also Omniscient].

THE CONCEPT OF LIBERATION AND BHAKTI:

Sankaradeva maintained that liberation of soul is the highest end of life.
Moksa or liberation means freedom of the human soul from samsara. He also upholds the annihilation of sins is liberation. His views on moksa and bhakti are to be found in his Bhakti-ratnakara, which contains his philosophical reasoning. In his work Sankaradeva not only tried to assimilate the philosophical views of the Gita and Bhagavata but also tried to express his views in the simplest language. Sankaradeva is in full agreement with Sankaracharya's advaita mukti regarding the concept of moksa. According to both Sankara and Sankaradeva, removal of ignorance is the way to liberation.

According to most Indian thinkers including Sankaradeva, liberation is regarded as the highest end of human life and the phenomenal world is full of sufferings. The transitory nature of the world appears to be the cause of profound sorrow for human beings. They believe that death is not the ultimate end of human life. The individual self can attain immortality through liberation. Ignorance is the root cause. Sankardeva claims that the individual self, in its true essence, is always free. But due to ignorance, the self-appears as bound. According to Sankardeva, happiness that comes from the material world is not the ultimate end of human beings. Sankardeva maintains that the individual self is under the suppression of maya which conceals the real happiness of indiviuadal jiva. (Bhakti-ratnakara :V-8-9). In its true essence, the jivatman is identical with paramatman. But due to ignorance the individual self forgets its own identity. Sankardeva in his 'Nimi-nava-siddha-samavada' writes as -
indriyar sange jiva bhunje bisayaka
atma buli mane mayamaya sariraka
dhare maha mohe ati hovai jnana sunya
sakame anek karma kare papa punya
sehi karmaphala bhunji bhrame samsarata
nahi anta jivara jatana dukha jata //

(V:110)

[Being ignorant, the jiva along with the sense organs experiences the worldly affairs, acquires papa or vice and punya or virtue according to nature of actions. To reap the fruits of actions, one must come to this world for innumerable times till he is finally released. So, ignorance is the root cause of bondage when ignorance is removed, the individual self becomes liberated].

Liberation means freedom from worldly sufferings and attainment of bliss. Sankaradeva admits three kinds of individudal consciousness, namely, waking (jagana), dream (Svapna) and dreamless sleep (nidra) (Bhagavat-purana:III, Anadipatana V-66). In dreamless sleep, the sense-organs along with ahankara absorb in the atman and the atman remains an witness or saksin. (Nimi-nava-siddha-samavada : V-196). According to Sankaradeva, though the jiva experiences the self in deep sleep, it does not mean liberation. Because at that time also avidya is present Nimi-nava-siddha-samavada : V-198). He holds that moksa or liberation is possible only after the destruction of linga-sarira. Sankaradeva writes as-
mayaye erila linga sarira bhangila
apunara atma paramatmate thapila

(Kirtanghosa :1955)

[As he become free from maya, his linga sarira broke away and he had his soul merged in soul supreme].

Thus, rebirth is due to the non-destruction of the linga-sarira. One can attain liberation as soon as he dissociates himself from the linga sarira. Linga-sarira means accumulation of thoughts acquired in the past lives and also in the present life which survives after death and is the cause of new life till absolute liberation.

Liberation is the highest end of the individual. Sankaradeva, as an advocate of Neo-Vaisnavism, maintains that without knowledge or jnana, a man cannot get liberation. Sankaradeva explains liberation through his theory of knowledge without devotion can not be regarded as the cause of liberation. According to Sankaradeva Moksa or liberation is complete merger with the Absolute or Brahman. It is to become one with the Absolute ego or the ashankara which is the product of Maya should be removed to achieve such a state and then the pure-at-heart sees the Absolute Brahma by removing the illusion of the intellect. Thus, when ego is cut by the weapon knowledge, absolute bliss prevails at the pure heart and it feels completeness. Jiva doesnot see his own body and becomes one with Brahma. This is known as atyantika-layo.
Moksa also means freedom from bondage of Maya. Maya is an attribute of God, it is the divine force which binds man very strongly to worldly attachment. A man cannot expect to attain Moksa, until and unless comes out of this bondage. Sankardeva has expressed his concept of Moksa through his various writings.

The Vedantic view on liberation can be traced back to upanishads which asserts that liberation is achieved only through knowledge, the knowledge of Brahman, the absolute, and not through any other means. Sankaracharya, following the upanishadic view, maintains that moksa is the ultimate goal of mankind and it is such a state where the illusory distinction between the soul and the Brahman disappears totally owing to emergence of knowledge of identity between the two. According to Ramanuja, the soul is bound on account of their ignorance and karma. Due to its karmas, the soul becomes associated with particular body, senses, mind and life. Therefore, the soul has to remove its karmic obstacles for obtaining release from samsara. This can be done by a harmonious combination of action and knowledge. ‘Ramanuja admits that knowledge is the immediate cause of liberation, but this knowledge is real knowledge and not the ordinary verbal knowledge. Otherwise all those who studied vedanta would obtain liberation.’ (Sarma C.D. 1987 : 352). The knowledge of vedanta being attained, the individual comes to realise that the soul is not the physical body, but is a part of God. Then through mercy of God, liberation is attained. Sankardeva’s views on moksa and bhakti are to be found in his Bhakti-Ratnakara, which contains his philosophical reasoning.
Sankaradeva is in full agreement with Sankar’s Advaita mukti. Sankaradeva is in favour of knowledge with devotion. As he expresses, knowledge follows the realm of veda. The ignorant jivas in this world are under the spell of maya. They are quite attached to this illusory world. The jiva has to conquer the darkness of ignorance in order to get liberation and the darkness can be removed only when the ignorant can attain self-realisation. They have to attain the real knowledge about the nature of this world, jiva and paramatma - “Jiva, brahmaeva naparah” - this is the real knowledge for the attainment of moksa or mukti. The moment, the ignorant jiva can overcome his ignorance, it becomes free from his karmaphala.

Mukti or liberation may be of two types, viz. (1) Jivan-Mukti or liberation attained in this life and (2) Videha mukti or absolute liberation from birth and death. Sankaradeva holds that liberation which can be attained in one’s own life time is called jivan-mukti. True knowledge destroys all merits and demerits and so in the jivan-mukti man holds his body only through the will of God. According to Sankaradeva, one who attains jivan-mukti need not go beyond the cycle of birth and death. Because, he is not affected by the power of maya. “The principal vaisnava sects of India viz. those of Ramanuja, Madhava, Nimbarka, Vallabha and Caitanya have not recognized Jivan-mukti, i.e. liberation during life time.” (Sarma, S.N.: 1996 : 56). But Sankardeva, like Sankaracharya has recognized both the types of liberation.

Like Sankara, Sankardeva believes in both Jivan-Mukti and Videha-Mukti. Sankardeva writes as -
Damadora Bipra with firm devotion to krishna, did away with worldly attachment and became free from the fetters of karma. Thus, having supreme attainment, he saw the world as Brahman and got merged with Krishna.

Again, he said as -

visnumaya dekhai yito samaste jagata
jivante mukuta hovai acira kalata

On His departure to vaikuntha, krishna said to uddhava - if a person sees the whole world as realizes that the entire world is permeated by visnu gets liberated in no time while one is living. Visnu’s reflection, even in his lived life, he soon attains emancipation.

The Bhagavata refers to five types of mukti - salokya, sarsti, samipya, sarupya and sayujya or ekatvam. “Sakardeva holds that according to the ability of the devotee there may be three types of spiritual achievements” (Mahanta, B.C. 1987 : 191). They are lina-mukti, baikuntha labha ad Saprema bhakti. Sankaradeva does not give much importance in lina-mukti on the plea that in such liberation there is no room for service to God. Lina mukti or absolute liberation is that mukti in which the devotee realises the nirguna Brahman.

....
the writings of Sankaradeva we find that Ajamila, Gajendra, Kamsa, Vipra Damodara and others attain salokya, sampiya, sarupya and lina-mukti, which are different forms of videha mukt. Accordingly Sankaradeva writes as -

save karmabandha haiba ksina
antakale mota yaibi lina

(Kirtanghosa : 454)

[All attachments of life shall end, in one you will merge in the end].

Sankaradeva holds that lina-mukti is the ultimate consequence of all the devotees. He shows various examples of lina bhakti. He gives description of vaikuntha in connection with mukti. All the writings of Sankaradeva regard bhakti as more important than mukti.

There are divergent views regarding the means of liberation. “Sankaradeva considers devotion to be the easiest means of liberation that can be accepted by all. According to him, though there are various means of liberation, yet Bhakti is the best for all to get rid of this painful life.” (Bhakti-ratnakara : V-14).

In his Kirtanghosa -

stri sudro karai yadi amata bhakati
tahata kahiba ito jnana mahatmati
aka bhakti kari padhe yito jnaniloka
maha suddha huya jnanadipe dekhai moka

(V : 1826-27)
Even if woman and Sudras offer the devotion. Reveal to them its content O’ Noble one, the wise who read it with a devotional urge, being highly purified, see Me in light of knowledge.

Sankaradeva does not accept jnana and karma to be totally useless. According to him, jnana is the spontaneous outcome of devotion. In Sri Mahabhagavata Krishna says to Arjuna that jnana is within bhakti, so one need not depend on jnana for liberation (Bhagavata : XI, V-200).

There are three ways of God- realisation-like-jnana marga or the way of knowledge, karma marga or the way of action and the way of devotion or bhaktimarga. Among these three ways of God realisation, Sankaradeva declares the way of devotion to be the ultimate way of realising God. As he said -

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{jnana karma bhakti kahilo kari bhed} \\
\text{bhakati parama pantha dilo parichched}
\end{align*}
\]

(Bhagavata-XI : 141)

For Sankaradeva, devotionless knowledge and action are of no avail-

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{bhakatibihin jnana-karma save vyarthar}
\text{kahilo swarupe Vedanta tattva artha}
\end{align*}
\]

(Bhagavata-I : 41)

Thus, Sankaradeva prefers the way of devotion as the best way of realising God. Hence, one has to choose the way of devotion for the attainment of the highest goal i.e. God.
It is noteworthy that Sankaradeva's great emphasis on devotion does not imply that he ignores knowledge. Like Sankaracharya, rather he is in favour of knowledge with devotion. He expresses as -

\[
\text{jnana gati kawai veda} \quad \text{lawa tar pariched}
\]
\[
\text{achoi jnana bhakatira maje}
\]
\[
\text{bhakati karante jana} \quad \text{apuni upajoi jnana}
\]
\[
\text{yoga chinti maroi micha kaje}
\]

\[(Bhagavata-XI :200)\]

Knowledge follows the realm of veda, bring out the sound judgement out of it; knowledge remains in devotion. According to Sankaradeva it is only through the performance of devotion that knowledge arises automatically. Man suffers in vain by thinking about yoga, Sankaradeva maintains that knowledge without devotion struggles for nothing. Such knowledge cannot produce any result. Bhakti is the bearer of great fruits. There are nine kinds of bhakti, but Sankaradeva emphasize on sravana and kirtana of the glories of God are the two modes of devotion].

Bhakti leads to Mukti or liberation. This bhakti is not simple utterance
of the names and glories of the Lord Hari or Krishna. It is a complex and gradual process of removing ignorance or avidya.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{jani ito tattva katha thir kari chitta} \\
\text{mokese dekhiba matra samasta pranita} \\
\text{apunata dekhiba isvara antaryamin} \\
\text{jnana-dristi chai moka phuriba pranami}
\end{align*}
\]

(Bhagavata-XI: 256)

[Bhakti should be practised with steadiness of mind. I am the supreme Lord and present within and outside this universe. Realising this with determination, see my presence in all living beings including yourself. With this knowledge (jnana-dristi) see me everywhere and bow to me].

Sankaradeva maintains in the Kirtanaghosa, Prahlada explains bhakti as sravana, kirtana, smarana, archana, padasevana, dasya, sakhitva, bandana and deha arpana. These nine kinds of Visnu bhakti are to be performed. Sravana is listening to the glories of God, Kirtana is the uttering of the names and glories of God. Smarana means remembering the glories of God. Among the nine forms of bhakti, Sravana and Kirtana are regarded as the best forms as they are necessary requisites for the purification of mind. It reflects in the writings of Sankaradeva as -

\[
\begin{align*}
sravana kirttana bina & \text{ ana punye napaya jana} \\
\text{ito ghora samsarar para}
\end{align*}
\]

(Kirtanaghosa:1673)
[No other virtues except the listening and hearing of the names of God enables one to overcome the worldly pains and sufferings of our life].

Again, Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva takes dasya-bhakti-bhava in order to cultivate devotion to achieve the state of liberation or desired ideal. God is taken by them as a compassionate master and bosom friend. Sankaradeva lays emphasis on the need for ethical life as an essential condition of spiritual realisation and bhakti leads us to that path. Bhakti is always linked with good. His literary works like - Bhakti pradipa, Bhakti-ratnakara and Kirtanaghosa of Sankaradeva explain that bhakti is greater than mukti. In his Bhakti pradipa he says that:

Bhakatira pare gatidata na hi aro

(Bhakti pradipa :23)

[There is no other way except devotion]. In his Bhakti-ratnakara, Sankaradeva says religion without bhakti is fruitless. Here he says -

‘All virtues lead to devotion’

(V :1037)

According to Sankaradeva, desireless devotion is greater than liberation. He said as -

harira bhakati eri ana pathe
kaharo na hi mukuti
parama vedanta gita bhagavata
sastrara ehi juguti

(Bhagavata-X:2267)
[All the sastras like, Vedanta, Gita and Bhagavata argue that nobody can attain mukti unless he takes the path of Haribhakti].

"The real devotee is disinterested to mukti and Sakaradeva calls this type of devotee as the highest type of devotee (uttama bhakatas)" (Bhakti-ratnakara :V-9). Such type of devotees realise that the world is but a manifestation of Visnu’s maya. They consider birth, death, pain, hunger, thirst and fear to be the functions of the body, senses, breath, intellect and mind and continues remembering God in all circumstances. His mind is not disturbed by the objects of senses as the mind rests calmly at the feet of the Lord. It is noteworthy that who prefers bhakti to mukti may be a house­holder. Even then he doesnot lose the serenity of his mind. Because, Sankaradeva denounced ascetism and believed in the teachings of the Gita that one can lead a social life without being attached to the world.

Thus, Sankaradeva being bhakti-vadi and believer in Sravana-kirtana or nama-dharma, at times he propounds knowledge as the means of liberation. Devotion to God or bhakti arises out of love of God or Bhagavata prema. He conceived that bhakti comprehends knowledge and sense of greatness of God. It is attachment to God accomplished by detachment to all worldly things. It is the loving service to God. Sankaradeva maintains that true knowledge dawns through the devotion to the Supreme God or Bhagavan. As a result, the devotee can understand the world as God’s Lila or Sport. Wrong knowledge or ignorance instantly vanishes of a man, with the attainment of the true knowledge. Then, he can realise that reality is one. Intensive knowledge of
the truth alone can lead a devotee to the eternal state of liberation. So, according to Sankaradeva, knowledge is intensive. True knowledge arises in the mind of devotee of God and then only he can realise what is true and real. But the people without devotion are ignorant. Their knowledge of the world is misleading. They are the victims of illusion.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{jata dekha charachara} & \quad \text{harimaya nirantara} \\
\text{harita prithaka kono nohe} & \\
\text{jjian bhakathinhana} & \quad \text{si dekhe harika bhinna} \\
\text{harira mayaye taka mohe} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Kirtanghosa :599)

[All creatures that we see are nothing else than Hari. Hari and His creations are non-different. Only the person who is without devotion to God, sees them as different from Hari or God. Because, he is the victim of illusion].

Like, Advaita concept of liberation, Sankaradeva strongly states that knowledge is the means of liberation through bhakti. He said as -

\[
\begin{align*}
moksakehe buli jana atyantika laya & \\
brahmajnani dekhoi jagataka brahmanaya// & \\
ahankara guchile brahmako jive dekhe & \\
maya ere apuni buddhira guchoi bhrama// & \\
jikalata jnana astre chede ahankara & \\
chinde karma-bandha jive teve apunara// & \\
hridayata paraama ananda hove jata & \\
paripurna atma hovai manate saksata// & \\
\end{align*}
\]
dehako nedekhe jive huiya brahmamaya
ihake bulya raja atyantika laya//

(Bhagavata-XII :170, 176-178)

[Moksa or liberation is complete merger with the absolute or Brahman. It is to become one with the absolute. To achieve such a state ahankara or the ego (which is a product of maya) should be removed and then the pure-at-heart sees the Absolute Brahman by the weapon ‘Brahman’ (knowledge), absolute bliss prevails at the pure heart and it feels completeness. Jiva doesnot see his own body and becomes one with Brahma. This is known as atyantika laya].

Therefore, the pursuit of Advaitavada is Absolute Brahman. The worshipful deity in Bhakti-vada is the determinate God-head. The faith of “Sankaracharya’s advaita-vada is a purely philosophical scheme. It is relatively free from theological obsessions.” (Radhakrishnan, S. :1999 :445). By the instrumentation of the willpower of Maya, Sankaracharya’s Isvara assumes many names and forms. Most of the advaitic views of Sankaracharya find expressions in Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva’s writings. Sankaradeva propagated Bhakti-marga instead of jnana-marg, because he thought that Bhakti-marga to be far more efficacious than the latter for the common people. But, it would be wrong to say that he did not pay any importance to knowledge. Effecting a synthesis between devotion and knowledge, Sankaradeva holds that it comes through devotion to God.
Like, the Bhagavata-purana Sankaradeva bridges the differences between monism and monotheism as follows -

brahma paramatma bhagavanta ekatattva
ekerese tini name laksana bhedata

(Bhagavata-II :183)

[Brahma, Paramatma and Bhagavanta are the same entity - the three names are due to their characteristic differences].

Thus, the faith of Sankaradeva based on the Bhagavat-purana and its most authoritative commentary Dipika of Sridhara Svamin which preached Bhaktivada but leaned towards Advaitavada in the philosophical plane. He traces the reality of the world to a single point that is Brahman in the philosophical plane and in the religious spheres he gives us a determinate God. Then, again for Bhakti-faith, the Isvara and Jivas are to be differentiated, though according to the advaitavada of Sankaracharya, they are identical. To overcome this difficulty, Sankaradeva holds -

jadyapi tomata kari jiva nohe bhinna
tathpito bhaila prabhu tomara adhina.

(Bhagavata- X : 1696)

[Though the jivas are not different from Thee, yet they are subordinate to Thee].

It is found that the sound philosophical basis of Sankaradeva’s religious faith is Vedanta as revealed in the Bhagavata-bhavartha-dipika, by
Sridharasvamin. Sankaradeva, by all means, was a practical philosopher. He brought vedanta philosophy from the ivory tower of theoretical speculation down to the common people and made it their common possession.
B. MADHAVADEV

Madhavadeva (1489-1596) was the chief disciple of Sankaradeva and he succeeded the latter as the religious head of the Neo-Vaisnavism. The two personalities connected with the Neo-Vaisnava movement of Assam were Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. Like his guru Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva also occupied a remarkable position in the religious philosophy and literary history of Assam. He is a man of versatile genius, an outstanding religious organiser, an erudite scholar and a poet and musician of a very high order. The union of these two saints is indeed the most epoch-making event in the history of Assam which is known as ‘Mani Kanchan Samjog’. The Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva gained much popularity and gathered many followers with the association of a great personality like that of Madhavadeva. Though, other disciples and associates of Sankaradeva also did their best to spread the message of bhakti far and wide in Assam, yet the vaisnava organisation received a concrete shape at the hand of Madhavadeva. He introduced different ways and modes of cultivating devotional practices.

Madhavadeva was born at a small village in the district of North Lakhimpur in Assam. After staying a few years in Assam he went to his ancestral home at Banduka with his father. He started his formal education at Banduka. He possessed a great power of the intellect and was a creative genius. Madhavadeva mastered all the scriptures within a short time. As soon as his father died, he returned to Assam again. He was a staunch follower of saktism and had firm faiths on blood sacrifice before he came into contact
with Sankaradeva. The personality of Sankaradeva attracted Madhavadeva most. Eventually he took initiation in the Bhakti Dharma. He promised to lead a dedicated life for the cause of propagating devotion.

Madhavadeva met Sankaradeva in 1522 when he was about thirty two and Sankaradeva was in his seventy three year of his life. Though, Madhavadeva was a disciple of Sankaradeva yet Sankaradeva considered him as a “friend, philosopher and guide” in his public as well as his personal life. Henceforth, Madhavadeva engaged himself completely in the propagation of the Neo- vaisnava faith as was done by his guru. He did not try to propagate any new doctrine or theology of his own. He simply followed Sankaradeva's ideals and instructions. Madhavadeva did not modify but magnified them and made further elaboration of the thoughts and principles set forth by his guru. “Madhavadeva who moved with Sankaradeva like a shadow through thick and thin was intimately known to the Guru than any other disciples”. Thus, Madhavadeva was a worthy disciple of a worthy Guru. As such, Sankaradeva made him his immediate successor amongst the six disciples of equal status. Thus, Madhavadeva was Sankaradeva's another self. “Madhava is my best friend, equal to my life itself so says Sankaradeva” (Thakur, D. : VV-19, 20 : 163). Thus, Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva were two inseparable co-workers for establishing a new faith in Assam with a firm and everlasting foundation.

In many respects, Madhavadeva was complementary to his guru. They took together with great zeal to propagate the new faith among the people and within a short period of time they were able to usher in an era of religious
and cultural regeneration in Assam. The main contribution of Madhavadeva to the neo-vaishnavism in Assam was the further elucidation of the tenets of Sankaradeva. He established beyond doubt the gospel of Bhakti as a means to the attainment of the Supreme Brahman by virtue of his unrivalled energy and intellect. Madhavadeva kept himself aloof from all worldly desires and even gave up the thoughts of his marriage.

Madhavadeva's contribution to Assamese literature is significant enough both from the religious and literary points of view. Like his guru, he too was a prolific writer. Along with other vaishnava followers like Ananta Kandali, Vyaskalai, Ramarama guru, Ramadasa and others, Madhavadeva offered the most active co-operation to Sankaradeva in the expansion of the Vaishnava faith. Madhavadeva, the scholar, poet and singer soon occupied a very respectable position among the people and became the real worker, associate and bandhava of Sankaradeva (Kathaguru-charit: 41). Thus, Dhuahata became the centre of attraction for the people, where religious discourses were always held. ‘Kirtana’, the songs of mass prayers in the delicious voice of Madhavadeva charmed the people from different sections of Dhuahata. (Kathaguru-charit: 288-304). Madhavadeva wrote a number of books in different literary forms and completed the religious exegesis of the Bhakti cult. He composed a plenty of songs, drama, verse narratives and other types of literature where he expounded and elaborated the tenets of the faith. These literary works acted as the chief instrument of propaganda and catered to both enlightenment and pleasure to the people. Daityari, who considers
Sankara and Madhava as two successive incarnations of Visnu and he says
“Sankara only revealed (the secret of) bhakti, the religion of love; it is
Mahdava, who made it public” (Daityari, 262-69, 315-27, 340-47). Madhava
was a scholar, poet and a fine singer. His literary works are beset with various
hurdles, shaped under the inspiration and ideals of the saint- poet of
Sankaradeva. His literary career starting on during the life time of Sankaradeva
but he carried it forward to sits final flowering after his Guru’s passing away.
He proved his mettle and ability on many occasions and trying situations. It
is narrated in the biographies of Sankaradeva that when his son Ramananda
approached his death-bed seeking spiritual instruction, then Sankaradeva is
said to have directed his son to approach Madhavadeva on whom all his
spiritual strength and energy developed (Ramacarana Sankara-charit: 199,
Kathaguru-charit : 229). The ardent devotee, who followed his Guru as shadow
does the body, confined his choice of subjects to those which suited the
desires and selection of his Guru during the early phase of his literary career
(Kathaguru-charit : 151, 257). Madhavadeva even followed the path indicated
by his Guru on his translation works. Sankaradeva had so much of confidence
in the abilities of Madhavadeva that he left to the latter the responsibility of
even those literary compositions which he would have done himself
(Kathaguru-charit : 225). He was a lyricist and a popular singer. He would
compose and sing lyrics and ghosa verses on various occasions as and when
his guru desired him to do so. (Ramacarana Kathaguru-charit : 123, 126,
211). His lyrics and ghosa possess a unique quality both from the points of
view of objects and expressions. It is noteworthy that most of the lyrics of Madhavadeva proved easily accessible to popular understanding and appreciation. Even a highly significant message of Bhagavata-purana and the Bhagavad-gita or a complex theory of vedanta philosophy found its easy and simple expression in Madhavadeva’s writings.

Madhavadeva's crowning literary works ‘Namghosa’ consists of one thousand devotional verses for which it is also known as ‘Hajari-ghosa’. The mystic, poet and scholar in Madhavadeva found admirable expression through the verses of Namghosa. He composed several one act plays depicting the childish pranks of Krishna. He translated into metrical Assamese canto I of the Ramayana, Bhaktiratnavali by Visnupuri Sanyasi, Nama-malika by purusottama Gajapati, king of Orissa. Rajasuya kavya of Madhavadeva based on an episode of the Bhagavata purana, is dignified in style, poetical in description and devotional in treatment. “In the sphere of poetical beauty Madhava's writings often surpass his master’s work.” (Neog, M. : 1998 : 127). During life time of Sankaradeva, of the many compositions by Madhavadeva, his Adikanda-Ramayana, Rajasuyakavya, Janma-Rahasya, Arjuna-Bhajan Nat and numerous geets and bhatimas were written. The other literary works of Madhavadeva which were composed at the directions of his guru, but were completed only after the death of the guru. We may mention Namghosa and Bhakti-ratnavali. These important works were composed while he was at Sundaridiya.
Madhavadeva’s literary works can be classified under the following heads:

1) **Works of philosophical Nature**
   a) Namghosa
   b) Bhakti-ratnavali
   c) Janma-rahasya
   d) Nama-malika

2) **Narrative Renderings**
   a) The Ramayana Adikanda
   b) Rajasuya Kavya

3) **Plays**
   a) Cor-dhara
   b) Pimpara-gucowa
   c) Bhojana-bihar
   d) Bhumi-telowa
   e) Arjuna-bhanjana

4) **Borgeets**

5) **Bhatimas**

6) **Plays of Madhavdeva’s authorship:**
   a) Bhusana-harana
   b) Rasa-jhumura
   c) Kotora-khela
   d) Brahma-mohana
   e) The Dhyana barnana part of the Kirtana
7) Plays found mentioned in the old Carita and attributed to Madhavdeva
   a) Govardhana - yatra
   b) Narsimha-yatra
   c) Rama-yatra

8) Compilation and editing
   a) Compilation of the Kirtana
   b) Editing of Madhava Kandali’s Ramayana

Like, his guru Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva throughout all his writings on bhakti was mainly influenced by the Bhagavata-purana. Because, the Neo-Vaisnavism of Assam mainly derived its devotional theologism from the Bhagavata-purana and the Gita. He almost invariably followed the ‘Bhagavata-bhavartha-dipika’, the commentary of Sridhar Svami (C-1400) in interpreting the purana. Therefore, “influence of the Bhagavata-purana in forming the theological background of Assam vaisnavism is quite clear and the monistic commentary of Sridhara Svami is highly popular amongst all sections of vaisnavas” (Sarma, S.N. : 1996 : 36). Madhavadeva said as in his Namghosa - "whoever has drunk to his heart’s content, the nectarine pleasure of the scripture, the Great Bhagavata, which is the essence of the whole gamut of the vedanta, must have lost attachment to all other pleasures found in other things.” (V:18)

The Bhagavata-purana has been praised as the best among all the scriptures in a few verses of Namaghosa. It is noteworthy that out of one thousand
verses of Namaghosa, Madhavadeva has translated and incorporated sixty
one slokas from the Bhagavata purana. He has deep faith and reverence for
the purana. Madhavadeva used nine verses from the Bhagavata-bhavartha-dipika
in his Namaghosa. Bhakti-ratnavali, another notable work of Madhavadeva is
completely based on the Bhagavata-purana. As he says -

bhakti-ratnavali  grantha bhagavata sara

(Bhakti-ratnavali : 4)

[Bhagavata is the essence of Bhakti-ratnavali].

The topics of Bhakti-ratnavali is devotion and its nature, classification
of devotion and devotees as contained in the Bhagavata-purana. Madhavadeva
composed the Rajasuya-kavya based on the story of Bhagavata Skandha-X.
Among his genuine plays, the Arjuna Bhanjana and the Bhojana Behar and
among the plays attributed to Madhavadeva the Brahmamohana are based on
the Bhagavata-purana.

Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva without any reservation have accepted the
advaita-vedanta of Sankaracharya. The Religious philosophy of Madhavadeva,
the conception of Brahman, Jiva and the world is based on the Vedanta. Again,
the philosophical aspects of Namaghosa are based on the Vedanta. Sankaradeva
begins his kirtana with obeisance to 'santana' (eternal) Brahman who is the
cause (karana) of all the incarnations (avatara). Madhavadeva's Namaghosa
accepts the same view and establishes Krishna as both Brahman, the cause
of incarnations and the Brahman incarnate. Madhavadeva, like his guru, readily
accepted the oneness of God, the world is unreal and beings as the effects of
God and the indeterminate character of Brahman. On the other hand, he also
give uppermost significance to the devotion of one Saguna Isvara.

In Madhavadeva’s thought we donot find any new interpretation of God. The
superiority of devotion to the Saguna Brahman is overemphasized, Sankaradeva
and Madhavadeva thought that the Nirguna Brahman or the abstract concepts
of God is not easily understandable and the worldly people may fail to realise it in
their life time. The personal God of Madhavadeva is Rama and Krsna. We said as -

krsna eka deva dukhahari           kala mayadiro adhikari
krsna bine srestha deva nahi nahi ara
srsti sihiti antakari deva           tanta bine ana nahi keva
janiba visnuse samasta jagate sara

(Namghosa :586)

[The Krishna being only God removing suffering, only owner of both time and
illusions, superior to Krishna no other God is there, creator, preserver, Destroyer. He, No mightier one than. He, remember Visnu as the essence of the whole universe].

According to Madhavadeva, the only form we can ascribe to God is the Nama of Isvara. The Name and the Nami, i.e. the name and the Lord who holds it, are synonymous. He maintains that the existence of formless (nirakara), blissful (paramananda), eternal and pure (sudha) Brahman as the
cause of the manifested world. Brahman is the indwelling spirit of every material element and being indwelling spirit effects the production of other things. Madhavadeva writes as -

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{jateka prakrta} & \quad \text{akara varjita} \\
\text{bhaianta jihetu hari} & \\
\text{sehi hetutese} & \quad \text{nirakar nama} \\
\text{asanta isvare dhari} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

\text{(Namghosa :162)}

[As Hari is devoid of forms coming out of matter (prakrta akara), Isvara holds the name Nirakara].

In the opening verse of the Namghosa, worship is offered to that Lord Jadupati who is the crown-jewel of all heads but is at the command of his own devotees. Madhavadeva makes a detailed discussion of the glories of his different incarnations. Thus, he established Krishna or Visnu as the Purna Brahman who is the cause of the universe. He is anadi (beginning less) and ananta (endless). The jivas are nothing but the part of Him. He said as -

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tumi nitya nira} & \quad \text{najana narayana} \\
\text{amio amsa tomara/} & \\
\text{tayu seva-cora} & \quad \text{paya mahamaya} \\
\text{muhile mana amara//} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

\text{(Namghosa :273)}
[Thou art eternal and free from falsehood, O’ Narayana, we are Thy parts. Finding that we were neglecting devotion to Thee, Mahamaya hath charmed our mind].

According to Madhavadeva, Brahman or Krishna is the only conscious power (Caitanya-Sakti), over the inert universe (Jada-Jagat), all the jivas including Brahma, are subservient to His power maya. He writes -

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{maya adhikari yata} & \quad \text{samaste jagat jarah} \\
\text{krsnese caitanya atma suddha} & \\
\text{caitanya krsnaka eri} & \quad \text{jarahka bhajia mare} \\
\text{kino loka adhama mugudha}.
\end{align*}
\]

\text{\textit{(Namghosa: 47)}}

[The whole world with Illusion is but inert matter, Krishna alone is consciousness, pure soul leaving aside consciousness-krishna, by worshipping matter. They die. Oh! How worst deluded are the people].

The nirakara Brahman pervades the whole creation. Every creature is a part of that eternal and spotless soul. He creates the world and the world which is appearance and manifested in Him. The Namaghosa rightly call Him the soul of the world \textit{(Namghosa: V-156)}.

The word ‘Vedanta’ occurs innumerable times in the large corpus of the writings of Madhavadeva. He believed and established through all his literary works that Bhagavata-purana and the Bhagavat-gita as the essence of the upanasadic vedanta. On the non-dual indeterminate reality, several verses can be culled from the writings of Madhavadeva.
antaryami rupe yihetu jivaka
sukha dukha bhunjavanta /
etekese para matma nama dhari
achanta prabhu ananta //

(Namghosa : 158)

[O’ Lord Ananta, since as inner Controller, Thou, makes the jives experience pleasure and pain, therefore, Thou has assumed the name paramatma].

God is eternal, omnipresent and omniscient. He is immanent in all things and beings of the universe. God is infinite reality by nature and qualities, there is no other Supreme Reality. He is one and the ultimate truth. He is Advaita or non-second. In his Namghosa, Madhavadeva said as -

rama krsna narayana niranjana nirakara
nirvikara nirmaya hari /
chidananda sadananda purusa paramananda
bhajo tua charanata dhari //

(V : 697)

[God who is formless, changeless is Rama, Krshna, Hari. He is eternal ultimate bliss, we devote ourselves to Him].

Madhavadeva too, like his guru, hold that prakrti and purusa are not independent. Both of them are dependent on and controlled by God Himself.
Matter and soul (prakrti and purusa) are controlled by God Himself who is the soul of them.

The essence of the Bhagavata philosophy is that Brahman or Atman is the only Absolute reality and that the whole universe, including body, mind and ego, is an expression in name and form of the reality and as such has no independent existence of its own (Cultural Heritage of India, Vol-IV : 1937 : 29). In the Janma rahasya, Madhavadeva explains the philosophy of Bhagavata as-

\[
\text{tumi matra sancha ana prapancha sakale} \\
\text{tohmara antara nuhi jagata yateka} \\
\text{tumi punu prabhu prapanchata vyatireka} \\
\text{yena mati vine sthiti nahika ghatara} \\
\text{ghata vyatireka mati thake nirantara} \\
\text{tumi matra sacha micha anarupa jata} \\
\text{yena nana latasata dekhiya vastrata}
\]

\[(V:35)\]

i.e. as the existence of an earthen-pot is impossible without the clay, but the clay can exist without the pot, likewise Thou alone art the truth, all other forms are transitory. A flowers and creepers appearing in a piece of tapestry are actually nothing but threads, likewise Thou art the only Reality in the three worlds.
According to Madhavadeva, the master of the three worlds enter into His creation as the inner controller and plays with vivid forms (Adikanda-Ramayana :V-369). Again, he said in his Rajasuya-kavya as -

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{upadhi rahita jyoti rupa atma eka/} \\
\text{samastake vyapi asa apuni pratyeke/} \\
\text{chidananda purna satya nitya nirantara/} \\
\text{mohara prakase prakasaya Caracara/} \\
\text{sristi sthiti pralayaro karana saksata/} \\
\text{jivaro avidya guche mohoro Sevata/} \\
\text{nochovai moka dosa gune jagatara/} \\
\text{parama isvaramaya praktiro para/}
\end{align*}
\]

\[V:31-32\]

[The Lord is free from all limitations is the splendid soul pervading all the universe. Eternal, conscious and blissful He, untrammelled by the qualities of the universe. He controls the jiva as the inner controller and maya is submissive to Him].

In Arjuna-bhanjana Nat’, Madhavadeva explains the supremacy of the Brahman and the unreality of the world as the sons of Kubera pray to Krishna as extremely blissful, supreme person and the primary cause of the universe. He is recognised as the only truth of the illusory universe. It is the only for His divine sport (Lila) that He appeared as a cowherd boy (cordhara). The Lord of the universe is free from birth and death yet He has born as a cowherd boy and did so many pleasure (Pimpora-gucowa). The God remains in the
hearts of all creatures (bhakta) but ignorance not being aware of it, search for Him outside but with no gain. However, the votary realising the truth meditate Him in their hearts. Here, lies the essence of Bhakti of Neo-Vaisnavism.

Madhavadeva’s deep knowledge of Vedanta finds its expression even in his sweet and beautiful borgeet lyrics. Among these lyrics of his, a good number is about the child-like pranks and a prettily appealing playfulness of Krishna, the child God. The poet devotee throughout all his lyrics never forget for a moment the divine self of that small child. Again and again he realises that He is the Lord Hari whose glory is expounded in all the four Vedas, the Puranas, the Mahabharata, the Gita and the Bhagavata and whose name is chanted by gods and saints alike, knowing it to be the essence of all vedic scriptures (Borgeet-3, 9). Even the principal God cannot realise the nature of Narayana’s maya, the power due to which all transitory things look like eternal. People lose their judgement of true and false (Borgeet-6). They treat the body as the soul and forget that the super soul is Hari alone (Borgeet No. 26). Self surrender at His feet, as being the only Saviour of jivas, under the appearance of a cowherd boy, He is the endless and beginning less, True, Eternal and Spotless Deva (Borgeet-44). The scriptures are not easy of access to all persons. It is easier for them to identify the little cowherd in the milkmaid’s house as the master of the Brahmananda, who out of this nature of submission to His devotees allows Himself to tied down by Yosoda, even though Brahma and other gods are not free from the noose of His maya
Krishna is the supersoul, beloved and well-wisher of devotees, worship at whose feet removes the fear of rebirth (Borgeet-82). Madhavadeva’s ever-blissful Lord takes the incarnation of Krishna only to save His devotees who are charmed by the power of ignorance and nescience (Borgeet-186). The nirakar Brahman presents Himself in different forms of incarnations. Though, He is formless and nirguna, for the sake of devotees He assumes immanence in bodied forms (Saguna) in degrees perfect or imperfect. In one Borgeeta it is said that - Govinda plays in glee with ysoda to show His human character. That great Lord who is the cause of creation, maintenance and destruction of the world, whose divine sport is known to nobody appears and plays as a cowherd lad just in order to save people. The merciful god of all Gods, service to whom is superior to final beatitude in playing in different ways. Madhavadeva says, child Gopala is the only refuge (Borgeet-139). Madhavadeva explains in his Adikanda Ramayana as-

\[
\text{eka murti nana murti, nana murti eka/}
\text{tohmata jagata tumi tata vyetireka}
\text{tumi prana mana mukha caksu karna nasa}
\text{tomatese sakala jagate kare vasa/}
\]

\( (V:582-83) \)

[One form (that is Thyself) becomes many forms (Jivas). The universe is Thee; but Thou art beyond the world. Thou art the vital winds, mind, month, eyes, ears and nose. All the universe lives in Thee].
Madhavadeva strongly established that Brahman as the only reality by his writings. He writes as - it is announced in the speech of the Lord Krishna to Arjuna that “O’, My dearest Arjuna, the noble one knows the truth that the world is born of Me, and in Me alone the would exists. That supremely wise one, with his mind absorbed in Me, adores Me alone by praising and hearing about My entity” (Namghosa : V-614). The supreme Lord assumes incarnations only for the pleasure of His devotees (Janma rahasya : V-133) and to fulfill His determination to have divine play (Gita). The Brahman which is full of its own bliss sportively incarnates in the form of man in the world to save the bhaktas from the grasp of ignorance (Borgeet-106).

According to Sankaracharya, Brahman is pure consciousness (jnana-svarapa) devoid of any guna or attribute (Nirguna) and of every trace of particularity (nirvisesa). It is incomparable and everfree, indivisible and absolute (Vivek-cudamoni : V-351).

Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva also said that there is no difference between Brahman and Jivas, it is only due to Maya's influence that jivas believe themselves to be independent entities and take the worthless body for the soul. Though, Madhavadeva mentions the vivid incarnations of Lord and offer worship to His Saguna (qualified) aspects, yet he considers Brahman as Nirguna (non-qualified) in the final analysis. He said as Namghosa as -

tayu guna-nama-hari kevale nirguna matra
avara samaste gunamaya

(V : 74)
[The name and glory alone is absolute while everything beyond that is qualified].

Worship of Saguna Isvara leads to the Ultimate Reality - the nirguna Brahman. There is nothing real except it. Brahman is Satya, suddha, akhandita jnana (integral knowledge) Nitya and Caitanya svarupa (Borgeet-36).

Madhavadeva maintains that Brahman is identifies with Krishna as He is full of extreme Bliss. It reflects through his writings as -

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{jagatate kari \ achanta nivasa} \\
&\text{Jagato tante basaya} \\
&\text{etekese tanka \ buli vasudeva} \\
&\text{namara ito anvaya}
\end{align*}
\]

(Namghosa :181)

[The Supreme Lord abides in the world and in Him, the world abides. For this reason, He holds the name of vasudeva consistent with that significance].

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{harire caitanya \ atmajnanamaya} \\
&\text{avara samaste jarah} \\
&\text{vede vedantara \ samaste sastrara} \\
&\text{ehise bicara barah}
\end{align*}
\]

(V :220)

[Hari alone is consciousness. Soul is all wisdom. All else in merely Matter; This truth supreme of vedas, vedantas and any other scriptures].
Madhavadeva maintains that the supreme Lord "As He enters senses and controls them, He is called Hrisikesa (Namghosa: VV-61, 81)." Though the Brahman or Hari possess different names and forms, He is indeed noumanifest. In one ghosa he says -

abyakta Isvara hari kimate punjiva tanka
byapakata kiba visarjana
etavanta murtisunya kenamati cintibaha
rama buli suddha kara mana

(Namghosa: 8)

[How shall you worship Lord Hari, which is unexpressed? Where shall you immerse Him, who is omnipresent? How shall you meditate Him, who is incorporeal? Better cleanse your mind uttering the name of Rama].

MAYA:

Maya is the mysterious power of God with the help of which He creates, maintains and destroys the universe. Maya is the chief characteristic of the Advaita Vedanta. Madhavadeva, in his all works, specially in his Namghosa, uses properly the terms maya, avidya and prakrti. Maya is the power of the Brahman which He creates and conducts the universe. There is no Maya in the Brahman. Madhavadeva says as -
All the creatures including Brahma are lying in sleep in the bed of maya. Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama, since Thou alone art conscious and perpetual, rouse us from this our state of sleep and take us into Thee.

God is the master of illusion or maya. All others are subordinate to and charmed by it. In parts as individual selves the Lord enters into its body. But the individuals are tied by this illusion. In his Bhakti-ratnavali Madhavadeva explains as - “Illusion and nescience generally charm the minds of the jivas, therefore, they (the jivas) do not realise the Lord in them. They feel a deep attachment for their bodies which is so very transitory” (V-87).

Madhavadeva says that maya has the property of avarana or concealment of the truth and vikrepasa or misrepresenting it. Since, Maya is deceptive in character it is called Avidya or false knowledge (Radhakrishnan, Vol.-II : 1989 : 572). Maya is not mere absence of apprehension but positive error. When this activity is attributed to Nirguna Brahman, the latter becomes saguna isvara. Maya is the creative power of the eternal God and is therefore eternal. Maya has no separate dwelling place. It is in isvara as heat in fire. Maya evolves a variety of names. Maya conceals God and holds the objects of attachments (asara visaya) unto the individual self. This is done by maya
through its powers of avarana and viksepana. Maya is jarah (inert) and controlled by the Lord.

*maya adikari samaste asanta*
*janiba jarada niscaya*
*hari matra santa caitanya isvara*
*param tattva nirnaya*

*(Namghosa :205)*

[Know that all including maya is unreal and therefore inanimate. The supreme truth ever ascertained is that Hari alone is real, being ever-conscious Godhead].

Like Sankaradeva, ignorance or avidya is the root cause of Maya in the philosophy of Madhavadeva. Maya is difficult to get rid of. It brings vagaries to jiva with its deceptive attributes. As Madhavadeva says -

*he krsna tumi matra caitanya svarupa nitya*
*satya suddha jnana akhandita*
*avara jateka ito tohmara vinoda rupa*
*caracara mayara kalpita*

*(Namghosa :73)*

[Thou alone art conscious, real and perpetual, constant, pure and absolute, Thou alone are indivisible. All this world is diversity manifesting the form of Thy sportive joy is but the handiwork of the maya].

Due to ignorance or avidya, jivas have to move in the circle of rebirth,
until they come out of the influence of maya. When it destroyed, they find
themselves as parts of the Brahman which means Moksa or liberation. To
overcome Maya the grace of the God is necessary.

isvarara seva karile jivara
guchaya mayara bhrama
brahmapade suddha jivaka bulaya
isvaraka paramabrahma

(Namghosa :174)

[Error, born of maya, disappears from the one who worships God,
whereupon the purged one is called the Brahman and God is called
parambharman].

According to Madhavadeva, Maya evolves a variety of names and forms,
which in their totality is the jagat or the universe. Maya is identified with the
names and forms which, in their unevolved condition inherent in God and in
their developed state constitute the world. In this sense it is synonymous
with prakrti (Radhakrishnan, S., Vol.-II.:1989:573). Maya or prakrti becomes
in the purana the loving consort of Isvara and the principal instrument in the
act of creation. Maya represents the false world as the real and conceals the
Brahman which is the source of the universe with these properties. The
Supreme Lord creates the world by means of it. The concept of Maya
intimately related to that of avidya. Avidya is dissoluble by jnana or knowledge
but maya is co-eternal with the supreme personality Isvara, the omniscient,
who controls His Maya, has no avidya. The avidya of the individual and prakrti
of the Brahman arise together. The appearance of the Brahman as the world is due to the influence of avidya.

\[
\text{atma isvaraka laga} \quad \text{pratyakse satate pai} \\
\text{napai jana tanka avidyata} \\
\text{avidya nasile laga} \quad \text{krsnaka pavaya yena} \\
\text{kanthalagna vastuka saksata}
\]

\textit{(Namghosa: 41)}

[While God, the atman, is directly comprehensible, He is beyond conception in the haze of ignorance. But with the annihilation of ignorance krishna is attained straight like a thing hung upon the neck].

Madhavadeva in all over his Namghosa, gives the picture of maya as a mysterious power which gives sorrows and sufferings to individual selves. It is full of deceptive attributes. Again he said that those people are the subjects of maya’s influence who have no faith in the supreme soul.

\[
\text{tohmata bimukha hari} \quad \text{haibara dekhiya maya} \\
\text{mora mati karila mohita}
\]

\textit{(Namghosa: 67)}

[Hari, finding me disinclined toThee, the maya has bewitched my mind].

Those individuals are the subjects to the maya’s torture, who doesnot possess sincere devotion to the Lord. Madhavadeva sings and prays as -
namo namo narayana prasanna huyuka hari
kariyoka mayaka nirjyana
apurara mahimaka apuni bekata kari
jivaka kariyo paritrana

(Namghosa :68)

[O', Narayana, I pay my obeisance to Thee Be pleased with me and despoil
the power of the maya. And instead, demonstrating the power of Thine own
save the soul].

tohmara mayaye hari kapata gunaka dhari
muhi ache amaka sumuli
gucoyoka maya svami tohmara carane ami
bhajiloho joya joya buli

(Namghosa :69)

[In the semblance of truth, O’, Hari, the maya has fully be guided us. O’,
Lord, be pleased to withdraw that maya, for, with obeisance we have come to
adore Thy feet].

Madhavadeva creates a myth when he calls maya a Devi -

jana pade maya devika bolanta
bhaktara maya marddanta.

(Namghosa :164)

[The word of jana signifies the goddess maya and God annihilates that
maya of his devotees].
Maya is subordinate to the Lord because it is Jarah (matter).

\[ \text{kariba adhina maya nija guna bale} \]

_\text{(Janma rahasya : 34)}_

“\text{The honeyed maya keeps all creatures in excitement and God subdues that maya of his devotees.}” For this reason God is called Madhusudana. 

_\text{(Namghosa : 165)}_.

Madhavadeva compared the ignorance with the darkness carried by the cloud. He said as -

\[ \text{caitanya isvara aditya yahara} \]
\[ \text{hiyata bhaila prakasa} \]
\[ \text{kala megha praya avidya andhara} \]
\[ \text{tahara hove binasha} \]

_\text{(Namghosa : 355)}_

[\text{Whoever has his heart, in which the sun of Supreme consciousness, shines in effulgence, finds the darkness of his ignorance, like ominous clouds dispelled for evermore}].

The saint says that the darkness of avidya can be removed with the light of devotion to the Lord. The Lord is above and beyond both prakriti and purusa. (Adikanda Ramayana : V-587). Madhavadeva establishes Him, the creator of the crores of universes with this power of maya and the Lord creates Himself into Himself with his power of yoga.

\[ \text{aponate aponara srajana apuni} \]

_\text{(Adikanda Ramayana : 580)}_
Thus, like his guru, Madhavadeva also established that it is the Lord alone who can save people from the illusion. Without the grace of God it is impossible to get rid of maya’s influence.

\[
\text{akhandita sada suddha} \quad \text{caitanya saktira bale}
\]

\[
\text{mora prabhu narayane}
\]

\[
\text{tumi dura kari asha maya}
\]

\[
\text{hari hari tohmara nikate nahi maya}
\]

\[
\text{tohmaka nabhajo pade} \quad \text{mayaye muhile moka.}
\]

\[
\text{mora prabhu narayanae}
\]

\[
\text{ave kripamaya kara daya}
\]

\[
\text{hari hari mayaka nibari kara daya horie}
\]

\text{(Namghosa :758)}

[Lord Narayana, with the strength of Thy ever-lasting and ever pure consciousness, Thou art driving away Thy maya from Thee, whereupon the maya keeps at bay. But, O’ Narayana, on my failure to pay adoration to Thee, I am beguiled by that Maya from me, show me The mercy].

Thus, Madhavadeva said that individuals who sing the name of Hari taking refuge in his feet, receives the grace of Hari and gets over maya easily and attains knowledge.

**LIBERATION AND BHAKTI:**

According to Neo-Vaisnavite philosophy, bhakti is the way to Mukti or Moksa. Moksa or liberation is the states of final release which means freedom.
from ignorance, doubt, misery, fear, egoism, passions, desires, attachment etc. Madhavadeva explains bhakti through his writings as -

kevale bhakati
sahaya kako nacave
jnane karme tave
bhakati napave yave

(Namghosa :200)

[Only devotion can protect a person without help from anything else, wisdom and action protect him never, unless to Devotion eagerly attends.]

Eka Sarana Nama Dharma is strictly on bhakti or devotion which emphasized the unity of Godhead. Bhakti, in which the relationship of the devotees to the Lord is that of the servant to the master, in the only means for God realisation. However, in the true sense of the term bhakti or devotion implies purity of mind, body and spirit. A person with true bhakti in God must be physically, mentally and spiritually free from all sorts of impurities. When one comes out of avidya, the existence of the world becomes meaningless and one finds Brahman alone covering the whole existence including oneself. The jiva and the world are by no means different from Brahman, it is only avidya that gives rise to a feeling of differences.

According to Madhavadeva, the devotee wishes that Lord will save him for He is the saviour and makes the devotee His servant. Sometimes the devotee in Neo-vaishnavism wishes the Lord as his beloved friend.
Madhavadeva says as -

\[
\text{yadava yadava yadava nanda deva} \\
\text{tumi bine suhrda bandhava nahi keva}
\]

(Namghosa : 544)

[There is no other great friend than yadava or the Lord].

Again he says-

\[
\text{ram buli taribc dahrai acho mana} \\
\text{tumi hari dinabandhu patita pavana} \\
\text{he hari more prana jivana murari} \\
\text{anathara natha bhakatara bhayahari}
\]

(Namghosa : 546-548)

[I am determined that oh! Lord, friend of the poorest will save me with thy kindness, you will remove my fear as you are the Lord of me, the shelterless person.

The God is the source of infinite love. He is merciful and the most precious for the devotee for he will bless him with his kindness and dispel him from all sins. Madhavadeva suppresses the atasyabhava in the following lines:

“Have mercy on me, oh! great joy, think of me as the servant and keep me in the company of thy servants.”

(Namghosa : 366)

Madhavadeva maintains that, when maya leaves off a jiva and the jiva
releases himself as Brahman, a part of the Paramabrahman, he enjoys the state of final release or Moksa. Liberation means union with the Brahman. It is possible only when one becomes free from the accounts of past virtues and vices and is no longer subject to the social laws. When the jiva with the help of vidya or knowledge becomes desireless for all types of happiness mixed with sorrows brought about by avidya and sees the Brahman pervading the world, then he attains to Moksa.

Madhavadeva regard Bhakti as more important than Mukti. He opens his ‘Magnum opus’ Namghosa with an obeisance to these devotees who are indifferent to Mukti as -

\[
\text{muktito nispersha jito sehi bhakataka namo}
\]
\[
\text{rasamayee magoho bhakati}
\]

\[ (V : I) \]

[I bow to that devotee who has no craving even for liberation. I pray for that devotion which is full of joy].

Thus, bhaktas of the highest plane donot care for salvation, they care for bhakti and bhakti alone i.e. the service to God, the absolute self. Man can win the grace of God by loving devotion. Thus, by admitting the superiority of bhakti, like Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva also asserted the dignity of man. The most fruitful ways of devotion are Sravana and Kirtana of the glories of God. He also accepts the jivan Mukti and videha Mukti. Mukti is the next stage on overcoming maya. It is an extremely blissful stage when an individual
identifies himself with the Brahman, Mukti is classified into five kinds. They are salokya, samipya, sarupya, sarsti and sajujya. “The person with a pure mind believes Hari as the well-wisher and take refuge in Him, overcomes all the hurdles with the grace of Hari and dances by singing the glories of Hari.” (Namghosa: V-6). In his Namghosa, the saint oftenly speaks of the salokya mukti. In this kind of mukti, a devotee gets the opportunity to worship the Lord through Sravana and Kirtana. “Sing the name of hari in the company of the devotees and ensure attainment of Vaikuntha.” (Namghosa: V-56)

After studying, all the literary works of Madhavadeva, it is found that Bhakti is the most effective means to attain Moksa.

The philosophy propounded by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva is really unique. They declare the Brahman to be the Supreme entity and also believe in the existence of God. It is true that we find monistic elements in both Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva’s all literary works. Like, Sankaradeva, Advaita Vedanta of Sankaracharya reflects in the religious philosophy of Madhavadeva also. Advaita Vedanta is distinct in the works of Madhavadeva. Therefore, a keen scholar like his guru, Madhavadeva was very much successful in bringing the hard philosophy of vedanta within the grasp of the common people. His treatment of passages from the Bhagavata Purana was attractive and popular because of the simple and lucid style of presentation. In those days, when sacred Sanskrit lore including the Purana was regarded as the property of the Brahmanas alone, Madhavadeva, throughout his sweet lyrics and entertaining playlets made matters of the Purana the property of all. He delivered his
philosophical thoughts through his verses, particularly the concepts of the Namghosha, which presents the celebrated poet as a Vedantic par excellence.