CHAPTER VII

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES OF
SANKARDEVA AND HIS ASSOCIATES
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(a) The Bhakti Waves of Vaisnavite philosophy.

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Sankardeva and his three associates
Madhabdeva, Damodardeva and Harideva had their specific philosophies and principles of education within the area of the Vaisnavite religion. All the four incarnate Vaisnavite leaders were the four pillars of the devotional bridge on the Kali torrents (Kali Age) from this bank of the earthly miseries to that one of eternal values. The knowledge of Visnu was the subject of learning and teaching and devotion through initiation for liberation and perfection was their chief principle of education. As perfect Gurus, preachers and teachers, they were parallel to God even a step ahead as they guided people

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to God through their teachings. Their God was not in the unseen heaven but here in this living earth and the whole universe was God. In that sense they were pantheists and Panotheism is based on the belief that God is not something unnatural. Rather, it is real with an existence amongst those of His creation. Each of them was the associate of the others and thus enjoyed the immense pleasure of association (Satsang). Such association with the wise was the highest ideal of their education and it was considered to be even higher than the kalpabriksha, the Kamdhenu and the chintamani. The Kalpabriksha can only give anything desired, the Kamdhenu gives any eatables and the chintamani gives those things thought of. But association with the wise can

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1 "I bow to you my teacher first who guided me to God."

RMDIAN, 1994 (Editorial) Ed.by Smti Rajlakshuri.

2 "jagatate kari achanta nibash juyato tomate bashoy"- Namghosha - by Madhabdeva., Sloka - 179 (Any Ed.)
give all peace all wealth that is not desired and not thought of. To them vice or virtue is the result of constant discussion, touch and co-living and these being done with the wise result virtue and with evils do vice. This pragmatic philosophy or their Panathism brought them down to the hearts of the common people and the same lifted them above ordinary human beings. Through preaching they always suggested the divine association with the wise for paving the way to liberation. Their God Krisna was a cowherd boy like the shepherd of the Bible - "My God is a Shepherd". Sometimes and somehow the rays of knowledge enters into someone's heart to make him able to see God. Sometimes the spark of energy makes fire in him to burn all evils of his contemporary surroundings and accidentally sometimes the thrill of culture pleasantly moves his eyes towards the breeze of change. He is directed from above to accept the unique moment that awaits to make him noble and the same came to the Vaisnavite associates in the same form and with the same blessings. They accepted the Bhagawata Purana as the final result

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of the Indian philosophy which echoes through all lines of each page that the name of God is greater than God Himself. With this Universally accepted philosophy of religion the great Vaisnavite teachers established a Mathurapuri at Kamrup through their techniques of education for public relation which were arts, writings and songs, (rekha, lekha, Sur) the chief carriers of "illiterate literacy". They rang in the bell of ism the sounds of the chief four (the caribastu) - Guru, Deva, Nama and Bhakata (the Preacher, Lord Visnu, the name of Krisna and the Devotee) to call the remoters to their fold, the real fold of life and living. For this purpose they read the literature Krisna, they spoke and wrote in the language Krisna, they thought and taught in the line Krisna, they sang on Him, danced and played as he did. They lived a Krisna maya life (Krisna Surroundings) and implied Krisna in anything around them. Like one all the four "dived deep into the ocean of milk of the Bhagawata." 1

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1 "bhagawata kshira payodhita gaila tol" Ghosaratna, Sloka 3 ; by Gopal Misra Kaviratna. Ed.by N.N. Dev Goswami, 1976, pp.2
However, amongst the four, Sankardeva wrote more than the other three on the basis of his concept. His teaching was not for kings and women and Brahmins who were unfit for Sankarite discipline of living and behaving but for ordinary common people including even the lower classes like Garo - Miri - Ahom - Kachari. It was within his principle to make the fire of his religious revolution flame in full by adding fuel of self-invented innovating devices to it. His one act plays are a pulpit for a sermon, a platform for a lecture and a singing gallery for ballad. With these he established the base of religion in the drawing room of literary discussion. Inclusion of songs and music, dances and other arts develops interest, imagination, vocal training, memory training, co-operation, creativeness, motivation, satisfaction and many other aspects of education for the youths. The central point of his educational principle was to teach people the ways of worshipping God through Name, the namadharma. To him worshipping with flowers is an external, transitory, limited
and a one man activity. On the contrary worshipping by the songs of Name is internal, heartful, wide, lasting and above all a group activity. So he was sticking to his never to be compromised principle of 'ek Nama' as the only way of satisfying the Supreme Lord. The Name purifies those who utter and those who hear and listen. The command to "say Hari for once" (Haribola, Haribola, Haribola) demands a common blessing to all to and at a long distance that the sound can reach. He implied his "basudeva Sarbamiti" ideal of one God - one Name ( ek nam - ek dev ) in his famous Bargit by declaring that all birds and animals, ants and insects, snakes and other living and non-living forms are the forms of Visnu. Harideva also found the Visnu image in anything. Sankardeva could

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1 A common slogan

2 "jata jiba jangama, kita patangama
aga naga jaga teri kaya"
Bargit by Sankardeva, Ed. by G. Chaudhury,1995
(Lawyer's Books stall) p.4
make him the leading pioneer of removing untouchability from the society by selecting the son of a neglected washerman Raghupati Dhoba for the role of Goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Narayana, a role played by himself in the Chinha Yatra and also by selecting Santi Radhika the wife of an untouchable and socially negligible fisherman as the fittest Sati (a chaste woman) for the purpose of pouring earth into the Tembuwani rivulet. How secular he was to accept Chandsai, a Muslim to his fold and to allow him to erect the first post of Bardowa Satra. At the same time he was noble enough to declare that he obeyed his able disciples, the wise and learned bhakats as his Gurus though no biographer dared to mention a name as the guru of the saint.

Harideva and Damodardeva were also his contemporaries and competents in this respect. Once Harideva rebuked his wife for hesitating to
cleanse the remnant of four bhakats of Salai caste at his home. Damodardeva also did not indicate any difference between a Brahmin and a sudra. Rather, he initiated kings, Brahmins, women, chandals, Kaibartas and Suris with the same Krisna name for the same purpose of liberation.

Thus this ideal of sincere belief and application of importance on their dear and able disciples irrespective of caste and status was a common principle to all the associates of Sankardeva. With this self oriented technique of teaching they alone could do what the whole army of language knowing people can't do today. They commonly hold the view of devotion to unique Krisna as pouring water into the roots of a tree for all its leaves and branches. To them all Srimadbhagwata is the book image of Lord Krisna who lives in it, being seen by those who know how to find and speak through it in God's language.

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The first national integrator Sankardeva also introduced education for national understanding by thanking Indian way of life and also an education of humanity. Besides, he introduced unification and integrity among all sections of people. Universal brotherhood through right to voice of love, equality of men, forgiveness and respect for the lowest of the low. The use of Brajabuli language in his literature made him speedy to create the feeling of oneness with the rest of the country. His associates were also in no way limited to the education and culture within small Assam rather they went out to collect the sources of learning from different parts of the country.

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1 Kukura Srigala gardabharo atma Ram - Kirttan Ghosa, by Sankardeva pp 496 (stanza 40) - Edited by (by Dr. M. Neog, 1967)
extending to Puri and Banares. They uniformly declared that they were no enemies to other religions and censorious to other communities. Their first lesson of religion was the knowledge of service to men. Those who hate and blame other religion really do not have any religion.

Madhabdeva was very sincere in following the path and principle of his great Guru Sankaradeva word for word. To him Sankaradeva was the part of that Hari who killed Kansa.1 As such

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1

jo Hari marala Kansa

Sankara taheri angsa.

- Guru Bhatima - by Madhabdeva.

Biren Das & Nam Prasang Pranali (Ed.)

Adomi Prakasan, Panbazer, Gauhati

he was none to say anything not said by the Guru and to do anything not commanded and prescribed by him. He always followed and accepted and preserved the "Sarba dharma parityajya mamekam saranam braja" ¹ principle of great Gita upon which the ek Sarana way of Sankarite fold developed. Through his famous Namghosa he only gives ways how to think the shapeless God who is greater than the greatest and smaller than the Smallest. He also prescribes the four main principles of Supreme Knowledge which are jnana, Vijnana, tadanga and rahasya respectively through the four popular symbols - guru, deva, nama and bhakata. The Vaisnavite Society is strictly conscious to the four real objects which are regarded as the caribastu (the four chief things). He advises all to be away from honour and pride treating them as harmful as poison. He never taught people without being tested. His principle of teaching was first to touch the pupil's heart and then to tell him anything of Knowledge as a milk-maid first touches the pot before pouring milk

¹ Srimadbhagawat Gita, Moksha Yoga (Ch.VIII) Sloka No. 65 (Any Ed.)
Otherwise he treated it to be like selling religion for price. He was a life celibate and thereby he made him an able soldier to fight the miseries of worldly life without the support of a rampart i.e. the life of a householder. By this he declared himself to be a "maharathi" - a great soldier who can fight without the support of a rampart in place of being a "rathi", an ordinary soldier who can fight only with the support of a rampart. But at the same time, he says that this philosophy of celibacy was unique to him alone. For others a rampart is a necessity for fighting without fear and without a one, risks of life cannot be done away with. He advised all not to follow his example of

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1 "bhand Para si lawanu thaba sisya para si jnan kaba" "Mahapurush, - by Hemprabha Hazarika. pp. 124 (1st Edition) 1982
celibacy for devotion, rather he preferred for others a devotional life in a family with the wife and amongst the children. However, his mode of initiation was open to both celibates and householders with several special restrictions to women for keeping them in seclusion from the male members of the satra. At the time of initiation also ladies were allowed to go only a few steps inside the main prayer hall and to enter through the furthest door from the sacred altar.

Madhabdeva always followed his guru's advice not to be important and prominent in any matter. He never wanted to be the master of a big house or the leader of a big organisation. He considered himself to be lower than the lowest and worse than the worst sinner. In all areas of Vaisnavite learning his philosophy is complementary to that of Sankardeva whom he could both increase

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1 bargain barmel nakariba
and decrease. His concepts are always simple and straight from general viewpoints but with deeper and difficult meaning within. They are like a ripe plum, the outer portion of which is soft and sweet with a hard seed inside. All his concepts and philosophies have been stored in his unique Namghosa for the years to follow and the generation to come.¹

Damodardeva, though wanted to develop a few principles in his own line, however, never went out from the Sankarite Circle, the centre of which was Krisna of Bhagawata Purana. His Bhagawata tree stands on the Narayana root with the four main slokas (Catuh Sloki) as the main

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¹ "Prithibir dharma sastra ase jata jata samastare sar ase ghosar madhyata"

- Manikanchan, by B.C. Sarma, 1989, pp 21
branches, the twelve Skandhas (divisions) as the expanding sub-branches, devotion (bhakti rasa) being the manure for the growth of the Bhagawata tree, the total 335 chapters are the leafy branches, the 18000 slokas are its green leaves with all other religions as shades and activities of Hari are the fruits and flowers for the perfection and satisfaction of the destination to liberation. This great educator prescribes three kinds of education according to its nature:-

(i) Elementary education or prakrit Vidya where the Master of the scriptures teaches disciples again and again but they fail to catch it. They also cannot discern what is virtue and what is vice. They fall in the below average group or the problem group.

(ii) Intermediate education or the madhyam Vidya where disciples know what is virtue and what is vice but only get charmed in the ecstasy of the devotion of Hari
Keeping the mind at the feet of Krisna. But they cannot discriminate knowledge and devotion together at a time. They fall in the average group, a higher level than the former.

(iii) The best education or the uttam Vidya where disciples give up trouble of knowledge and action, meditate on Hari within the mind and serve the saint earnestly as advised by the preceptor. They fall in the talented group with expected behaviour.

As the remedial measure Damodardeva suggests the Harinama (Name of Hari) for the correct application of the values of life. In the ocean of the phenomenal life human body is the safe boat with the preceptor as the boatman and Harinam as the favourable wind (anukul bayu). His mission is to liberate people from the unnecessary attachment for the phenomenal life. He took the Vedas and their allied texts as the basis of his ideology.

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With this he established his theory of education of men which is the knowledge of dharmadharma, what is knowledge and what is ignorance. Bhagawata, the fifth Veda being the readymade ripe fruit of the Vedas he took it as an elaborate exposition of the latent ideas of all branches of knowledge that leads to devotion as the target and above liberation. In his teachings we can find the principle of essential unification of sraddhwa bhakti and dhyana as the direct means to education for liberation. To educate people on the light the guru preached the Monotheistic form of religion for mankind and with the same purpose and with the ablest authority he advised his able disciples to write books for common people all of which needed his approval and recognition.

Harideva, the seniormost, learned and respected associate of Sankardeva also followed his own principles in teaching the common people. His explanations on the Bhagawata theories were in simple and lucid language with examples of day to day life.
He always picked up the day to day activities as his media of education creating an interesting situation. He led his philosophies and principles from "known to unknown" and from "easy to difficult". He followed the "situational method of instruction" in response to the environment he had around him. He gave less importance in writing books for readers who had already attained literacy and learned the things than in explaining the ideals of Bhagawata in the most comprehensive ways to the ordinary listeners who were ignorant and illiterate and thereby played the part of an adult educator as well as a non-formal teacher. He always noticed the daily life of his disciples and of the others and advised them how to keep the order of living a devotional life through what they did and spoke and thereby he directly acted as an informal teacher, a parent of the masses. Mostly he sent his learned disciples to different distant and interior parts for spreading the principles of Vaisnavite education by establishing satras and hence started the mode of present distance education.

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Visnu being the centre of his learning and teaching he always evaluated everything as Visnu and was strictly against blaming others. Accordingly he respected the worship of other Gods and Goddesses through which, as he believed, everything goes to the feet of Visnu as the rain water flows through hundreds of streams and rivers to the single bed of the sea. In regular and compulsory daily activities he prescribes reciting the names and activities of Madhaba, Worshipping Hari and Singing his names and qualities, and accepting Tulsi leaves (basil) as Nirmali (offerings to the deity).

Like Madhabdeva he also gave priority in devotion (bhakti) than liberation (Mukti) and treated liberation as the inferior maid servant of devotion. And for perfect and successful devotion he always felt the necessity of an able guru who is the only destroyer of worldly fears (bhaya bhaya haraka) giver of real knowledge (jnana chakshu dayaka) and the practical guide of life (Kandari

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Sansare). ¹ His world is unreal and uncertain, and so fearful and complex. Here in this jungle of life six robbers - the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the desire and the mind with their respective misleading activities rob us of the truest treasure of the other world. Besides the wife is the tigress, the sons are the foxes and all these enemies are a great trouble to the honest house holding fathers and husbands who are helpless like goats and lambs.

There are also sand winds like maintenance of sons and wives, satisfying friends and neighbours and desires for being great and rich to cover the eyes of knowledge with dust. An able Guru is the safest hand from all these troubles and the association with the wise (Satsang) is both the precautionary and remedial measure for doing away with them.

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¹ Mahapurush Sri Sri Harideva Kirttan -
by Sri Damodardeva Goswami.
(559 Haridevabda) pp.20
Perhaps he had vomited out all his educational principles through the last series of advice to his dearest disciples on the eve of his eternal sleep. It includes among many more things eating of easily received food as it is sent by Visnu, being satisfied all along, dedicating all work, speech and mind to Visnu, reading and listening of the activities of Hari and treating all sacrifices, offerings, devotion, sons and daughters, family earnings and other hard earned treasures and fames as the essential items of worshipping Hari. He devaluates the sons and daughters and friends and relatives as the ones met in a waiting shed for a short time on the way for journey to their different places. ¹ He also prescribes here his "Bhaktirasa taranginee" as the dependable honey substance of Bhagawata and advises to follow

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1 "Pantha nibasata yena pathik sahita
ejehena darsana hai "
- Mahapurush Sri Sri Haridev Kirttan,
by Sri Damodardev Goswami. (559 Haridevabda)
pp.141
it as the text of self purity (Chitta Suddhi) and self regard. During the series of advice he gave importance on good qualities of men, good behaviour to others, readiness for forgiveness, self control, giving up pride of fame, simplicity in living with higher ideals of thinking, desire for collecting knowledge and informations from the learned and obedience to all vedic directions. His last words of advice and teaching were a bell of alarm against disregards to women, the mothers of kings and queens, the wise and learned, you and me and the unique nobles. He declared the form of women as the root of all the vedas. Not only that, but he translated his abstract precept of recognition to women into the concrete example by offering his eldest unmarried learned daughter Bhubaneswari the responsibilities of the head of his Maneri satra.

Thus all the Vaisnavite leaders of Sankardeva's time thought of an education almost alike. All their principles were based on same ideas which have all been echoed in the present day National Educational Policies of the country with a little change
in name and form. Perhaps they introduced a rigid course of study and prescribed it for next five or six hundred years with provision of enough flexibility. They were four in one with the same ideals but in separate human forms of four Gurus, \(^1\) they lived for their time and did for the generation to follow. And hence they made them live after they died. At the bottom of conclusion it will be no wrong to say that the philosophical concepts of Sankardeva and his contemporary Vaisnavite associates were the base lines upon which the present areas of Indian educational principles have rested and developed.

\(^1\) "Hariguru Damodara Sankara Madhaba Charijana Guru rupe eke kalebara."


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