CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
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The concepts of Puruṣa, Prakṛti and Līlā in Sankaradeva's Philosophy demand an analysis in an extensive manner. In my thesis of this said topic while discussing Sankaradeva's concepts of Puruṣa, Prakṛti and Līlā, I have particularly dealt with some problems concerning these concepts which are fundamental and genuine to both Indian and Western philosophy. Western philosophy has its own equivalent terms which more or less correspond to Indian terms, viz., Puruṣa, Prakṛti and Līlā. I now propose to examine and summarise the views upheld by Sankaradeva regarding these concepts and their related problems. Before summarizing the findings and giving the personal observation on the subject of my enquiry, I feel it is necessary to have a detailed discussion with a view to bringing out the traditional and modern views of Indian and Western thinkers to make a comprehensive study of the concepts.

From the foregoing discussions in the different chapters, it seems that though the problems of Puruṣa and Prakṛti and Līlā are the main problems of Sankaradeva's philosophy, yet it is very difficult to arrive at a final solution. In the history of thought, the problems of Puruṣa Prakṛti and Līlā have not been discussed always from the same angle of vision which can satisfy the demands of reason. These are the fundamental problems of philosophy. Sankaradeva was a traditionalist. His philosophy is based on traditional concepts, belief and thought. These concepts are not empirically verifiable as they are related to faith.

In the introductory chapter, I have presented the origin of the concepts and their historical development. The first concept Puruṣa is originated in the Ṛgveda, which is the first and earliest written document of human civilization of the world.
Anthropologically the Puruṣa is male principle, Metaphysically it is the self the Reality and from the religious point of view it is God. Referring to the concept of God, Max Muller observes. - “We see in the Vedas, the theogony itself, the very birth and growth of the gods.¹ In that ancient period the tendency was definitely towards polytheism. The Rgveda is replete with hymns addressed to various gods inhabiting the three regions, viz. the earth, the atmosphere and the heaven. As their knowledge and meditative power increased, the Vedic seers began to realize that multiplicity of gods cannot be true. This tendency is clearly noticed first in the insistence of the ṛṣis in glorifying one deity above all according to exigency. This tendency has been termed ‘henotheism’ by Max Muller.² The henotheistic ideas were gradually replaced by monotheism as the henotheism paved the way for monotheism and that momentous moment ultimately did arrive when the seers could have a vision of the true Reality leading them finally to establish the supreme truth. “The priests and poets with words make into many the hidden reality which is but One.”³

The philosophical tendencies implicit in the Vedic hymns are developed in their full glory in the Upaniṣads. The Puruṣa sūkta and Nāsadiya sūkta of the Rgveda contained seeds of the highest philosophy i.e. the concepts of Puruṣa and Prakṛti. The ultimate Reality was termed Brahman or the (ātman) by the Upaniṣads. It is the significant achievement of human thought. According to the Purāṇas, the Ultimate Reality is the one, non-dual consciousness. It is One the Supreme Spirit — that has been variously called the Brahman, Paramātmān and Bhāgavata. As Sankaradeva’s philosophy is based on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, he establishes that there is one, One Reality — the Supreme soul and the individual soul are one and the same. God is one
but appears as many. *Puruṣa* is another name given to God. *Puruṣa* is self—*Puruṣa* is consciousness — *Puruṣa* is God, *Puruṣa* is One — non-dual. These concepts are viewed from the view point of Reality. *Puruṣa* is the creator sustainer and the destroyer of the universe. He is the cause of all creation but he has no cause for His existence. Sankaradeva called Śīkrṣṇa as *Puruṣa* — Parama *Puruṣa* — the Great Being. But due to ignorance individuals fail to recognize the Great God in Śīkrṣṇa. For him, jīvas — the individuals are not different from the Supreme Being as ether in the pot is not different from the ether in the universe. In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, the Lord *Kṛṣṇa* occupies the highest position. *Kṛṣṇa* — the name is associated with the human form, the son of Devakī and Vāsudeva, is the Absolute Being — One without a second. *Kṛṣṇa* is Nārāyana — the cosmic God of *Mahābhārata*; *Viṣṇu* — the Vedic sun God and even Brahman — the Absolute of Vedānta. Thus we see that Sankaradeva is a monist. His ultimate Reality is Pure consciousness and the rest is all in a very material in character (*Jaḍa*).

The material world is called *Prakṛti* in Sankaradeva’s philosophy. *Prakṛti* is primordial matter. According to Sankaradeva, *Prakṛti* is energy — power of God. It has no independent existence. *Prakṛti* has been termed as Māyā in Sankaradeva’s philosophy. Speaking about the origin of *Prakṛti*, it is observed by Sankaradeva. Before creation only the *Brahman* existed. He became bifurcated in the forms of Māyā and jīvas reflected therein — the sight and the seer. The first is *Prakṛti* and the latter is *Puruṣa*. *Prakṛti* is an inseparable energy or sākti of God. It produces an unreal world which appears as real. *Prakṛti* is not separable from God and is eternally with Him.
Thus from the concepts of Puruṣa and Prakṛti it is clear that as a monist philosopher, Sankaradeva gives the monistic views of the ultimate reality — that the Ultimate Reality is One. One is only real, others are unreal. Therefore, Sankaradeva has similarity with Sankaracharya’s Advaita Vedānta. Like Sankaracharya, Sankaradeva’s reality is only One — Puruṣa is only one Reality. Māyā or Prakṛti is the Power which reveals the unreal and conceals the real — (avastuka dekhāvaya vastuka āvartī). Thus Sankaradeva admits the power of concealment and projection (āvarāṇa and vikṣepan sākṣti) as the unique functions of Māyā or Prakṛti.

Sankaradeva admits that the world appearance is real. The world including all living beings and physical objects are only names and forms which have no separate existence except Brahman i.e. Parama Puruṣa. Thus all these are, in reality, not separate from Brahman.4 Like Sankaracharya’s Brahman Sankaradeva’s Puruṣa is Nirguṇa or no qualities can be ascribed to It.5 The concept of Saguṇa Brahman is the Personal God of Sankaradeva and like Sankaracharya, he also believes that the phenomenal world is an appearance. To explain the world appearance in the Ultimate Reality — the Puruṣa, Sankaradeva also employs the famous simile sarpa-rajja-bhrama.6 Both Sankaradeva and Sankaracharya hold in common that Āvidyā or ignorance is the cause of jīva’s bondage and in the ultimate analysis there is no difference between God and the individual self. In this way, we see that as his metaphysical doctrine Sankaradeva’s advaitavāda is not different from Sankaracharya’s Advaita Vedānta. So, Sankaradeva establishes the Advaitavāda in his philosophy.

The philosophy of Sankaradeva presents some points of resemblance with the system of Ramanuja, therefore some critics are of the opinion that Sankaradeva’s
religious philosophy belongs to Ramanuja’s Visiṣṭādvaitavāda (qualified Monism) school. Ramanuja’s Brahman having parts i.e. matter and selves and these are as real as God or Brahman. Brahman possesses real parts (Visiṣṭa) i.e. matter (Prakṛti or Māyā) and the individual selves constitute the body of God or Brahman. Ramanuja’s God is full of distinctions as these are Viṣāliya bheda or hetero-geneous distinction; the sajāliya bheda or homogeneous distinction and the svāgatiya bheda or internal distinction. But Sankaradeva’s God has no such distinctions as he says — Brahmato bhedaḥina. To Ramanuja, the universe is real, but to Sankarādeva, the universe is unreal or false. According to Sankaradeva, Brahman does not undergo any real change during creation but to Ramanuja, the Brahman really undergoes modifications. For Ramanuja, only through Bhakti one can attain liberation. Sankaradeva also mentions that Bhakti is the only means to all classes of people high and low. Thus it is obvious that though Sankaradeva has some similarities with Ramanuja, yet he has not followed the Visiṣṭādvaitavāda of Ramanuja.

The problem of Puruṣa and Prakṛti is one of the most important problems of Indian philosophy. In western terminology, this problem is the problem of mind and matter. This philosophical problem is concerned with the general framework of our thinking about mind and matter and their everyday relationships with the other’s minds also. It deals with the problems of ‘One’ becoming ‘many’ and the relation between the finite and the infinite. The subject of these problems has its intrinsic philosophical interest which makes it a natural focus of philosophical attention to the fundamental question that can be raised so far as the concepts of mind and matter — soul and body— nature and supernature— God and man are concerned. By this discourse, an
honest endeavour is made to provide a detailed interpretation of these fundamental concepts like *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* in the second and third chapters of this thesis.

A monist philosopher interprets all the changes in the world — all the manifold appearances in the world in terms of a single principle — single reality. In the case of material objects we may see that a single substance assumes various forms as — there is water in the world but when it is heated, it becomes vapour and when it is cold, it becomes ice. This is the exact view of Sankaradeva’s concept of *Puruṣa*. *Puruṣa* is one and only Ultimate Reality. He maintains that the essence is One — but it appears as many. It is interpreted variously by different thinkers.

The concept of *Puruṣa* of Sankaradeva is the concept of ‘One’. *Puruṣa* is the only and one reality. Regarding this ‘One’ and only ultimate reality and the appearance of ‘many’ i.e. the manifold universe, the question arises as to how do the various things — how does the manifold universe arise out of the basic or ultimate ‘One’ reality? The different thinkers of the west presented some views like the process of transformation, separation and condensation and Rarefaction etc. to explain the process of the birth of many out of ‘One’. Sankaradeva’s concept of *Prakṛti* or *Māyā* is an answer to the problem of ‘One’ becoming or appearing ‘many’. The relation of finite to infinite, ‘One’ to ‘many’ is inexplicable and no one can describe it in positive terms. Sankaradeva rightly employed metaphors and similes to explain it. Sankaradeva is also found to use the simile of the part and the whole to signify the relation between *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* which has created maximum confusions among the scholars. If the whole is real so is the part. Some scholars (like Dr. H.V.S. Murthy, Dr. B.K. Baruah and Rai Saheb K.L. Baruah) think that Sankaradeva on this point comes close to Ramanuja.
However our observation does not corroborate with such view. "Sankaradeva’s strong assertion on the illusoriness (mithyātva) of the manifold universe does not allow us to accept such a view." ¹⁰

To Ramanuja the universe is as real as God for the universe is a part of God. But for Sankaradeva, the world appearance is not real as Ramanuja’s world. Though like Ramanuja, Sankaradeva approves the whole and part relation of God and the world — Puruṣa and Prakṛti, on certain complex situations, yet he disagrees with Ramanuja on the basic point of the reality of the world. He endorses the view of the world illusoriness as he says —

"athira dhana jana jīvana jauvana
   athira chu saṃsāra /
putra parivāra sabahi asāra
   karobo kāheri sāra //" ¹¹

(Wealth and people, life and youth, the son and the family, even the world is not real, whom shall we take as real?).

In Ramanuja, the whole is always the whole and the part is always the part for which the ‘whole’ does not become the part and the ‘part’ does not become the whole. So, for Ramanuja, there is no absolute identity between the individual self or the world and God. But Sankaradeva admits the absolute identity between the God and the world as the latter is wholly dependent upon the former — as an outcome of It. Some critics are of opinion that at times Sankaradeva admits the difference between the God and the world “which is not consistent with his total view of the universe." ¹² But, in this case, we have the answer that from the empirical point of view there is difference between the part and whole. Due to ignorance we see difference between the God and the
universe. But from the ontological point of view there is no difference — the whole and the part do not differ from each other,\textsuperscript{13} there is only identity. So, identity is only real. Regarding the problem — “If the whole is real, so is the part” we can also have the same answer that — the part is real as the whole in the empirical level. We cannot know the unreality of this universe due to our ignorance. But in the transcendental level the part cannot be real as the whole.

Another objection against the doctrine of \textit{Māyā} is relating to the basis where from \textit{Māyā} originates and operate or where from does \textit{Prakṛti} originate or operate? Though this question is illegitimate as — “The followers of Sankaracharya seem to have no clear and positive answer to this. They say that the very question is illegitimate.”\textsuperscript{14} but Sankaradeva’s conception regarding this, given the answer in appropriate manner. For Sankaradeva’s \textit{Prakṛti} is the magical power of \textit{Puruṣa}. \textit{Prakṛti} appears from the \textit{Puruṣa} and again disappears in It. \textit{Prakṛti} is eternal power of \textit{Puruṣa}. It is not separable from \textit{Puruṣa} and is eternally with Him. It has no independent existence and at the time of dissolution \textit{Prakṛti} gets merged into \textit{Puruṣa}.\textsuperscript{15}

Sankaradeva’s concept of \textit{Puruṣa} is One, but we experience many in the manifold universe. The appearance of the universe is found as ‘many’. So, how does ‘one’ become ‘many’ is the problem faced by all monist philosophers. The concept of \textit{Prakṛti} is the key to this problem. Through this concept, Sankaradeva tries to explain the relation between the finite and the infinite as it is inexplicable to describe it in positive terms. Sankaradeva employs the simile of the clay and the pot gold and the golden ornaments to mean that ultimate reality is ‘one’ and appears as many like pots and ornaments and these are illusory forms and names. According to him the crown and
earning are not different from gold, the names and form are unreal in the ultimate sense. The names and forms are real only in the empirical sense. From the metaphysical point of view, the ego and the five gross elements are not distinct from Puruṣa – the ultimate reality.¹⁶ The cause of the ‘many’ or the Prakṛti from the ‘one’ (Puruṣa) is lack of knowledge i.e. ignorance. Like Sankaracharya’s advaitavāda, Sankaradeva also speaks of ignorance or ‘Avidyā’ as the cause of ‘many’. These distinctions between ‘one’ and ‘many’ or Puruṣa and Prakṛti are meaningful only at the surface level- empirical level and for some specific purposes and they need to be resolved in the ultimate state.

In Indian epistemology, Vidyā stands for the absolute or unconditioned knowledge of the ‘Total Reality’ or Reality of the ‘whole’. Vidyā is the knowledge of the Brahman which is True – ultimately true for all times. It is not acquired by empirical means or through sense experience and not verifiable by empirically. It is self-illuminous and self evident and leads to self realization. On the other hand, Avidyā is the knowledge of an aspect of Reality. It is acquired by empirical means or through sense experience. It is relational and conditional knowledge of the impermanent universe or many’ or Prakṛti the empirical Reality. It is not truth. Because its truth or falsity is dependent upon certain conditions. Sankaradeva’s concept of Avidyā is only appearance. It appears as real. Like the snake falsely appearing in the rope, Prakṛti appears in Brahman i.e. Puruṣa as real Avidyā appears as Vidyā like clouds appearing and disappearing in the sky, the Prakṛti the Avidyā appears and again disappears in Puruṣa. According to Sankaradeva the universe is unreal, which has come out of the Puruṣa and always appears as real.¹⁷
Thus ‘all empirical knowledge is Avidya in the sense that it is believed to be true and the moment its falsity is exposed belief in its truth is withdrawn. In it there is always a super – imposition of conceptual categories upon pure experience and this renders it subject to built in falsification.’

In Sankaradeva’s epistemology also Avidya is known as Aparāvidya — knowledge as information and Vidya is known as Parā-vidya – knowledge as wisdom. Parāvidyā is the unconditioned knowledge of the whole i.e. Puruṣa and Aparāvidyā is partial and conditioned knowledge of appearance of the same Reality. Here a question arises as – can the Avidya and Vidya be evaluated? As both Parāvidyā and Aparāvidyā are knowledge and hence true and valuable. So, though Parā and Apara are different in subject matters, the Parāvidyā transcends the Aparāvidyā as the whole transcends its parts. So, this difference does not make one more valuable than the other. Sankaradeva’s spiritualistic approach to knowledge is that both Vidya and Avidya are not mutually exclusive with each other. “They are complementary and have a logical order of prior and posterior, Avidyā being a stepping stone to Vidya.” As our intellect is limited and inadequate to grasp the ultimate reality i.e. Puruṣa, as a seeker of ultimate truth, we have to know the nature and bounds of both Vidya and Avidya, this is Brahman realization- the self realization.

Our existence is composed of two different entities- these are Mind and Matter-God and nature, self and other, Puruṣa and Prakṛti etc. Regarding the questions of reality and unreality, independent and dependent existence, and their relations to each other there are different views.
In the Cartesian philosophy, a dualism is made by Rene Descartes between mind and body, the two are regarded as separate substances that mind is an entity separate and distinct from the body. It is thought that the interaction between them is impossible. Descartes establishes the connection between them through the pineal gland. But the pineal gland is physical, so the original assumption of the possibility of the interaction between mind and body is contradicted. G. Ryle also criticizes his dualism as Descartes’ concept of mind to be a ‘ghost in the machine.’

Besides dualism, the epiphenomenalism regards that bodily events can cause mental events but mental events can never cause bodily events. Many Christian scientists would go so far as to maintain that all bodily events for example, the activity in our sense organs during perception are caused solely by mental activity.

This is the view of Sankaradeva regarding the relation between Mind and body, that anything that ever happens at all happens only in the mind. Because as an idealist, like the subjective Idealist philosopher of the eighteenth century George Berkeley, he holds that only minds exist and that matter and in particular bodies do not exist at all, except in the mind.

In the Sāṁkhya philosophy, the mind and body are both grouped together, both considered as the results of Prakṛiti which is fundamentally a material principle i.e. matter. So, the Prakṛti is physical, unconscious, Jāda. The other independent entity is Puruṣa, whose very nature is that of conscious luminosity and inactivity. Though Sāṁkhya tries to connect the two separate entities to produce the creation, it still remains mysterious as to how the unconscious principle assumes the consciousness that
belongs only to *Puruṣa*. So, the consciousness of *Puruṣa* remained a mystery in the Sāṅkhya philosophy.

Sankaradeva’s concepts of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* are different from Sāṅkhya. The Sāṅkhya concept of *Puruṣa* takes the place of God in Sankaradeva’s philosophy.²¹ He is the *Saguṇa Brahman* — He is Mind. This God produced *Prakṛti* — nature or matter from Himself.²² Unlike Sāṅkhya, Sankaradeva’s *Prakṛti* or matter has no independent existence. After creation or at the time of dissolution, *Prakṛti* — the matter get merged into God.²³ or the Mind. Thus the concepts of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* of Sankaradeva’s philosophy are able to solve the problem of dichotomy between Mind and Matter or Mind and body dualism. Like Advaitavāda, Sankaradeva also takes the help of *Pratibimbavāda* to explain how the ‘One’ Absolute appears as ‘many’. Like the same sun appears as many in the different receptacles of water.²⁴ The Absolute or the *Puruṣa* is reflected on the individual mind and appears as ‘many’. He says —

"eka Brahman āche sarva dehata prakaṭe / yena eka ṛkāśā prayeka ghate ghate ṛkāśa ॥²⁵"

(One *Brahman* is present in all the human beings like the same sky present in different jars).

Thus Sankaradeva explains the process of creation by explaining the concepts of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* and establishing their relations. Sankaradeva rejects the reality of manifold universe. For him, creation means not real change, or transformation of one to another, but it is merely an appearance. Sankaradeva’s creation is only apparent change of One *Puruṣa*. Sāṅkhya’s *Puruṣa* is not One but many and they do not differ in essence. Sankaradeva’s creation or material appearance are the manifestation or *Vivarta* of One *Puruṣa*, but not *parināma* or real transformation of Absolute. Sankaradeva’s
Puruṣa is One all pervading Absolute entity. To him, the universe appears in Brahman, and as such it has no real status.

The concept of creation and dissolution is given by Sankaradeva in his philosophy as the circle of creation and dissolution. The development of the worldly process is sometimes bear the reflections of the Śāṅkhya. When God or Puruṣa longed for creation, Prakṛti came out of Him. Prakṛti, being inseminated by the will of God consequently gave birth to Mahat, the first principle of Prakṛti. Three Gods — Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśwara arise, respectively, out of three guṇas, rajas, sattva and tamas. Brahma is concerned with the act of creation, Viṣṇu with the protection and Maheśwara i.e. Śiva with the destruction of the universe.

The circular process of creation and dissolution cannot limit or condition Puruṣa from His absoluteness. The Kalpa or the circular process occurs only in the empirical level — Vyavahārika jagat — not in the ultimate level or Paramārthika jagat. This process is held in Prakṛti — not in Puruṣa. Prakṛti has no independent existence, so this process cannot limit or condition Puruṣa from His absoluteness.

Thus the concepts of Puruṣa and Prakṛti in Sankaradeva’s philosophy endeavour to solve the Mind and body problem of Modern philosophy, Mind and Matter are not separate entities, they are basically One. Prakṛti or Matter is not wholly different from Puruṣa — the Mind, and it is only because of its being neither real nor unreal that identification of it with the Puruṣa — the Mind, is made possible.

Such reference to oneness is also implicitly describable in modern physics. Modern Physics has successfully arrived at a residuum of affirmation — that, from a neutral ground, an undifferentiated field of force which is neither mental nor physical,
arise all our physical, conceptions.\textsuperscript{27} Thus it seems that science in positing an impersonal and nonmaterial character to the basic aspect of the universe — the all pervasive ‘field of energy’ has approximated the sublimation of the ‘many’ — Prakṛti into the unity of spirit — Puruṣa — the One as insistently demanded by Sankaradeva.

The problem of Līlā is another important problem in Sankaradeva’s philosophy. In the fourth chapter, an honest endeavour is made to illustrate clearly that play i.e. Līlā is associated with Sankaradeva’s writing in a positive way. In his philosophy Līlā is used extensively. Generally he termed Līlā as a divine activity of God i.e. Kṛṣṇa. Regarding the motive of Sankaradeva for using the term Līlā we may observe the following.

Firstly, Sankaradeva uses Līlā as a technique of cult, as a vehicle or mode of expression for cultic as well as devotional activity. Līlā may function as a technique, whereby one may transcend one’s individuality, one’s limited position in space and time. It is also a means of extending devotee’s devotional feelings and to abolish ego or to expand self.

Secondly. Līlā is used to create an appropriate context in which the divine human relationship may be established. The joy of the relationship its bliss impels man to express himself in play. Kṛṣṇa Himself, in Sankaradeva’s philosophy, is a great player, merrily playing endlessly in eternal Vṛndāvana, while his heaven is a sporting ground par excellence. This relationship of God and man takes place in Līlā, that is outside the ordinary, amusement or enjoyment. Thus, Sankaradeva tries to establish a bridge between God and man — nature and supra-nature.
Lastly, we see that Sankaradeva uses *Līlā* as a phenomenon which is regarded as peculiarly religious and clearly divine. Sankaradeva regarded play as divine activity. *Kṛṣṇa* is a great player and his activities are termed as *Līlā*. So, in *Bhakti* cult of Sankaradeva, *Līlā* is holy because God who is worshipped reveals Himself as the Divine player 'par excellence'.

Thus we find that Sankaradeva successfully employs the term *Līlā* in his writings. *Līlā* is not a *Vāda* or doctrine. A doctrine always deals with the constitution of the world, the transcendent etc., but *Līlā* deals with the activities of Divine or of the sacred. Sankaradeva usually narrates and unfolds the nature of divine and sacred activities with the help of *Līlā*, to reach easily the hearts of the common people. Sankaradeva employs the term *Līlā* as a Myth to convey the higher religious or moral ideas among the common people. He uses the term *Līlā* sometimes to serve as symbols to establish the relation between nature and supra-nature God and man—*Puruṣa* and the individual self. *Līlā* is a significant term. It is not accessible by reason. It cannot be proved by science—or any empirical evidences. Therefore, Sankaradeva may face the objection that when reason fails, he employs the term *Līlā*. It is true that *Līlā* is beyond reason or scientific verification. It is based on faith only. Thus *Līlā* is faith, Kierkegaard says about faith as—“....faith begins precisely there where thinking leaves off.”

Sankaradeva is not a methodical philosopher. Yet he is not wholly unaware of all the concepts of philosophy. Almost all the significant philosophical concepts are present in his writings. So, it will not be unwise on our part to recognize him as a great philosopher of medieval age of India. He is a monist philosopher and mainly influenced by the philosophy of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Bhagadgītā*. We see that *Bhāgavata* is
not a systematic work of philosophy. It is more religious than philosophical. Yet, it has
a philosophical basis which has two aspects of theoretical and practical. Theoretically,
it is Absolute monism as it believes on only One God who is variously called Brahman,
Paramātmā, Viṣṇu, Hari, Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa etc. From the practical point of
view, Bhāgavata preaches dharma — religion as a means of realizing God without any
motive and it should be performed with sincerity of heart by devotee, who have freed
themselves from anger, passion, jealousy and attachment to all kinds of worldly
objects. Such a devotee becomes Brahmajñā or the knower of the Absolute and this
knowledge naturally leads him to liberation or supreme bliss.29 Like Bhāgavata school,
Sankaradeva believes in the existence of One Absolute God — the Puruṣa and the
others i.e. Prakṛti as unreal or illusory, his philosophy can be rightly called Advaitavāda
or Monism.

However, ignoring the immense contributions of Sankaradeva to the philosophy
of culture to this region, he is merely known by majority of the people as a religious
preacher. Sankaradeva introduces Neo-Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. “He possessed all the
saintly qualities and a robust healthy physique. His artistic talent helped him much in
propagating the Neo-Vaiṣṇava religion.”30 As his religion is in the main the religion of
the Bhāgavata purāṇa, so his religion is Vaiṣṇava dharma, but it is not a religion of
worshipping Viṣṇu, the popular god of the Vedas. The Supreme Being in his religion is
Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva Nārāyaṇa, or Hari, Mādhava etc. His religion is known by several
names as — Bhāgavata Dharma, eka śāraṇa nāma-dharma, Mahāpurusiyā dharma etc.
In that sense, he may also be called a monotheist. He preaches a religion of supreme
surrender to the One and therefore, his creed is known as eka śāraṇa-nāma-dharma. In
there is one God, Vasudeva Krsna and there is none else other than the one. The concept of Purusa which is known as Krsna Hari, Narayana, Madhava etc. in his religion – as the object of worship –devotion. So, the worship of other gods and goddesses is strictly prohibited. However, metaphysically Sankaradeva has proved himself as an incorrigible Monist or a Non dualist or an Advaitin.

Sankaradeva propagated his new religion at a time when ritualism was gaining ground with occasional intrusions of ultra-religious animism and occultism. In order to do away with the plurality of Gods, he is logically proceeding against the theological basis of polytheism. He emphasizes the unity of essential Godhead. He holds that selfless devotion is the only way to attain the intuitive apprehension of God. The most fruitful ways of devotion are sravana and kirtana of the glories of God, i.e. the chanting the name of Hari. He totally discourages the extreme emotionalism, unnecessary intellectual disputes excessive ritualistic practices, etc. On the contrary he emphasizes the selfless love for God, good conduct towards all the living beings. His religion is the religion of the common man as he prescribes a very simple mode of religious worship which is completely free from ritualistic complexities and so the easiest way of attaining God. Like Ajamila of the Ajamila Upakhyan of Sankaradeva, one can get rid of all sins and sufferings of the chanting the name of Hari.

Thus Sankaradeva teaches the Bhakti cult as the only and best way to reach the ultimate truth or perfection. His loving devotion to God has been and is undoubtedly a great moral force in human history. As he says human life is transient and illusory except devotion, we can make our life real only by devotion to Hari. It is indeed an unfailing means to attain real success in living the religious life.
From the foregoing chapters, it is clear that the concept of 'Eka sārana' and unqualified devotion are unique in Sankaradeva's cult. All other founders of Bhakti cult like Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Vallabha, Chaitanya, Jnanadeva, Namadeva and Ramananda advocated the worship of Rādhā, Rukmini, Sītā, Lakṣmī, etc. respectively as the case may be along with Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Nārāyana and so on. It seems to be a queer approach to the problem of one supreme Reality—only one God, and at the same time paying equal importance to the other co-concepts like Rādhā, Laxmi, Sītā etc. Thus most of his contemporary religious philosophers excluding Sankaradeva himself are not advocating consistent non-dualism. Sankaradeva practised in his life whatever he cherished as philosophical ideas. As he always tried to correlate his philosophy and religious practice, in a harmonious manner, he could exert his influence on his followers to imbibe the same spirit.

His philosophical teachings accompanied by his pragmatic activities establish Sankaradeva as a great humanistic philosopher. Hence it is unwise to label him only as a religious philosopher. His life and benevolent service to the laity exemplify his great humanitarian ideals. Welfare of the down trodden was the motto of his life. In the Middle age, Sankaradeva could exhibit his fore-sightedness as he could read the pulse of the Indian people long before many eminent Indians (like B.G. Tilak, M.K. Gandhi, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan etc. of the 20th century) that in India, any socio-cultural-change is possible only through the aid of religion. He realized that religion is the best means but way to teach people— to unite people to do welfare for mass people. His teachings teach us that the act of welfare service to man is the service to God. So, he took the help of religion the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism which is different from other forms of Vaisnavism. His
Neo-Vaisnavism is that religion which looked forward, and humanized Īśvara making Him the symbol of infinite love and patience. He asserted that Puruṣa or God is gracious and merciful and both the virtuous and the vicious shall receive Divine blessings. It is indeed true that when man himself becomes the emitting source of eternal strength, his thoughts words and deeds influence all those who come in touch with him. As a philanthropist, he considers all lives – the individuals to be equal. All creations of the world reflect the Divine truth. Hence they all should be treated equally and mercifully. Sankaradeva is disinterested in the heavenly happiness and like a true mystic provides universal peace which is the long cherished goal of humanity. He is that great man who throughout his life worked for the welfare of mankind and tried to overthrow the human bondage of casteism and other social evils from Indian society and thereby bringing mankind to the vicinity of the Tagorean concept of universal man.

The vortex of questions which agitate the modern mind in the present century are: Is Sankaradeva’s teaching relevant to the 21st century? Does the age of modern science and technology make his teaching most outdated and obsolete? Has his religion simply remained as a conventional religion? Is there any impracticability to follow the path shown by Sankaradeva?

In the foregoing chapters, an honest endeavour has been made to discuss the important concepts of Sankaradeva’s philosophy and their relevance in the modern age. The word ‘Modern’ is a dynamic concept. Today’s modern things may be classical or puranic to morrow Sankaradeva’s teachings may not seen to have social import for today’s society. But his spirit of universality, sense of self control, feeling of well
being of the laity, notion of simplicity, practicability, modernity etc. make his teaching relevant even to modern age of science and technology.

We have most humbly shown the extra ordinary significances of his teachings. The motive and means of his theory and practice, the practicability of his ideals, the universality of his humanism etc. which have cited ample evidences that Sankaradeva is relevant for all ages including the modern age.

Sankaradeva's concept of faith is not far away from Indian tradition. Sankaradeva studied all the Hindu scriptures and started his social reformation on the basis of his faith. It may be said that on the fertile soil of the Vedas, the Gītā, the Bhāgavata, Sankaradeva made his unique interpretation of Hinduism and founded his Bhakti cult known as Eka sāraṇa nāṁ dharma. As a founder of Neo-Vaiṣṇava movement, he abolishes the caste barrier, the intermediary priests between God and devotee and the barter system in the name of religion. The main features of his nāṁ dharma are: (i) the worshiping of only one God, who is Lord Kṛṣṇa; (ii) rejection of all ritualistic section of the Vedas and the preaching of the mode of worship as śravaṇa, Kīrtana and the chanting the name of Hari. (ii) acquisition of ‘Devotion’ in the pious company. (iv) there is no casteism, untouchability (v) self control i.e. purification of mind, etc. find that Sankaradeva's nāma dharma is different on certain points from other pan Indian Bhakti movements. Hindu religion, in a broader sense, consists of catholicity, universality and other such virtues. Sankaradeva's Eka sāraṇa nāṁ dharma embodies all the virtues of Hinduism. The chief contribution of Sankaradeva is that he applied Hindu ideals through his Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement among all sections of people in North East India. He could democratize the lofty ideals of Hinduism by
making them very simple in observation. He could unite the people of North Eastern region of India including all castes and tribes and religions and endeavoured to form a classless society.

Sankaradeva’s *nāma dharma* shows the path of salvation of mankind. His concept of liberation embraces entire humanity as there is no discrimination between man and man in his doctrine. So, he prescribes the means for the salvation of the mankind as a whole. Sankaradeva’s *Bhakti* cult is a practical method for spiritual liberation. The life of Sankaradeva is the finest example and proof for his relevancy; because his teachings show that how can an individual rise to the summit of sublimity of the *Bhakti* ideal. His *Bhakti* cult shows that even after leading a vigorous purposeful and simple or luxurious life both in the domestic and social sphere, one could achieve detachment from gross materialism through the practice of ethical discipline. As a great saviour of mankind Sankaradeva could practically guide the mass people with his hard struggle and unceasing effort and provide a royal passage, for the salvation of men from all types of bondages.

The element of humanism in Sankaradeva’s philosophy is also evident in the recognition of *Jīvanmukti*. Such liberation can be attained even in one’s lifetime performing good works and achieving values. According to Sankaradeva, a true devotee sees God in everything in the world and finds Him in the form of Love. Further, a real devotee does not hanker after *Videha mukti* for his constant wish is to enjoy *Bhakti* for the Lord perpetually. Thus the philosophy of devotion and Love has universal appeal, for which people from all castes are attracted towards it. In fact, it is the true religion of
the masses which gives opportunity to everybody for self-transcendence in the spiritual sphere.

Sankaradeva says about self-transcendence, Man can transcend himself. But how? For him self-transcendence is a spiritual endeavour which gives the Jīvan mukti. As a spiritual endeavour self-transcendence needs the moral progress. For healthy society and individual Sankaradeva laid emphasis on the need of moral purity in daily life. He advises all to keep away from greed, falsehood, desire, anger etc. and to live on purity - non-violence, and self-discipline. Such disciplined life of the individual promotes 'social peace' to a great extent. Due to mental disturbances and anxieties man may commit acts that may be harmful for the others. Keeping such situations in mind, Sankaradeva advises the necessity of 'self-control', 'Ātmān śūdhi.'

The 'self-control' is the best ethical code of Sankaradeva not for his age only but it is more valuable and relevant to the present age of society. Man is the supreme creation of God and our mind is most mysterious than our body. To have control upon it is very difficult and without controlling it we cannot live a peaceful life. Attachment and greed for wealth lead us away from God. So, Sankaradeva teaches us that all worldly things are illusions, only God is true. Thus Sankaradeva stresses upon self-control and self-purification to acquire mental peace. Sankaradeva's concept of action is also more relevant in the modern age of science and technology, because science assays the properties of matter, renders them through technology to the services of men, helps generating immense wealth and resources. But it always avoids the dictum of ethics in its distribution so much so that a few individuals or nations amassed huge resources resulting a bulk of deprived ones. Again the moral degradation of to-day in our society
of Assam as well as in India also, due to the degradation in value systems. Though science has minimized pangs of diseases and improvised communications for life to be comfortable and much more are yet to come, but the immoral and unrestricted wealth has enhanced social and individual evils. The ultimate dictum of Sankaradeva for emancipation is detachment to mundane allurements — which should be cultivated.

Sankaradeva’s philosophy teaches us the art of living a successful and happy life. The treasure of success of one’s life lies on satisfactory ending of the problems hidden in life and may imply both gain or loss, victory or defeat. Happiness as a mental state implies the stoic propensity embedded in sanity and holiness and may sustain joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain that may appear in our phenomenal existence on earth. Therefore it is pertinent to follow the path prescribed by Sankaradeva to develop individual’s personality with which one can face the battle of life fearlessly viewing alike life and death. The teachings of Sankaradeva, basically convey universality and oneness of mankind.

Sankaradeva’s ideology including his ethical principles and socio-religious ideals has the capacity to protect the evil doers from violence, drug abuse, illicit sex, alcoholism and all other satanic vices that allure them and lead them to self-destruction. Socio-religious organizations with his ideology can play a pivotal role to reach a constructive stratum of our social well-being. However, the first necessity is to follow his principles at the individual level; so that his views on ‘self-knowledge’ and ‘self-purification’ can reveal their relevance in modern age and can play the desired role for the healthy growth and well-being of the society.
"The destiny of civilized humanity depends more than ever on the moral forces it is capable of generating."  

Notes and references


3. Ibid., page 56.


5. ‘Bhakti-Ratnākār’ — V/2 note.


9. Ibid., Verse – 1663.

10. ‘Advaitavāda in Sankaradeva’s Theology’ — Chetia, Dr. Bepin, pages 22, 23.


17. Ibid., Kīrtan Ghoṣā, Verse – 1669.


19. Ibid., page 3.
20. 'The Concept of Mind' — Gilbert Ryle, pages 2, 3.


22. Ibid., Verse – 45.

23. Ibid., Verse – 50.


27. 'The Concept of Māyā' — Reyna, Ruth, page 92.


30. ‘Advaitavāda’ in Sankaradeva’s Theology’ — Chetia Dr. Bepin, page 8.
