CHAPTER – II

THE CONCEPT OF PURUṢA IN SANKARADEVA’S PHILOSOPHY
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Sankaradeva is a Monist. He believes in one primordial entity – One reality as the ground of the whole universe and from which the universe has emerged. The term Puruṣa has been treated in his philosophy as the Ultimate Being, which signifies the Parama Puruṣa, Paramātmān, the God. He uses the term Kṛṣṇa indiscriminately as he places Lord Kṛṣṇa at the highest position. Therefore the term Puruṣa is identical with Kṛṣṇa, Puruṣottama, Parameswara, Nārāyaṇa etc. as he holds that God is the central Reality of all and nothing can exist without Him. Sankaradeva says, –

"tumi Paramātmā jagatara Ṣā ek /
eko bastu nāhike tomāta vyatirek ||"¹

(Thou art the supreme self, the only Lord of the universe, there is no other thing except Thee).

Sankaradeva firmly believes that there exists only one Absolute Being. He is pure consciousness and the rest are all in a way material in character (jaḍa). He accepts three kinds of substances – matter, (acit), soul (cit) and God (Īśvara). According to him, the subtle jīvas and the subtle material powers of the universe emanate from Paramātmān – the Puruṣa, from whom both the conscious and the unconscious parts of the universe spring forth.

Here we may take note of the following view — “......the term Puruṣa is almost invariably used in the Vast Asamīyā vaisṇavite literature in a restricted sense to Jīva (Life) and is seldom applied to men in the ordinary sense.”² Thus in Sankaradeva’s philosophy Puruṣa, is the Mind – the spirit – the consciousness. His great disciple Madhavaadeva thus glorifies the Puruṣa —
"Kṣara pade īto/dehak bolay/aksar sabade brahma /
Duito kari Hari/Uttama nimitte/prakhyāt Puruṣottama //”

(Kṣara refers to this body, aksara to Brahma (Ego); Hari (God) being superior to both is well known as Puruṣa Uttama (supreme soul).

Sankaradeva’s ultimate reality is the Absolute Brahman, which is infinite, quality less and beyond words. Nothing can be predicated or ascribed to it. None can bring Brahman to any limit of place, time, virtue, power and self (personal). In western philosophy, it is known as ‘Infinite’ ‘Eternal’ ‘Absolute’.

In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, the Puruṣa is formless-nirakara. It is the Absolute soul and ever shining. He is the controller of all individual souls. Sankaradeva calls Puruṣa as part of God. The interpretation of the various descriptions of the Lord, are all meant to describe the Absolute in positive terms. The God the Puruṣa is one, the first cause which gives reality to all modification. It is also the soul of the universe, which is the object of worship. It cannot be described by any human language. To Sankaradeva God is both transcendent and immanent. From the point of view of the devotee, the Absolute becomes a kind and loving God. This infinite, indescribable Absolute one is viewed differently by different people.

"tomākese bolāi jñānī Brahma nirankūṣa /
sāṁkhya mote boltāi tumī prakṛti puruṣa //
bhakatara mote tumī parama Īśvara /
motivede tomākese pāyoi nirantarā //”

(This wise will call the unconditional Absolute. According to Sāṁkhya, Thou art Puruṣa and Prakṛti. To the devotees, Thou art the Great Lord, people of different mental capacity worship thee in diverse ways).
I. THE METAPHYSICAL ASPECT:

Metaphysically, Idealism is the theory which maintains that the ultimate reality is spiritual in nature. On the metaphysical plane, as an Idealist, Sankaradeva holds a non-dualistic standpoint unlike many of his Vaishnava counterparts in the rest of India. According to him, only 'Idea' i.e. the 'Spirit' or 'Mind' is the ultimate reality which is spiritual in nature. When we turn to consider the metaphysical aspect of Sankaradeva's doctrines, we have to bear in mind the general trend of Vaishnava theology. Vaishnavism, as a philosophy represents generally the synthetic character of thought and reality. It formulates the conception of a being which would comprehend the spiritual experience arrived at through the different ways of knowledge, action and devotion.

Sankaradeva's philosophy is mainly influenced by the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Bhagavadgītā. So, the concept of reality or the Brahma or the God or the Puruṣa maintained by him is the same as is found in the Bhāgavat Purāṇa and the Bhagavadgītā. Like the Upaniṣad and the Gītā, Sankaradeva accepts the supreme reality as one without a complementary second. Brahma, the ultimate reality, is formless Brahma, in truth, is beyond all qualities. He is indescribable, indeterminable, immeasurable and immaculate. In short, Brahma is the whole reality, Sankaradeva uses the word 'God' in place of Brahma also; because for him, God is the presiding Lord of the whole universe. He is the supreme self and is the material as well as the operative cause of the universe. In fine, God is the substratum of all things.

Sankaradeva's concept of the Puruṣa is called by different names e.g. Brahma, Paramātmā, Bhāgavata, Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa, Hari etc. He says that the Brahma, Paramātmā and Bhagavān connote the One Absolute - the perfect self. They
are in fact the different faces of the same reality. $Nārāyaṇa$ is another name to the supreme reality in Sankaradeva's philosophy, Sankaradeva clarifies this point $\text{Nimi Nava Sidha Sāṁbād}$.

"God as the director and the controller of the senses is known as $\text{Paramātmān}$ as the creator, preserver and annihilator of the world, He is $\text{Bhāgavat}$ when God appears to the $\text{Yogins}$ in their meditation after the disappearance of ignorance, He is called $\text{Brahman}$. $\text{Brahman, Bhagavān}$ and $\text{Paramātmān}$ are the names of the One Reality. The same Reality is called by different names owing to different characteristics seen from different angles."$^5$

According to scriptures like the Vedas, Upaniṣads, purāṇas and itiḥāsas, $\text{Nārāyaṇa}$ is the Supreme Reality. This pervading reality in Him abide in all beings, through Him does the finite individual progress to perfection and in Him do all finite souls reach their everlasting and peace of life. The three fundamentals of the Upaniṣadic philosophy namely, the Supreme Reality, the Supreme way and the Supreme End are all enshrined in the single term $\text{Nārāyaṇa}$ for He is the truth, the way and the end of life.

The term $\text{Nārāyaṇa}$ is a compound of two words – $\text{Nara}$ and $\text{Āyana}$. $\text{Nara}$ again is derived from $\text{nara}$, human or man and means collection of men. $\text{Nara}$ is again derived from $\text{na}$ and $\text{ra}$ that which never perishes. Hence, $\text{Nārāyaṇa}$ is the Imperishable spirit of the Imperishable universe, which the manifestation dichotomies as ‘This’ and ‘That’ or which bifurcates itself into two aspects of the subjective and the ‘objective’ or in other words, the ‘Noumena’ and the ‘Phenomena’. It is the principle of Love that links both these aspects.$^6$
Sankaradeva has conceived the highest reality – the Puruṣa as Nārāyana. In the Kīrtana Ghoṣā the Brahman is identified with Nārāyana —

"prathame praṇamoBrahmarūpī śanātana ā/t sarva avatārāra kāraṇa nārāyana ā/t" 7

(All the outset, I bow down to Nārāyana, the eternal One in the form of Brahman, the cause of all incarnation).

In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, the Puruṣa is the only unchangeable Reality of the world, others are all changeable. The Puruṣ is the Prime cause of creation. He is above birth and death – He is an Eternal – Primal unlimited, undifferentiated and Complete and Infinite Being. He says in the Bhaktiratnakāra —

"O, Lord! You are the only unchangeable Reality of the world; others are all liable to change and decay. Being the primal cause of creation, you are above the changes caused by birth and death. O, Nārāyana, You being the primal and eternal Puruṣa, are free from change and decay and therefore no limitation of any sort is being applicable to you. Space time and matter cannot measure or differentiate you. You are complete in yourself." 8

According to Sankaradeva, Nārāyana is the Ultimate Reality which is characterless and indeterminate God and incomprehensible. Regarding the nature and character of the Supreme Reality, he says —

Nārāyana is the ultimate cause of creation and dissolution; there is no other God superior to Him. He remains sākṣī in all the activities of the world, in deep sleep as well as in a state of dreaming and awakening. It is He who infuses life and validity into all beings and causes Jīvas to suffer and enjoy the fruits of their activities. Hare, Hara and Brahma carryout His order and therefore He is the God of all gods." 9
Sankaradeva is of the opinion that Brahman is metaphysically the ground of existence. Brahman is real, pure, unstained and infinite. He is the father of the universe and the life of the world. He is the first and final cause of creation. He has the character of infinity as an indeterminate quality, which distinguishes Him from Prakṛti and the individual soul. In His glory Sankaradeva states —

“namo namo acintya śakati nārāyaṇa /
kāraṇaro kāraṇa tumi se akāraṇa //
nāhi ādi anta Madhya parichanna yār /
pūrṇānanda prabhū herā karo namaskār //
namo namo ātarka mahimā devahari /
jagatake byapiyā āpuni āchā-dhāri //
tumi sarba sākṣī rākhi āchā prāṇīcay /
tomāiše hante howai sriśi sthitī loy //”

(Salutation to the Nārāyana of immeasurable power; Thou art the cause of causes, yet no cause at all. Thou has no beginning, end or interruption. Oh, blissful God, I bow down to Thee, whose magnanimity is unknowable. Spreading over the world, Thou art upholding it. Thou art watching and protecting all living beings; from Thee emanate creation, preservation and destruction).

In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, the Supreme Metaphysical Being – the Puruṣa can be realized from three different points of view – “From the study of all the works of Sankaradeva, three points of view regarding God can be made out. These three concepts of God are only three modes of realizing God.”

Firstly, Puruṣa as the Absolute – the Supreme Reality. It is one without a second. It cannot be known by any source of knowledge like perception, inference and testimony. The Absolute which is also infinite cannot be expressed in words. According
to Sankaradeva, nothing can be predicated or ascribed to Brahman, the Purusa. Hence it is said to be qualityless or devoid of qualities (nirguna).

The other concept of God is a concept of Personal God – the Saguna Brahman. The Nirguna Brahman appears as Saguna Brahman or the Personal God while viewed through Maya. The Personal God is the moral governor and giver of reward and punishment. He “is a perfect person who creates, sustains and destroys the universe, and also kind and benevolent, saviour of his devotees who resides in the celestial abode Vaikuntha.”

The third concept of God in Sankaradeva’s philosophy – “is a God of flesh and blood who can be intimate and therefore friendly and one giving inspiration and strength at the time of peril and distress. Krsna is such a man – god whom people awaited eagerly to save them from the injustice, done to them by the evil force.”

Sankaradeva devotes himself to popularize the Krsna cult and takes much pleasure to declare that Krsna, the son of Vasudeva and Devaki is the only God and that there is no second.

Though these are the three concepts, they are not distinct from one another. These are the three perspectives through which the one and the same Purusa is seen differently. Due to difference in mental capacity or the stages of knowledge, one sees at the One and the same reality differently. Krsna, who is Parameswar for devotee, is Purusa or Saguna Brahman for logical mind and to the wise or intelligent person. He is the Absolute, Nirguna Brahman. From metaphysical point of view Krsna is an Absolute – Nirguna Brahman – Parama Purusa.
Thus Sankaradeva’s *Puruṣa* as the God is the presiding Lord of the whole universe. He is indescribable, unchangeable and eternal. He is all powerful, all pervasive, omniscient, Omnipotent, omnipresent, Infinite, without beginning and end. He is the Supreme Self and is the material as well as the operative cause of the universe. Infine, He is the substratum of all things and beings of the world. Thus his *Puruṣa* is the *Advaita Brahman* of Sankaracharya’s philosophy. Sankaradeva says —“How shall I know Thee who is beyond quality. All the objects (quality) fail to understand.”

Regarding the *Nirguna* and *saguna* form of *Puruṣa* we may cite the view of Rudolf Otto “The *Nirguna Brahman* is not the exclusive opposite of the *saguna Brahman*, but its superalative and a development of the tendencies which lead to the *Saguṇa Brahman* itself.”

In the *Bhāgavata*, the concept of *Nirguna* implies that He is that non dual supreme Reality which is termed *Brahman*, *Paramātmā* and *Bhagavān*. Like the *Bhāgavata*, Sankaradeva’s *Puruṣa* denotes that He is Transcendental, that is He transcends the universe, *Paramātmā* expresses that He is the immanent principle of the world. In this context the following comment is relevant “such a concept of God will be found to meet the requirements of the philosophical metaphysician, theologian and the mystic, it can appeal to the different aspects of a man’s personality and cater to his changing moods and environment. In fine, it is the most perfect conception of Perfect Being that human intellect can conceive of.”

Sankaradeva’s concept of the *Puruṣa* is Sankaracharya’s *Advaita* Absolute. *Ramanuja* differs from Sankaracharya as the *Nirguna* concept of Brahman has not been admitted by *Ramanuja’s*. *Ramanuja’s* God is *visista* or possessed of qualities and parts,
It is Saguna He starts from *Saguna Brahman* for, qualityless *Brahman* is a void. Sankaradeva admits *Nirguna Brahman* to be the ultimate reality and Jīva to be one with Brahman. “To him Brahman is indeterminate (*nirvīśeṣa*), changeless (*avikāri*) and eternal (*nitya*). With this monistic view, Sankaradeva seeks to combine the theistic or religious ideas of a determinate personal God, which is the pivot of his creed.”

Sankaradeva’s concept of *Puruṣa* is the direct refutation of *Sāṁkhya*’s dualism of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*. His disciple Madhavadeva clearly status

> "prakṛti Puruṣa duiro / niyantā Mādhava /
> samastare ātmā Hari / parama bāndhava //" 19

(*Mādhava* (God) is the ordainer of both *Prakṛti* (matter) and *Puruṣa* (Mind). *Hari* (God) is the (supreme) soul and great benefactor of all).

Absolutism occupies an important position in western philosophy some of which has similarities with Sankaradeva. Sankaradeva’s idea of Reality may be compared with Parmenides, the disciple of Pythogoras. The concept of ‘Being’ of Parmenides in *Puruṣa* of Sankaradeva by which he establishes that a thing may exist and also not exist. His Being is eternal, changeless and unborn. It is undivided since division makes it non-existent. It is motionless since there is no space outside it so that motion may be possible. For him, thought and being are one.

Sankaradeva’s concept of *Puruṣa* as the ultimate reality is similar to Plato’s idea of good. According to Plato, the idea of good is the highest idea which is the substratum of the universe. The Idea of good has been described in Plato’s dialogue – ‘The Republic’, as the highest knowledge, highest value and the supreme existence. It is absolutely free, self-existent and perfect. It is the cause of the universe and the existence of all things. According to Plato, the physical world is only an appearance of the Idea of
Good like Sankaradeva’s *Puruṣa* (and its appearance as *Prakṛti*). Like Sankaradeva, the ultimate reality for Plato is indescribable—beyond language, senses, and worldly experiences of human beings. Like Sankaradeva’s *Saguṇa* form of Brahman, Plato’s concept of God is the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the universe. It is also the God of highest moral perfection. Sankaradeva’s God is the moral governor, and giver a reward and punishment according to the deeds of the performer. He is the soul of the universe.²⁰

In the *Bhaktiratnākara*, Sankaradeva’s *Puruṣa* is the God head and remains wholly unaffected by the faults of the body—

“Thou art the supreme being,
The image of Omniscience itself.
Thou art incorporeal existence, free from all unhealthy influences,
Always the embodiment of all that is pure.
Supreme delight itself, not susceptible to the senses,
Yet you hear, yet you speak, all things feel your touch.
You cause movement, remain seated,
And some are put an end to by you.
Thou art the Lord of the universe,
You govern all, you cause yourself to avenge as destroyer.
Motionless and pure, companionless, None is superior to you
You do not accept anything, neither you look like working
Having created the universe, you have
Chosen to stand in utter indifference
Thou art not overwhelmed by the cares of the world
Nothing can touch You.”²¹

In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, superiority is claimed for the best *Puruṣa* or Supreme *Puruṣa* to Brahman (Ego) Itself. His *Puruṣa* is something like the Aristotelian
God. The Aristotelian God is Pure Form. According to Aristotle, the initial push or motion provided to matter is by Pure Form that is, God. So, God is the prime mover of this world. Sankaradeva’s best *Puruṣa* is akin to Aristotelian God ‘Primum mobile immotum (prime mover unmoved), who is „a.....do..... nothing king that reigns but does not rule.”

According to Christianity, God has human qualities and human personality. He is omnipotent. This bears similarity with Sankaradeva’s third concept of *Puruṣa*—‘God in human form.’ According to Sankaradeva, *Kṛṣṇa* is such a God, who is in human form and had all the human qualities. *Kṛṣṇa*, the God in human form is the central figure of Bhāgavatism. Sankaradeva calls himself the servant and *Kṛṣṇa* his master. He is the only God and there is no second. Aristotle denies personality to God, because according to him, God is Pure Form. Therefore, God cannot be a person.

In the medieval period of Western thought, St Augustine’s view of God or Spirit as the sole Truth of the world comes close to the views of *Puruṣa* advocated by Sankaradeva. Just as *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* are co-related to each other in every existing individual (*vyakti*), whose existence is wholly sustained by the supreme principle, *Uttam Puruṣa* or God (*Īśvara*), so also in St. Thomas’ philosophy the potency in every existing individual is sustained wholly by God, who is called ‘Pure Act’ by St. Thomas.

Like Sankaradeva’s *Puruṣa*, Spinoza’s God is ultimate reality, one, attributesles, formless unmodified, infinite and absolute. Spinoza’s philosophy is a thorough going pantheism and hence bears certain similarity to Sankaradeva’s views on *Puruṣa*. Leibnitz puts forth a number of substances called Monads, each Monad is soul. God
Himself is the chief Monad. So, also Sankaradeva's \textit{Puruśa} is the soul and God or the \textit{Param Puruśa} is the soul of souls.

According to the qualified monism of Sankaradeva the phenomenal world is only the manifestation of \textit{Puruśa}, the Supreme Soul in several forms and shapes and has no reality apart from Him. Everything in this world, including the offerings to the God, are only aspects or attributes of \textit{Viṣṇu} Himself and exist only as such.

The Post-Kantian idealist like, Fichte and Hegel, tried to eliminate the transcendental reality of Kant and made efforts to convert thought into the exclusive basis of the universe. Like Sankaradeva's \textit{Puruśa}, Fichte bases all reality on the Ego. For Fichte the Ego or I is the only reality. It has the tendency to split itself into subject and object, the I and the not the not I. In Sankaradeva's philosophy, the individual self or \textit{Jīvātmā} is not essentially different from \textit{Paramātmā} or the Absolute. Due to ignorance, or \textit{Avidyā}, the individual self does not know this.\textsuperscript{24} Again he says that in the ultimate analysis, the individual self the ego or \textit{ahaṅkāra} – the five gross elements or \textit{pañcha mohābhutas} are not different from the \textit{Puruśa}, the Absolute.\textsuperscript{25} And “the individual self is not different from the Absolute, the former is dependent on the latter.”\textsuperscript{26}

Sankaradeva's Absolute - 'the \textit{Puruśa}' is also comparable to the Absolute of Jasiah Royce. Royce tried to show that the self-transcending implications of our finite experience point to an Absolute Being. The Absolute of Royce is the God of religion which is akin to the personal God or \textit{Puruśa} of Sankaradeva.

Among the existentialist thinkers, S. Kierkegaard views on 'Faith' with all their implications come very close to Sankaradeva's faith on \textit{Puruśa}. Kierkegaard criticizes
the objective notion of faith and maintains all the time that faith does not belong to the
realm of conceptual cognitivity as it is subjective and inward. So, he holds that the
object of faith is the existential reality of the teacher, that the teacher really exists.
Further, ‘Faith does not require any proof.’ For him, ‘faith is the highest passion in the
sphere of human subjectivity’ and does not need any thing else in order to justify. He
regarded Faith as the highest good as he says- ‘…... It is said to be the highest good,
the most beautiful, the most precious, the richest of all blessings, not to be compared
with anything else, not replaceable by anything else. It is then so different from the
other goods, because it is the highest good.’ In Sankaradeva’s thinking also, faith is,
not about a doctrine – about its truth or falsity, but it is about the reality of God himself.

II. EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF PURUṢA:

Epistemology as an enquiry concerning knowledge of man has to pre-suppose
the existence of Self with the objective world to justify itself. Our knowledge consists
of a relation between the knower and the known, the subject and the object.

According to the Upanisads, Brahman is described as knowledge and bliss.
Knowledge has been identified with light and ignorance with darkness. When there is
light, everything becomes visible. Likewise, the moment, there is knowledge, all false
notions disappear and truth reveals itself. Sankaradeva’s epistemological concept of the
Puruṣa is stated in his interpretation and translation of the ‘Bhāgavata’ where ultimate
knowledge is identified with the Paramātmā—

“tadeva bhāgavadvācyam svarūpam paramātmā nah
vācako bhāgavachadbādatāsyā dyasyāksayā imanah”28
(The state of supreme soul is the knowledge of God, and the term 'Bhagavad' denotes the original and the Endless state of supreme soul).

According to the Bhāgavata, the supreme soul is Vijnānaghana or mass of knowledge, while the individual soul is Vijnānakāna or only a particle of that knowledge. So, the supreme knowledge is Parāvidyā or the attainment of the knowledge of supreme soul. The knowledge of the three Vedas (karma kāṇḍa) is aparāvidyā. For Sankaradeva, therefore, Puruṣa is the supreme soul is all knowledge as he says —

"Brahman, the god without a beginning is all purity; He is all knowledge, all delight and is everlasting." 29

Again Sankaradeva describes — Brahman as the only reality — "all else is untrue or illusory. He is the beginning, the middle and the end of the universe." 30

Sankaradeva’s nirguna form of the supreme Puruṣa is beyond definition or qualifications and the saguna Puruṣa is Sat Cit Ānanda. The Puruṣa is Cit which means consciousness or knowledge. Cetana is that which is entirely free from an element of Jada (inertia) of any kind. The supreme soul is consciousness. And as He is free from the Jada (inert) element one cannot attribute even the quality of a knower as that would mean asserting the existence of some element which being Jada is independent of Him. He is that consciousness which has no place for the distinctions like knower, knowledge knowable, seer-seeing sight and the like. In ordinary sense, the beings that have life and activity are known as Cetanā or animate, and the things that have no life and activity are termed as Jada or inanimate. But though Sankaradeva’s God is Cetanā, He does not possess that type of consciousness which is associated with life and activity. He is pure,
absolute knowledge in the Bhāgavata, Sankaradeva says — “know me to be only reality
existent before the world without any distinction of cause and effect. Know me to be the
only reality in the created world and I alone shall remain at the end.”\textsuperscript{31} The same idea is
repeated by him in the Kīrtana Ghośā.

\textit{Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa} is personified as the supreme Reality in Sankaradeva’s
philosophy. He says that Nārāyaṇa is ultimate knowledge as — “He is not
comprehensible to the mind, sense and intellect. Just as sparks separated from fire
cannot illuminate again its source, similarly mind and other sources though originated
from Brahman, do not know Him owing to the overpowering influence of ignorance.
Even the Vedas, unable to grasp fully the real nature of God, have tried to indicate His
nature by the negative method. Without whose aid nothing could be achieved and the
knowledge of whom marks the culmination of all activities and spiritual urge. Know
Him to be Nārāyaṇa.\textsuperscript{32}

Sankaradeva’s concept of \textit{Puruṣa} as ‘Pure knowledge’ cannot be known by
sense organs; because sensual knowledge is illusory. According to Heraclitus, the
sensual knowledge is illusory. Pratagoras, also holds that, the sensations of individuals
are personal and particular for which they differ. In the same way Democritus declares
that thought which transcends sense perception and appearances provide really genuine
knowledge. The sophists regard knowledge as more of a subjective opinion and not as
objective truth, i.e. the mind of man is an important factor in the process of knowing.
Sankaradeva also says that our sense experiences are illusory for which we cannot see
the reality – the actual truth. He says “All forms are illusory creation, so, keep your eyes
focused in the \textit{Brahman} alone. Basically, it is one and the same earth, owing to
difference in size and form we see them as many. In the like manner, the One, non-dual self due to Maya appears as many. Reject all these names and forms as illusory and see Me, alone, who is also omniscient.  

Like Sankaradeva, for Socrates – a man of knowledge is a man of self-control which leads to self-realization. Virtue is bliss for Socrates and Purusa is bliss or Ananda for Sankaradeva.

In Plato’s epistemology, the idea of the Good is the highest knowledge, highest value and the supreme existence. It is the substratum of the universe and like Purusa of Sankaradeva, Plato’s idea of good is absolutely free, self-existent and perfect. Like Sankaradeva’s concept of Highest knowledge, where the distinction between knower and known is eliminated, the idea of good in Plato’s philosophy is ens realisimum where the distinction between Esse and essentia, the sein and da-sein is eliminated.

According to Aristotle the highest good i.e. the self-realisation is the highest knowledge, for which everything else is a means in this world. For him, self-realization does not mean selfish individualism. A man realizes his self, so far as he acts according to the supreme part of his being. This supreme part is the rational part.

St. Augustine’s knowledge of God is the highest knowledge which is based upon faith like Sankaradeva’s faith. The knowledge of the Divine and His tripartite nature is the Highest knowledge. Because Divine knowledge alone provides us the ratio essendi of all knowledge. Like Sankaradeva, Augustine also asserts that the self knowledge is a stepping stone for knowledge of God.

Descartes and Spinoza say that the highest form of activity is encountered in Supra-reflectise intuition, which is the realization of true knowledge. According to
Sankaradeva, "Knowledge is the matter of realization and not an object of verification. He prefers the devotional knowledge of God." Leibnitz states that man's mind is not passive it is always active, though he has no knowledge of his unconscious and sleepy states and only through intellect one can arrive at the universal knowledge. For Sankaradeva, mind is the internal sense organ or the eleventh sense organ. The manifold universe is said to be the product of mind and three kinds of perceptions are ascribed to the three states of mind—the waking, dreaming and sleeping states. In the state of waking, the mind perceives the objects through active co-operation of the sense-organs while in the state of dreaming the mind perceives objects without the co-operation of the senses but feels pleasure or pain as in the state of waking. In the state of nidrā or dreamless sleep the mind perceives or precisely experiences the Pure Self or Ātmā or the Highest knowledge – the Puruṣa.

Both Hume and Berkeley claim the empirical basis of all knowledge. But for Berkeley, the very existence of knowledge implies the thing which is known as well the knower – the Great Mind of Subjective Idealism which is comparable to Sankaradeva's supreme Puruṣa. Hume's empiricism ends in scepticism as he establishes that there is no absolute certainty in knowledge, it is only probable. Sankaradeva was not a sceptic, although he pays more heed to devotion in comparison to knowledge. To him, mere theoretical knowledge is not enough. Realisation of the true nature of reality or self is a process for ultimate knowledge.

Like Sankaracharya of Advaita Vedānta Sankaradeva admits three viewpoints, i.e. pratibhāsīka, vyavahārīka and paramārthīka. Objects perceived in dreams belong to Pratibhāsīka level. In the case of the rope – snake – illusion, the relativity of the
knowledge of reality belongs to the Vyavakārika level. But it is not the highest reality. The phenomenal world is real in the Vyavakārika level but from the point of view of Ultimate Reality, it becomes unreal. In the Paramārthika level, there is no distinction between knower or known — subject and object. Sankaradeva speaks of the phenomenal world as —

\[
\text{“asanta jagat khana tomatō ubhava bhaila /}
\text{santa hena prakāśe sodāya //”}\]

(The unreal universe came out from Thee (Reality) and it appears as real).

Again Sankaradeva says —

\[
\text{“brahma vyatireka yata dekhā michā āna /}
\text{jarīna upaji yena āche sarpa jñāna //”}\]

(Except Brahman Everything that is perceived is unreal like the snake-rope-illusion).

Like Sankaradeva, Hegel’s Objective Idealism also maintains that the Ultimate Reality resolves within itself the distinction between knower, known and knowledge. Hegel regards the objective world as manifestation of the Absolute Idea, so there is no distinction between object and idea since both are fundamentally one. Sankaradeva’s Puruṣa is one all pervading Absolute knowledge. This Absolute Reality is reflected on the Citta or mind. He says that one Puruṣa is present in all the human beings like the same sky present in different containers.

Sankaradeva’s phenomenal world is only the manifestation of Viṣṇu or supreme Puruṣa in several forms and shapes and has no reality apart from him. Everything in this world, including the offerings to the God are only aspects or attributes of Viṣṇu Himself and exist only as such. At this point, this doctrine has a remarkable resemblance to W. Hegel’s ‘idea’ and its self-evolution, where everything is only a
manifestation of the Idea exhibiting its infinite variety of forms and every act is a step towards the self-realisation of this idea.

Fichte has some affinity with Sankaradeva in the case of the Absolute Ego as well as the highest knowledge. Epistemologically – the Absolute ego (egoity or Ichheit) is the Pure ego – Universal Reason, intelligence which is logically prior to the personal ego – as the condition or logical ground of the individual ego. It has the tendency to split itself into subject and object. In the \textit{Vyavahārika} level, Sankaradeva’s Highest knowledge splits itself into the subject – object or knower-known relation. He says – “One \textit{Brahman} is known to all as Ultimate Truth but many sentences are ascribed to it due to ignorance.”\textsuperscript{42}

Sankaradeva’s self realization or the knowledge of Brahman is similar to Green’s view where the latter maintains the inseparable co-relation between the knower and the known. Green abolished the epistemological dualism of Kant by establishing a universal knowledge or mind, which pre-supposes the existence of spiritual principle in man; which should be identical in man and nature. Like Sankaradeva’s self-realisation, Bradley’s direct awareness is taken to be non-relational and ultimate.

According to existentialist thinkers, S. Kierkegaard’s Truth is inward, subjective and intuitive. Subjectivity is truth, objectivity is falsehood. In Sankaradeva’s philosophy also, there is a stress on the subjectivity and intuitive knowledge. Sankara’s insistence on self-realisation as the Ultimate Truth is very close to Kierkegaard’s views on subjectivity.

Heidegger observes that philosophy studies the Being-perse, which is beyond our common sense experience. It is beyond both the knower and the known. Thus in
epistemological studies, we always miss the Being. Being can be studied only by inwardisation, by self knowledge as advocated by Sankaradeva.

Like Sankaracharya, Sankaradeva maintains the three different modes of realizing the ultimate knowledge. According to Advaita, the various means of knowledge only remove ignorance, but do not give real knowledge. Real knowledge aims to reveal the nature of ultimate Reality and it is beyond the ability of subject and object. The ultimate knowledge is self-illumined, self evident and self validating. In the same way Sankaradeva says that, the real knowledge can not be known to any mediating factor. Those who pretend to know, actually know nothing of it. those who think of it as possessing some qualities, do not know the actual nature, Again he says—

\[ \text{"nirguna guṇaka āve jānive kimata} \\
\text{yata vastu ekowe nājāne āponāka //}\]

(How shall I know Thee who is beyond quality All the objects (quality) fail to understand That).

The knowledge is above all relations- the knower- the known and beyond the grasp of the categories of human understanding. The subject object relations also vanishes in this knowledge.

Sankaradeva speaks of the futility of way or sources of knowledge in giving us the knowledge of Reality i.e. the ultimate knowledge. These ways of knowledge can help us in knowing the manifold universe which is not real from the Pāramārthika point of view, Like Sankaracharya, Sankaradeva identifies absolute knowledge with absolute reality.
III. ETHICAL ASPECT OF PURUṢA:

The ancient dictums of the ‘Vedas’ are Satya (Truth as Being) and Rita (Truth as Law) which are the primary principles of Reality. The word Satya signifies the eternal spiritual principle rooted in the Absolute. Satya is the integrating law of the cosmos. Rita is the principles in its working process. It manifests the application and function of Satya as the operating rule of the universe. When Rita manifests itself in the moral consciousness of a person it is called Satya or Truth. When Satya is socialized, it becomes Dharma – these satya and Dharma are the highest goal of ethical endeavour and must be pursued for one’s own sake.

Ethically the concept of the Ultimate Reality or the concept of Puruṣa is called the Highest Good (Paramgati) in Sankaradeva’s philosophy. He gives the way to know the ‘Good’ – to achieve the highest good, i.e. the way of complete surrender and self-abnegation and through the devotion to God. The Param Puruṣa is Truth in Epistemology, Dharma in religion and devotion or service of Kṛṣṇa in ethics. Ethically, Sankaradeva gives the three modes of knowing the Highest Good; the service to Kṛṣṇa and the devotion to Kṛṣṇa alone beget knowledge. In the next mode only the devotees receive God’s grace. Without His grace nothing can be achieved i.e. the self-realisation or the knowledge of Puruṣa – the ultimate reality is impossible.

“There is no Dharma except the services of Kṛṣṇa. Devotion to Kṛṣṇa alone begets knowledge. Without His grace nothing can be achieved. Even Brahmā, the Creator, could achieve self-realisation or knowledge by the grace of Kṛṣṇa. That individual effort bereft of God’s grace is of no avail, - is best illustrated in the case of Brahmā, who having been born of the lotus of Nārāyana, tried to probe into the
mysteries of His origin by delving deep into the cosmic body of the Lord, but had to come out ultimately baffled in his attempt. He tried his best to have the knowledge of God and of himself but failed. At long last, realizing the utter futility of such an attempt, he resorted to devotional meditation lasting for a thousand years. God being pleased with his devotion endowed him with divine vision by which he could not only see the beautiful form of the Lord but also revealed the true knowledge of God.”

Regarding the grace of God, Sankaradeva says — “If knowledge (jñāna) can achieve release what is the use of bhakti? — Even a very little of the grace of the Lord leads to a knowledge of the Lord, and by no other means can one attain it.”

From the ethical point of view, Sankaradeva considers the concept of Puruṣa as the benefactor well doer of individuals —

“The Lord is not be considered as a person with a body. He is immeasurable, endless Brahman with no control of qualities (guna) on him. He manifests Himself in form only for the good of men.”

Sankaradeva’s Puruṣa as the Highest Good is the moral governor of the world. He believes in the theory of Karma, according to which — “suffering is recognized as the fruit of previous sin and when a good man dies he goes to the next world carrying his merit with him.” According to Sankaradeva’s concept of action, which is based on the traditional ‘doctrine of karma’ we are all within the sphere of karmas. Any embodied being cannot completely renounce his actions. It is obligatory and mandatory that nobody can escape from his actions and their effects. Our life is a series of karmic cycles. The whole process of thought materialising into deed is a karmic cycle. The orthodox systems of Indian philosophy are generally found to agree on the point that
suffering is recognized as the fruit of previous sins and when a good man dies he goes to the next world carrying his merits with him. The Buddhist theory of *Karma* also believes that by *Karma* one attains glory and praise and reversely experiences bondage, ruin and sufferings. The world exists through *Karma* and people live through it. Likewise Sankaradeva also claims that our good or evils are due to our own actions done in our state of existence. So, no external fate constrains one from acting as he does. One is free and determined by one self. Hence, there is no room for fatalism. He says —

"All creatures take their birth and are subjected to pleasure and pain, afflictions and fears due to *Karma*. Life cannot be one of inaction, it may be either good or bad action. People enjoy or suffer as inevitable consequences of their deeds."\(^{47}\)

For Sankaradeva, human beings lead their lives bounded by their illusive actions (*Karma bandha*) and are doomed to suffer under the spell of illusions (*Māyā*). For him, bondage to worldly existence is the outcome of *Karma* and like Vedic seers he tries to explain the moral foundation of the universe, according to which the righteous persons are rewarded and the wicked are punished in the present lives or here after.\(^{48}\)

*Karma* is a cosmic principle and God is cosmic intelligence. God is independent of *Karma*. Sankaradeva conceives God as the moral governor and He is the soul of the universe. As he says — "God is the creator, protector and destroyer of this universe. He is the Lord and also moral Governor. He is a kind and loving God who dispenses grace."\(^{49}\)

Like the *Gītā*, Sankaradeva preaches the ethics of *Niskāma karma* — the detached action — the action without the desire for the fruit there of. The *Gītā* advocates
the *Niskāma karma* which implies duty for the sake of duty, irrespective of consequences. The ethical aspect of the concept of the *Puruṣa* of Sankaradeva, God is absolutely Good and the ethics of *Niskāma karma* aims that man must choose the way of goodness so that he may grow into the goodness of the Deity. Sankaradeva advises his followers not to do the duties that are done with the intention of gaining worldly pleasures or even heaven, i.e. the *Sakāma karma*. For him, detachment from worldly affairs is necessary for the mind’s concentration on devotion to God, and as such detachment can come only when we realize the true meaning and goal of life.

Sankaradeva’s doctrine of *karma* also implies man’s freedom of will. As the Highest Good is the ultimate principle for Sankaradeva, he speaks about the freedom of will and the consequent possibility of conscious effort on the part of the individual for the attainment of good. He also lays emphasis on the autonomy of man in determining his fate, on the ability of moral personality to transcend the merely natural laws of the universe and on the supremacy over it all, as the supreme moral personality of the Highest *Brahman*. So, for him man is free to reform his character and alter his ways. Man himself is responsible for his present state. In this context, we may make mention of an interesting incident narrated in the *Kathā-Guru-Carit*.

One day while Madhavadeva was on his way to a village, he came across a ferocious buffalo, on seeing which the colleagues of Madhavadeva made way for the animal. But Madhavadeva went his way unheedful believing in the decree of fate, by saying, “...if I am fated to die to day by the attack of this animal nobody can save me.” As fortune would have it, the animal did not attack him. On their return from the village, Madhavadeva’s colleagues narrated the story to Sankaradeva, who, on hearing
this remarked, “Do you know Madhava, that a lamp may go out in spite of oil and wick 
being present if proper precaution is not taken. Your action practically amounts to an 
attempt to commit suicide. This attitude on your part towards life will encourage others 
to be reckless of their life.” Later he advised Madhavadeva not to view life 
fatalistically.50

The Bhagavadgītā enumerates some godly virtues which need to be cultivated 
by all irrespective of caste and creed to reach the ultimate Highest Good. They are 
fearlessness, purity of thought, steadfastness in knowledge and devotion, almsgiving, 
self-control and sacrifices, study of scriptures, austerities and uprightness, non-violence, 
truth-freedom from anger, renunciation, tranquility, aversion to slander, compassion to 
living beings, freedom from covetousness, gentleness, modesty and steadiness, courage, 
patience, fortitude purity, freedom from malice etc. Faithful to the Gītā, Sankaradeva 
professes the same virtues.51

Sankaradeva laid greater stress on the practice of ahiṁsā – non-violence, than 
the performance of sacrifices and the ascetic acts. He says – “If he who decapitates 
animals in sacrifices and makes (the earth) muddy with blood shed can go to heaven, 
who else is destined for all?”52 Again he says “......The broad minded devotee 
sanctifies even worms and insects of his habitation. He does not harm any creature, he 
is immune from desire and he delivers himself to Me.”53

According to Sankaradeva, all living beings are nothing but part and parcel of 
the all pervading God and hence they are sacred, from which it follows that they are not 
to be hurt or killed either in the name of religion or for the use of our own self.
Spiritual progress, to attain the Highest Good is not possible without self-control and therefore Sankaradeva laid stress on this moral quality. The mode of living is, to be regulated in the interest of life as a whole which implies the control of both mind and body. The devotee must always avoid becoming a slave to wayward senses. According to Sankaradeva, self-control is of great importance to ensure control of mind. The constant meditation of the name of the Lord or chanting the name of Hari, is the only process through which the concentration of the mind is possible. He establishes the glory of the nama kirttana of Hari in the koliyuga as the only way to Highest Good. Self-control, for Sankaradeva, does not amount of self-torture but it implies self mastery and moderation. He says—

"kāko ninindibā kāko nāvāndibā
śravaṇa kīrtana samasta pāpe taaribā!"54

(Do not taunt or idolize others, chanting and hearing of Lord’s name will alone free you from the snares of passions).

In ethical plane, endurance is the best way to get the Highest Good. Self-conquest is possible only through endurance and so Sankaradeva asks his disciple to attain the Highest Good through endurance. Endurance implies the importance of patience and tolerance, the supreme effects of which lead to the Highest Good.

Sankaradeva, the Great humanist philosopher was concerned for humanity both in its abstract and concrete forms and his life was a complete dedication to the service of humanity. For him, compassion and loving kindness as the great moral virtues are at the root of all righteousness. He extorts that the only way to overcome enmities and to establish love to achieve the Highest Good is by non-vengeance, compassion and
forgiveness. Compassion can win over the hearts of even our enemies. So, according to Sankaradeva, the ethical disposition of the mind or the spirit is not merely important for the man himself but it is at the same time, a power which reaches out to others around him. Sankaradeva says that compassion is not limited to human beings alone, but it extends to all living beings. He considers killing or cruelty towards animals a great sin, an obstruction which stands in the way of the attainment of the Highest Good. Thus the ethical aspects of Puruṣa – the Highest Reality, reflects itself in the conditions pertaining to conduct and devotion obligatory on the seeker of release.

Dāna or giving gifts is one of the greatest virtue in the moral life of a person. It is regarded as a part of Dharma. And this gift, whether it is small or big, given at a proper time, to a worthy person, is considered as an act of great merit. Sankaradeva laid emphasis on Dāna dharma. In Harichandra Nāi, he states – “Life is futile of a man who dishonours his promise, he is ostracized. There is no other virtue besides truth. So think not otherwise, give the gift.”55 The ideal of Dāna dharma of Sankaradeva is repeated in Ninī siddha saṁbāda also and in Bhakti Pradīp (pages 248-152). Thus Sankaradeva not only preaches this ideal to all, but practices it himself, setting an example for others to follow.

In ethical plane, Sankaradeva recommends constant meditation of the name of God to be the best medicine in this world of sufferings, so, he opens the portals of Bhakti to all people irrespective of caste, colour, creed or social status. He also says that religion is the spiritual realization of God by every person irrespective of social as well as caste distinctions. He preaches that everybody has equal right to worship God —

"kukuro śrigāla garddabharo āimā rām
jāniyā savāko podi karibā praṇām"56
(God is the soul of the dogs, the foxes, the dankeys and the out casts, knowing this, pay reverence to all living creatures).

Sankaradeva stresses that real nobility is founded not on birth but on conduct. He considers him a wise man who never makes any difference between a Candala and Brāhmaṇa. So, he says —

"brāhmaṇa caṇḍālarā nibicāri kulo,
dāśaa curaīa yena drṣṭī eka tulo, /
miśāa sādhuta yāra bhaila eka jñāna,
tāhākese pandita boliyā sarvajana //"57

(Him, indeed I call a wise man who does not distinguish between the caste of Brāhmaṇa and that of a Candal; who looks at a donor and a thief with an equal eye and who does not differentiate between a debared man and an honest person).

Sankaradeva could not accept the superiority of the Brāhmaṇas over all other castes in matter of religion and worship. He defines a true Brāhmaṇa as a person free from arrogance and impurity and as one who possesses self-restraint, knowledge and piety. Thus to obtain the Highest Good i.e. the final release and in order to realise the Divine presence, One need not be a Brāhmaṇa, nor a sage, nor should one know all scriptures. As his disciple Madhavadeva put it —

"harināma kīrttaṇata nāhi kāla desā pātra /
niyama sāmyama eko bidhi //"58

(No time, place or person is prescribed to sing Hari’s Name, No rule, no restraint is also there).

Sankaradeva asks his disciples to develop an attitude of detachment. He appeals to all — "Do whatever you do without any desire, without any craving for the result of
the work. Do whatever you do as a servant of the Lord. Practise this habit and make
yourself free of all the bondage of the world. Keep this priceless key in your hand like a
torch into the kingdom of God and God will make Himself visible to you." Sankaradeva
believes that desire for happiness does not come to an end by the mere
enjoyment of pleasures. Passions and propensities, desire and inclinations are to be
controlled and trained for the appreciation and conscious pursuit of higher values.
Sankaradeva says in the Bhāgavata tenth canto that—nāhike parama sukh nirāsat par.
As happiness in the sense of earthly enjoyment can never be the end of life. Self
realization is the only devotional joy by which one can get the Highest Good. So, it is
only the summun bonum of life.

The Greek thinker of pre-Socrates period, Democritus, also thought about the
ethical aspect of Reality in a similar vein. Democritus emphasized upon curtailment of
desires which should be substituted by reason and thinking and mental power should be
developed to get the Highest Good as well as the highest bliss. Like Sankaradeva,
Socrates also asserts on self-knowledge as for him, knowledge is the Highest Good. His
first dictum of ethical concept is 'know thyself' which is very much similar to
Sankaradeva's self-realisation.

Plato’s idea of Good is similar to the Highest Good of Sankaradeva. According
to both, the idea of Good is the highest value and summun bonum of life. Like
Sankaradeva's ultimate Reality – the Puruṣa, Plato's ultimate Good is indescribable.
Their Good is intrinsic good but not extrinsic good. As Plato dismissed the theory of
pleasure as good, it can be interpreted in terms of the ethics of self-realisation — the
ultimate aim of Sankaradeva’s concept of the Puruṣa – the Highest Good – Puruṣārtha.
In the same way, Aristotle also maintained that the ethical aspect of the Highest Good is the self-realization. It is the Highest Good, Aristotle called it *Endaemania* which means happiness. The highest good is the complete habitual exercise of the human functions. Aristotle in one place said — "The virtuous man will act often in the interest of his friends and of his country, and if need be, will even die for them. He will surrender money, honour and the good for which the world contends reserving only nobleness for himself, as he would rather enjoy an intense pleasure for a short time than a moderate pleasure for long and would rather live one year nobly than many years indifferently, and would rather perform one noble and lofty action than many poor actions. This is true of one who lays down his life for another, he choose great nobleness for his own."60 This passage shows that self-realisation does not mean selfish individualism. A man realizes his self so far as he acts according to the dikttets of his conscience. Likewise Sankaradeva also expresses —

"*viṣṇumoy dekhe yitū samasta jagate /
jiwante mukuta howe acira kālāte //
sakala prāṇīka dekhībe kāti māma //
upōy madhyata itto ati mukhyatama // "61

(Practise physically, orally and intellectually until you realize *Viṣṇu* in every element. One who sees *Viṣṇu* in all the world, attains, one’s deliverance at once in this very life. To see every being as equivalent to one’s own soul is the supreme means of attaining deliverance).

The stoics, the post-Aristotelian philosophers also stressed on the fulfillment of duty in virtue, for which they tried to make intellectual life completely non-sentient. Sankaradeva’s ethical principle is not rigorism because according to him to be a
virtuous man it is not necessary to give up the sensual life or to be a scholar of all Vedas or to be a great donor. He re-iterates the practical and ethical means of attaining deliverance.\textsuperscript{62}

According to St. Augustine, 'Love' is the highest Virtue and the ultimate end of human life is union with God. St. Augustine's view recalls Sankaradeva's self-surrender – ātmanivedana.

The approach to ethics in terms of an emphasis on duty was rigorously expressed by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who provides a practical moral guide for mankind i.e. obey the dictates of your reason and always act for the sake of duty. He advocates the principle of "duty for duty's sake". Kant holds that it is not moral to help another if one is pained by his sorrow and the help is consequent upon this feeling. The value of actions depends upon their reason, not result. Thus Kant's views are very much similar to Sankaradeva's niskāma karma. According to Kant, — "an action done from duty derives its moral worth, not from the purpose which is to be attained by it, but from the maxim by which it is determined, and therefore, does not depend on the realization of the object of the action but merely on the principle of volition by which the action has taken place, without regard to any object of desire."\textsuperscript{63}

In the same way Sankaradeva asks his disciples to develop an attitude of detachment only to the mundane affairs and attachment to higher spiritual values of life.\textsuperscript{64} He further emphasises the same idea in Bhakti ratnākar.\textsuperscript{65}

In this regard, Sankaradeva has an affinity with the wellknown existentialist thinker Jean Paul Sartre. In Sartre's existentialism, man is encouraged because there is no hope for man except his own action. According to him, man defines himself by his
acts. He says — “Our aim is precisely to establish the human kingdom as a pattern of values in distinction from the material world.” Since any absolute standard for judgment of norms is rejected, Sartre asserts that man must be sincere and genuine in his conduct and should be true to his own values, because as an autonomous being man has created values. When a man rises from inauthentic to authentic existence, he becomes free of all attachments and becomes disinterested. Thus man can then perform his duties disinterestedly which is similar to \textit{niskāma karma} of Sankaradeva.

American idealist philosopher Josiah Royce, says that the real mark of good life is devotion to same cause which is noble and has wider social implications. When human energies are directed towards a carefully chosen ideal the individual is able to give purpose and direction to his life. Sankaradeva also stresses on devotion as the golden path. In the wards of Royce — “Your true cause is the spiritual unity of all the world of reasonable beings.” This supports Kant’s “Categorical imperative” as well as \textit{Niskāma karma} of Sankaradeva. But it lifts it from the level of a purely logical criterion into a rule for judging the rightness and goodness of actions in terms of their ultimate social worth.

Thomas Hill Green also asserts that the ultimate end or the highest good is to realise the spirit in us which has an affinity with self-realisation of Sankaradeva. Green says that as this spirit is universal the individual good is also the universal good. Sankaradeva too, shares the same view on universal good that one should treat all beings as his own self.

Referring to the self-realisation as the ultimate end, F.H. Bradley thus exhorts — “Realize yourself as an infinite whole means realize yourself as the self-conscious
member of an infinite whole, by realizing that whole in yourself." Like Sankaradeva he also says that man should realize himself in and through society.

Like Sankaradeva, who says that desire is the root cause of all unhappiness, Arthur Schopenhauer also asserts that it is the will which is the cause of all our problems in actual life. But unlike Sankaradeva he suggests contemplation of beauty and art as well as renunciation — living a life of holiness to escape from the grip of Will as well as Desire.

Thus the ethical aspect of the concept of Puruṣa in Sankaradeva's philosophy is indebted to classical Indian thought. Upaniṣads emphasise the importance of ethical discipline as preparation for realization of the Supreme. The ideal of universal love which forms the essential part of our religious and cultural tradition is declared as the real achievement for man — "See yourself in all beings and all beings in yourself" which is similarly echoed in Sankaradeva's teaching as — "To see every being as equivalent to one's own soul is the supreme means."  

Sankaradeva's ethical aspect of the Puruṣa is largely indebted to the Gītā. His concept of action — the Niskama karma — the low of karma — the concept of self-realizations are all borrowed from the Gītā. Following the Gītā, he lays down practical ethical ideals to be followed by all men in all situations of worldly existence. Sankaracharya, also formulates the view that the Ātmabodha or Self knowledge i.e. the self-realization is the ultimate end of moral life. The ethical aspect of the concept of Puruṣa in Sankaradeva's teaching, ever manifests Himself as the inner controller — the moral governor.
IV. SOCIAL ASPECT OF PURUŚA:

Man, as a social being, is an integral part of society. Society means a group of some individuals, but it is to be measured not by men and their groups but by the interactions and interrelations that exist among them. The social philosophers evaluate the sociological facts in the light of Supreme Good of the man examining the validity of social values. It also evaluates the human achievements in the light of eternal values and pronounces judgments upon them. Social philosophy studies the general good and ideal and suggests means with which to realize those ideals in referring to the Ultimate Good – Justice – Virtue etc. Man’s social life is full of various problems, so his life is constantly in need of a criterion of reality by which he may be able to distinguish between right and wrong. To think is to evaluate, and to evaluate is to use a criterion of reality. The quest for such a criterion in social life leads to the social aspect of the Ultimate Reality, i.e. the Supreme Puruśa.

As a great social thinker, Sankaradeva had to face various problems during his times. When Sankaradeva was born, the entire region was in turmoil, rife with all types of strifes, social inequalities, communal hatred, jealousies, religious intolerance and all types of barbarous acts, the weaker sections of the people were facing all kinds of oppression. Thus there was total degeneration of values. In order to challenge such situations, Sankaradeva started a reformative movement in Assam, keeping the aim of the ‘highest good’ in society. He projected social values, a code of conduct in the context of the family, society and the nation through his various works. As a great humanist and as a visionary, Sankaradeva not only belongs to his country but to the
whole world with his messages having universal appeal beneficial for the entire humanity.

Sankaradeva mentions about the Grace of God, which is not arbitrary, but acts in proportion to moral worthiness of the doer, as he writes —“All virtues lead to devotion.” It is the grace which soothes the broken heart and contrite spirit. Thus the solidarity of the spiritual universe is the bedrock on which the social ethics of Sankaradeva is founded. Sankaradeva had galvanized the society with his message of devotion to one Supreme Reality, Sankaradeva had unified the diverse racial, social and cultural elements of his society with his wonderful capacity for synthesis. Again, he had imbued the newly welded society with the spirit of liberalism and open heartedness that have stood the test of time.

Sankaradeva as a great social reformer tried to establish an egalitarian one society. He was the first great preacher of Assam who opened the portals of Bhakti to all people irrespective of caste, colour, creed or social status. Nothing was demanded of man except what they could give, high and low, rich and poor without rite or ceremony. Hence, the statement of M.K. Gandhi — “Assam, indeed is fortunate for Sankaradeva has, five centuries back, given to Assamese people an ideal which is also the ideal of Rāmarājya.”

The four classes of society, mentioned in the Purusa sūkta of the Rg Veda - as originating from the sacrifice of the Primordial Being; soon degenerated into rigid caste system and heredity became the determinant of caste. The first three classes – the Brāhmaṇas, the Rājanyas and the Vaisyvas – became the privileged castes in the society and the Sūdras were debarred from reading the scriptures. Thus salvation became the
monopoly of the few. Sankaradeva, by his social ideal led a ceaseless crusade against this anachronism.

In the midst of such a disturbing social scenerio, Sankaradeva found a fertile ground for propagating his doctrine of bhakti based on the principle of universal brotherhood. Sankaradeva’s creed is based on the worship of One God, Visnu-Krsna, as the Supreme entity, of Pure-Existence and that all other gods and goddesses are subservient to Him. His ideal is ‘One God, One shelter, none else but One’. Through this idea, he tried to bind the whole of mankind into one thread of Justice – Virtue.

Sankaradeva never regarded heredity as the determinate of a particular caste. Even people of the lowest caste could be purified and elevated in thought and spirit if they lovingly adored God in all humility and earnestness. Thus Sankaradeva proclaims that in the realm of Bhakti there is no distinction of caste. As he says —

“In bhakti devotion, there is no distinction of caste. Everybody has equal right to chant the Harināma.” He says in another place —

“si tu caṇḍālaka garhiṣṭha māni,
 yāra jibāgre thāke Hari bāṇī
 sehise kulīna vedaka buji
 yāhāra mukhe Harināma siji”

(That Candāla is glorious who has the name of God on the tip of his tongue. He alone is pure. While chanting His glory, we ourselves hear, think, and worship Him).

Sankaradeva’s aim or purpose is of establishing social harmony in society and for developing fellow feeling. So, he discards the caste code and emphasizes rather in the matter of personal cleanliness, both inward and outward and correct social behaviour. Thus the social recognition of the common man irrespective of caste and
status, is the best social reform, brought by Sankaradeva. He declares that even the souls of dogs, śṛigālas (fox), asses and the outcastes are verily God and with this idea in mind all of them should be respected. Sankaradeva stresses that the real nobleness is founded not on the birth of man but on his conduct. By birth a man cannot be higher than others. He is considered as a wise man who never made any difference between a Brāhmaṇa and an outcaste (Cāndāla).

Sankaradeva could not accept the superiority of the Brāhmaṇas in matters of social status over the other castes. He defines a true Brāhmaṇa as a person free from arrogance and impurity and possessed of self-restraint, knowledge and piety.

Sankaradeva’s social ideal, therefore was democratic in spirit, principle and organization and all people could embrace it. This was the ideal of his Vaiṣṇavite movement. In this way, Sankaradeva rejected — “racialism and religious dogmatism which impede the unfoldment of this oneness in his ideals and activities. For him, the secret of human fulfillment and freedom lies in worldwide fellowship, and it is the instinct of separateness that gives birth to a brood of barrier building creeds rigidity of caste, untouchability and credoes like race and caste superiority. The antidote for this engineered antipathy between man and man is to be discovered in love of man, for love is the secret of self-realization and ‘swarājya’ of the soul, while slavery and caste are the result of distinguishing one from the other. In the heart of love there dwells the desire to bind itself to another and this love is made luminous only through the symphony of joy in the widest commonly spread.”

As a social ideal Sankaradeva envisaged unity in diversity and oneness in many. For him, the prosperity of the family depends upon the harmony of its members, the
ideal society also depends upon the non distinction among its members. ‘Suṣrū mītra
udāśīna sabate samāṇa’ — to make no distinction between friend and enemy, i.e. to
convert enemy into a friend through good thought and feelings indicates social peace
and progress.”78 Again Sankaradeva says that in a society all beings are equal as all are
creatures of the same Paramātmā. So, all human being can live in the society with
harmony and love. His ideal society was well organized and ruled by the principles of
equality. He tried to establish oneness in the society.

“This utter disregard for the age old tradition of caste in his religious system
greatly helped to alone for the rigour of casteism and untouchability in the society. The
Mahāpurusā did not try to kill the serpent of caste system but simply moved the poison
out of it, he gave us the very kernet of democracy.”79 Sankaradeva greatly emphasises
the importance of human values. One should be more closely related to human values
such as love, kindness to the weak, help to the distress etc.

For social good, the path of truth and non violence should be followed at social
as well as individual levels. Just like individual truth, social truth is the essence of all
actions. So, the truth is the best ideal of society. As he says that except truth, there are
no other religions.80 Again he says —

“satyaatese āche rāhī māhī carācara
satye sama dharma āura nāhī purusār.”81

(All creatures have existence only for the truth, Individuals have no other
religions except the truth).

Self control is the ultimate truth of the social aspect of Sankaradeva’s concept of
the Purusā. Every disciplined life of the individual guides the social peace of society to
a great extent. Man may suffer from anxieties in society due to various adverse
situations. These lead man to commit some unwated acts which may be harmful for
the society if the individual concerned has no self restraint. Therefore, Sankaradeva
advises each individual to cultivate self control. Self control is that mental discipline by
which one can take rational decision in every unfavourable circumstance to make
individual as well as social life smooth.

Sankaradeva established a new democratic social order through the institution of
the namghar (Congregation prayer hall) which is its base and the centre for the
villagers' intellectual and cultural activities. The namghar plays the best social role and
became the solid base of Assamese society in an integral sense. Thus he laid the
foundation of a unified society through the namghar the symbol of unity and integrity.

Justice – the highest social ideal of Plato is comparable to Sankaradeva's notion
of social justice. According to Plato, justice is the quality of the soul; it does not depend
upon any external source of power. It is the voice of the conscience of man. Justice,
again results in happiness both in the individual and the society. Justice means harmony
and rhythm in the individual and the society. For Sankaradeva also, justice is the
conscience of man- a quality of the soul. Like Plato, Sankaradeva also lays stress on
social harmony among all irrespective of caste, creed, colour etc.

According to Aristotle, Justice promotes social interests. It is lawfulness and
fairness. It aims at providing facilities to the citizens. Justice imposes laws as it tries to
fulfil the interests of a community as a whole, of which each citizen is a member.
Aristotle says that the difference between virtue and justice is only a difference of
context. That which is justice in relation to others, is virtue in relation to one self. The
chief function of the state is to provide justice to everyone. In the same way
Sankaradeva also maintains; that all men are equal and that all have the right to get equal justice in a society.

Among the modern western social philosophers, J.S. Mackenzie's social philosophy is guided by his spiritual and ethical ideas. But at the same time he stresses on the practicality of social philosophy. He has an affinity to Sankaradeva also; because Sankaradeva also says that man as a social being must possesses the spiritual and ethical ideal to improve himself a social being. He gives some practical social ideal to be followed by individual to improve his personality acquiring the highest good of man and Sankaradeva could anticipate many of the ethico-social ideals of M.K. Gandhi five centuries, ahead of Gandhi's which himself has acknowledge in Young Idia, 1922.

Gandhi's social political ideology is based upon Vedānta for which he has similarity with Sankaradeva. The essence of Vedānta philosophy is that there is one universal element underlying all human beings and therefore a low or an ideal that is applicable to one person, should be applied to all and vice-versa. Gandhian social ideal is religious and spiritual as it us based on the tradition of Vedānta philosophy.

V. RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF THE PURUṢA:

Vaiṣṇavism is one of the oldest religions of India. It has been extolled through the ages as the religion of redemption. In this religion, Viṣṇu is worshipped as the Supreme God. Viṣṇu must have been an important Deity in ancient times. According to Hiriyanna – "Viṣṇu is also a Vedic Deity. He is represented in the mantras as one of the solar deities and as such is associated with life and light." Viṣṇu is often times conceived as a Deity and is recognized by Vaiṣṇavism as Bhāgavaṇa (the glorious One), Puruṣottama (the supreme person), Nārāyaṇa, Hari, as the sole Lord. As a religious
preacher, Sankaradeva developed some practices in his neo-Vaishnavite movement and gave them a distinct character. He devoted himself to popularize the Krsna cult or Bhagavatism and declared that Krsna, is the only God without the second. This Krsna is the Purusa – the Absolute Reality – the Great person from the metaphysical point and from the religious point, He is Krsna. Sankaradeva writes,—

"eke Krsna deva koriyoka seva
    dhardyo tāhāno nāma /
Krsna dāsa huyā prasāda bhūnjiyā
    hoste korā tāna kāma li" 83

(Lord Krsna — the only one is to be worshipped and his names should be chanted. Be the servant of Krsna and take His ors and do His works).

BHAKTI AS A COMPONENT OF THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF PURUSA

Philosophy tells us that realization of God or of the self is the sumnum bonum of human life and conduct and that there are various obstacles in the way of such realization. Hinduism admits three kinds of sādhanā namely — jñāna, karma and bhakti i.e. the practice for reaching the spiritual goal. Bhakti is the prominent method in Sankaradeva’s thought, because according to him, realization of God through intense love is the best way or means to unitive love. This road leads us to the ultimate end, where all miseries come to an end.

THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA OF BHAKTI

The word Bhakti is derived from the verbal root, bhaj, which is said to signify complete servitude or seva. According to Narada, it is an intense love for God. The root
bhaj from which bhakti is derived, is found employed in the Vedic texts in its various forms in the sense of 'to distribute', 'allot or apportion', 'to furnish', 'supply or bestow', 'to share with', 'to partake of or enjoy', to set about its resort to but never in the sense of 'to love or adore'.... The words bhakti, bhakta and bhāgavat are all cognate terms, all obtained from the root bhaj.\textsuperscript{84}

The cult of Bhakti, adumbrated in the hymns of the Vedas, partly developed in the Upaniṣads, but it received a definite shape when Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa revealed the Gītā to Ārjuna. Thus we get the indigenous growth of the Indian Bhakti Movement.

**SANKARADEVA AND BHAKTI MĀRGĀ**

Sankaradeva's Bhakti Mārga has the distinctive character with its emphasis on the essentially monotheistic character of God and the superiority of devotional path to ritualistic sacrifice and to mere theoretical knowledge. He says that God – the Puruṣa cannot possibly be comprehended by sense organs and He is even beyond logic or arguments. God is easily attainable through whole hearted devotion. For Sankaradeva, in this world of illusion, faith in adoration of and devotion to Kṛṣṇa or Rāma can only release human beings from death, destruction and utter ruin. In the Bhāgavata, he says —

"Realise this truth – never believe any more in knowledge and deed. Tide over the world easily by hearing and singing about me. Behold how mighty is the path of devotion, he who sings the attributes of God easily comes by at his own seat all the fruits derivable from penance, mutterings, pilgrimage, donation, knowledge and aversion to worldliness."\textsuperscript{85}
The concept of *Purusa* is known as God or *Krsna* in His religious aspect, the nature and idea of whose existence are the fundamental problems of religious consciousness for Sankaradeva. Religious consciousness consists of three elements,—thinking, feeling and willing. Man's religious life consists in the realization of this infinite spirit behind the world through which one can be successful in one's practical life. For Sankaradeva, it is the Lord, the ultimate, the Absolute power underlying this world whom he calls *Krsna, Nārāyana, Mādhava, Hari* etc. *Krsna* is regarded by him as the highest, best and the most ideal divinity. His appearance in the form of *Viṣṇu — Nārāyana* is the celestial *Vaikuntha* with His liberated devotees and attendants is the supreme manifestation. Sankaradeva realizes that the world, which is full of miseries can be overcome by man with his great effort if he takes the help of some unseen power that is God. The devotional recitation of the name of God in reverence and love is a sovereign remedy for all ills. Sankaradeva says — "In this life all get the liberation only through devotion."^86^ 

Sankaradeva declares that *Eka Śāraṇa Nāma* Dharma is the supreme religion of this age. It states that the means of worshipping God is the chanting of the name of God with undeviating devotion, being pure in heart, thought and action. As the name of God is identical with God Himself the devotee beseeches God to grant him the privilege of seeing shelter in his *Nāma*. At the time of Sankaradeva the religions of Assam were more a means of exploitation than a way of life, and besides worshipping different gods and goddesses, various crimes were freely committed in the society in the name of religion. By preaching the Neo-Vaiśṇavism, Sankaradeva establishes a new faith, propounds a new cult and therefore, gives a new direction to the people of Assam.
Sankaradeva aims to arouse religious consciousness among the people of that time of Assam and to unite the society, by fostering the feelings of love and brotherhood. The existence of the Purusa — the Absolute Being and the way to establish oneness with this Being are the subject matter of his religion. The feeling absolute dependence upon God, the feeling of absolute surrender and the feeling of oneness with the supreme self constitute the crux of Sankaradeva’s Vaisnavite thought. He maintains that the religious practices in the shape of constant recitation of the name of Hari, though they begin mechanically, will succeed in generating a real feeling of devotion. He says — “In Golden Age the true religion is only Harināma.”

Again —

“devaka upari Rājā Mādhava dharmaka upari nāma /
   koti kalapaka pātaka nāśāka dāki bolahu Rāma Rāma //”

(Just as Mādhava is the king among gods, so the chanting of the name is the supreme religion. Nāmadharma destroys sins committed through the errors of ages. So, reiterate the name of Rāma).

Madhavadeva, the staunch disciple of Sankaradeva, also advocates the same view by citing the example of Bhakta Prahlāda — “......Hiranyakasipūr put his son Prahlāda under various tortures, even a hair of his body could not however be moved because of the magical influence of the great Amulet of Harināma.” He again says that the utterances of the name of Rāma Kṛṣṇa, Hari etc. is the best of all religions. There is no religion higher than that.

Thus nāmadharma was an innovation of Sankaradeva and he gave himself whole heartedly to this Kīrtana and thus enlisted it in the service of faith as the Bhakti cult. His loving devotion to God has been and is undoubtedly a great moral force in
human history. As he says, human life is transient, we can make our life fruitful only by devotion to Hari. It is indeed an unfailing means to attain real success in living the religious life.

COMPARISON OF NĀMA DHARMA WITH SOME WORLD RELIGIONS

There are points of agreement between the religious aspect of the concept of Puruṣa as depicted by the Nāma Dharma of Sankaradeva and some of the great religions of the world. God of Zoroastrian religion which is known as Ahura Mazda, the meaning of which is 'the wise God' is similar to only one God like the Kṛṣṇa of Sankaradeva's religion. Ahura Mazda resembles the Supreme Puruṣa of Sankaradeva which is nirguṇa and spenta Mainya of the Zoroastrians corresponds to the notion of Kṛṣṇa in Sankaradeva. Ahura Mazda is responsive to the prayers of his worshippers. Like Sankaradeva, Zoroastrianism has no place for animal sacrifice and worship of images.

Judaism is also pure monotheism, because Lord — God is one, and none is besides Him. Like Sankaradeva it also believes that this world has been created by God out of nothing (ex nihilo) which makes God must supreme Judaism as a matter of religious experience and worship through prayer is a spiritual necessity for the Jew. Judaism holds that only prayer bridges the gulf between man and his Creator which is similar to the Bhakti cult of Sankaradeva.

Christianity has common beliefs with regard to monotheism that of Creatorship of God, Heaven, Hell etc. and of One God, who has created the world and man. According to Christianity, Man is free to choose either the good or bad. But by
sanctifying his will, by surrendering it to God’s will, he can reach a destiny which is higher than that of the angel. Sankaradeva also preaches in the same way — “Dedicate all the works to the name of Hari.”

Again both Christianity and Sankaradeva teach that the service of God is owing greatest freedom. Sankaradeva lays emphasis on bhakti for the deliverance of man. The ultimate destiny of man is that he should overcome his physical passions and desires and make his will the will of God. Christianity teaches the salvation for all, likewise the very essence of Sankaradeva’s teaching is to plead for sarvamukti.

Islam — the prophetic religion means surrendering of one’s will to the will of God, throughout one’s life. It also means complete obedience to the laws of God. God is called Allah, who is One, omniscient and omnipotent like Sankaradeva’s God. Islam means realization of the development of the Divine Spark in man by means of surrendering One’s will into the divine will. Sankaradeva also says that by surrendering himself at the feet of Lord Krsna, one could enjoy the blissful form of the Lord and easily attain salvation.

For the Muslims, prayers are to be said by purifying one’s body and mind and by wearing clean clothes. Ibn El Arabi — the greatest Arabic mystic of Islam, teaches that Allah is the only reality who is above description and qualifying attributes. El-Arabi states that — “God is the only real Being. He is above all qualifying attributes and the world is a mere illusion.” The same is echoed in Sankaradeva’s concept of Purusa or the concept of God in religions aspect.

Sikhism, believed in the efficacy of nama-simaran (the repeating of God’s name by heart) which has an affinity with Sankaradeva’s nama-dharma. Both believe that
salvation means freedom from the cycle of birth and death and reunion with God. Both of them advocate the necessity of worship in which performance of righteous actions, *Nām simaran*, *Bhajan*, *Kīrtan* importance of Guru etc. are the ways. According to Sikhism, *nām simaran* and *kīrtan* are not a mere mechanical repetition of words, the name of God should come from the core of one’s heart. Sankaradeva’s *nāmadharma*, had liberalized his religion that simply by chanting the name of Hari consciously, one can attain perfection.

**SANKARADEVA AND THE VAIṢṆAVISM OF SOUTH AND NORTH INDIA**

**Ramanuja and Sankaradeva**

*Ramanuja*, the propagator of the Bhakti-cult, like Sankaradeva, believe through *bhakti* alone one can attain the ultimate truth. Sankaradeva accepts *bhakti* as the only means to all the classes of people high and low, while in *Ramanuja* there is a means of liberation called *prapatti* meant for the *śūdras* or *prapannas*. *Ramanuja*’s concept of *prapatti* is similar to the concept of *śāraṇa* which means to take refuge or seek shelter in God and the idea of God as *prapanna-janatāraṇa* which means saviour of the helpless who take refuge in God. Like Sankaradeva, *Ramanuja* also declared a suitable means to achieve purity, sinlessness and selflessness in life. Thus Sankaradeva’s concept of devotion emphasizes on the importance of the *Dāśya* type of *Bhakti* to win the grace of the Lord *Kṛṣṇa* and above all the exalted position accorded to the *Guru*, is a clear evidence of its close association with *Ramanuja*’s philosophy.
Vallabha and Sankaradeva

Vallabha’s view is pure non-dualism which is called suddhadvaita, Sankaradeva and Vallabha both agree in holding that the unending service to God is the highest goal but not with an end towards liberation or mukti. He says — “I do not aspire for absolute oneness (liberation) with Thee, where there is no scope to service at Thy lotus-feet.”93

Vallabha’s bhaktimarga is a long strenuous process and admits worship of Rādhā while Sankaradeva does not admit the worship of Rādhā in his Bhaktimārga towards the Supreme One.

Ramananda (1300-1411 A.D.) and Sankaradeva

It is seen that Sankaradeva has little affinity with that of Ramananda, a Vaisnava saint, who flourished in the fourteenth century, and was a disciple of Rāghvānanda, the teacher of Visistavāda school. Both of them preach the Bhaktimārga for the attainment of Truth. But in it, Ramananda maintains the dual worship of Rāma and Sītā instead of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa of Chaitanya. Sankaradeva rejects dual worship.

Kabira and Sankaradeva

Kabira was a Vaisnavaite thinker, but his philosophy is more dualistic. In the system of Sankaradeva, it is necessary to be guided by a Guru in the soul’s journey towards God. Kabira also asks his follower to consider Guru as Govinda. For Kabira, the real; meditation is of Guru’s form, the real worship is at Guru’s feet.

Chaitanya and Sankaradeva

Chaitanya, the founder of Bengal Vaisnavism was junior in the age of Sankaradeva. According to him, worship means Kirtana or simple utterances of names
and glories of the Lord Kṛṣṇa with love and devotion which has similarity with 
nāmadharma of Sankaradeva. Chaitanya’s bhakti or love of God entertains the 
madhura bhāva. He introduces the concept of Rādhā as a lover which is consciously 
absent in Sankaradeva. Sankaradeva entertains dāsya bhāva. “The amoral and anti-
social ideal of the figure of the Parakiyā has always had the risk of bringing in 
erotism and even moral turpitude and this was carefully avoided by Sankaradeva.”

_Tukaram and Sankaradeva_

_Tukaram_ another important name in the history of Vaisnavism in Maharashtra, 
teaches all men through his life to devote their entire energy to sing the glories of God. 
_Tukaram_ has similarity with Sankaradeva, because he also condemned the religious 
ceremonies as valueless. He advocates humility purity of mind and unalloyed devotion 
to God as the necessary pre-requisites to attain the kingdom of God.

Thus, in fine, we see that Sankaradeva, in religious aspect of the concept of 
Puruṣa, establishes Kṛṣṇa as the only God and popularize the Kṛṣṇa cult. Kṛṣṇa, the 
man-God, the personal God and the Supreme Puruṣa — all these three concepts are not 
distinct from one another — they are three points of view which represent three different 
grades or degrees of knowledge. Through his religion of Kṛṣṇacult — Sankaradeva 
shows the path of Bhakticult — the easiest path to self-realization. Thus, we may 
conclude that Sankaradeva makes truly worthy attempts to establish the Puruṣa as a 
Supreme Self at the religious level.

VI. PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT:

Philosophical psychology has its primary responsibility to the analysis of the 
concept of consciousness as a specific mental phenomenon. Psychological aspects of
any concept are particularly concerned with the nature of consciousness, the kinds of things with which they are conscious or are capable of conscious and with all those phenomena which we call ‘mental phenomena’ to which only beings capable of conscious are subject. Consciousness as a primary datum of human existence, presupposes three levels of knowledge—the knowledge and awareness of the external world by exteroceptors, the knowledge of inner sensing—the emotions, intuitions, memories etc. and the knowledge of one’s self (other than the body) i.e. the belief that there is an ‘I’ the self, who does the perceiving in man.

The meaning of Consciousness

Consciousness is used, as implying the awareness of a situation characterized by the relationship of subject and object in an act of cognition. It also implies the consciousness of self-hood, because no one is ever empirically conscious without being implicitly conscious also of one’s own self. A reflective self feeling sharply divides the world of consciousness from the world of unconsciousness. The ‘I’ as the distinguishing feature of the realm of consciousness is absent from the realm of the unconscious.95

Psychological aspect in the Rg Veda and the Upanisads

We find the germ of ‘mind’ (manas) in the Rg Veda. The hymn of Creation (X. 129), declares that — na asat asit no sat asit tadānmm — “Then there was neither Being nor non-Being,” and again then for the first time there arose Kāmas which had the primeval germ of manas within it. It adds significantly that—“the sages searching in their hearts discovered in ‘non-being’, the connecting bond of ‘being’. Though it is not quite clear what is meant by saying that kāma is the foremost germ of ‘mind’, for it
is usually the mind that generates kāma and not vice-versa, yet reading the verse along
with its first commentary in Sat. The causal introspection- 'what thing I truly am I know
not'\(^96\) of the Rgveda is, perhaps, the earliest instance of a man's reflection upon his own
self. This causal reflection of the Vedas can be taken as the starting point of the serious
and strenuous meditation of the Upaniṣads on the nature of the self.

In the Upaniṣads consciousness is conceived and propounded as an independent
and eternal reality without any distinctions whatever, in it, as completely inactive,
capable of existing as pure jñā pure light without content, untainted by experience and
yet strongly fundamental of all experience. This theory of the fundamental nature of
consciousness or self has been the legacy of the Upaniṣads to the subsequent systems
which have sometimes deduced from it quite contradictory doctrines about the nature
and function of consciousness.

The focus of Indian philosophy is to determine the nature of that spirit or self
which is the centre of everything. It is the animating force (prānasākti) which makes a
person alive, alert and aware. It is consciousness variously called by Indian thinkers as
the self, knower, seer, experiencer or the witness. It is the unchanging and all pervading,
transcending the limitations of time and space, birth and death. It has no distinction of
gender, nationality, race or religion. Thus, it is the substratum or essence of the entire
manifest universe. But this Absolute consciousness is logically and empirically
uncharacterisable, it is yet not unknown, and its nature is 'jñā' or pure intelligence as
opposed to unitelligence. Its nature is not that of the variable moulds of intelligence of
which we have an experience in our daily life of mediated consciousness, but its nature
is of the constant, unchanging and basic consciousness, which is the pure supposition of all distinctions and manifoldness.

Regarding the ontological nature of consciousness, the Hindu philosophy says that consciousness has been held to be a substance, a quality and a movement and as unchanging and eternal; or as changing and momentary; as distinctionless, pure and isolated; or again, as eternally differentiated into distinctions of subject and object, and as always possessing a content.

Self-Consciousness and Sankaradeva

Different theories of self-consciousness imply the nature of consciousness and lead to the conclusion of a unitary and distinctionless consciousness. The problem of self-consciousness is a pseudo-problem and the attempt to know the subject in the manner of an object is unsound. The true self is 'ipso facto' self conscious and revealed and is yet not amenable to any division within itself of the cogniser and the cognized. The true self is not cognized as an object of knowledge, and the psychological self which is cognized, is not the true self.

The term self-consciousness is ambiguously used. It may be used either for consciousness of the self as an object given in introspection i.e. for the empirical ego, the jīva and the jñātā who is alternately both a subject of experience as well as an object of experience in an act of self introspection. Or it may stand for the transcendental- the pure subject-consciousness which is known to exist as the ultimate subject and the presupposition of all knowledge, but not known in an act of knowledge as an object.

Edward Caird thus propounded — "....a human consciousness cannot exist without some dawning of reverence — of an awe and aspiration." He again said "I
maintained that the consciousness of God or at least the principle out of which the consciousness of God arises, is as truly one of the primary elements of our intelligence as the consciousness of the object or the consciousness of the self." 

The consciousness of God or ultimate reality is *Sat-Cit-Ānanda*. God is *sat*, that is, He exists forever. The ‘*cit*’ means consciousness or knowledge. *Cetanā* is that which is entirely free from an element of *Jaḍa* (inertia) of any kind. The supreme soul is consciousness. And as He is free from the *jaḍa* (inert) element or cannot attribute even the quality of a knower, as that would mean asserting the existence of some element which being *jaḍa* is independent of Him, He is that consciousness which has no place for the distinctions like knower, knowledge, knowable, seer—seeing—sight and the like.

The Absolute consciousness cannot be regarded as *Ānanda* in any empirical sense of the term. The term *Ānanda* is only to indicate that the nature of Reality is positive, not negative. Reality is *saccidānanda*. It is ‘*sat*’ as it is unchanging. It is ‘*cit*’ which means that it is not *acit* or *jaḍa*. It is *Ānada* which means that it cannot be of the nature of pain or discard, for all negation must have a basis in something positive. Even this description of *Brahman*—the supreme *Puruṣa* as *saccidānanda* is imperfect. It only expresses the reality in the best way.

From the psychological aspect, Sankaradeva’s *Puruṣa* is pure consciousness. He holds the finite selves within Him by His power of consciousness. It is by His power of materiality that He spreads an illusion of the entire world. He is said to have three distinct powers—the inner power as forming the very essence—the external power as
Maya and the power by which the finite selves are manifested. This conception sets at naught the idea that Brahman is one undifferentiated consciousness.

Sankaradeva admits three levels of consciousness, viz.- waking (jāgana), dream (svapna) and dreamless sleep (nidra). Again he says that these three waking, dreaming and sleeping stages represent the three faculties of mind. According to Sankaradeva, the self or ātmā in its true nature can be realized in deep sleep (nirbhog nidra). In this state, the self remains as sāksī or witness, and it does not have any sense experiences. But Sankaradeva say that though our individual experiences the self in deep sleep yet it does not lead to liberation as in deep sleep avidyā is present, because of its attachment to the linga-deha or the subtle body.

In his writings, we see that, that the individual experiences the physical world with sense experience in the waking state and so the physical body is also treated as the self or ātmā. In dream (svapna) the individual perceives things though the sense organs do not function. So, the mind or the physical state is treated as the self or ātmā in this state. Lastly, in the dreamless sleep (nidra) the Jīva (individual) experiences the bliss of the pure self. But this does not mean liberation.

Like many Indian thinkers, Sankaradeva also says that the cause of bondage is ignorance or avidyā. Due to avidyā or ignorance one seers or experiences his self as different from God. As due to dirt in the eyes one cannot see the sun clearly, in the same way one cannot realize God with dirt in the consciousness. Liberation is to be achieved through realization. Mere theoretical knowledge is not enough. Sankaradeva prescribes the way of realization as —

"nirmal manata hoye ātmā parjchay /
tevese Kṛṣṇata driha bhakti upajay /"
(Purification of mind is the only method of removing ignorance or *avidyā* to liberation. Realisation of the true nature of reality or self is a process).

Sankaradeva says that the Mind the cognitive consciousness alone is responsible for the conception of the so-called universe. He writes –

“(Mind) resides in the heart and does all good and evil deeds. Mind is one, its forms are four: hear their names. It is Mind that proposes to do so many things, but is not settled in any of them. That is intellect which plans any making or unmaking. That is pride which considers itself as the author of all things. That is Heat which does all good deeds from day to day. This world as a whole is the creation of the mind.”\(^ {103}\)

In his philosophy, the Mind has four forms – mind (mon), cognitive consciousness (*buddhi*), pride (*ahānkār*) and heart (*citta*). Sankaradeva applies the analogy of a dancer (*nāṭa*) to the soul in the garb of the mind. Just as the dancer or actor appears differently with different appearances (dressings), Mind also takes different forms in different conditions. But in actual form consciousness is one. Sankaradeva’s *Puruṣa* is one all pervading Absolute entity. Like the sun reflecting in all the jars containing water, the Absolute *Puruṣa* is being reflected on the *citta* or mind. He says in Bhāgavata.\(^ {104}\)

Mind appears in many forms because mind is there in the body of every being. Sankaradeva says — “......in everybody’s heart mind resides. The mind catches a reflection of God. Life is that which is inseparable from the mind, like a lump of iron which becomes one with fire. Whenever the mind is afflicted so also the life. Whenever the mind wants to go somewhere or does something, the life also wants to do so.
Whenever the mind dies, so the life also dies. It is like the reflection of the sun that moves or remains still as does the water." 105

Mind is responsible for all sakāma karma which is the root cause of bondage. So according to Sankaradeva, mind is responsible for rebirth — the bandage of life. He mentions that — “Mind makes one born, mind makes one dead. Man’s salvation or bondage is due to the mind. All worship of minor gods or goddesses is effort of the mind. It is why life is enslaved and cannot free itself from the bondage of consequences of acts already done.” 106

According to Sankaradeva, mind is the product of avidya. Mind makes vice and virtue and mind also makes hell. It is mind that makes the divisions among the people. All the sense organs of our body are subservient to mind. All the sense organs obey the commands of the mind all through the day and night. 107 Sankaradeva shows the path to free ourselves from the consequences of our actions by which we are ensnared.

Mind is also called the eleventh sense organ. In its four different forms — i.e. mana, buddhi, ahaṁkāra and citta, reside four gods (or principles) namely — Chandra, Brahmā, Rudra and Vasudeva respectively. The five guṇas or tanmātras (i.e. sound, calour, touch taste and smell) and the eleven indriyas are together called sixteen Vikāras. These sixteen vikāras along with five elements (pañcha bhūta) Prakṛti, mahat and ahaṁkāra are known a chaubis-tattva or twenty four principles.” 108

Madhavadeva also ascribes conotion and negation of conotion (saṁkalpa — vikalpa) to manas, determination to buddhi, and egoism to ahaṁkāra and calls Citta the abode of pure knowledge. Sankaradeva ascribes all phenomenal existence to the activity of the mind. The mind with its five organs migrates from sphere to sphere that is body
to body, and the self follows it. It is the mind that creates the body, qualities and karma (virtue and vice) the mind again is a creation of Māyā. So long as the body, mind, karma and self are together, we call it Jīva (individual). It is, therefore, the mind that leads the soul to unending births and rebirths (sāṁśāra). That the world of phenomena is a fabrication of the mind is also the view of Gaudapada.¹⁰⁹

Thus Sankaradeva gives an account of the mind – the individual mind – which is in reality not different from Paramātmā or the Absolute. Due to ignorance or avidyā, the individual self does not know this.¹¹⁰ He again says that not to speak of the soul, even the ego or ahamkāra and the five gross elements or pāñcha mahābhūtas in the ultimate analysis are not different from the Absolute self. For him, from the empirical point of view or Vyavahārika drṣṭi, there is a difference between the Jīva and the Brahman – the consciousness of the Jīva and the ultimate consciousness. God has divided Himself into many selves and thus the object of worship (bhajanta) becomes the worshippers.¹¹¹ Empirically, the difference is true but from the ontological point of view, there is no difference and identity alone is real.¹¹²

In this regard, we see some inconsistencies in Sankaradeva’s view. Because, ‘some scholars think that Sankaradeva at times, admits identity and at others, admits difference which is not consistent with his total view of the universe.¹¹³ If we admit two different view points of Sankaradeva, we must admit the above inconsistency. But we can say that this inconsistency is apparent. Because empirically the difference is true, but from the ontological point of view, there is no difference, and identity alone is real. He says that just as the crown and ear-ring are not different from the gold, all the names and the forms are unreal. Likewise, the consciousness – the Ego and the consciousness
of the individuals i.e. the five gross elements are not different from the ultimate point of view — not different from the Lord.\textsuperscript{114}

If we try to find out the similarity of Sankaradeva with the Form and Matter of Aristotle, we have a little of Aristotle's concept of Form as mind in his psychology. His dualism of Form and Matter or Mind and body is the same as Active and passive reason. Active reason is creative reason which is connected with the soul. Like Sankaradeva Aristotle's immaterial, imperishable and immortal soul is endless and beginningless. It is the spark of the divine in human soul as Sankaradeva says — ‘\(\text{tomāreśe āmsā āmi yata jīva yāk}\)’ (We the creatures are all the parts of You). Aristotle also showed the path of self-realization like Sankaradeva by which the Mind – body dualism can be abolished.

Spinoza tried to give a monistic explanation of the relation of mind and body. He conceives of matter and mind as two attributes of the same substance God. \textit{Madhavadeva} echoes the same thought in his \textit{Nāmghoṣā}.\textsuperscript{115}

Sankaradeva's consciousness in the case of individual self is creation of \(\text{Māyā}\) due to ignorance of Reality i.e. \textit{Brahman}. Like Sankaradeva, Spinoza also mentions two different stand-points, one is sub-specie (temporal stand-point) and the other, the eternal stand point, to merge the plurality in unity. Plurality, according to Spinoza, is due to our intellect and therefore it is in fact an illusion or appearance like \(\text{Māyā}\) of Sankaradeva.

In Hegel's view, the ultimate reality is absolute and pure consciousness and the aim of his philosophy is to discover and locate this absolute reality. Hegel suggests that the mind contains within itself the substance with which it creates nature. The Absolute is all consciousness and all power of mind. All substances and objects found in the
world are merely manifestations of this consciousness. Sankaradeva also ascribes all phenomenal existences to manifestations of the mind.

Sankaradeva’s concept of consciousness can be compared also with Fichte. For Fichte, Mind — the Ego or I is the only reality as Mind has the tendency to split itself into subject and object, the I and the Not I. Sankaradeva’s pure consciousness is the only reality and the world is the product of Maya imposed upon it. Fichte says that the world is the product of self-differentiation of this Ego. The only Reality is that Mind creates matter by self-limitation.

Thomas Hill Green’s consciousness is the mind which is the ultimate reality. It is itself free from all changes and transcends the spatio-temporal limits. Green’s Universal mind creates or perceives nature. Like Sankaradeva, Green also says that the individual mind is the product of self-limitation of the absolute mind. The human body or Man’s consciousness is a ‘Limited mode’ of world consciousness.

Sankaradeva’s consciousness has a close relationship with the different concepts of consciousness of Indian thinkers. According to Sankaracharya there is only one reality or the universal consciousness which alone exists without any duality or distinction within or without it. All distinctions of knowledge into the knower and the known are not applicable to the Absolute Reality — Pure Consciousness. As it is self-luminous, the absolute consciousness is immediately intuited. The self-consciousness i.e. the Atman can not be an object of knowledge. Just as fire cannot burn itself, the Atman cannot know itself. It cannot be an object of perception, neither mental nor intellectual apprehension, because it cannot transform itself into jñātṛ and jñeya. It can only be apprehended by higher intuition.
Sankaradeva endorses the same view regarding the pure. Consciousness as ultimate reality. He holds the finite selves within Him by His power of consciousness. It is distinctionless. He says — Brahman, the God without a beginning is all purity, He is all knowledge, all delight and is everlasting."

Sankaradeva’s *Puruṣa* as a Pure-consciousness is different from Śāṅkhya’s concept of *Puruṣa*. The Śāṅkhya’s concept of *Puruṣa* takes the place of God in Sankaradeva’s philosophy. Śāṅkhya’s *Puruṣa* i.e. consciousness is inactive while *Prakṛti* is active but blind. For *Prakṛti* by itself cannot produce the universe and *Puruṣa*, being incorporeal cannot be the material cause of the universe. Thus unlike Sankaradeva, Śāṅkhya’s *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* are two separate realities. For Sankaradeva’s consciousness is the only real ultimate Truth. It produced *Prakṛti* or unconsciousness (*Jaḍa*) from Himself. Unconsciousness has no independent reality, it exists due to ignorance, Only consciousness is real. But in Śāṅkhya, the unconscious *Prakṛti* manifests the object to the self (conscious *Puruṣa*) only when the reflection of the self is cast upon the unconscious *Buddhi* modified in the form of an object. Thus the self knows an external object only through the mental modification on which it casts its religion.

Yoga philosophy holds that “the self is always a knower, the witness, sāksīn, the seer, the spectator (*drāṣṭṛ*) so, it can never turn back upon itself and be truly self-consciousness. But it can know itself through into reflection in the pure *sattva*, unmixed with *Rajas* and *Tamas*. By super-normal intuition (*Pratibhā jñāna*). But it comes to this that while the pure self can know the empirical self, the empirical self cannot know the pure self. Like Yoga, Sankaradeva’s self as consciousness is also a
knower, the witness sāksīṁ, but not always, it remains saksin or witness only in the state of deep sleep (gabhirā nidrā). In this state the self or ātmā, the consciousness in its true nature can be realized. He says — “At the state of deep sleep, the pride (ahamkāra) with all the sense organs get merged with the self. At that time, the self — the consciousness remains the witness. Sankaradeva says the same thing that Nārāyaṇa is personified Supreme Reality. As a consciousness He remains saksi in all the activities of the world.¹¹⁹

Sankaradeva, being a theist, has much affinities with Ramanuja. According to Ramanuja, self-consciousness is an essential and inseparable feature of consciousness. Self is a conscious subject which never loses its self-hood — Ahampratyaya. The Ahampratyaya is present even in deep sleep in a dim degree. This theory of the eternal presence of self-consciousness comes conflict with Sankara’s theory of eternal presence, not of a consciousness of self or individual which is an illusory super imposition, but of a selfless and distinctionless presence of consciousness.

Sankaradeva is one with Ramanuja when he preaches that the universe is the manifestation of the supreme consciousness and Hari is eternally pure, free from blissful consciousness itself. According to the Visisṭādvaita theory, “ātman is self-illumined joyous, eternal, atomic, imperceptible to the senses, unthinkable, devoid of parts, unchangeable, the substratum of knowledge, subject to God’s control, depending on God’s existence for his own existence and attribute of God.”¹²⁰ Ramanuja’s consciousness is not a distinctionless indeterminate Reality. He only believes in the qualified Brahman as the transcendent and immanent God holding within Him as His body, the finite self and the world of matter. Likewise Sankaradeva states.
"yihetu caitanya pūrṇa paramātmā rūpe hari
hrdayate āchanta prakāśi /
tātēse indriya-gaṇa bhūtraprāṇa budhi mana
pravarte yateka jāḍa-ṛāśi ///"¹²¹

(As consciousness is full, as soul is universal, Hari dwells in the hearts of all. All senses, bodies life breath, intellect and mind are matters that subsist alone on Him).

VII. SCIENTIFIC ASPECT OF PURUSA:

Our quest for knowledge is called science. The word ‘science’ is derived from the Latin Seicio which means I know. The word Veda is derived from the Sanskrit word Vid which means to know. Thus science deals with the outer, physical world of objects and ‘Veda’ deals with knowledge of both the outer (physical) and inner (psychospiritual) world. Science is limited to the outer while ‘Vedas’ have a larger connotation as they stand for eternal truths and the comprehensive spirituality is also implicit in it. In the 19th century, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, said — “All scientific truths of modern age can be found in the Vedas.”¹²² We can see that the material well being alone cannot lead to total fulfillment. Profound knowledge of secular subjects and also Vedic treatises could not give one tranquility of mind. It is the trans-sensuous knowledge of spirit, Brahma jñāna, through which one can transcend the material and intellectual planes and can attain the goal of human perfection.

Religion and Science

Man of religion usually find it more convenient to dismiss science as irrelevant or trivial than to come to terms with it. But many scientists give the opinion that science and religion are not enemies but friends, in fact complementary. Einstein is of the view
that science is lame without religion and religion is blind without science. We see that though the ways are different, both religion and science are intended to serve man. Science, on the one hand caters to the physical needs of man while religion to all his higher needs such as love, goodness, truth and justice which lie outside the domain of science. Man cannot be happy with the fulfillment only of his physical needs. Again we see that the more one’s material wants are satisfied, the more insistent becomes one’s psychological, moral and spiritual problems.

Recent developments in science have brought about a dramatic change in our understanding of the cosmic landscape. It is now realized that the universe is a constantly unfolding story. Against this back drop, religion seems to be pitted against science. In fact, it appears that science has made religion intellectually implausible. Some thinkers feel that science rules out the existence of a personal God. Other think that the theory of a valuation makes the entire idea of divine providence and an ordered universe implausible.

Regarding the relation between religion and science, we see "....religion as a confirmation of the trust on limitless rationality of the real will not obstruct, it will only promote the work of science"123 On the other hand science had placed vast powers in the hands of man and there is an imminent danger that he may misuse them to destroy himself or even the entire human race. This treat from science can be met only by a religion, which is based on scientific and universal principles.

Science and spirituality

Both science and spirituality need to work together to understand total reality. Einstein remarked ".....Science can denature plutonium but science cannot denature
evil in the heart of man." Science merely increases knowledge but spirituality takes a truly comprehensive view of matter and spirit. Science includes only a part of human experience. While spirituality extends the supra intellectual and other subtle planes of human consciousness as it denotes the pursuit of knowledge for the Infinite. Its domain is not only of matter but also of human life, feelings, emotions and consciousness. "Modern scientists, especially geneticists, have gone so far that it appears as if the destiny of man lies in their hands. They proclaim that in the future they will make human clones according to demand and necessity. This sort of scientific revolution started in 1543 with the publication by Copernicus, the polish astronomer of the heliocentric theory (i.e. the premise that planets revolve round the sun)."

But we see that God – the Purusa – the ultimate Truth is still as necessary as ever and that the further advancement of science itself is necessarily dependent on this understanding. We have reached a point in our teleological capability where humanity, whose independence is the corner stone of the scientific edifice is threatened by the achievements of science. Science, one day killed off the nation of God that is now strengthening our belief in a 'supreme power.' Latest revelations in cosmology and quantum physics are fostering this paradigm shift.

Religion, science, spirituality and faith

Science attempts to understand how the universe works. Religion attempts to understand the purpose and meaning of the universe. If there is purpose and meaning it will affect the nature of the universe. Once we understand the meaning we can get to know the purpose. Science is said to be objective while religion is subjective.
Science merely increases knowledge but spirituality takes a truly comprehensive view of matter and spirit. There is no totality of human experience in science as it includes only a part of human experience. Spirituality extends to supra-intellectual and other subtle planes of human consciousness as it denotes the pursuit of knowledge for the Infinite.

Generally, most people do not think that science like religion, requires faith. Belief and faith are spontaneous when one is made to experience what is sought to be taught or perceived. We make so many assumptions, we believe that the laws of physics are reliable – that is a kind of faith. We create experiments that can test and verify these laws.

Perceiving the existence of the supreme scientist i.e. the Purusa

No one can deny that the universe is the outcome of intelligent placing. We can see that everything of this wonderful universe is working under the control of a supreme brain. The arrangements in nature are perfectly ordered, everything has been intelligently planned. So, there is indeed a spiritual world, a creator. It is a common understanding that there is a cause behind each action.

Some scientists believe that the universe (including all living organisms) behave like a machine, obeys definite laws and shows no marks of being influenced by a supernatural being. But we see that a machine cannot come into existence of its own. It does not grow, develop, repair and even improve itself, reproduce its own kind, think and talk, love and hate, create new ideas, set its own tasks and operate itself. Even the best of computers imply a maker, an operator and a maintainer besides its external source of energy. Even if we think of the universe as a vast machine, it is logically
proved that it has a creator ruler and director who is infinitely superior to the vast and wonderful machine as a machine cannot run without an operator.

Modern scientists are very proud of automation, and there is a scientific brain behind it. Even Albert Einstein agreed that there is a perfect brain behind all the natural physical laws. When we talk about ‘brain’ and ‘operator’ these terms imply a person, as they cannot be impersonal. He is that person who is the supreme scientists. He is a supreme engineer, under whose kind — the whole cosmos is working. In the *Bhagavadgītā, ŚriKrṣṇa* says — “The whole cosmic order is under Me. By My will it is manifested again and again and by My will it is annihilated at the end.”¹²⁶ In the same way Sankaradeva also says — “The unreal universe has come out of Thee and always appears as real.”¹²⁷ And —

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"srajantāro sraṣṭā tumī Parama Puruṣa /
kāryate lekhilu duyo nāhika mānuṣa //
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¹²⁸

(You are the supreme Person — the Creator of all creators. Your actions prove that you are not ordinary man). Again he says — You are the soul of all existence i.e. the physical object, You are *Purāṇa Puruṣa* and God witness the All. You are the sustainer of all creation.¹²⁹

Charles Sherrington, the renowned neuro-physiologists and Nobel Laureate is of the opinion that mind or spirit could not be explained away in terms of matter. He writes in his book — *Man on His nature* — “Biology cannot go far in its subjects without being met by mind. Though living is analyzable and describable by natural science, that associate of living, thought, escapes and remains refractory to natural science. In fact, natural science repudiates it as something outside its ken. A radical
distinction has therefore arisen between life and mind. The former is an affair of chemistry and physics, the latter escapes chemistry and physics.”

In the same way, Sankaradeva says that — the Purusa — the super Mind is not describable — nor perceptible through matter or physical objects — or sense organs. The Purusa — the Absolute is beyond words, for words are related to the objects or qualities of the phenomenal world. The Absolute which is infinite, cannot be expressed in words. Nothing can be predicated or ascribed to It. Hence it is said to be qualityless — devoid of qualities, as — “How shall I know Thee who is beyond quality; all the objects (quality) fail to understand that.”

Unity in diversity – Purusa is the source of all

Science has definitely established that nothing can be created out of nothing, Studying the origin of the universe, cosmologists came to the conclusion that — all the countless galaxies, suns, planets, moons were originally an emanation from one single glowing ball of super-dense matter, which is called primordial atom by some scientists and the primordial amoeba by others. Like the theistic Indian thinkers, Sankaradeva also declares that God — the Purusa created the world out of Himself — “as a spider produces a web, as trees grow out of the earth and hair out of the body.” Sankaradeva says — “God, Thou art the father, mother and whole of the world. Thou art the supreme soul and is the one and the only Lord of the Universe. Nothing exists without Thee. Thou are the cause and effect of all.”

This fundamental concept of Sankaradeva’s philosophy that everything has evolved out of God and is manifestation or concretization of Him — comes right within the sphere of science. For if all things have had a common origin it would be possible to
prove scientifically that stars and men, wood and iron, sand and sunlight, thought and electricity, food and emotions, movement and feeling are all, in essence, one and the same thing, derived from the same thing or reducible to the something. It is till now a pre-supposition of science which is yet to be proved.

**Matter and Energy are one**

According to a chemist, all the objects known to us are found to be composed of a few hundred-thousand different kinds of substances. These again, are made up of ninety odd elementary substances. The physicist shows that each atom consists of three fundamental particles, namely, protons, neutrons and electrons. All matter of the universe has been built out of these three. For science, these three elementary substances are though different from one another in practical purposes, are essentially one and the same. Because they can all be converted into one another and into radiant energy. According to Einstein, matter and energy are equivalent. So, the different forms of energy like motion, heat and electricity could be transformed into one another. Matter and energy are one just two aspects of the same reality. This matter is called Māyā of Sankaradeva. Māyā is the eternal power of God or the Puruṣa. This eternal power or sakti is called Prakṛti matter. Like matter and energy, Māyā is not separable from God and is eternally with Him. It is subordinate to God only is our sense that it has no independent existence and at the time of dissolution the latter gets merged in the former.  

**The Generating Seed of All Existence**

According to the great natural physical laws and principles, this material universe, from the microscopic atom to the galactic objects, is running like an intricate
well oiled clock work. In it \textit{Krśna} effortlessly produces vast spaceships, such as planets and stars, which are perfectly equipped and maintained. In the \textit{Bhagavadgītā}, \textit{Krśna} says — “I enter into each planet, any by My energy, they stay is orbit.’ The laws made by the supreme brain always remain perfect, they are never violated. There are innumerable examples of molecular networks so fantastically and delicately arranged that chemists cannot but wonder about the most expert hand and brain who is making all these wonderful artistic arrangements in His laboratory.”  

Sankaradeva says — “The universe has came out of thee and always appears as real.” and \textit{ŚrīKrśna} is the supreme scientist of the universe, as Sankaradeva says — “Thou art alone real and all except thee are illusory. Thou art the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe.”

Indeed, the intelligence and ability of the supreme scientist the \textit{Puruṣa} \textit{i.e.} \textit{Krśna} are inconceivable. We see the wonderful arrangements of the supreme Lord, who is creating, maintaining and guiding all living entities, small or big.

According to the \textit{Gītā} — \textit{Krśna} is the cause of all causes. Science cannot apprehend the ultimate causes Newton saw the falling of the apple, he asked why and how the apple fell. As an answer to his inquiry he discovered the laws of gravitation. But who made this law? Therefore Newton’s gravitational theory was not enough to explain the falling of the apple. So, Sankaradeva tries to establish that the ultimate Reality is the ultimate cause of all causes and effects. He says— “Thou art the cause and effect of all — “The endless moving and the non-moving things.” Sankaradeva has made it very clear that \textit{Brahman} is the only Reality and nothing exists without Him. He is the cause as well as the effect of creation. Just as ornaments of gold do not differ in
substance from gold itself, similarly there is no distinction between God as the cause and God as the effect.\textsuperscript{138}

By virtues mechanical means (telescope etc.) assumptions, empiric theories and conceptual models, cosmologists and astronomers are trying with tremendous vigor to understand what the universe is, what its stage is, and the time scale of its creation. At the present time they are speculating that there may be a tenth planet in the solar system and they are trying to locate it.\textsuperscript{139} But we see that it is impossible for science to fully discover the secrets of nature, which is the product of creation of the Infinite Being, — the supreme scientist. Saankaradeva's concept of the\textit{ Puruṣa} — the Absolute. It is beyond words — it cannot be expressed in words. To predicate qualities is to make it determinate. The famous expression like\textit{ Saccidānanda} too is not competent to define Brahman.\textsuperscript{140} Brahman — the Ultimate Reality, the secret of the Nature is above all relations and beyond the grasp of the categories of human understanding. He says — "How shall I know Thee who is beyond quality. All the objects (quality) fail to understand That."\textsuperscript{141}

This limitation is applicable to science also, though material scientists have sophisticated equipment and advanced technologies they cannot apprehend the Ultimate Reality.\textit{ Srila Prabhupada} cites the example of the philosophy of Dr. Frog, who lives in a well of three feet and has no idea how vast the Pacific Ocean is but who speculates that the Pacific Ocean might be five feet wide — ten feet deep etc., comparing it to his well. The point is that comprehending the unlimited knowledge beyond by our limited means is simply a waste of time and energy.\textsuperscript{142} So, the secret of the universe i.e. of the Brahman cannot be unfolded by the tiny brains of material scientists.
On Faith

Though scientific knowledge is always based upon the facts proved by scientific equipments, yet scientists have to agree that even in their own scientific experiments, there are many facts which cannot be proved by experiments. Everyone in the scientific community knows that mathematicians work with an imaginary number called 'i', which is the square root of minus one (√-1=1). This number does not figure among the natural numbers (1, 2, 3 etc.). However, important branches of mathematics — for example — the theory of analytical functions are based on this imaginary unit. Without the help of this branch of mathematics, various complex theories and problems cannot be solved. Thus the existence of this number cannot be denied, yet there is no experiment to prove it. In a similar manner, scientists in the field of statistical mechanics also utilize various conceptual models — ensembles, for example — to explain their theories and arguments. These are all beyond the realm of experimental science. 

Another scientific theory like Heisenberg's uncertainty principle is beyond experimental enquiry. The statement of this principle is that it is impossible to simultaneously determine the position and momentum of any object. In mathematical language, it is stated that, the product of the uncertainties in the measured values of the position and momentum (product of mass and velocity) cannot be smaller than Plank's constant. No existing experimental technique can prove this principle. However, scientists all over the world accept this statement as a fact, knowing that the experimental proof is beyond their ability. Similarly, there is no scientific experiment to prove the Third Law of Thermodynamics. This law, as formulated by Plank, states that
the entropy of a perfect crystal at absolute zero degrees is equal to zero. Factually, there is no means available for measuring directly the absolute entropies. Therefore, the proof of this law is beyond the realm of experimental science.144

From the above observations, we may conclude that if scientists are willing to accept these imaginary and conceptual models, then the knowledge of the Supreme Puruṣa must be accepted though not grasped by sense experience. Sankaradeva says that the Absolute — the Puruṣa is not in the realm of sense experience not in object of verification. So, the knowledge of Ultimate Truth is not the matter of verification — it is the matter of realization.

Science cannot give us unchangeable eternal theories because we see that the so-called scientific theories are changing constantly. We know that at the beginning of the Nineteenth century, John Dalton, in developing his atomic theory, stated that atoms could not be further divided. But after one century, it was found that atoms could be further divided into fundamental particles like electrons, protons and neutrons; so Dalton’s atomic theory could no longer be considered correct. It was also found that some atoms could emit alpha and beta particles, thereby producing new atoms, the so-called nuclear bombs are a result of these findings and so on. Thus we are led to conclude that just as past and present scientific theories are changing, the future scientific theories are also likely to change. As the theories of the material scientists are changing, it goes to prove that their brains are not perfect, actually perfect brains cannot be changed. So, we have to take perfect knowledge from the perfect brain of the Perfect Being. Like the Gītā, Sankaradeva also says —
"Thou art the Lord of the universe. Thou art the eternal Reality of the world. Thou art the vital force of all material objects and holder of the whole world. Thou art the creator of all creations, all perceiver and saviour of the earth. Thou art the director of individuals — supreme soul and the ceaser of the death of individuals."

Consciousness is the soul just as the air can be felt by touch, certain molecules can be felt by fragrance and aroma, similarly consciousness is the clear symptom of the soul. "Biologists confirm that even the smallest micro-organisms, such as bacteria, have consciousness. When consciousness enters into a material body, we call it a living body. However, when there is no consciousness in the body — in other words, when the spirit leaves the body — simply a lump of matter is left over. This phenomenon we call death." Therefore, the spirit — or the soul — the consciousness never dies and is never born. It is eternal. For Sankaradeva too, the soul is immortal and eternal. For him—

"pañcha bhūta dehā ise naṣṭa hui /
āṁār maraṇa nāi /"

(The subtle body is destroyed but the soul does not die. Soul is immortal).

Science also agrees with the view that the soul is the hidden vital force of our body. In deep sleep, the body — the senses and the mind are resting, so there must be something else which keeps all our unconscious physiological processes going, such as breathing, circulation of blood, digestion and growth. This hidden vital force is the soul, which is eternal, immortal, source of all energies, life, happiness etc. What we call birth and death are nothing but the changing of different material bodies, the replacement of old bodies with new one. As Sankaradeva says —
(We are all under the law of *karma*. Soul entering a new body means taking birth, leaving the old body means death).

*Sir John Eccles*, Noble prize winner in physiology said, “I come to the concept of the soul and its special creation by God. I believe that there is a fundamental mystery in my existence transcending any biological account of the development of my body (including my brain). And that being so, I must believe similarly for each one of you and for every human being.”

The individuals – the living entities – are fragmental spirit souls- where as *Kṛṣṇa* - the person is the supreme soul- supreme *Puruṣa* and supreme scientist. For *Sankaradeva*, individuals are *aṁśa* or parts of supreme soul. In the empirical level, the soul enjoys and perceives its own existence but in the transcendental level- this consciousness merges with the consciousness of the supreme soul.

According to the law of conservation of energy, energy can be neither created nor destroyed. The living entities are the parts or *aṁśa* of the supreme energy i.e. *Kṛṣṇa*. Therefore, the soul is eternal.

*Sankaradeva* believes in the law of *Karma*, whose scientific counterpart is the law of causation. Science believes that the universe is ruled by laws which are fixed and universal, which can be discovered and even predicted. *Enerson*, as a great scientist says that ‘cause and effect’ means end, seed and fruit ‘which’ can not be several, for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end pre-exists in the means the fruit in the seed. *Sankaradeva* also says that man is the architect of his own fate. Good deeds
bring him good and bad deeds bad results. Man is free to choose good and evil and is therefore accountable for his own actions.

**New Physics Points to Cosmic Spirit**

For the first time in human history, man has objective knowledge of an entity that fills space and time throughout the universe, representing the primary elements of reality. This entity’s existence, comprising unmanifest quantum fields and possessing the elemental blueprint of everything physical, rests on a solid scientific foundation. This source, that was present in an infinitesimal suggestion at the inception of the universe, sequentially unfolded to create the universe and everything in it. The harmony and incredible accuracy of the blueprint possessed by the source predisposes us to believe that it mirrors the intelligence of a supreme power to veritable experience of a deity.

"Just as the religious God did not create the world and leave it, the source is still active through the universe. This is so because physics at extremely high temperatures that existed at the onset of the universe is equivalent to physics at fundamentally small distances. Therefore, the manifest condition at the onset of the universe is presumed to be the same in an unmanifest, quantum physical way at or near the fabric of space. The existence of the common source at the fabric of space would be no less real than the elusive denizens of empty space known to scientists as virtual screening charges."\(^{151}\)

This entity as a source of the universe now present in all space and time, is very much akin to Sankaradeva concept of the *Puruṣa*. Science finds that the common source has an inherent quality of awareness, thereby giving credence to the existence of a cosmic spirit. This spirit is present in every element of space. Sankaradeva says —
“samasta bhūte byāpi āchu moi Hari
sabāka mānībā tumī Viṣṇu buddhi kari.”

(Thou art an existent in everything — all elements of the universe — so, treat all the beings as Viṣṇu, the consciousness.)

Micro-Physics and Metaphysics

It is of relatively recent knowledge that the Metaphysical concept of the ultimate Reality is similar to sub atomic physics. An Einsteinian physicist, while looking beyond Black Holes, found that matter is so aged and compressed, that nothing escapes from it, not even radiant energy. In the outer reaches of the universe, time does not exist and material is constructed out of non-material. No time, no mass no dimensionality. This sounds familiar to what the upaniṣadic seers have been saying about ultimate Reality. As there is no mass, no time, but all is plenum of spirit, so universe is spiritual in nature.

Theoretically, the ultimate Reality is spiritual. According to the doctrine of superimposition, this universe is a manifestation of this ultimate Reality. It is Absolute Experience as it appears as Sat-Cit-ānanda. ‘Sat’ is existence, and ‘Cit’ is consciousness. As ‘Cit’ it becomes ‘Cit Śakti’, and it appears as many by superimposition or Vivartaṇa. Then innumerable selves or quanta of cit śakti appear at this level. The concepts of mass and energy appear at this level, they pre-suppose multiplicity. Mass and Energy are relative concepts depending on each other. Energy is spiritual power. All the energy in this universe possesses this urge to return to the perfect spirituality of the Absolute. The intensity of the urge is different in different things. It is latent in the atom and potent in the mind of man. These quanta of spiritual
energy have a position but no magnitude and it has a free will which is derived from the freedom of ultimate Reality. This is the common factor between spiritual units, namely the selves, and particles in micro-physics. It is this common indeterminism that makes us equate the two. Spirit is the essence of all things in this universe. Such things have primary qualities of which one is mass. It is the essence of matter. Mass is related to energy. Mass is bound energy. Time and space depend on duality of mass and energy. When this duality ceases, they also cease to exist. These concepts of time and space and mass and energy are working concepts of science in this finite universe. But they cannot aspire to be Absolute.

Thus, Sankaradeva, arrives at the Absolute Experience, which is the first and last word, the alpha and the Omega. But in science, there is no last word as its theory, by which it arrives at the steady state of the universe, may be exploded at any time.

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