CHAPTER IX

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The comparative discussion of the thoughts of Sankardeva and Tulsidasa in the preceding chapters of the dissertation shows that they have greater elements of similarity than of difference. Whatever difference is there it is almost negligible. Their broad ideational similarity supports the view that the different regions of India have a basic oneness of literary and cultural traditions, although their language, life and custom differ. The works of Sankar and Tulsí were, no doubt, written in different languages. Nevertheless, their works remained an important achievement of the same great Indian tradition of the late medieval devotional movement as manifested in religion, spiritualism, culture and literature. Their ideational similarity is intrinsic and the difference comparatively external and regional.

Both Sankar and Tulsí were vaisnava devotee - poets; Sankardeva was 'Kṛṣṇa-kinkar' and Tulsí 'Rāma-bhakta'. In their writings Sankar has described náma, rūpa, vasā and lilā of Kṛṣṇa, and Tulsí, of Rāma. The subjects of poetry in Sankar are mostly based on the Bhāgavata and other purānas; Tulsí mainly depended on Vālmīki and Adhyātma Rāmāyan. Besides the story of Kṛṣṇa, Sankardeva also wrote about Rāma as in Uttarākanda and Rāmavijyotam. Similarly, Tulsidasa made Kṛṣṇa's
story the subject of his *Krsna-gītāvali*. The sources of their stories are different, but the undercurrent of devotion that flows in them has its basis mainly in the Bhāgavata. Not only in case of Sāṅkar and Tulsi, the influence of the Bhāgavata has been of the most wide-spread nature on the entire devotional poetry of medieval period. The Bhāgavata was equally the source of devotion as of inspiration to scholars—‘*vidyāvatām bhāgavate parīkṣhā*’

From the viewpoint of devotional religion it can be said to be the landmark. Its four elements—*sūddhabhakti, upāsanā-vritti, paurāṇik bale* and *kāla*² are more or less made similar use of by Sāṅkar and Tulsi. This has been the main factor for the broad intrinsic similarity in their thoughts.

The religious, cultural and literary traditions as well as the contemporary socio-political situation and the conditions in their own lives played important role in the nourishment and development of Sāṅkar and Tulsi’s thoughts. Both of them were sympathetic with the people suffering under social discrimination, political tyranny and economic disparity. Both of them were deprived of their parents’ love in their childhood. It was in their maturity that Sāṅkar and Tulsi found support in their respective Lords. They learned the virtues of self-reliance, firm conviction and true goal from their life of struggle. The vision of
unity in diversity reflects their genius, perception and thoughtfulness.

Both were believers in the philosophy of Advaita. Philosophically the nirguna and saguna forms of the Brahman were acceptable to them with a difference - Sankardeva gave greater importance to nirguna Brahman and Tulsī to saguna. They conceived of jīva as the conscious element in Brahman. The jīva appears to be separate from the Brahman under the spell of māyā. Māyā is the instrument (dāsi) of the Brahman. Emancipation from avidyā-māyā is essential for salvation. However, the two poets gave greater importance to devotion than to salvation.

Sānkar and Tulsī are more prominently distinguished in their devotee-forms. To them devotion was the religion of love and mission of life. They treated devotion as inseparable from life. Sankardeva emphasised on the portrayal of the aśīvarya rūpa of the deity. But Tulsīdāsa on the integrated form of śīla, sakti and saundaryā. Sānkar's deity is Devaki-putra Kṛṣṇa, and Tulsī's, Dāśarathī Rāma. Both of them subscribed to the idea of different kinds of planes of devotion. However, they gave more importance to the sahaja and dāsya-bhakti. That is why the nāma-smarana, although it is only the principal and easy means, assumes the proportion of the end itself towards which it leads. Idolatry is discarded
in Śāṅkar, but Tulsī does not distinguish between image worship and nirguna-upāsana. The achievement of the state of sāranagata is the goal of their devotion. There is no fundamental difference in their ideals and the goals of their devotion. The master servant relationship of the Lord and the devotee is accepted by them, because they are supporters of dāśya bhakti.

Śāṅkar and Tulsī were opposed to the sectarianism, artificial worship, religious hypocrisy and corruption that prevailed in the contemporary society. The religious malpractices were to them born of Kali-kāla. Their eradication and the establishment of true religious thoughts and scriptural haribhakti were their ideals. With this end in view, they gave emphasis to unity in diversity, oneness in duality, and in place of enmity to religious tolerance and good conduct, discipline, benevolence and santa-saṅgati. Śankardeva propagated ekāraṇīyā mata for counteracting the unhealthy religious atmosphere and creating new religious consciousness. In course of time it became popular in the sattras and nāmgharas throughout Assam. This religion came to be known as ekāraṇīyā or mahāpurusīyā. Tulsī did not propagate any particular religious sect. The images of Hanumāna or akhārās established by him as means of devotion and religion, later on became centres of inspiration for social organisation.
There is a singular emphasis on scripture and scholasticism in Śankar's religious thoughts whereas Tulsī gave sufficient place to loka-dharma as well.

The devotion in Śankar and Tulsī is of positive nature and not negative. It is scripture-based, but not opposed or completely indifferent to lokadharma. It has been means of social reform only through its relation to lokadharma. Both of them tried to eradicate social disharmony and economic despairity and to establish harmony and integrity through vaisñavite viewpoint. The reflection of their good taste in folk-beliefs, cosmetics, ornaments and costumes. Many customs described in their work are of universal Indian nature but some are limited to regional significance. These regional customs have external dis-similarity but are intrinsically similar. The happiness of each individual of the society is desirable to both. The shortage of the commodities of daily use and living gives rise to many evils; it makes the establishment of the healthy society impossible. That is why Śankar and Tulsī took the parity of income and expenditure as their economic principles.

It is true that Śankar and Tulsī were not political or social thinkers in the strict sense of the term. However, they were not blind to the evils and corruptions of the contemporary society and politics. Through the portrayal of
Kamsa and Rāvana they have given a suggestive description of contemporary rulers and their evil policies. They aimed at its eradication and establishment of benevolent rule. In this sense there is practically no difference in Śankar's 'Hariśhchandra-rājya' and Tulsī's 'Rāma-rājya'. Their ideal state is committed to religion and to the welfare of the people. They saw the relationship of the ruler and the ruled in terms of the master-servant or father-son. Here also their devotional vision is predominant. It may be mentioned that social and political thoughts in Tulsī are deeper than in Śankar.

The ideas relating to poetry in Śankar and Tulsī's are almost similar. Both of them were well acquainted with Indian poetics; they were rasa-vādī poets and took bhakti-rasa to be essential to poetry. Good poetry is that which is pregnant with the Lord's nāma, japa, līlā etc. Deprived of hari-kathā or hari-rasa poetry loses its value. The poet is a devotee, that is, singer of prayer. They accepted the traditional doctrines of poetics but favoured distinction between pure poetry and devotional poetry. Herein lies the nobility of their thoughts. Besides narratives, their writings include muktas. They made dexterous use of the prevalent poetic forms, styles and metres.

Śankar and Tulsī were great personalities of medieval India. The light that emanated from their thinking continues
to inspire the Indian mind even today. Theirs was the
genius of sharp perception and broad vision. They were
thinkers of great ability and also good organisers. They
took to organisation and propagation with a view to give
concrete shape to their thoughts. A glimpse of their
organisational capacity can be had in the fact that they
were able to influence the minds of even the opponents with
their thoughts and doctrines. The recognition of the doctrines
propounded by Śankardeva by Koch-king Naranārāyaṇa and Tulsi's
popularity in Vārānasī, the citadel of Śaivas are its living
proofs.

The fact that Hindū religion and culture continue to
flourish in Assam mainly due to Śankardeva speaks eloquently
of the greatness of his thoughts. It is quite possible that
in the absence of the light spread by Śankardeva it would
have deviated from the main current of Indian culture and
would have been closer to Nagaland, Mizoram or Bangladesh.³
Similarly, the entire Hindi belt is even today illuminated
by Tulsi's thought. The Indian culture is spread beyond the
boundary of the country to far-flung areas like Mauritius,
Fizzi, Surinam through Tulsi's Rāmcaritmānas that the Indians
in foreign lands did not become culturally bankrupt is due
to the ideas propounded by him.

The ideas propounded by the two poets are pregnant
with devotion; they are not negative revolution but positive
religion. Sankar's statements like 'satru mitra udāsina sabāto samān' or Tulsi's 'śīya rāmamay saba jaga jānī' reflect their love of humanity; it is in fact a form of the cosmic voice 'Kṛṇwanto visvāryam'. Not only to support the oneness of India and counteract the forces of disintegration but also for the welfare of humanity at large the ideas and thoughts of Sankar and Tulsi remain relevant even today. And therefore a study of their thoughts relating to separate disciplines may be carried on with purpose and usefulness.

References:
1 Acārya H.P. Duivedi - Hindi Sāhitya ki Bhūmikā, pp. 70-71
2 Thondākaramdarṣānī, p. 126
3 Māgadh - Sānkardeva : Sāhityakār aur Viśārak, p. 465