Basically the present work entitled “The Concept of Bhakti (Celestial Love) - A Study of Sankaradeva and Kabir” is an attempt to understand the concept of Bhakti. In this research work an attempt has been made to present the concept of Bhakti in an Indian perspective - mainly North India and North East India (Sankaradeva and Kabirdas). The founder of Neo-Vaisnavism Sankaradeva first established the primacy of Nirguna Bhakti in his famous ‘Ekasarania Dharma’. Sankaradeva is called the ‘Mahapurusa’ who interpreted the problem of divisionism or religious difference among different communities and people after him have followed his path. Similarly Kabirdas, who was a bold and uncompromising reformer in the religious history of mediaeval India, was always against cast distinction. He tried in his whole life to reconcile the religious differences among different communities which raised its ugly head out of superstition and religious dogmatism. Sankaradeva and Kabirdas - both gave importance to Bhakti because they knew that without Bhakti, Jñāna and Karma become meaningless. For Sankaradeva and Kabirdas, Bhakti or devotion alone can lead one to realize oneself from the bondage. They remind mankind that human life is transient and illusory, but mankind can make it real by devotion to Hari, for there is nothing real on earth other than devotion or Bhakti. With the help of devotion or Bhakti one can annihilate selfishness and thereby realize Moksha. The obligation of Bhakti is therefore an unfailing authority in favour of purpose. It is indeed an unfailing mean to help man to attain real success in living a religious life.

The concept of Bhakti is discussed by many philosophers of Eastern and Western philosophy. In order to take a certain limited area of research it is decided to study the concept of Bhakti in Eastern or Indian perspective rather than Western
perspective. The work of study includes Bhakti, its subject, its relation to mental or psyche and its existence with human life etc. All these are studied in the Indian perspective and special reference is given to Sankaradeva and Kabirdas.

The present work comprises six chapters. The first introductory chapter of this Ph.D. thesis deals with the concept of religion (dharma). It is worth mentioning that the word ‘Bhakti’ is used in the Indian context and parallelly the word Dharma has been used instead of Religion. Here the connection between religion and Bhakti has been briefly mentioned and also what is Bhakti, Jñāna and Kārma. In this chapter a brief idea of the life history of Sankaradeva and Kabirdas has also been given. Moreover the importance and necessity of this research work and ultimately the objective of the work is also included in this chapter. Here it need to be mentioned that though the title of this research work is “The Concept of Bhakti (Celestial Love) - A Study of Sankaradeva and Kabir” but in the whole work of this research the word ‘Kabirdas’ has been used instead of ‘Kabir’. This is because in many a doha of Kabir, Kabir has used the term ‘Das’ before his name, like ‘Dasa Kabira’. It implies that Kabirdas practiced Dashya Bhakti.

The second chapter discusses about the concept of Bhakti, its varied elements and a thorough insight into Bhakti. Here, in this chapter, an attempt has been made to analyze the meaning and nature of Bhakti, the definition of Bhakti, the classification or types of Bhakti, essential features of Bhakti and the meaning of Nirguna and Saguna Bhakti. After that the nature of true Bhakta is also analyzed on the basis of Bhagavad Gita. In the last paragraph a general estimate of the entire chapter has been made.
The third chapter is based on the concept of Bhakti of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva. Here Bhakti has been analyzed from Sankaradeva’s view. The aspects brought into discussion here are: Advaitavaad in Sankardeva’s Bhakti Dharma, the Qualified Form (Sakara Rupa) of Brahma, the four entities and its significance, nine elements of Bhakti, the main features of Neo-Vaishnava Dharma and at last the general estimate. Here the reason as to why Sankaradeva propagated Ek Sharana Naam Dharma is being discussed. The basis of Bhakti Dharma as projected by Sankaradeva lies in the Bhagavad. Lord Viṣṇu has been propagated as the Supreme power in the Bhagavad. ‘Many in One and One in Many’ – this was the basic philosophy of the religious ideology of Sankaradeva. The basis of the religion founded by Sankaradeva was ‘Ekatattwa’ (one principle). He has expressed his view that it is Bhakti which is the supreme path to liberate man from worldly ties or bondage or Maya. In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna has said that it is through Bhakti alone that all the sins of a Bhakta is washed away. It is through the Bhakti of Sri Krishna alone that sinners can be delivered from their sins. A Bhakta’s foremost duty is to meditate and bring to his mind the image and activities of the Lord. According to him it is through Bhakti that man is liberated from the bonds of Maya. He has also said that it is Bhakti Marga (way of devotion) and not Karma Marga (way of action), Yoga Marga (way of meditation) or Jñāna Marga (way of knowledge) through which the supreme bliss can be achieved.

The fourth chapter deals with the religious philosophy of Kabirdas. Here, Bhakti has been discussed in the light of a universal characteristic where it is shown that Bhakti is the only way of attachment with God. Bhakti is found in a universal fellowship where the basic principle is sharing and having mutual understanding with God. As far as this discussion is concerned, Bhakti is an Indian concept. But if seen
from a broader point of view, Bhakti is a universal concept and its basic features are known to each and every religion. One need not be a scholar to understand God or have a mutual understanding with God at the spiritual level. The poorest of the poor and most wretched person can also connect with the spiritual power of God if he wants to. It's only a matter of approach and sinceremost devotion of the heart. Kabirdas is an excellent example of this form of devotee. In this chapter Kabirdas' concept of Bhakti has been discussed through his couplets, the place of Rama in Kabirdas' Bhakti, elements of Bhakti, and the eight features of Bhakti such as Parammātmābodha, Mādhurjyabhāba, Nāma-Smarana, Guru-Mahattva, Madhyamamārga, Prapattibhāba, Hathayoga, and Saddha-Ācharana and lastly the general estimate.

In the fifth chapter an attempt has been made to throw light on the development of the Bhakti movement in India in the mediaeval times and the impressive characteristics of the Bhakti movement. A society has an important role to play as far as any change or development is concerned. If the case of Bhakti movement in India is taken into consideration here, the same thing can be observed. In this chapter the inception of the Bhakti Movement in India and its growth has been discussed, causes behind the spreadth and development of the Bhakti movement in India, contribution of the saints in the development of the Bhakti movement in India, the similarities and dissimilarities of the Bhakti of Sankaradeva and Kabirdas and ultimately the general estimate.

In the sixth or the concluding chapter of this research work, an attempt has been made of an overall assessment of the entire work. At this point it can be clarified that there is no such repetition of the earlier discussions. Bhakti has mainly come into human minds from religion. It doesn’t matter whether this religion is Hinduism, Islam
or Christianity. Nevertheless there is a strong connection between religion and Bhakti. Bhakti is a mental curriculum because it is related to man's feelings and emotions and no word can express feelings and emotions properly. For this reason it is no easy task to explain what Bhakti is. As this research work is based on Sankaradeva and Kabirdas, here one thing is noticed that Sankaradeva and Kabirdas were always against religious rituals. But though they reject Vedic rites and rituals which are elements of religion, they have established a religion which is very much simple and common to all.

As far as the study of the Bhakti movement in India is concerned, much work has already been done. But as far as the initiation and development of the Bhakti movement along with the comparative study of Sankaradeva and Kabirdas in the North-East India (Assam) is concerned, not much work has been done. A humble attempt has been made here to churn out some important aspects from the comparative study of Sankaradeva and Kabirdas' perspective of Bhakti and to identify the similarities and dissimilarities. It is hoped that this research work would be one more opportunity to divert scholarly minds towards study of the concept of Bhakti propagated by Sankaradeva and Kabirdas.