INTRODUCTION

Both Śaṅkara and Śrī Caitanya claim to have propounded the philosophy of Vedānta based on Bādarāyaṇa’s Brahma-sūtra.

According to Śaṅkara, the Absolute Reality is nirguṇa or quality less Brahman. Māyā is an indescribable power of Brahman which is responsible for the revelation of the individual self and the material world. This Absolute Brahman under the spell of māyā is revealed as the individual self, on one hand, and as the material world, on the other. In reality, the individual self is identical with the nirguṇa Brahman and the material world is a false appearance of Brahman. When the self realizes its identity with Brahman through the process of jñāna-mārga, it is liberated from the spell of māyā.

Śrī Caitanya’s philosophy is known as acintya-bhedābheda-vāda or the theory of unthinkable difference-cum-non-difference. In his view, the Absolute is saguṇa or qualified and is identical with the Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The individual self is a part of the Lord and, hence, is both different and non-different from the Absolute. Śrī Caitanya does not accept the theory of complete non-difference between the Absolute and the individual self. The
material world is created out of the tatasthā-sakti or peripheral power of the lord and is real for all-purposes.

In the view of Śrī Caitanya, the Absolute is realized not by the process of jñāna but only by Bhakti or devotion. When, by the deep devotion of the self, the Lord is pleased, He receives the self within Himself and allows Him to live along with His attendants or parikaras in the nitya or eternal Vṛndāvana. This is the final attainment of the self's spiritual journey, which is otherwise called Liberation.

One point to be noted is that most of the views of Śrī Caitatya are found in the Caitanya-caritāmṛta, but this work is not written by Śrī Caitanya himself. It is a work compiled by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja after a long time of Śrī Caitanya's demise. Hence, it is doubtful whether the views contained in this work are really of Śrī Caitanya or his disciples or of Śrī Kavirāja himself. Even then, we shall discuss Śrī Caitanya's views mainly on the authority of this work, particularly when the views are not in contradiction with other works.
From an initial glance it appears that these two philosophies are quite opposed to each other. In this thesis, we propose to see whether these two philosophies are really opposed to each other or whether there is some similarity between them. We have divided our study in the following six chapters, namely, (i) the concept of the Absolute (ii) the concept of the individual self (iii) the concept of the world (iv) the concept of Liberation (v) means for Liberation (vi) synthesis of the two philosophies. In the first five chapters we have discussed the views of both the thinkers and in the last chapter we have tried to make a synthesis of the views of these two thinkers. In other words, in this last chapter we have tried to express our views after a comparative study of these two philosophies.