CHAPTER -5

Bhakti as a Movement in Mediaeval India and its exponents
5:1 Inception of the Bhakti Movement in India and its growth

The social, political, cultural and religious Movements that emerged in various parts of India during mediaeval times tried to bind the people together with a harmonious cord. In this regard the Bhakti movement plays a prominent role. The contemporary society was in chaos with disorder everywhere. Whether be it politics, socio-economic, cultural and religious life – there was chaos everywhere. The Bhakti movement tried to reinstate the chaotic society then by means of novel ideology. This attempt made by the founders of the Bhakti movement contributed much towards the cultural revival in India. Apart from the Hindu religion, there were other religions like Jainism, Buddhism and Islam. But it was the Hindu and Islam religion that gained a lot of popularity. In those days, due to the patronage of the Mughal rulers the Islam religion spread to several places in India at that time.

In between the eighth century and thirteenth century A.D. the spiritual world of India experienced a revolutionary change. Inspired by the ideology of Advaitabaadi Sankaracharya, Vishistha Dvaitabaadi Ramanuj and Dvaitadwaitabadi Nimbakacharya the people started believing the illusionary world as real; equal importance was given to both Jeevatma and Paramatma. In simple words to say, from the last part of the thirteenth century till the seventeenth century, the numerous changes taking place in the world of religion in India gave birth to the Bhakti movement. After the birth of Ramananda in 1399 A.D., North India experienced a whole new transformation as Ramananda initiated the Vaishnava Dharma there on the basis of the Bhakti movement and gradually turned it into a social revolution. It is worth mentioning that the saints who were born during the fourteenth and fifteenth century, took upon themselves the noble task of transforming the Bhakti movement into a dynamic movement so that it
may reach the unreached, isolated ones in society with its gradual expansion and find firm and strong footings in society.

A peep into the history of the Bhakti movement in South India, will make one realise that the Bhakti movement there, was the after effect of a number of socio-religious contradictions, superstitions and exploitative attitude of the priesthood and powerful in society. Buddhism and Jainism was prevalent in South India earlier to the sixth century. The Bhakti movement there started as a ‘Weapon’ to counter the existing Buddhist and Jain religion. There was logical ground behind this. In those times irrational ideas, malpractices and superstitions crept up into the Buddhist religion. Buddhism strongly advocated for maintaining celibacy and monkhood then. This austere life style could not be followed by the common people. Moreover the Digambara sect of the Jains and their way of life wasn’t bearable for all sects of people in society. In addition to this, the rites and brutal rituals observed by some people of Sakta group created a kind of fear rather than devotion in the minds of common people. The Saktas offered human as well as animal sacrifices to appease God. The other extravagant rituals and customs, at times, was a torture for the gentle common people. As its outcome the common Tamil people lost interest in embracing such religions and tried to find ways and means to get rid of all these. Seeing the plight of the common people, the Vaishnava Bhakta Alwaars and the Shaivite Nayanmaars lit the flame of Bhakti movement in South India.¹

The Bhagawad Purana was behind the evolution of the Bhakti Dharma. It was through the path of Bhakti that the Bhagawad Purana gave a new facelift to the society then. It was at the initiative of the Alwaars of South India in between the seventh and tenth century that the Bhakti Dharma rose to be popular among many
across societies. In a word to say, it was from this period that the renaissance of the
Vaishnava Movement started. The Alwaars were considered to be among the lowest
class in the Tamil society at that time. The social injustice and exploitation heaped upon
the Alwaars motivated them to find a permanent solution to this injustice pronounced
upon them by the so called higher classes in society. The Alwaars renounced the
religion in vogue then, which included numerous rites and rituals. Moreover, some of
those rites and rituals ‘Imposed’ upon the public had no justifications. It was only
introduced to serve the purpose of groups with vested interest. In contrast to this the
Alwaars gave far more importance to love, respect and devotion and composed several
thousands of religious songs based on Bhakti. The Vaishnava Acharyas such as
Sankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhavacharya, Nimbakacharya, etc. gave a strong
philosophical base to the concept of Bhakti introduced by the Alwaars and gave form to
four different sects or community in later times. In this way Krishna tattwa came to be
popularised and a firm philosophical base was given to this ideology by these four
particular sects. The Vaishnava Bhaktas of the middle ages were successful in bringing
about the Bhakti movement on the basis of the above mentioned philosophical base. The
middle ages were by and large an age of realizing the path of Bhakti. This new found
form of Bhakti didn’t remain confined to South India alone. In fact it spread to the
whole of India. In various parts of India, the exponents of Bhakti such as Ramananda,
Kabir, Tulsidas, Nanak, Tukaram, Jnandeva, Eknath, Vallabhacharya, Chaittanyadeva,
Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva, Mirabai etc. tried to reinstate the socio-cultural as well as
economic condition of India by means of Bhakti.
5:2 Causes behind the spreadth and development of the Bhakti movement in India

In the previous discussion an attempt was made to describe in brief the history of the Vaishnava or Bhakti Movement in India. From that discussion one can come to this decision or conclusion that the Vaishnava Bhakti movement is purely a social issue as it is related to the ups and downs in society.

From the seventh-eighth century up to the twelfth century, the Vaishnava religion got firm footings at some pockets in India. But it did not attain an All-India image. It was during the fifteenth- sixteenth century that the Vaishnava movement got a new extensive facelift by virtue of the campaigning of the Vaishnava saints. As an outcome all the people in society, unbiased of class sentiment, were being influenced by this movement and its universal message of love, devotion and equality. Although it is a fact that this movement is an instrument to counter the ills and malpractices related to religions prevalent in society then, there are also other reasons as to why this movement influenced society and human mindset extensively. Below the reasons are cited as to why this particular movement took such a turn and influenced the entire Indian society to the core.

(a) “With the establishment of the Mughal Empire in the twelfth century in India, the Islam religion spread to different parts in India. Some of the orthodox Muslim rulers implemented such strict laws that their Hindu subjects were compelled to convert into Islam. For fear of stringent punishment at the hands of the Mughal ruler and humiliation at the hands of the so called upper Hindu class in society, most of the low caste Hindus embraced Islam. In view of this chaotic, depressing situation in the Hindu society, many a liberal minded Hindu reformist came forward to carry out the noble task of reforming the Hindu society of those times
and make it more liberal, vibrant and dynamic. Those social reformers felt that it was high time then to work for the upgradation of the social status of those deprived people who have been neglected since centuries. They also realized that if those people have to be flocked together within the Hindu society forever, attention need to be given to their spiritual and mental development as well as enhancement of their self respect as individuals from the Hindu community. The reformist group had this notion in mind that if some of the rigid beliefs and practices followed by the so called high caste Hindus are discarded and in its place some universal, virtuous beliefs and practices are incorporated into the Hindu religion, then the so called low caste Hindus may not convert into Islam for some of its universal humanitarian teachings. In view of this the Hindu religious preachers as well as social reformers tried to introduce the Hindu religion in a new light devoid of strict and rigid norms and customs so that it may be acceptable for all Hindus in society maintaining the self esteem of each individual in society unbiased of caste, creed or sect. In view of this noble aspiration the religious reformers choosed the Vaishnava Bhakti Dharma as the most convenient mode to motivate the Hindu community at large. They were confident that the simple form of worship as instructed in the Vaishnava Dharma would be able to enrich the human soul with a new spiritual realization. The Vaishnava Bhakti movement was an outcome of this noble aspiration. Gradually this movement spread to different parts of India. Eventually this movement gained momentum and came to be known as the Bhakti Movement of India. The religious reformers gave stress on the popularization of the Vaishnava Dharma as because it has been clearly mentioned in the Bhagawat Purana that one need not be a scion of a high caste to get initiated into the Bhakti Marga. The only
quality necessary for this is unconditional devotion and faith in Lord Viṣṇu. Moreover one need not practice austere Tapa-Japa –Yagya or religious rituals in Bhakti Mārga. All these are unnecessary in the Bhakti Mārga. Chanting and remembering the name of God can lead one to Salvation here. In view of this the Vaishnava saints accepted this easy procedure as mentioned in the Bhagavat Purana for the common masses.

(b) Secondly, the so called high caste people looked down upon the so called low caste people. Moreover, due to their weak economic background the low caste people couldn’t perform rites and ritual filled (yagya) that required a lot of money. This led to the conversion of the low caste Hindus into the Buddhist religion. At this juncture of crucial time Sankaracharya appeared to deliver the Hindu religion as well as society from disaster. He adopted the rule of non-violence or Ahimsha from Buddhism and incorporated it into the Hindu religion. As a result of his farsighted effort a bridge of understanding and brotherhood sprouted between the followers of Hinduism and Buddhism.

(c) Most of the religious rituals related to Hinduism were accomplished by the Brahmin priests in the Sanskrit language. That tradition is still prevalent. The Mantras (mystic words recited in prayer to God) were chanted in the Sanskrit language. The common people could not understand Sanskrit. The Vaishnava saints and preachers saw through this inability of the common people. They took a novel step. They composed some religious songs and hymns in the regional languages for the common people’s convenience. They selected subject matter from Holy Scriptures like the Bhagavat Purana for this novel purpose. The common people were drawn towards this gesture of the Vaishnava saints and preachers. They
started flocking into the Vaishnava way of worship. In this way the Bhakti Dharma gained dynamism as far as the social aspect was concerned then. With the passing of time, as the modern Indian languages started coming into being, the Sanskrit texts came to be translated into the regional languages. The common people came to understand the essence of the Vaishnava Dharma by going through these translated works. The outcome of this effort made by Vaishnava saint-scholars brought in rich dividends. Many of the hurdles coming in the way of the development of the Nava Vaishnava Dharma were removed.”

(d) “The economic condition too, had a role to play as far as the evolution and development of the Bhakti Dharma was concerned. During those times there was a visible difference of the economic status between the so called high class and the so called low class in society. In matters of finance and other materialistic facilities, the high class got the better of the low class. In view of this economic backwardness, the so called low in society could never afford the lavish rituals and other rites and customs observed by the high during religious worship. When the Vaishnava Dharma came into being these poor people were easily attracted towards it for its simple way of worship. They embraced the Vaishnava dharma soon enough.

(e) When the imposing challenge of Buddhism ended Hinduism regained its former position in society. But the irregularities and malpractices came to raise its ugly head once again. This resulted in a chaotic state of affairs at the religious front once again. As an outcome several new religious beliefs, various sects, methods of worship, rites and rituals came into being. Inspite of believing in monotheism campaigned by the Vedas and Upanishadas, the people started believing in
numerous Gods and Goddesses. With a view to please those Gods and Goddesses the Tantric way of worship offering sacrifices and other lavish rites and rituals, came to be followed by the people. This brought about chaos once more. The Vaishnava saints saw through all these and started preaching the Bhakti Dharma among the people with its message of love, sympathy and non-violence. In this way the Bhakti Dharma started spreading all over India.

5.3 Contribution of the saints in the development of the Bhakti movement in India

At the beginning of this chapter it has been mentioned that the Alwaars initiated the Bhakti Dharma. The Alwaars belonged to the Saguna sect. They have established the spiritual relationship between Bhakta and Bhagwan through the devotional songs composed by them. They were not only the reformers of the Bhakti Dharma but also poets of a high caliber. The Alwaars included all the nine elements of Bhakti in the Bhakti literature composed by them. The ‘Nalayi Divyaprabandhan’ – a literary collection of the Alwaars influenced the Bhagawat. Many scholars are of the opinion that it would be right to say that ‘Nalayi Divyaprabandhan’ is the main text of the Bhakti movement rather than the Bhagawat Purana. This is the first text of the Bhakti movement. The Bhakti movement which came into being in the land of the Dravids later expanded into Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat and got merged.

"Uttapana Dravude Sahang Briddhing Kornatoke Gota
Kocchit Kocchit Moharastre Gujure Jirotang Gota"

Similar to Hindi literature Tamil literature too, has been divided into different eras. The period from 5th century B.C. till 2nd century A.D. is known as Sangh era. The only book recovered of the pre Sangh era is ‘Talakappiyam’. The period from 3rd century A.D. till 5th century A.D. is known as Post Sanghkal era or Buddhist – Jain
era or Pre-Bhakti era. The period from 6th century A.D. till 9th century A.D. is the Bhakti era of the Vaishnava Bhakta poet Alwaars and Shaiva poet Nayanmars. In Tamil the word Alwaar is used to denote the twelve Vaishnava Bhaktas. Those twelve Vaishnavas were Poigai Alwaar, Bhut Alwaar, Pey Alwaar, Tirumalisoi Alwaar, Nammalwaar, Madhu Kavittlwar, Kulshekharr Alwaar, Perialwaar, Aandaal, Tontoraddipodi Alwaar, Tirappan Alwaar and Tirusangoi Alwaar. Nathmuni was one of those prominent teachers who made philosophical analysis of the Bhakti Marga propagated by these Vaishnavas. It was Nathmuni who collected and compiled the songs of the Alwaars as a compilation named ‘Nalayiradivya prabandham’. He was born in 824 A.D. his son was Jamunacharya who was the teacher of Ramanujacharya. The emergence of Shri Sankaracharya is a path breaking event in the cultural history of India. Sankaracharya was the renowned commentator ‘Brahmasutra’. His period has been denoted as 788-822 AD. The emergence of Sankaracharya gave a boost to the spiritual life of India. As an outcome the anti Veda concept and ideology became restricted. In spite of this, the concept of Advaitavaad had no impression on the masses of those times. After the Alwaars, Nathmuni and Sri Jamunacharya took the responsibility of the re-establishment and building renovated roadmap of the Vaishnava ideology. But it was Ramanujacharya who took pains of popularizing the Vaishnava ideal throughout the country. He was born at Madras in 1017 A.D. The Dvaita view (Dualism) propagated by Sankaracharya as discord against Mayavaad succeeded Ramanujacharya’s Visisthadwaitavaad. This ideal of Sankaracharya came to be popular as Dvaita view (Dualism) in South India. The actual founder of this ideal was Maddabacharya. Maddabacharya was born in the year 1197 at a place named Udupi in Karnataka. If seen from this view point of the Bhakti movement, then it can be realized
that the Dvaita view (dualism) established by Maddabacharya was quite significant. The first condition of Bhakti is this that God and devotee are different. According to him the universe is truth and living being a part of God. For him liberation is of four types i.e. \textit{Salukka}, \textit{samipyya}, \textit{saruppya} and \textit{saajuya}. Liberation is the actual realization of satisfaction. According to Maddabacharya the tool towards achieving liberation is \textit{Amala Bhakti}. This kind of Bhakti need to be unique and intense. After Maddabacharya the name of Nimbakacharya need to be mentioned. He was born to a Telegu Brahmin family. The tenet propagated by Nimbakacharya is known as Dvaitadvaitabaad (simultaneous diversity and unity of God and the Soul) or Bhedabhedbaad. In this way many a saint contributed towards the wide spreadth of the Bhakti movement in South India. But after the death of Ramanujacharya the Vaishnava Bhakti movement of South India took a North turn and North India became the focal point of the Bhakti movement in the gradual course of time. In other words to say, the main source of inspiration behind the Bhakti movement in North India was the Bhakti movement of South India. Swami Ramananda, who was born in the last part of the thirteenth century, initiated the Bhakti movement in North India. Ramananda was a scholar, Bhakta and social reformer. From the theoretical point of view Ramananda was a follower of Sri Ramanujacharya. But his revered God and the method of worship was different. He did not worship Lord \textit{Vişṇu} but His human incarnation \textit{SriRamachandra}. His motto was ‘Ram-Naam’\textsuperscript{10}. Moreover he believed that each and every human being has the right to do Bhakti and eradicated irrational belief related to caste, creed and religion. He welcomed all into the folds of Ram Bhakti. He, practically, gave the example of positioning the Brahmins and Chandalas (low caste people) in the same status and preached ‘Ram-Naam’ to all thus striking a balance between Bhakti and life. By doing
so he tried to take the Hindu religion to greater heights. As a result the Bhakti Dharma, with its liberal outlook, spread all over North India.

Similar to the Tamil literature, the Hindi literature too, has been divided into four stages. These are Swarnakaal, Aadikaal, Dwaparkaal and Bhaktikaal. Among these the Bhakti kaal, which was propagated by Ramananda was divided into two parts. These two parts are Nirguna Bhakti dhara (way) and Saguna Bhakti dhara (way) respectively. Kabirdas was exponent of Nirguna Bhakti and Goswami Tulsidas the exponent of Saguna Bhakti. Tulsidas was born at Rajapur village, Bida district in Uttar Pradesh in the year 1497. During his time there was chaos in the religious life of India.

In order to bring stability to society, he took the help of his pen. Through his writings, he not only thought of his mental satisfaction but also thought of the wellbeing of all in society. In order to bring those back who have gone astray, Tulsidas included the example of Sri Ramachandra as an ideal brother, ideal son, ideal friend and ideal king in his teachings. Tulsidas gave stress on Dasya Bhakti in his teachings. The famous creations of Tulsidas are ‘Ramcharit Manas’ and ‘Binoy Patrika’. Tulsidas was a Saguna Upashak (follower). His Rama is the Nirguna Brahma who is omnipotent, omnipresent and who is the source of all living being; inspite of this he took human incarnation for the wellbeing of the Bhaktas. Tulsidas was the most prominent representative of the Bhakti Movement initiated by Ramananda in North India.

Yet another prominent disciple of Ramananda was Kabirdas. Much has already been discussed about Kabirdas in the fourth chapter of this research work. But the discussion of this chapter will be incomplete if Kabirdas is not brought back into discussion in this chapter. Kabirdas has been described as the Guru of the mystics. Kabirdas the exponent of Nirguna Bhakti, assimilated the Indian Brahmavaad along
with the emotional mysticism of the Sufi Saints, the mysticism of the Yoga practitioners and Ek Sharanvaad of the Vaishnavas and developed Bhakti. Kabirdas was the first and foremost saint of the Nirguna sect of Bhakti Dharma. He was neither a scholar nor his aim was to compose literature; but he possessed an extraordinary power of speech. His language was known as Purvi Bhasha. Words from different languages and dialects such as Arabic, Persian, Avadhi, Braja, Bhojpuri, Khariboli, Punjabi, Rajastani etc. are found in the language used by Kabirdas. The language used by him can be regarded as the language spoken by the people then. The dohas composed by him inspired the people of North India to live a peaceful and healthy life and gave a new lift to the Bhakti movement of North India to a great extent.

After Kabirdas, the name of Guru Nanak needs mention. He preached the Sikh religion as far as the Bhakti movement of North India is concerned. Nanak was born in Punjab in the year 1469. Nanak too, was illiterate like Kabirdas; but it was through his minute observation and mental ability that he was able to motivate a good number of people and preach the message of equality and fraternity in a society full of turmoil and pain. After Guru Nanak the name of Ballabhacharya needs mention. Ballabhacharya was born to a Brahmin family at South India in the year 1479. But he had powerful influence on the people of North India. He gave a new look to Vaishnava Dharma by the worship of Sri Krishna. The Braja speaking communities were greatly inspired by his teachings and Bhakti literature. Ballabhacharya mastered the Vedas, Puranas, etc. at a very young age of thirteen and sat for discussions with saints and scholars of the Vedic scriptures and preached Brahmavaad and Bhakti through the elimination of Mayabaad. After completion of his pilgrimage, he would go to Brindaban, sometimes Mathura and sometimes Kashi and preached his religion. He
composed a number of Sanskrit texts for preaching Bhakti Dharma. Among these the “Anubhashya” of Brahmasutra and commentary of Bhagawad “Subodhini” is wellknown. In the world of philosophy the findings of Ballabhacharya is known as the doctrine Suddha Dwaita. According to him Brahma is Satcitananda. Brahma is widespread, independent, all-knowing and all-powerful. Ballabhacharya has recognized both the Nirguan and Saguna form of Brahma. According to him, Brahma is many inspite of being only one and dependent on Bhakti inspite of being independent. According to the Ballabha sect or the Rudra sect Sri Krishna is the Purushuttama Paramabrahma the source of Pure happiness. Attaining Sri Krishna is but liberation. The worshipping site of the Ballabha sect is ‘Pustimarga’. After Ballabhacharya’s death his son Gopinath succeeded him as the Acharya. After the untimely death of Gopinath Ballabhacharya’s second son Bitthalnath accended the Acharya’s throne.17 Bitthalnath did a lot for the spreadth of the Ballabha sect. With an aim for the spreadth of Krishna Bhakti in the Braja dialect, Bitthalnath selected eight prominent poets to sing the glory of Lord Krishna in simple lucid language. Thus the ‘Astachaap’ sect came into being through the initiative of Bitthalnath. Surdas is one among these Astachaap poets. Surdas was a disciple of Ballabhacharya. Surdas’ period has been determined as around 1493. The ‘Sur Sagar’ composed in the Braja language by Surdas is a famous compilation in Hindi literature.18 In Surdas’ composition one can find Vatsalya Bhakti, Sakhya Bhakti, Madhura Bhakti, Dashya Bhakti, Sharanagati or Prapatti Bhakti. In fact everything has found place in his depiction of Bhakti. Surdas has composed several verses on the sorrow as outcome of worldly wants and seek self realization and relief from such sorrows. Surdas used the local dialect spoken in Braja in his writings. This book ‘Sur
Sagar' of Surdas made a sizable contribution towards the spread of the Bhakti Dharma in North India.

After the 'Astachaap' poets Mira Bai's name is well known as far as Krishna Bhakti is concerned. Inspired by the Madhurjya Bhakti, Mira Bai composed a good number of songs in praise of Lord Krishna in the mixed language of Marwari and Braja. Mira Bai was born in 1504 AD at Chaukari village in Merta District of Rajasthan. Mira Bai is an excellent example of Madhurjya bhava Bhakti of SriKrishna. Mira Bai was not a preacher of religion. As like all other Bhaktas Mira Bai too, seeked relief from the circle of birth and get united with Lord Krishna. Her devotional songs deeply attracted the Rajasthani and Gujarati people of the middle ages. As a result the Bhakti movement spread to Gujarat too. Mira Bai's Bhajans play a significant role in the Bhakti literature of India. Apart from Mira Bai some other prominent Bhaktas are Narottamdas, Harirai, Govindadas, Swami Haridas Hitaharivangsha.

The saints of Maharashtra too, took initiative for the spread of Bhakti movement. The most prominent among the Marathi saints is Jñandev (1271-1366). The other prominent names are Naamdev (1270 – 1350), Eknath (1508-1649), Tukaram(1608-1649), etc. In this way the Bhakti movement that has its roots in South India, spread to different parts of India and gradually it made its way to West Bengal. Chaitanyadeva is responsible for the spread of Bhakti Dharma in West Bengal. Chaitanyadeva was born to a Brahmin family at Nadiya or Nabadip in West Bengal in the year 1485. He worshipped Lord Krishna as the full incarnation of God and preached the Bhakti Dharma. 'All are equal in the eyes of God, there is no question of caste, creed in the eyes of God', Chaitanyadeva preached the Bhakti Dharma among the
masses with this liberal outlook in mind. He came to be considered as the incarnation of Radha. He accepted ‘Sankirtana’ as the simplest way to spread the glory of Lord Krishna. Within a short span of time many disciples flocked around Chaitanyadeva. Most prominent among them is Nityananda. Nityananda played a significant role in the foundation and development of the Vaishnava movement in West Bengal. It was much earlier before the arrival of Chaitanyadeva to Puri that the Bhakti Dharma got established in Orissa. It was related to the Bhakti of Radha-Krishna. The Vaishnavite poets of Orissa such as Balaram Das, Sarala Das and Jagannath Das composed the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagawat Purana respectively during the 15th -16th century and preached the Vaishnava ideology among the people.22

It has already been mentioned that Chaitanyadeva didn’t organize his disciples to preach his religious philosophy, but it was through ‘Sankirtans’ that he attracted people towards Krishna Bhakti. In this way he gained a large number of disciples. His ideal thoughts and life style inspired his disciples. It was through these disciples that the Bhakti dharma got flourished in West Bengal in later times. The names of six prominent disciples of Chaitanyadeva can be cited who played a prominent role in the spreadth of Bhakti movement then. These are known at the ‘Shat Goswami’.23 Among them Rupa Goswami, Sanatan Goswami and Jeeva Goswami’s names are more prominent. They established Brindavan as the center place of Bhakti Sadhana and tried to give a classical form to the Chaitanya sect by means of composing a few selected books. They used Sanskrit language as the medium of expressing their thoughts in their books. In Chaitanyadeva’s time the Bhakti Dharma flourished in the west part of Bengal. In later years the East part of Bengal too, came under its influence. Finally, Dhaka too, became a center of Bhakti Dharma. From the philosophical point of
view, the Chaitanya sect is known as ‘Achintya Bhedabhed’²⁴. Chaitanyadeva assimilated both Dwaita and Adwaita view in his religious preaching of Bhakti. According to him Bhakti is Paramapremarupa. He forgot himself by complete engrossment in Lord Krishna. There is similarity between the Madhura Bhakti of Chaitanya sect and Ballabha sect. But Chaitanyadeva’s deity isn’t the incarnation of Lord Krishna; He is but the Paramtwatta Paramatma(Absolute truth). Chaitanya threw open the door for all in society to merge into Krishna Bhakti. In this way the Bhakti movement gained momentum in West Bengal at the initiative taken by Chaitanyadeva and his disciples.

After West Bengal, it was the turn of Assam where the Bhakti movement brought in novel changes. Sankaradeva was at the helm of affairs here as far as the spread breadth and popularization of Bhakti Dharma is concerned. Earlier to Sankaradeva too, a thin influence of Vaishnava Dharma was there in Assam. The Pushpabhadra copperplate of king Dharmapal of the 12th century and the copperplate of king Satyanarayan – Laxminarayan of North Lakhimpur of the 10th century gives an idea of the existence of the Vaishnava Dharma in Assam. Poets like Hem Saraswati and Madhava Kandali of the pre-Sankaradeva era have mentioned of Vaishnava Dharma in their creative writings. Some translations from the Ramayana and Mahabharata gave the people an idea of the Vaishnava Dharma²⁵. Apart from these the Kalika Purana and Yogini Tantra has mention of the practice of Vaishnava Dharma at Hajo, Ashwaklanta and Vashudev peeth in North Lakhimpur. Though there was a thin influence of the Vaishnava Dharma during the pre Sankaradeva era, yet, it has been understood that it couldn’t mould the people’s mind nor the Tantric Vaishnava Mārga could attract the people’s attention then. The emergence of Sankaradeva was an inspiring factor to mould
the society towards the Vaishnava faith. The political situation then wasn’t favorable. It could be seen that during the 14th and 15th century there were a number of small kingdoms in Assam. Later, in the last part of the 15th century and early part of the 16th century two powerful independent kingdoms came into being. From Guwahati to the Eastern direction the Ahom kingdom and in the West upto North Bengal (some parts) the Koch kingdom came into being. There was social as well as cultural give and take among the people of these two kingdoms. The Ahom kings then, did not follow the Hindu religion. But they did not discourage the Hindu religion either. On the other hand, the Koch kings were Hindus and favoured the flourish of the Hindu religion. The Ahom administration was quite stern. Even a small wrong called for capital punishment. The working class in society was the most wretched group. They did not enjoy any kind of social status like the other so called higher classes in society. This deprivation and low self-esteem of the low class people motivated them to aspire for spiritual betterment so that they may regain their lost self-esteem back. The Nava Vaishnava Dharma propagated by Sankaradeva brought such a flicker of hope to them. Moreover the Aryans groups and Non-Aryan groups in the Assamese society then, had low social interaction due to numerous reasons. Sankaradeva removed the barriers of society and made it possible for the Brahmins, Kayasthas, Kalitas, etc. of the Aryan groups to mix up with non-Aryan groups like Bodos, Kacharis, Rabhas, Karbis, Ahoms, Morans, etc. As a result unity and harmony was established in society. The Vaishnava saint Sankaradeva is well remembered for this noble contribution of his towards Assamese society at large. Keeping in tune with the Bhakti movement taking place in other parts of India, Sankaradeva perceived the concept of \textit{Ek Deva Ek Sewa} – the worship of one God only and restricted some ill, irrational practices of worshiping several gods and
goddesses which involved some evil and immoral practices and rituals. Sankaradeva’s foremost disciple Madhabdeva made notable contribution toward the spreadth of the Vaishnava Bhakti in Assam. Similar to the other Vaishnava saints of India, Sankaradeva too, talked about greatness of the name of Hari, equal status of all in society, allpowerful influence of Sri Krishna or Lord Vishnu as far as the Vaishnava ideology is concerned. He explained to the people about the importance of spiritual Guru or teacher, the various forms of Bhakti such as Dasya, Sakhya, Vatsalya, Madhura, etc.\textsuperscript{26} Taking instances from the other parts of India, Sankaradeva tried to reform the Assamese society from all possible aspects so as to bring social stability and religious tolerance. His religion was humanitarian in feature and it catered to a large chunk of individuals in society. No doubt there was the existence of Vaishnavism in Assam much before Sankaradeva came into being. But the Neo-Vaishnavite which Sankaradeva initiated in Assam and its close proximity with the pan Indian Bhakti movement gave a boost to the noble ideology of saint Sankaradeva. From this point of view Sankaradeva is well worthy of applauses for the religious renaissance that began at his initiative in the middle ages in Assam.

5.4 The similarities and dissimilarities of the Bhakti of Sankaradeva and Kabirdas

The Bhakti of Sankaradeva and Kabirdas has already been discussed in the third and fourth chapters respectively. Adopting those two chapters as the basis, an attempt has been made to identify the similarities and dissimilarities between the Bhakti of both.

\textbf{Similarities:-}

As far as the similarities are concerned the following points can be taken into consideration –
(a) Both the saints advocated for Dashya Bhakti. In Kabir’s doha (couplets), many a time Kabir mention himself as das Kabira. Similarly in Sankaradeva’s writings one can find the same. For example:

“Raghupati Houk Goti
Tumar Charane Narayana
Dasa Buli Damudara
Diyuko Sharana”\textsuperscript{27}

(Kirtana- Ghosha, Kaljawan Bodh)

(Meaning : Ye Lord Raghupati ! I am at your feet, Narayana ! do give me shelter as your slave, O Lord Damodara)

Similarly, for Kabirdas,

“Sukhiya Sab Sansharhai
Khawe Aur Shawe
Dukhia Dasa Kabira
Jage Aur Rowe”\textsuperscript{28}

(Meaning: All those of the mundane world are happy and happily they are sleeping; only poor dasa Kabira is awake and crying)

(b) The One whom Sankaradeva addressed as Param Brahma, Parammattma, Govinda, Narayan, Hari, Vi\textsuperscript{2}du, etc. the same has been addressed as Rama by Kabirdas. Of course Sankaradeva too, has used the word Rama to address the Supreme Being in his writings at the some places. For example:

“Joy Hari Govinda Narayan Ram Keshaba Hari I
Rama Rama Kesaba Hari II
Prathame Pranamo Brahmarupi Sanatan I

143
Sarba abataror karon Narayan. II

(Kirtan-Ghosa, Avatara- Barnana)

(Meaning: Hari be hailed! Govinda! Narayana! Rama! Keshava! be hailed! First and foremost I offer my prayer to Lord Narayana who is the Sanatana God in the form of Brahma, who is the cause of all the incarnations)

For Kabirdas,

"Ram Rahim Ek Hai, Naam Dharai Dui I
Kahe Kabir Do Naam Suni Bhrami Pare Mat Koi II
Krishna Karim Ek Hai, Naam Dharai Dui I
Kahe Kabir Do Naam Suni Bhrami Pare Mat Koi II"

(Meaning: Though there are two names, Ram and Rahim are the same. Kabir says that one should not make a mistake that Ram and Rahim are separate entities. In fact both Krishna and Karim are one; Its only that there are two names. So, one should not make a mistake after knowing this.)

(c) Both Kabirdas and Sankaradeva gave stretch on Chanting (kirtana) of the name of Hari and remembering (smarana) of Hari's name. Sankaradeva has quoted in Bhakti Ratnakara-

"Tomaro Namor Ananta Mahima
Aacharya Ati Parama
Naamo Matro Loile Chandalo Dehote
Howe Oti Shresthatama.

(Bhakti Ratnakar)

(Meaning- The greatness of your name is beyond comparison. Even a lowly Chandala attains greatness by the chanting of your name.)
Similarly,

"Krishnar Eshabo Bakya Anushare Jani
Huya Eksharana Krishnat Sabe Prani
Korio Kirtana Krishna Naam Gunasoy
Aatopore Aan Srestha Dharma Nohikoi"\textsuperscript{32}

(Bhakti Ratnakar)

(Meaning: Having realized that Krishna is none but God, all the living beings surrender themselves before Him. Chanting His name with heart full devotion is the best religion.)

Sankaradeva has described the significance of Hari Naama Kirtana and said that it is through the chanting of Hari's name that man can attain atonement of his sin. He has also said that 'Madhava resides' within him who chants Hari's name with a pure heart-

"Aano Aano Joto Paapo Ase Aato Pore
Hari Naamo Mukhyo Prayochitto Somostore
Jitu Jone Harinaamo Ucchare Somproti
Take Lagi Jaai Madhobor Moti II"\textsuperscript{33}

(Bhakti Ratnakar – Kirtana Mahatmya)

(Meaning: There are numerous sins which atonement can be made possible by the chanting of Hari Naam; Lord Madhaba showers His benevolent grace upon him who chants His name)

Sankaradeva has concluded this discussion on Hari Naam Kirtana saying that one should denounce all karma and surrender before the feet of Hari and chant His name thus –
"Jani Sarvajone Parama Jotone
Teji Aano Joto Kaamo
Krishnar Charane Dhori Drihomone
Sada Bole Ram Ram"\(^{34}\)

(Bhakti Ratnakara)

(Meaning: Having realized this, one should discard all worldly passion and surrender oneself before Lord Krishna’s feet and chant Rama! Rama.)

Similar to Sankaradeva Kabirdas too, has given importance to the chanting of the name of Hari. Kabirdas has said –

"Khash Khash Pe Naam Le, Birtha Khash Mat Khoi
Na Jane Ush Khash Ka, Awan Houe Na Houe"\(^{35}\)

(Meaning: Kabir reminds man of the uncertainty of human life. Keeping this in view he warns that man should chant the name of the Lord during each breath which he takes, for human life is uncertain and man knows not whether he would be able to take the next breath or not.)

Again,

"Sawe Rashayan Mai Kiya
Harisa Aur Na Koi
Til Ek Ghat Mai Sansare
To Sab Kanchan Houe"\(^{36}\)

(Meaning: Having tried many an alchemy Kabir came to this conclusion that none but recitation of the name of Lord Hari is most effective of all alchemies. The name of Hari is such that it’s chanting effects the entire
body within moments and man feels that he has been transformed into gold.

(d) Both Sankaradeva and Kabirdas share the same view as far as the remembering (smarana) of the name of Hari is concerned, Kabirdas has said –

"Dukh Mai Sumiran Sab Kare
Sukh Mai Kare Na Koi
Jo Sukh Mai Sumiran Kare
To Dukh Kahe Ko Hoi"\textsuperscript{37}

(Meaning:- All remember God during their bad days; but forget to take the name of God during their days of happiness. How can he be unhappy who remembers the name of Hari?)

Moreover Kabirdas has spoken of remembering the name of God in each breath that he takes. According to Kabirdas there is no guarantee of human life; that is why man should remember the name of God in each and every moment of his life.

"Kiya Bhorosha Deh Ka Winash Jaat Shin Mahi
Sansh Sansh Sumiran Koru, Aur Jatan Kuch Nahi II"\textsuperscript{38}

(Meaning: The unvanquishable power of death can lay its hands upon anyone and at any time. No matter how strong or young its target is. That is why Kabir warns that one shouldn’t rely on physical strength alone. He should pray to God and seek His mercy and protection.)

Again according to Kabir,

"Ganga Tir Jo Ghar Kare, Piwe Ganga Neer
Bin Hari Sumiran Hari Na, Kah Gaye Ds Kabir” \textsuperscript{39}
(Meaning: It is through single minded devotion and meditation of the Lord that mortal beings can realise Him. Staying on the banks of the Ganges and drinking water of the Ganges is meaningless. Such are mechanical formalities and Kabir has no respect for such mechanical ceremonial rituals and piety. He feels that observing all these cannot prepare man for the vision of the Lord, his ultimate home, his last refuge.)

Similarly, in case of Smarana Bhakti, Sankaradeva has said that one who always remembers the name of Hari equally in happiness and sadness, it is he who doesn’t have to suffer from fear, hesitation and physical pain –

“Tomar Saran Smare Jitu Jan
Manot Nissoy Kori
Shitu Bhakatar Ateke Mukhyak
Diya Prabhu Deva Hari”

(Bhakti Ratnakar – Smaran Mahatmya)

(Meaning: That devotee (bhakta) who remembers Your Name, O Lord Hari! Do bless him with Moksha)

Again,

“Smaran Mattrake Mukuti Diwai
Kripamoi Narayan
Henoi Devak Nupujili Tura
Koria Ati Jaton”

(Bhakti Ratnaka- Smaran Mahatmya)

(Meaning: The All Benevolent Narayana can give you salvation if you remember His name; but you people do not care to remember His name.)

148
Similarly,

“Krishna Pawe Eko Sharana Pashiya
Krishnako Xoda Smoroyo
Howe Papo Kshyo Mukuti Pawoyo
Ehixe Bhoilo Nirnoy”

(Bhakti Ratnakar – Smaran Mahatmya)

(Meaning: One who surrenders himself at the feet of Lord Krishna and remembers His name, such a devotee’s sins lessen and he attains salvation.)

In this way it can be seen that both Sankaradeva and Kabirdas has mentioned Smarana Bhakti in their preaching of Bhakti.

(e) After Smarana Bhakti both Sankaradeva and Kabirdas gave stress on self surrender. For example, Sankaradeva has said –

“Bhava Baitarani Maje Mojiloho
Nere Muko Shoko Bhoyo
Tomaro Charane Sharan Poshilu
Kripa Kora Kripamoyo”

(Kirtana Ghosha, Prahlad Charita)

(Meaning: The maladies of this mundane world has made one confused and lost, liberate me from fear, O Benevolent Lord! I seek refuge at Your feet.)

Again for Sankaradeva,

“Garuda Ketu Trano Heto
Rama Tumi Narayana
Jani Loilu Tumato Sharana II”

(Kirtana Ghosha, Boli Chalana)
(Meaning: O Rama! It's You who took the Narayana incarnation to rescue Garuda, knowing this I surrender myself at Your feet.)

Similarly, Kabirdas has said,

"Bhagati Duheli Ram Ki, Nahi Kayar Ka Kaam
Sish Uttare Hath Kori So Keshi Hari Naam"45

(Meaning: One can realize Lord Rama only if he makes complete self-surrender before the Lord. Kabirdas pointed out that this is no easy task. The devotee has to bow his head down before the Lord and readily serve Him.)

Again according to Kabirdas,

"Mere Mujmai Kuch Nahi
Jo Kuch Hai So Tera
Tera Tuj Na Soupte
Keya Lage Hai Mera II"46

(Meaning: There is nothing which I can say Mine, everything is Yours. How can I but not surrender everything to You, for You are the owner of all.)

(f) While discussing the Bhakti Dharma preached by Sankaradeva and Kabirdas it will come to one's notice that both the saints gave stress on this aspect that man need not be a scholar or a sage to practice Bhakti in the true sense. God is pleased when a Bhakta or devotee remembers the name of Hari with all purity of heart-

"Nalage Devo Dwijo.Rishi Huibe
Nalage Sambhuto Shastra Janibe"
Michate More Aano Karma Kari

Howonta Bhakatite Tusta Hari II”

(Kirtan Ghosha, Pashanda Mardana)

(Meaning:- (You) need not be a god or a brahmin, nor a sage, you need not master all the holy scriptures, it is useless to toil for the Lord in other things, it is simply Bhakti through which one can please Hari.)

Similarly Kabirdas has said –

“Pothi Porhi Porhi Jagmuwa
Pandit Huwe Na Koi
Dhai Akshar Prem Ka
Porhe So Pandit Huwe”

(Meaning:- It is not by reading the scriptures again and again that one becomes learned and wise, but by knowing the essence of love of the Lord that one becomes learned and wise.)

(g) Both Sankaradeva and Kabirdas gave importance to the association with pure hearted people, i.e. Satsanga. Sankaradeva has said –

“Sadhusowe Diye Samahita Upadesha I
Sedanta Monor Joto Sansaya Nihshesha II
Eteke Dusanga Eri Buddhimanta Jone I
Sadhuro Sangaka Matra Loibe Sorbakhyana II”

(Bhakti Ratnakar, Sadhusanga Mahatmya)
Meaning: Being in the association of Sadhus one gets fruitful advice, it helps him to break through the complexity of the world. So, one should abstain from bad company and seek the company of righteous people.

Similarly, Kabirdas has said,

"Kabira Sangati Sadhu Ki, Hare Aur Ki Byadhi
Sangati Buri Kusadhu Ki, Aatho Prahar Upadhi
Kabir Man Panchi Bhaya, Jaha Man Taha Uri Jaye
Jo Jeisi Sangati Kare, So Tesi Fal Khaye."50

Meaning: Good person's or Sadhu’s company will give you mental peace and tranquility of the soul, staying in the company of fake Sadhu will bring restlessness to the mind; so, do select your company carefully as for the outcome of your mental health depends on the company you keep.

(h) Both of them advised people to abide by their Gurus and mingle up with Sat Sanga i.e., with those fellow disciples or fellowmen with purity in their thoughts and deeds. For example –

"Nibindhila Guru Sewa Granthara Addyyat
Lage Guru Upadesh Xakalo Karyyat II
Samanyya Biddyak Guru Upadeshe Pai
Harirbhakati Guru Sewa Bine Nai II"51

(Bhakti Ratnakar, Gurusewa Mahatmya)

Meaning: Service towards the teacher or Guru is the foremost duty of one, a Guru’s advice is needed at every steps of life; the Guru’s advice can be
attained from the little knowledge that he bestows upon one, serving the
Guru is serving Hari)

Again, according to Kabirdas,

“Guru Govind Dono Khare
Kiske Lagu Paai
Balihari Guru Apne
Govind Diaa Batai II”

(Meaning: Guru and Govind are one, only the form is dual. Comparing Guru and
Govind Kabirdas firstly respect the Guru because Guru can show us the
path for attaining God)

(i) Both these saints looked to the downtrodden in society and preached Bhakti among
them to guide them towards spiritual wellness as well as all round development of
the physical self. If the sixth similarity is considered it will come to one’s notice
that both of them were against idol worship and pilgrimage. For example:

“Hari Hen Etu Dui Guti Akhyar
Jihva Aogre Thake Jaar
Ganga Goya Kasi Prayag Setut
Jai Baak Nalage Taar II”

(Kirtan Ghosha, Ajamil Upakhyan)

(Meaning: That the two syllable word Hari is at the top of the tongue of that person,
he need not go to the holy Ganges, Kasi or Prayag to attain salvation)

Again, for Sankaradeva,

“Tirtha Buli Kore Jolot Huddhi

153
Pratimat Kore Devote Buddhi
Vaishnavot Naai Ishobo Moti
Goru To Odhom Krishna Bodoti II
(Kirtan Ghosha, Pashanda Marddan)

(Meaning: Those who sprinkle water for purification thinking it to be going out on a pilgrimage regard the idols as duties; They do not concentrate their minds on Vishnu, such are inferior to cows even as said by Krishna.)

Similarly, according to Kabir,

Tirath To Sab Belori
Sabmelyashai
Kabir mulnikandiya
Koun Halahal Khaye II
Pahan Puje Hari Mile
To Mai Puju Pahar
Tate Yoh Chakki Bhali
Pisi Khai Sansar II

(Meaning: Pilgrimage is the venom tree which's spread over age to age; Kabir has uprooted the tree, why should a man this hemlock take? if God's realized by stone worship, then let me worship a mountain; but a hand mill of stone is better since the world feeds on its grounded grain.)

(j) Both these preachers worked for communal harmony among the Hindus and Muslims. Kabirdas' life itself is an ideal example of Hindu-Muslim unity. Kabir asserts that all those who are dedicated to the Lord and chant His name are equal in his view. Differences in their caste, creed, colour, language, etc. are of no
consequence. Kabir implies that man plays a very insignificant role in God’s vast universe. Also he asserts that basically or from birth no man belongs to any particular faith or cult. He is born as man alone. According to Kābirdas—

“Sab Hamare Ek Hai, Ju Sumire Hari Naam
Bastu Lohi Pehchan Ke, Bashon So Kya Kaam II”

“Hindu Kahu To Mai Nahi, Musalman Bhi Nahi
Pancah Tattwa Ka Putla, Gewo Khele Mahi II”

“Jati Na Pucho Sadhu Ki Puch Lijio Gyan
Mul Boju Tarwal Ki, Para Rehne Do Myan II”\(^{56}\)

(Meaning: All we are one who remember the name of Hari, he is neither Hindu nor Muslim; what to be proud of this body made up of five elements? It will break down to nothingness. A saint isn’t known by his cast or creed but by his wisdom, the sword is important rather than the covering of the sword.)

Sankaradeva’s task was much more diverse than this. He not only brought the greater Hindu community in friendly and harmonious term with the Muslim community, but was also responsible for revitalizing the lower sub-castes of the Hindu community to live a life of dignity and cheer. According to Sankaradeva,

“Brahman Chandalor Nibisari Kul
Datat Dhurat Jen Dristi Ektul
Nisot Sadhut Jar Bhoilo Ek Gyan
Tahakuche Pondit Bulio SarbajonII”\(^{57}\)

(Kirtan – Ghosha)
In this way it can be seen that though Sankaradeva and Kabirdas were from different places, yet they shared the same thoughts as far as Bhakti Dharma is concerned. There are similarities in their preaching of Bhakti Dharma. But there is also some dissimilarity in their approach. An attempt has been made to discuss these dissimilarities as well.

**Dissimilarities**

Although both Sankaradeva and Kabirdas gave importance to Kirtana and Smarana of Hari’s name, yet it is seen that Sankaradeva gave much importance to the Sravana of Hari’s name apart from the Kirtana and Smaran of Hari’s name. Moreover there is the presence of a particular class of people in the Naamghars known as ‘Sravani’. The task of these Sravanis is to listen (sravan) to the Hari naama kirtana in the Naamghars. A close look into the Bhakti Dharma of Kabirdas will make it clear that he has, time and again repeated about the Smarana and Kirtana of Hari’s name. But he didn’t find a single person who spoke to him about the glory of Rama. According to Sankaradeva the glory of Krishna is boundless. One who listens to the glorious name of the Lord, it is in his heart that Narayana resides. Listening, chanting and remembering the name of Hari make man’s mind free of fear, hesitation, haughtiness etc. It has been said in the Kirtana Ghosha-

“**Ishwara Krishnar Leela Charitra Jijone**

(Meaning : It is meaningless to classify a Brahmana from a Chandala, even a person of low cast, by dint of wisdom, attain the same position as a sadhu and people would recognize as a scholar.)
Param Shraddhaye Sada Koranta Sravana
Ati Alpo Kale Aasi Taharo Hiyato
Hanta Bhagabanta Krishna Prakasha Syakhyata II

(Bhakti Ratnakar, Sravan Mahatmya)

(Meaning: one who is inspired by the Leela of Lord Krishna, one who always listen His blessed name with devotion; it is into his heart that the Lord goes into and distributes His divine glow. It is here at this point that Lord Krishna shines with all splendour.)

Again,

“Guse Ahankara Chinde Joteko Songshoyo
Karmar Baxona Mane Sobe Huwe Khyoy
Atma Ishwarat Matra Dristi Howe Taro
Krishnar Kotha Sravanar Mohima Aparo II”

(Bhakti Ratnakar, Sravan Mahatmya)

(Meaning: Listening to the blessed name of Lord Krishna work wonders- It removes arrogance from the mind, sets the mind at peace chasing off hesitation, carnal desires leave the mind and directs the soul towards God the Almighty.)

But there is no special mention of Sravana Bhakti in the couplets of Kabirdas. Kabirdas has lamented thus —

“Esha Koi Na Mila, Jalti Jot Bujai
Kotha Sunawe Naam Ki, Tan Man Rahe Samai I”
(Meaning: Kabir implies that it is rare to find a man who is by his wisdom removes from another anxieties and anguish of his mind and by reciting the name and message of the Lord, fills the latter's mind and body with love and reverence for him.)

Sankaradeva has talked about incarnation. But Kabirdas has different view regarding this. He doesn't support incarnation. Still, at places he has but mentioned about incarnation. Kabirdas has taken into account both Sringara Bhakti as well as Madhurjya Bhakti. Many a time Kabirdas thinks himself as a beloved of Rama. But Sankaradeva hasn’t said much about Madhurjya Bhakti. He has given much stretch on Dashya Bhakti only.

From the social point of view the preaching and teaching of Sankaradeva was such that each and every member in society was motivated to embrace the Ek Sharana Naam Dharma propagated by him. Anyone could come into its fold without hesitation. But it was not the same in Kabirdas’ case. No doubt his religious teachings were based on humanity, religious tolerance and harmony between Hindus and Muslims. But only the poor and under privileged in society came into the folds of his religion. It may be that Kabirdas, to some extent, lacked the charismatic and appealing personality of Sankaradeva. Sankaradeva was a man of letters, a good orator, an excellent craftsman, litterateur and a whole lot of unique talent in his disposition. These qualities in him earned him the attraction, respect and adoration from both the elite and gentle class in society, whereas Kabirdas was a very simple man with humble upbringings and without education or other creative qualities in comparison to Sankaradeva. But yet, in the international level Kabirdas is a well known name because of his couplets which is based on Rama Bhakti.
5.5 General Estimate

At the closure of the discussion of this particular chapter it can be concluded that both Sankaradeva and Kabirdas can be described as such great personalities who brought about revolutionary change to an era in his own right. Such great personalities, by dint of their merit and ability, can mould generations and bring historic change to human mindset and society at large. In this way they script golden era in history (as far as social history is concerned). Such noble minded human beings are blessed with excellent qualities and a selfless motive to do good for society. Similar to other saints cum preachers of Bhakti movement in other parts of India, Sankaradeva and Kabirdas too, had good knowledge of their social surroundings. Their minute observation power helped them to identify the flaws in social as well as religious life and tried to correct all those drawbacks of society. As per the motto of the Bhakti movement, these preachers cum social reformers tried to cut through the barriers of caste and other vices of social life that was a barrier in the path of development and growth of liberalism in the human mind for the long term development of society. Both Sankaradeva and Kabirdas realized the flaws present in their respective societies and offered remedial measure for those. Through their intelligence and Prema Bhakti (loving devotion), they got into the skin of the prevailing problems and sought for long term solution to such problems. Their Bhakti was and for the betterment of humanity. It had humanistic appeal of its own. The overall appeal of the Bhakti movement motivates people to practice and realise Vaishnava Bhakti Dharma.

The Bhakti movement took some time to reach Eastern India (Assam in particular). But making its journey through North India and enriched by the teachings of Kabirdas, the Bhakti movement made a deep impact in Assam and Assamese society.
From the historical point of view, this overwhelming flow and popularity of the Bhakti movement was a golden feature to the religious history of the middle ages in India. On the backdrop of this unique realization was the harmonious assimilation of caste, creed, religion, society, culture, language, etc. Both Sankaradeva and Kabirdas provided such elements to a backward society for its upliftment that it did more than expectance. The idea of the Bhakti Dharma has developed and got enriched too, over the ages. Both Sankaradeva and Kabirdas have a significant role to play in this regard.
References


2. Ibid, pp.92-95


7. Ibid, p. 27

8. Ibid, p.34

9. Ibid, p. 105

10. Ibid, p.105


161
15. Ibid, p.56
16. Ibid, p. 70
17. Ibid, p.72
24. Ibid, p. 85


32. Ibid, p. 75

33. Ibid, p. 64

34. Ibid, p. 62


36. Ibid, p. 20


39. Ibid, p. 58


41. Ibid, p. 81

42. Ibid, p. 81


44. Ibid, p. 178


54. Ibid, p.35


59. Ibid p. 47