CHAPTER IV

SAKTISM
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The fundamental belief in Hinduism about the all pervading and all transcending reality which is the source and support of everything has been visualised by the Sāktas in the form of Sakti.

"The Sāktas conceive the Great Goddess as the personification of primordial energy and the source of all divine and cosmic evolution. She is identified with the Supreme Being, ... as well as the controller of all the forces and potentialities of nature."¹

Saktism takes on a unique position in claiming the superiority of the Goddess over other Gods. According to it, the unmanifested Prakrti alone existed before creation. Assuming the form of Great Mother she created Brahmā, Visnu and Siva out of her own body. Later, the Mother Goddess, the Devi is transformed into the eternally existing all powerful Female Principle, the Prakrti or Sakti. And having associated with the male principle the Purusa, she becomes Jagadambā or Jaganmātā, the mother of the Universe, the creator of the Gods. She is Mahādevi in her highest form and in spite of being the consort of Siva she is his creator.²

The Vedic Aryans were worshippers of father Gods, but they could not annihilate the Pre-Vedic Earth Mother and therefore Goddess Prithvi remained in the Vedic Pantheon. But she was allowed in a less glorious position in contrast to her male consort Dyaus, the sky Father. As wives of the Great Gods, Goddesses occupy a subordinate position in Vedic religion. With little independent power they play a very insignificant part.

The worship of the divine feminine has been prevalent in India from a very early period among all the ethnic groups. Later different deities combined into one Great Goddess (Adyā Sakti) to be identified with Prakṛti of Samkhya.

The Mother-Goddess conception culminated in the idea of a cosmic principle as the source of all creation. Sakti is called the Mother — the resort of all beings. Sāyanachārya, the great Vedic commentator, in his commentary on Rg Veda says that Durga is none other than Great Sakti. "The three vedic deities - Vac (Saraswati), Rātri and Sri gives us a vivid picture of the three manifestations of Sakti as Mahakali, Maha Saraswati and Maha Laksmi."
There are Upanisads called Sakta Upanisads which contain the philosophical basis of Saktism where Sakti is regarded as Brahman or Isvara. They lay stress on the dynamic nature of the creative power of Brahman i.e., Sakti. Here Sakti and Brahman are inseparable from each other. This inseparableness is the key note of Saktism. Sakta upanisads regard Sakti as the creative power of Siva without which he cannot create the universe. She is the mother of the universe, the creator of Prakrti-Purusa and the world. Sometimes she is identified with Prakrti as well as with Māyā.7

Devi Bhagavata Purana conceives of God as the Divine Mother. She is described as Para Brahman, Atman, Pure consciousness and bliss. Para Brahman has a power called Māyā, which is neither existent nor non-existent, nor both but different from them. Māyā is a positive entity and always exists in Brahman and Atman as heat exists in fire. Brahman in conjunction with Sakti is the seed of the world. Māyā is called Pradhāna, Prakrti, Sakti or Avidya.

Prakrti, Avyakta or Māyā is the material cause of the world and the power of Brahman. Māyā is composed

7. Ibid., p. 20.
of three Gunas, viz. Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Isvara is the reflection of Brahman in Maya and the individual self is the reflection of Brahman in Avidyā.

Sakti in this Purana is called the eternal and Supreme Goddess and the ultimate cause of all causes. Sakti is said to exist in all things. Though Sakti in its absolute aspect is formless, yet it has got to assume visible forms for the sake of showing grace to the devotee. 8

The Brahma Vaivarta Purana mentions manifestation of Sakti as Saraswati, Durga, Laksmi and so on. The most important cult of this Purana is that of Rādhā. In this Purana Sakti is called Great mother and mulaprakrti out of which the whole universe evolves. It is held to be the real essence and ultimate substratum of all that exists. This original Prakrti first assumed five forms viz. Durgā, Sakti of Śiva, Laksmi, Sakti of Viṣṇu, Saraswati and Savitri of Brahma and Radha, the favourite of the youthful Kṛṣṇa.

Besides these manifestations of the Sakti or Prakṛti, the whole body of goddesses are said to have sprung

8. Ibid., pp. 66-68.
from the same source. In every creation of the universe Mulāprakṛti assumes the different gradations of Amsarupini, Kalarupini and Kalamsarupini or manifests herself in parts and further subdivisions. Sakti, not only is the creator, but she is also the preserver and destroyer of the universe. In the Mahabharata more specifically in Sapta-Matrika Kali is seen as a symbol of death and destruction. It is in the Devi Māhātmya that a full account of goddess Kali is given. In the first two episodes Devi, the great goddess defeats the demons (Madhu, Kaitabha and Mahisasura). In the third episode, while confronting the demons (Sumbha and Nisumbha, Chanda and Munda) the goddess Kali appears on the scene. When Chanda and Munda approach Durgā, she becomes furious, her face becoming dark as ink. Suddenly there springs forth from her brow the terrible goddess Kāli, armed with a sword and noose. She is adorned with a garland of human heads, wears a tiger skin, and waves a staff with a skull handle. She is gaunt with sunken, reddish eyes, gaping mouth, lolling tongue and emaciated flesh. She fills the four quarters with her terrifying roar and leaps eagerly into the fray. She flings demons into her mouth and crushes in her jaws. Laughing and howling loudly, she approaches Chanda and Munda grasps them by

9. Ibid., p. 89.
the hair, and in one furious blow decapitates them both with her mighty sword. Returning to Durga with the two heads, she laughs jokingly and presents them to the goddess as a gift.\textsuperscript{10}

Once again, while fighting against the fearful demon Raktabija\textsuperscript{11} Durga repeatedly strikes him and later calls upon Kāli to defeat the monster. Kāli swoops onto the field of battle and opens her gigantic mouth. She swallows the blood born creatures and drinks up the blood from the demon's wound and finally sucks the blood from the demon, who falls to the ground dead.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus, it appears that Goddess Kāli is born from wrath, horrible in appearance, and is ferocious in battle. She takes delight in destruction and death and thus symbolises the wild and fearful aspects of the divine.\textsuperscript{13} Of course, in the Linga Purāṇa Kāli plays a positive and motherly role.\textsuperscript{14}

In various contents it is seen that Kāli and Siva dance together. The dance is wild and world shaking. Kāli

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Kinsley David, Hindu Goddesses, p. 118 and also 'Chandi' 7th Canto.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Note: Everytime Raktabija is wounded and begins to bleed, other demons in his image and might and ability are instantly born from his blood - Raktabija badha adhyaya. 'Chandi' 8th Canto.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 118.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 119.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 104.
\end{itemize}
and Siva appear as mad partners in cosmic dance that is destined to destroy the worlds. There is a tradition in South India where a dance contest is held between the two. In every case Siva is victorious. It is arranged to settle the superiority of the sexes. Pārvati takes the form of Kāli but is still not able to defeat Siva. The defeat of Kāli in the dance tournament by Siva is the origin of Chidāmbaram temple (famous Saivite holy place in South India). The stories regarding the defeat of Kāli by Siva reflect the Saivite confrontation with and accommodation of Kāli. In South Indian mythological tradition Kāli is subdued by Siva and not accepted on equal terms.

The dance performance of Siva and Kāli has got other implications. It is also held that had Siva not defeated or calmed Kāli, the whole universe would become subject to her blind bubbling fury and destroy itself. 'Her fury is equated with Prakṛti - the realm of vibrating matter that proceeds according to its own laws. Siva by subduing Kāli represents Purusa, or the Yogin's heroic taming of matter, his defeat of Kāli is sublimation and deification of matter.'

15. Ibid., p. 120.
However, the Rāmāyana shows Kāli as dominating Siva. It is said that after the conquest of the ten headed Rāvana, Rāma boasted of his victory. Sīta, however, was not impressed and wanted Rama to confront a thousand headed Rāvana. The giant Rāvana threw only three arrows which drove all Rāma's army back. Rāma became disheartened and began to weep alone on the battle field. Sītā then assumed the form of Kāli and killed the demon. She started tossing his heads and limbs, gulped his blood in her frenzy and began an earth-shattering dance. The Gods were alarmed and wanted Siva to intervene. Siva threw himself in the battle field under her dancing feet. Recognising Siva (who is called her husband) she was astonished and embarrassed and stopped her dance. (This is the usual representation of Kāli in Bengal). Of course, Sīta resumed her appearance and accompanied her humiliated husband, Rāma. 16

This dominant position of Kāli can also be seen in certain forms of Tantrism. In many Tantric texts Kāli is declared as the supreme deity and is equivalent to Brahman. Compared to Kāli, the gods Brahma, Visnu and Siva are like the amount of water in a cow's hoof print compared to the water of the sea.

16. Ibid., p. 119.
In the Mahanirvana Tantra Kāli is described as the premordial Sakti; and Siva praises her as follows:

"Because Thou devourest Kāla, Thou art Kāli, because thou art the Origin of and devourest all things thou art called the Ādyā (primordial) Kāli. Resuming after Dissolution Thine own form, dark and formless. Thou alone remainst as one ineffable and inconceivable. Thou having a form, yet art Thou formless; though Thyself without beginning, multiform by the power of Māyā, Thou art the Beginning of all, Creatrix, Protectress, and Destructress that Thou art."17

In Vāmācara Sādhana, the Sādhaka (the practitioner) seeks to, gain moksa by realising the nature of the world which is thoroughly pervaded by the One Sakti. He realises the identity of Sakti with the whole creation.

As Siva represents "all devouring time", Kāli, by dancing on Siva, represents a mastery over time: the dark immeasurable void which is above time, space and causation. In this characteristic pose, it appears that by conquering the god of destruction, she affirms creation which is the ultimate expression of the feminine principle in the universe.

The creative, preservative and destructive forces are but the three aspects of Divine energy that exists

17. Ibid., p. 123.
in Brahman. And Mahā Sakti is the complete perception of Brahman with the three Gunas — sattva, rajas and tamas. From this it appears that the philosophical concept of Brahman is conceived as Mahā Sakti in the Tantras. 18

According to Sākta Tantras, Sakti has a double aspect. In one she is identical with Siva and at this stage Siva alone shines. In another it is the tattvas from which the universe appears. Again Siva is the static absolute and Sakti is the conscious energy of Siva who creates the world.

Siva and Sakti as Brahman are inseparable and non-different from each other. Sakti is the supreme energy (Parā Prakṛti) of Siva, the Supreme Self. According to Mahā Nirvāṇa Tantra, Sakti creates, preserves and destroys the world at the mere will of Brahman. In other words, Siva creates, preserves and destroys the universe through his Sakti. Here Sakti is conscious, omniscient and the fountain head of all powers and knowledge. It is both subtle and gross, manifest and unmanifest, formless and multiform. Thus Saktism combines absolute monism with the Samkhya theory of evolution. 19

18. Ibid., p. 152.
In Saktism there is an integration of both Vaisnavism and Saivism as Sakti is conceived as Vaisnavi Sakti and Saivi Sakti. The Saktas have transformed the Impersonal Absolute into a personal divinity — the omnipresent and omniscient Sakti or the Divine Mother. Though popularly Saktism is identified almost wholly with the worship of the Sakti (female) yet there is no dirth of the efforts on the part of Scholars to somehow show Sakti as subservient to Siva (male). She is either highlightened as Sivas spouse, sometimes as his counterpart or is treated as a substitute for the Upanisadic Brahman, conceived in feminine terms and images. Rarely is the independent nature of Sakti emphasised.

The nineteenth century scholars sought to trace the worship of this female principle in the literal interpretation of some of the hymns of the Vedas and in the philosophical interpretation of the Samkhya system.20

In Sahajia Buddhism (sunyata) void and compassion (Karuna) transformed as the prajna and the upaya, are held to be the primary attributees of the ultimate reality. In the Buddhist Tantra and in Sahajiā Buddhism these two aspects — Prajna and upaya are conceived just as Sakti

20. Ibid., p. 131.
Even now in Tibet, different Hindu Gods and Goddesses are being worshipped with full honour. Most of the Lāmās are the Tantric worshippers. According to Hindu Tantra, Tārā Devī is the manifestation of Sakti or Kāli. Regarding the origin of Goddess Tārā, there are different opinions. Some scholars are of the opinion that Tārā Devī is a Buddhist Goddess. There are twenty one forms of Tārā. Manjusri is the Goddess of learning in Buddhist religion. Though in Buddhist Tantra, Manjusri is taken as a male God but the form is similar to Saraswati of Hinduism.

The 'Bon' religion of Tibet is similar to Siva-Sakti concept of Hinduism. The Chief God of Bon religion is La-Chenpo-mig-dupa which means nine-eyed Mahādeva. He is the Lord of the Universe. The main Goddess is Gi-Brijidamthaysma meaning the two handed white Goddess.

Theologians as well as sociologists see in the Devi concept an integration of the elite culture with folk culture. Ghurye in his book Gods and Men, has described different names and forms of worship of Devi in South India.  

In North East India more specifically the present State of Assam, we have the Ahoms who are believed to have practised Prakritik puja. This puja is offered in honour of two powers, Lang Kuri (male) and Nang thau (female). It is similar to Siva-Sakti puja and it is offered to bring peace for the country. The early religion of Assam may be called the religion of the plains tribal and it was said to be worship of a host of minor deities with the belief in a superior creator deity. The foundation for the evolution of various religious cults in Assam was laid by Alpine and Tibeto-Burman elements. The Supreme Creator deity was mostly inactive like the Purusa of the Samkhya. The religion of Saivism mixed with Tantricism prevailed in Assam from about 7th Century A.D. In different historical periods Saivism exercised a considerable influence on Assam's religion. In the second phase of Saivism in Assam, Goddess of Tantric Buddhism Aparājitā and Ugra Tārā got mixed up with Saivite rites. According to Gait Buddhism was also wide spread in Assam at some previous period.

According to P.C. Choudhury, the Brahmanical religion of Siva and Sakti flourished in Assam when the influence of earlier surya worship and Buddhism had declined.

"A land of planetary and Surya worship, having been assimilated into the cult of Visnu, and evident from the existing temple remains at Hajo and Kamakhya in particular, and as explained by the Kalika Purana itself, other Buddhist works and epigraphs, the Aryadharma had its established root in the soil. Buddhism from the time of Mahamaya existed at different centres in Assam, followed by the cult of Siva and Sakti from which period might have started reaction of what may be called the Brahmanical Hinduism. With the rise of the sectarian faiths and the evolution of the cult of Sakti in its various aspects from about the 7th - 8th century A.D. of Siva, one of the Hindu trinity and of Devi with the incorporation of Tantricism and ritualistic details began to flourish round the Devipitha Kamakhya."25

The most dominating name in the early history of Assam is the Goddess Kāmākhyā. She was the presiding deity of the State and the later religious history also centres round her. Even other goddesses were recognised as the varied manifestations of the Goddess Kāmākhyā. It was over her emergence, that the Saivites and the Vaisnavites went into silent conflict at a certain period. Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā was associated with and patronised by Visnu during the reign of Naraka. In the later periods she was pictured as the spouse of Siva.26

Besides the identification of Motheer Goddess Kāmākhyā and wife Goddess Parvati, she has also been

completely assimilated to a virgin Goddess of beauty and sex, Tripura. The cult of virgin worship and sensual aspect of Devi worship seems to be derived from the cult of Tripura.²⁷

Thus Tantric form of Hinduism in the worship of Kāmākhyā, the Mother Goddess has been flourishing in Assam for quite some time. Among the tribals, cult of Goddess worship was also in a dominant stage. It is interesting to note that within the Vaisnava pantheon, the worship of Devi was also included. Goddess Kāmākhyā found a place along with Guhya Kāli of Nepal and Nilā Saraswati of China.²⁸ Kāmākhyā was worshipped both according to right-hand and lefthand methods. Similar is the case of Tripurābālā who is identified with Kāmākhyā. The lefthand worship of Tripurābālā often required the worship of an actual living girl. Institution for virgin worship also was there.*

Kamarupa is described as:

"the favourite haunt of the Devi .... She dwells in every House, Every woman in Kamarupa is a miniature incarnation of the Goddess."²⁹

²⁷. Ibid., p. 49 and p. 51.
²⁸. Ibid., p. 43.
* Virgin worship is still in practice during Durga Puja.
²⁹. Ibid., p. 45.
The female Goddess Mahādevī of the Tantra has been variously identified as Vishnu's Māyā. In one sense it is a positive connotation. 'As Prakṛti or Māyā, the Devi is identified with existence itself'. Here Māyā is not the binding aspect, rather she is the ground of all existent things.\(^{30}\)

According to the Saiva Siddhānta, Māyā is the Sakti of Brahman. It is the primordial stuff out of which the world is made. Māyā is non-intelligent and it evolves by the guidance of Siva.\(^{31}\) It is noticeable that in the Upanisads this aspect of Māyā did not get much importance. It was viewed only as a negative element (i.e. as ignorance).

Avidyā or Ajnana is the subjective expression of Maya. In the Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Māyā means 'illusion', unreality, deception. In the Samkhya, it is identified with Prakṛti or Pradhana, sometimes identified with Durgā and also regarded as the daughter of Anrita and Nritti, etc.\(^{32}\)

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Similarly, in the Bhagavad Gita, Māyā is synonymous with Prakrti. It is the differentiated matter from which all delusions of duality are born and in which the ignorant take refuge.

Here one must note that the Brahman of Vedānta could create the universe only with the association with Māyā which is also equivalent with Prakrti and Sakti. Here again, one can identify Brahman with Purusa and Māyā with Prakrti. It should be admitted that in spite of becoming the creative power of Brahman, Māyā always got a derogatory position. Sankara uses the term Māyā to mean the indescribable (anirvacanīya) power of Brahman. Māyā also veils Brahman and creates delusion. Just as the Purusa must dissociate from Prakrti in order to get liberation, the Sadhaka, must tear the veil of Māyā in order to know the true reality.

From the other point of view, of course, Māyā is seen as the extraordinary power of Gods. The precise relationship between Brahman and the world, in Advaita Vedanta is inexpressible and is sometimes referred to as Maya. I shall not discuss Vedantic Māyā in more detail. The term Māyā may be of common gender, but since it is very often equated with Prakrti, and Prakrti everywhere got a feminine connotation, so Māyā became in the popular
mind equated with the female. Let me refer here to N.N. Bhattacharjee's observation:

"Vedanta could not get rid of the expanding influence of Saktism. Even in its Advaita form, in which Brahman is one without the second, the conception of Māyā as a female principle gradually evolved. Thus Brahman could become the creator only when he was associated with Māyā, which was subsequently called the eternal energy (Nitya Sakti)."\(^{33}\)

The dominating influence of Mother Goddess in Assam received a break through the Neo Vaisnavism of Sankar Deva. Radha is not acknowledged here nor any female complement.\(^{34}\) A formula of four names — 'Rāmā-Krishna-Nārāyana-Hari' is given at the time of initiation. This Vaisnavism of Sankar Deva is similar to southern Vaisnavism in some points. In Sankar Deva's system Nārāyana is the "self conscious pure form of Hari" (Caitanya maya suddharupa Hari) and the primal cause of all incarnations (Sarvā-Avatara-Kārana Nārāyan).\(^{35}\) In many systems of Northern Vaisnavism Rādhā, the unmarried consort of Krishna symbolises the Madhura relationships with God. "The Ekasaraniyā system of Sankar Deva may be looked upon as a protest against varied Rādhā cults that prevailed in different

\(^{34}\) Kakati, B.K. The Mother Goddess Kamakhya, p. 71.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 74.
parts of contemporary India." In the Ekasaraniya system there are the monks (Kevaliyā) but no nuns. "Women were never permitted to mix with men in devotion or abandon their usual household duties much less to assume the character of nuns."37 It is said that Sankar Deva never gave any 'nama mantra' to women. He even drove out one of his follower (Vyāsa Kalāi) from his fold, because he secretly offered worship to the Goddess of small pox when his son was ill.38 Sankar Deva encouraged dāṣya bhakti, i.e., puritan form of bhakti excluding the emotional side that which is free from tāntrik influence. In Sankar Vaisnavism Krsna maintains his manly independence without being overshadowed by the female aspect. Krishna is pictured as masculine hero, conqueror of Kama. However, Damodar Deva, the successor of Sankara Vaisnavism, was much influenced by the Caitanya Vaisnavism of Bengal. Unlike Sankardeva, Domodar Deva prescribed the worship of Visnu. Thus creating a sect of Brāhmaṇical Vaisnavism along with worship of other deities. The influence of Tantras and Samhitās got entry once again in Damodoria Vaisnavism. Unlike Sankar Deva, Brahmanical Vaisnavism considered sakti or prakṛti

36. Ibid., p. 75.
37. Ibid., p. 76.
38. Ibid., p. 80.
as the root cause of creation and Purusa as the inactive aspect. Whereas Sankar Deva considered Brahman to be an active Purusa controller of both Purusa and Prakrti. Damodar Deva, like other followers of Caitanya considered him as the dual incarnation of Radha and Krsna.

The philosophy of Sankardeva is mainly influenced by the Bhāgyvata and the Bhāgavad Gitā. The Bhakti-cult, propounded by him consists in the cultivation of an intimate relationship between the worshipper and the eternal omnipotent God, who is a person. In his 'Bhakti Ratnākara he admits the reality of Jīva and Jagat which are by no means different from Brahman. The apparent difference is only in nāma (name) and rupa (form). When Māyā is transcended, the existence does not disappear rather it gets a new meaning.

According to Sankar Deva,

"Purusottama, Paremesvara and Nārāyana is identical with Vāsudeva Kṛsna. He prescribes Kirtana as the method of worship. He teaches that it is only the action of Māyā that prevents us from the realisation that the whole universe, comprising the moving and the non-moving, the static and dynamic ... is pervaded by one God, in the form of Isvara...."39

For Sankardeva Paramesvara Nārāyan is the cause and uphold-der of Purusa and Prakrti. His Krṣna is the supreme Brahman. The Bhagavata prescribes the method of worshipping this Supreme Lord in the Kaliyuga with Kirtana. By identifying Him with Srikrṣna and Ramachandra and addressing Him as Maha Purusa, Sankardeva calls his religion as Maha-purusia Dharma. It is also called the Nama Dharma as the main method of worship is Kirtana or singing the praise of the name of the Lord. Idol worship does not occupy any position in the Ekasaraniya Nama Dharma of Sankardeva. The female element of the deity is acknowledged, but no separate worship is prescribed. The dual worship of Ramasita or Radha-Krisna, which is a common feature of other Vaisnava sects, is remarkably absent in the Ekasarana Nāma Dharma.

Vaisnavism enjoins that the devotee should establish a relationship with the object of his worship. This relationship can be of five types, viz., sānta (of a serene devotee), dāsyā (of a servant), sakhya (of a friend), vātsalya (of a parent) and madhura (of a consort). Of all these, Sankardeva emphasised on the dāsyā-bhāva, teaching implicit sense of service to God, like a faithful servant, without hoping or asking for any reward in return. The Madhura bhāva with the Rādhā cult which gathered

40. Ibid., p. 206.
a great impetus in Caitanya Vaisnavism, had no attraction for Sankar Deva.\textsuperscript{41}

In the \textit{Ekasaraniyā Dharma} one has to take refuge in the \textit{Deva}, \textit{Guru}, \textit{Nama} and \textit{Bhakat}. \textit{Deva} being inseparable from his \textit{Nama}, \textit{Sarana} (to take refuge) to the \textit{Nama} is essential. The \textit{Guru} (spiritual guide) is a human form of \textit{Deva} and the \textit{Deva} is subservient to his \textit{Bhakat} (devotee). Therefore, \textit{Sarana} is very significant part of a life of a devotee.

Though Sankar Deva lived a family life with wife and children, Mādhavdeva led a celibate life in spite of Sankardeva's protest. According to Mādhava deva, "A celibate devotee is like a soldier within a well-guarded fort, whereas a devotee leading a family life is like a soldier fighting in the open field."\textsuperscript{42} Damodaradeva was a widower and Vamsi Gopāla Deva remained a bachelor. It later became the custom in several of the \textit{Bamuniā satras} and some of the \textit{Mahapurusiā satras}, that the Chief \textit{Guru} of the \textit{satra} should be a celibate. The devotees living within the \textit{satra} also lead a celibate life, and they are

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{41}] Ibid., p. 207.
  \item[\textsuperscript{42}] Cf. Sri Ramakrisna has often told that it is much easier for a celibate bhakta (devotee) to remember the name of God, but a householder devotee when he does that it is, as if he is doing the same by removing a huge stone.
\end{itemize}
called Udāsin Bhaktas or Kevaliās. The rejection of the female deity has also influenced the position of woman in the Vaisnavaite society. Sankardeva is said to have denied the privilege of formal initiation to women. They were to be benefitted only by hearing religious discourse and singing Kirtana-songs. The present position is that even the formal sarana is denied to a woman. She can neither become a Kevaliya or a Udāsina bhakta, nor become a Satrādhikara. 43

43. Ibid., pp. 209-10.