

JAGAT-GURU ŚAÑKARDEW

THE FOUNDER OF MAHĀPURUSISM

DIMBESWAR NEOG

জয় শুক শঙ্কর



শ্রীমন্ত শঙ্করদেব সঙ্ঘ

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Sangha

JAGAT-GURU ŚAṆKARDEW

THE FOUNDER OF MAHĀPURUṢISM

*“Śrīmanta Śaṅkara Hari-bhakatara
Jānā yena kalpataru:
Tāhānta bināi nāi nāi nāi
Āmāra Parama Guru.”*

“Śrīmanta Śaṅkar is as the wish-yielding tree for all devotees of God. We have no supreme Guru, thrice we declare, other than Śaṅkardew.”—*Nām-Ghoṣā*

DIMBESWAR NEOG

The author of Mahāpuruṣism, a Universal Religion; New Light on History of Asamīyā Literature; The Origin and Growth of the Asamīyā Language with a History of its Script; etc. etc.

জগৎ গুৰু শঙ্কৰ



শ্ৰীমন্ত শঙ্কৰদেৱ সঙ্ঘ

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IN MEMORIAM
OF
LATE LAKṢMĪNĀTH BEZBARUWĀ

WHO not only had been the unofficial Dictator of Asamīyā literature for the last generation, but had also discovered Jagat Guru ŚĀŅKARDEW for the new generation of the world.

Guāhāti, Assam,
BHĀRAT
May 1, 1963

DIMBESWAR NEOG

NB : Pandit Dimbeswar Neog spelt Jagat-Guru's name as *ŚANĀKARDEW*. But the name is commonly spelt as *ŚANĀKARADEVA*.

—Publisher,
Second Edition

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

(Second Edition)

Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, the greatest religio-cultural organization on *Mahapurism* or *Eka-Sarana Hari Nam Dharma* in its most original and purest form as propounded by Jagat Guru Srimanta Sankaradeva is going to celebrate the 550th Birth Anniversary of the Jagat-Guru this year with a year-long programme, starting with the Inaugural celebration on October 1, 1998 in New Delhi, the Capital of India with a view to acquainting the people of the world in general and of India in particular with the neo-Vaisnavite religion, philosophy and culture of the Jagat-Guru. On this pious occasion the Sangha has decided to publish a series of books on different aspects of Srimanta Sankaradeva's *Eka-Sarana Hari Nam Dharma* in a phased manner throughout the year.

Poet-Scholar Dimbeswar Neog, one of the renowned pioneer-Presidents of Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, spared no pains in popularizing the religio-philosophy of Jagat-Guru through a series of books. This book of his, first published in 1963, has proved to be still relevant in all aspects of the *Mahapurism*. The Sangha after having a negotiation with the Xuwani Prakash, Guwahati, the copy-right owner of the book, has brought out its second edition which, it is expected, will go a long way in driving home the message of Srimanta Sankaradeva to the humanity at large.

I offer my heartfelt thanks to the members of Xuwani Prakash, Guwahati, for according us consent for publishing the second edition of the book. I also offer my due regards to the Sahitya Sakha Samittee of the Sangha in general and Dr. Purnananda Saikia, its Advisor, in particular, who has reviewed appropriately the text of the first edition of the book as well as the final proof-copy of the second print. I also acknowledge with thanks the sincere services of the printers of the Saraighat Photo Types, Industrial Estate, Bamunimaidam, Guwahati.

Nagaon, Assam,
1.9.1998

Sd/- Hariprasad Hazarika
General Secretary,
Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha
Nagaon, Assam

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

(First Edition)

This little book, which I should call a pioneer work on the religion and philosophy of Sankardew, is a sincere effort to study this great Saint of the world who is unfortunately so little known outside. It is not because materials were really wanting, but because no able writer ever set his hand on the subject, difficult indeed but none-the-less important and interesting.

Sri Neog, the noted historian of Assamese literature and culture, dealt with the subject, mostly by the way, in his survey of Indian Vaisnavism in general, in many of his publications in Assamese and the one in English. But this is the first book, as far as I am aware, where he devotes himself to a scientific study of Sankardew's philosophy and religion in the proper perspective. I understand Sri Neog has also written a *magnum opus* on the life and teachings of Sankardew in Assamese, which we hope to see in print soon, and he gives here the result of his researches almost in a nutshell for non-Assamese readers.

While serious attempts at proper investigation of Sankardew's religion were few and far between, there are unfortunately no few gropings in the dark to attribute Sankardew's religion to this or that school of other Indian teachers or preachers. Sri Neog now definitely shows that Sankardew's philosophy is his own and that his religion is as original as that of any great preacher of the world; and he substantiates his views by precisely quoting authentic sources.

The Srimanta Sankar Mission intends to publish other works on life and mission of this great Religious Preacher, Social Reformer, Saint Poet, Master Musician and original Dramatist, all in one, of 15th century India, in due course to acquaint him correctly to the world outside.

Nagaon, Assam,
1.5.1963

HALADHAR BHUYAN,
President,
Srimanta Sankar Mission

INTRODUCTION

By

SHRI BISHNURAM MEDHI, *Governor of Madras,*

Formerly Chief Minister, Assam

I consider it an honour indeed that Sri Haladhar Bhuyan, who is a valiant fighter during the struggle for independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, and a reputed social and political leader of Assam and the President of the Sreemanta Sankar Mission, a Society registered under the Societies Act, 1960, which has been rendering very useful services and humanitarian works to alleviate the human sufferings and translate into action the high ideals of Sree Sree Shankar Deva, the father of Assamese literature and culture and the torchbearer of the classless and casteless society, has asked me to write the introduction of this valuable book “Jagat Guru Sankardew, the Founder of Mahapurisism” delineating the various aspects of the religion preached and practiced by Sree Sree Shankar Deva, written by a well-known author, Sri Dimbeswar Neog, a scholar and a historian of the literature and culture of Assam.

It is most appropriate that Sreemanta Shankar Mission, which has been carrying on various social welfare works and cultural activities in different parts of the Hills and Plains of Assam for about 15 years and maintaining an orphanage and a home for the handicapped children including those who are blind and deaf, for translating into action the ideals of Sree Sree Shankar Deva, who was not only a great religious Preacher and Teacher as is well known to the people outside Assam, but was also a literary giant, a social reformer, musician, artist and organiser. He has given us not only a new form of Universal Religion but also poetry, drama, art and a democratic organization in the social sphere. In fact, during his life-time he created almost everything that goes to make up Assam into a cultural place adding lustre to the composite culture of India. The magnitude of his gift to the country is fully realized and any one who cares to know Assam and her people very soon discovers that everything that we call Assamese is rooted in the soil that was prepared more than five centuries ago by this Great Saint and Savant Sreemanta Shankar Deva.

Sree Sree Shankar Deva was born in Assam in 1449 AD and he lived upto the age of 120 years. In the 15th century, the ancient Kamrupa (Assam) with the seat of Sanskrit learning at Pragjyotishpur (modern Gauhati) was a land of religious and social chaos. Rituals and animal sacrifice and worship of Sakti in different forms, Tantric practices etc., captured the popular mind of Assam and swept over the country at the time. The great religious principle of Ahimsa, service to humanity and belief in One Universal God, traditionally associated with the Hindu society, were forgotten under the cover of dark ritualism of the tantras. Sree Shankar Deva was pained to see this state of affairs, and set himself to study the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavata, the Geeta, and the like with a view to discovering the truth. After prolonged studies and an India-wide pilgrimage which lasted for over 12 years, in the course of which he visited the various places of pilgrimage in the North, West, South, and East, including Setubandha, Rameswaram, Dwaraka, Brindaban, Mathura, Kashi, Gaya, Puri, Kurukshetra, Ayodhya, Badarikasram and shared the thoughts and aspirations of devotees of those places of universal pilgrimage, as his religious ideas got an added strength.

He expounded his new Vaishnavite cult, in which he preached the belief in One Universal God and the path of Supreme Devotion to Him – the Bhaktimarga. Students of Indian history are generally aware of the religious renaissance in different parts of India in the 14th and 15th centuries and how such movements were responsible for the religious culture and social awakening arresting the disintegration of the religious system and social fibre.

His philosophic ideas resembled those of the qualified monism or the Bisista Adwaitabad of Ramanuja in some respects. Bhakti finds its culmination in the intuitive realisation of God Absolute, and according to Him, Bhakti is its own reward. Sree Shankar Deva took this cult of Bhakti from the Bhagavata, Which lays down that we must love God for His own sake and not for any reward, and that the soul which worships God and remains ever distinct from God is much happier than the one who becomes merged in God. According to this view, even Moksa is not considered desirable in preference to Bhakti. He preferred to emphasize in Assam the Dasya form of Bhakti (relationship between the Lord and Devotee as that between the Master and the Servant). It will thus be seen that according to him, love is the relation between God and man, and Sree Shankar Deva viewed God as the Lord or the Master.

Sree Sree Shankar Deva preached devotional faith in One Universal God. According to him, devotion requires no priest, for the offering of love, and does not need the sanction of the scripture, and the Grace of God is not in the keeping of any man. Nor has the caste distinction got to do anything with the qualities of soul which alone count in devotional faith. Thus casteless and priestless society was a logical conclusion of Sree Sree Shankar Deva's teachings, and he strove for its realisation throughout his life and against great odds. His disciples were drawn from all sections of the people living in Hills and Plains including Garos, Mikirs, Nagas, Kacharies and Muslims, etc.

He flourished and radiated the Eastern part of India, and propagated the Vaishnavite cult of Bhakti about 500 years ago at a time when the whole of India was pulsating with the Vaisnavite renaissance. Whether as a Religious Teacher or as a Social Reformer or as a Litterateur or as an Artist or as an Architect, Sree Sree Shankar Deva stands equally great. He gave us universal religion, culture, music, dance and drama and a well-knit democratic social institution of Satra, through which he preached his religious tenets. In these Satras people of all classes and castes whether devotees, disciples, followers or sympathisers meet together and perform social and religious functions. It is a holy place which contains within its boundaries, a prayer hall, without any image whatsoever, residence of celibate devotees and of Adhikar or Chief Preacher, a house for keeping the holy books, and other houses for holding religious and social meetings, "Bhaonas" or dramatic performances. In addition to initiation ceremonies, it regularly holds prayers with devotional songs and dances, as it soon became the centre of art and culture. He taught us to lead a pure life of service and dedication and helped in bringing about a feeling of unity amongst all classes of people living in this region and laid a sound foundation for political, cultural, spiritual and linguistic growth in this region forming the North-Eastern corner of India.

The need of such central Cultural Centre after the name of Sree Sree Shankar Deva for propagating the message of Universal Religion and Social Reformation on the basis of our culture and his teachings for formation of a casteless society by drawing in all classes of people including Garos, Miris, Bhutias, Nagas, Mikirs, Kacharies and Muhammadans etc., into his fold through social services and humanitarian work was felt and the Sreemanta Shankar

Mission was started as a non-political organisation to carry on social welfare works and to run institutions for humanitarian work.

Another sequence of his universal teaching about devotion to God was the discouragement of idol worship. This aspect of his religion has a universal appeal today, as the other great religions of the world like Christianity and Islam preach the same ideal of one Universal God.

I have great pleasure in placing these few lines as an Introduction to this volume and I wish its publication will be generally appreciated.

Raj Bhavan, Madras,
February 1, 1963

BISHNURAM MEDHI,
Governor of Madras

NB: - *The original spelling of the name of Sankaradeva as given in the introduction is retained untouched.*

-Publisher,
Second Edition

“Guru lāge mai śikṣit śiṣya.”
Jagatat jānanī dilō !
Jagatar Guru ŚAṆKAR gharatei !
Andhalāi nicinilō !!”

—Lakṣmināth Bezbaruwā.

‘WANTED a Guru. An educated disciple here.’ So I advertised throughout the world. Lo ! ŚAṆKARDEW, the Guru of the world, has been here even in my own house. Blind as I had been, I recognised him not.’

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ONE

MAHĀPURUSISM - ITS REAL SIGNIFICANCE

Mahāpurusism (Mahāpurusiyā Dharma) is not the name of a religion like Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity or Muhammadanism, commemorative of its propounder, as many people wrongly hold. Neither was the epithet Mahāpurusa earlier applied to Śankardēw¹, the founder, still less to his great disciple, Mādhawdēw. It is only in comparatively recent times that the epithet came to be secondarily applied to them although there is still no authentic record when this practice came first to be in vogue. *Mahāpurusism* is a term, like *Mazdaism*, used for the faith of devotion to **Mahāpurusa** (God) which term, not unusually, must have become transferred to the first devotees of *Māhapurusa* in course of time.

The term *Mahāpurusa*, applied to God, is at once a challenge to *Prakṛti-Purusism* of the Samkhya system of Hindu philosophy and immediately stamps the originality of the philosophy of the religion founded by Sankardew. The epithet *Mahāpurusa* cannot be compared with the common epithets like Mahāprabhu or Mahātmā that are applied, may be aptly, to men. Even the term *purusa* is almost invariably used in the vast Asamiyā Vaisnavite literature in a restricted sense to *jiwa* (Life) and is seldom applied to men in the ordinary sense. One need not strain one's imagination for any visible proof in this regard, and we presently find a direct refutation of Samkhya in so many verses of the holy *Nāmghosā* by Madhawdew, the great disciple and successor of Sankardew: -

*Prakṛti Purusa / duito kari para / duihāno nija kāran:
Param Iswar / nāmak dhariā / āchā tāte Nārāyan. 173*

[Apart both from Prakṛti (Matter) and Purusa (Mind), (but) primal cause of both: whence Narayana assumes the name of the Great Lord.]

*Prakṛti Purusa duiro / niyantā Mādhawa :
Samastare ātmā Hari / param bāndhawa. 405*

[Madhawa (God) is the Ordainer of both Prakṛti (Matter) and Purusa (Mind). **Hari** (God) is the (supreme) soul and great Benefactor of all.]

Even according to the Vedanta philosophy the highest cosmos is Brahma (Ego), and there is none beyond: "Etat param Brahma veda, nātah param astiti" (Prasna Upanisad, VI, 7). But Sankardew pushes boldly beyond: -

*Ksara pade ito / dehak bolay / aksar sabade Brahma :
Duito kari Hari / uttama nimitte / prakhyāt Purusottama. 171*

[*Ksara* refers to this body; *aksara* to Brahma (Ego); **Hari** (God) being superior to both is well known as **Purusa Uttama** (Supreme Soul).]

¹ Pandit Dimbeswar Neog spelt Jagat-Guru's name as *Sankardew*, but the name is commonly spelt as *Sankaradeva* - editor

*Sabad Brahmar / pār bhaila yito / Krsnat bhakati nāi:
Tār sāstrasram / sram mātra fal / yena rākhe bāji gāi. 290*

[One who has gone beyond the Word called Brahma (Ego), (but) has no love of Krsna (God), has only toil, (and), the toil is the fruit, like one keeping a barren cow.]

*Purusa Uttama / Parama Purusa / Parama Ānanda Swāmi:
Tayu pāda-padma / makaranda āse / saran pasilo āmi. 186*

[Thou the Best Purusa, the Supreme Purusa and Master of Supreme Joy. I seek refuge in Thee for the nectarine juice of Thy Lotus Feet.]

Thus we find that Sankardew not only brings in the best Purusa or Supreme Purusa in brighter relief against the bare Purusa of the Samkhya philosophy, but superiority is claimed for the best Purusa or Supreme Purusa to Brahma (Ego) itself, which is reduced to something like the Aristotelian God, *Primum mobile immotum* (Prime mover unmoved), who is “a do-nothing king that reigns but does not rule”. For is it not said by Madhawdew for him: -

Brahma pade suddha / Jiwaka buliya / Iswar Param Brahma. 194

[Brahma is Life pure. The Supreme Brahma is God.]

Yamunacarya, a great predecessor of Ramanuja, is said to have compiled one *Mahāpurusa-Nirnaya*, now lost. It is not known for certain what he wrote, but it may probably be presumed that he described certain aspects of Godhead as Mahāpurusa. Besides the applications and interpretations of the terms *Purusottama*, *Param Purusa* etc. already shown, we find in the holy *Namghosa* the very exact epithet *Mahāpurusa* very significantly used of God: -

*Suka nigadati Pariksita / yadi āmi nirgunata sthita,
Tathāpi uttama slokara mahimā gune:
Karileka vasya mora citta / Bhāgawata grantha bipolarita,
Parama ānande padhilo mai āpune. 646
Tomāka kahibo sehi sāstra / tumi tāka sunibāra pātra,
Mahāpurusara sewaka tumi samprati:
Isāstrata sraddhā mātrakata / Mukundara pāda-pankajata,
āti sikhre tāra howe jānā sati mati. 647*

[Suka says, O Pariksita, although I stand for *nirguna* I have been so impressed by the glory of the excellent verses that I have myself gone through the wonderful scripture named *Bhāgawata* with great joy. I am going to read that scripture to you, for you are worthy of hearing it being now a servant of *Mahāpurusa*. One’s intellect presently becomes chaste in the Lotus Feet of Mahāpurusa (God) once one acquires reverence for this scripture.]

So there exists not a shadow of doubt that the religion preached by Sankardew stresses on unqualified devotion to God in all the aspects of the term Mahāpurusa, and it is the reason why it is rightly called *Mahāpurusiyā Dharma* (Mahāpurusism). It is monotheism to be sure, and it is so even in a severe sense. Mahāpurusism of Sankardew had no reason to have any

mutation, still less any affiliation, with Absolute Monism of Sankaracarya or with Qualified Monism of Ramanujacarya, not to speak of the faiths of their followers. If there could be any question of mutation or affiliation still, it could have been with the *Gita* and the *Bhagawat* direct which Sankardew read and interpreted in his own way, at once original and new.

In order, therefore, to read Sankardew and to study the religion preached by him, one's mind must first be purged of all superstitions connecting him with any sectarian faith by puerile scholarship. There is no genius, still less any prophet worth the name that does not create and that has not his own message for mankind as a whole. The same Vedanta philosophy that nourished earlier a galaxy of philosophers, each so original, also produced Sankardew in later days of neo-Vaisnavism to interpret the development of the Vedanta philosophy to the progressive human mind.

TWO

FACTS ABOUT THE EARLY LIFE OF THE FOUNDER

There are at least four regular biographies of Sankardew besides a similar number of books of reference in regard to the facts of this great Founder of Mahapurisism. The first of these is by Ramcaran Thakur, own nephew of Madhawdew, Sankardew's apostolic successor. Ramcaran was brought up by Madhawdew and he must have seen Sankardew in his later days. The second biography was by Daityari Thakur, son of Ramcaran. It appears that Ramcaran married at a much advanced age and Daityari was too young when his father died, so that he somehow missed the biography written by his father. So he compiled a new work on Sankardew collecting facts from secondary sources as he admits; and this accounts for this second biography not fully agreeing with the first in some details.

The third and fourth biographies are by Bhusan Dvija and Ramananda Dvija who were contemporaries of Purusottam Thakur and Chaturbhuj Thakur, own grandsons of Sankardew. Curiously enough, they too complain of having no "arisi" (model), and so these two biographies disagree with their two predecessors, as they do with each other, in many points. So we place reliance on these biographies according to their seniority in cases of differences, but admit other facts for other references when found agreeable or consistent.

Sankardew's birth at Āli-pukhuri, Nagao, Asam, on the tenth day of the bright moon in Āswīn (September-October) of 1449 A.D. (Ram. v. 360 ff) is admitted on all hands. The date of his demise on the second day of the bright moon in Bhādra (August-September) of 1568 A.D. (Ram. v. 3934) was never questioned. Any doubt about the date of his birth was finally set at rest by the oft-quoted line of the contemporary biography of the sixteenth century by Ramcaran – "Eka barsa manda āyu bhaila chaya kuri" (Rām, v. 3935, Rāmā, v. 1685) i.e. 'Sankardew had his longevity of 120 (years) deficient by one year'. Sarva Bhauma Bhattacharyya, earlier an antagonist and later a disciple of Sankardew, in the colophon of his version of *Swargakhanda Rahasya (Padma Puran)* speaks exactly the same thing, though only by the way. So we are doubly assured of the first date.

Sankardew completed his studies at the age of seventeen with Mahendra Kandali as his teacher, and presently took over the charge of the hereditary Chief of the Bhuyās about 1466 A.D. (Ram. v. 1401-06), which office was held by the paternal uncles of his father since Sankardew was only five years old when his father died (Ram, v. 1135 ff). The prose biography of Sankardew states definitely that he studied the Vedas and philosophies, the Epics and the Puranas both extensively and intensively during the five years of his stay with Mahendra Kandali. Other biographies too clearly testify to the exceptional brilliance of Sankardew and his deep study of the scriptures. Each and every biographer also extols his wonderful physical capacities proving his *mans sana corpore sano*.

Two years after the assumption of the hereditary charge of the Chief of the Bhuyās, the intellectual achievements and practical attainments of the young leader were put to test almost unexpected: -

*Āta anantara / Sankardewar / unais batsar bhaila:
Grhata basiā / āchanta Sankar Budhā Khāye taika gailā. 1451*

*Vidyāta pārgata / sāstra āche yata / samastaka āchā padhi:
Samasta lokar / haris bistar / Vaikuntha diyok gadhi. 1453*

[So, after this, Sankardew attained his nineteenth year of age. (One day) while he was sitting in his house one Budhā Khā had been even to his place... ‘(Thou hast been) well-versed in sciences; thou hast studied all the scriptures that are there. Do present us the Paradise to the delectation of all the people.]

It was almost a challenge, and the young Chief at once accepted it: -

*Tomāsār bākya satye satye satye / dekhāibo Vaikunthapur:
Cihna yātrā nāme / karibo bekat / haris pāibā pracur. 1457
Vaikuntha nagar / patat lekhiā / anka karilanta tār: 1457
Dhemālr ghosā / prathame likhilā / dvitiye slok racilā:
Sutra bhatimāk / gitak kariā / Cihna sava bibhajilā. 1462
Git nāt sutra / samasta kariā / yeve sāng karilanta: 1463
Bhuyāsave rabhā / ghar sāji save Sankarak janāilanta. 1463*

[By your words, in truth thrice promised, shall I show you the city of Paradise. I shall reveal a play *Cihna Yatra* by name, and you are sure to secure delight enough... (Sankardew) painted the city of Paradise (on cloth) and wrote an one-act play. (He) first wrote the songs for preliminary music, and then wrote verses in Sanskrit. (He) composed preludes (to each scene), invocations and songs; and made the divisions of the scenes. As he finished writing the songs, the drama, the preludes, all and sundry, the Bhuyās sent information to Sankardew that they had completed the construction of the pandal.]

This first important event in Sankardew’s early intellectual life was also the foremost, and had more far reaching effects than perhaps the author could himself think. The play itself was a marvellous success so-much-so that Mahendra Kandali, Sankardew’s early teacher, and other scholars of the day were inspired and convinced of Sankardew’s possessing divine and supreme spiritual power.

*Ehimate CIHNA YATRA yeve sāng bhaila:
Sankare Mahendra Kandali pāse gaila. 1546
Namaskār karibāk guruk cāhanta:
Dekhiā Kandali āthe-bethe uthilanta. 1547
Tomākese namaskār kariba lāgay:
Tumise Iswar swāmi jānilo niscay.
Hena suni Sankar pālāti yeve gaila:
Mahendra Kandali guru sabhāt uthila. 1548
Hājār dasek lok taita huyā āche:
Hāt tuli Hari-dhwani karilanta pāche. 1549
Sunā sabhāsad bolo niscay vacan:
Sankardewat mai pasilo saran. 1550
Cāribār cāri dandawat karilanta:
Bhaila guru buli ucca kari dākilanta. 1551*

[Thus as the *Cihna Yatra* (performance) ended, Sankar (-dew) had gone to Mahendra Kandali. He wanted to salute his teacher. Seeing this, the Kandali rose from his seat with eagerness: “It is thee who is to be saluted. Thou art God incarnate, I have known it for certain”. As Sankardew had come back on hearing this, Mahendra Kandali took his stand in the assembly. About ten thousand people gathered there. (Mahendra Kandali) raised his hands and shouted the name of Hari: ‘Listen, O learned audience, to my words which are sure and certain: I am bound for initiation from Sankar (-dew)’. He prostrated four times and resolved four times. Then he cried aloud: ‘(Sankardew) has been my Preceptor’.]

Mahendra Kandali’s noble example was presently taken up by Ram Ram, Caturbhuj, Narottam and other high-class Brahmans and begged for initiation from Sankardew (Ram. vs. 1555-56). It seemed also as another challenge, and, being unable to avoid, Sankardew had to accept it. He, having always had a keen sense of decorum, avoided the customary practice of giving initiation at the Preceptor’s feet and asked them to come the next morning. Meanwhile, overnight he translated *Uddhawa Sambad* from the **Bhagawat, Book Ten**, and advising prostration before it, gave initiation to this first batch of his celebrated disciples inclusive of his early teacher and his family priest, Ram Ram (Ram. vs. 1558-83). This prostration before the rendering of the Bhagawat by the proselytes combined oaths of allegiance to God (**Krsna**) about Whom the work was written and to the Guru (Sankardew) by Whom it was rendered.

Thus it is that the *Saran* (initiation) ceremony of Sankardew has the unique practice of prostration and taking solemn oaths by proselytes before the sacred scriptures by the great Founder of the faith. This has been in vogue for the last half millennium years and is expected to thus continue for all times. Also on all occasions the *thāpanā* (Vedi, altar) of a Mahapurusiya institution is scrupulously clean by the absence of any image or picture including that of Krsna Himself, and has only the *Kirtana* or any other Mahapurusiya scripture instead for adoration. This unique practice of adoration of a holy book, against idols or pictures, is now paralleled only by the reverence paid by the Sikhs to their *Granth Saheb*.

THREE

ŚARAN (INITIATION) – ITS MEANING FOR LIFE

While owning that the Buddha must have been the first to use the word *Śaran* (lit., shelter) for initiation, we feel that Sankardew's use and application of it was quite his own. It is as appropriate as it is unique. His Mahapurushism has four *Śaranas*, but it is really one in four. It is the **Guru** (Preceptor) who comes first and sets the ball rolling. He acquaints the *jiwa* (life) with its own hunger of the heart and thirst of the soul. The Guru shows the *jiwa* its own wretchedness and tribulations it is always undergoing. He says that *tri-tāp* (three sorrows) are there - material, super-natural and spiritual, and affirms that there is a remedy, a panacea, against all these evils. This panacea is nothing else than taking **shelter** in the **Feet of God**, as everything else is ephemeral and ever-changing.

With a grateful heart the proselyte then moves to **Dewa** (God) and offers all the entreaties at His Feet: -

*He Krsna ito ghor samsār panthat:
Tini tāpe atisay huyā ācho hat.
Tayu pāda-padma chāyā-chatra bine tār:
Nāhike tāran ār tāp edāibār. 1174
Tomār caran-yug chatra biparit:
Chāyā kari sarvadise barise amrt. 1175
He Krsna tayu pade pasilo saran:
Āpad-grastak mok kariyo raksan. 1177
- Bhakti Ratnāwali.*

[Oh God, I am (almost) killed in this dreadful path of the world being victimized by the three sorrows. I have no other shelter to escape from their attack save and except the shade of the umbrella of Thy Lotus Feet. Thy Feet are an umbrella so wonderful that they shower nectar while spreading shade on all sides. So, O God, I take shelter under Thy Feet; do save the trouble-stricken one.]

But God denies that He may be more potent than His Name: for has it not been said: -

*Ananta sakati tumi Rama / Laksmana, Sugriva, Bibhisana,
Hanumanta ādi mahā mahā viragane:
Āni taru-latā parvatāka / sateka yojana samudraka,
Setu bāndhi pār bhailāhā mahā yatane. 636
He prān-prabhu Raghupati / Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma,
Tomāt kariā tayu guna nām cār:
Binā setu-bandha kari nare / Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma,
Apār samsār samudrar howe pār. 637
-Nāmghosā.*

[O Rama, it is infinite power that You (Yourself) possess. Laksman, Sugriva, Bibhisan, Hanumanta and other supreme heroes collected mountains with trees and creepers and bridged the sea hundreds and hundreds of miles long. It is thus that You crossed the sea with so much care. O, Rama, the Lord of my life, five times do I name Thee and declare that **Thy Name** and Glories exceed Thee; for men, without making any bridge, cross the infinite ocean of this world (by reciting Your Name and Glory).]

So the proselyte now asks God to grant him the privilege of seeking shelter in **His Nām**, for he knows: -

*Āpon nāmar sang nachādanta Hari:
yei Nām sei Hari jānā nistha kari. 514*

[God does not part company with His Nām (Name). Know it for certain that where Nām is there God is also.]

So he prays: -

*Nām-dhan diā mok kinā Banamāli:
Dās pāi nalawā kaman Thākurāli. 540
Nij dās kari Hari mok kinā kinā:
Ān dhan nalāgay Nām-dhan binā. 541*

[O God, do purchase me by giving money in shape of Nām. What master is there who would not buy a slave that offers himself? Do purchase me as Your own slave. There is no need of any money else than Thy Nām.]

When the proselyte thus approaches Nām for shelter, Nām denies that it has any position without **Bhaktas** (Devotees) that contain it. Bhaktas are considered more foremost than anything else, even more foremost than God Himself. The great *Nām-Ghosā* was written by Madhawdew as asked by the great master, Sankardew. Madhawdew started with the invocation to God having the ten incarnations as it stands now in the third verse. But Sankardew Himself is said to have taken the pen from Madhawdew and to have written the first half of the present first verse of the *Namghosa* which was thus completed by Madhawdew: -

*Muktita nisprha yito, sehi bhakatak namo,
Rasamayi māgoho bhakati:
Samasta mastakmani, nij bhakatar basya,
Bhajo hena Dewa Yadupati.*

[I bow low to the Bhakta who is averse even to salvation. I beseech for Love that is full of joy. I dedicate myself to God Who is the gem of all crowns, but is subservient to the will of His Bhaktas.]

This supremacy and preference given to the Bhakta has been sung in Mahapurusiya scriptures in a thousand ways. And Krsna is said to have told Arjuna in so many terms: -

*Bhaktar sesat pare bastu srestha nāi:
Tāk bhunjibāk Sakhi mor icchā yāi.*

[Nothing can be more desirable than the remains of food of the Bhakta. Oh Arjuna, I myself feel a craving for tasting the remains of my Bhakta's food.]

*Bhakatak pāi yār nabhaila harisa:
Harik pāile sito karibeka kisa.
Krsnar Bhakat jānā pāy thāi thāi:
Bhaktar Bhakat Sakhi pābalai nāi.*

[He who has not been moved with joy having met a Bhakta, what can he do if God happens to come across his path personally? Devotees of God are found here and there, but devotees of devotees are few and far between.]

*Mor Guru Bhakatese svarup svabhāw:
Yen bāyu-ākāsar nāhi bhinna bhāw,
Sarva-tattva Bhakatak mai Guru māno;
Bhakat-Gurut pare ānak najāno.*

[(Krsna says) Bhaktas represent the true nature of My Preceptor and are not different from Me just as the sky and air are inseparable. I respect Bhaktas, containers of all spiritual truths, as my Guru, and I know no others than my Bhaktas who are my Gurus.]

Thus we see that the chain of the four Mahapurusiya Saranas is a ring where the four are one as the one showed itself in four. It is a cult of Love which seeks direct communion with God being purged of all formalities and ritualities. So it is Mysticism which is “the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order”. It is not only not an intellectual speculation, but an investigation of it entails “a definite preparation, a purging of the intellect”. To put in the words of Evalin Underhill, “Where the philosopher guesses and argues, the mystic lives and looks; and speaks, consequently, the disconcerting language of first-hand experience, not the neat dialectic of the schools... The Absolute of the mystics is lovable, attainable and alive”. “Oh, taste and see!” - they cry in accents of astounding certainty and joy. “Ours is an experimental science. We can but communicate our system, never its result. We come to you not as thinkers, but as doers”. So it is that Madhawdew welcomes us: -

*Piyu piyu piyu amiyā mādhuri Hari-nām...
Durata tejiā thāio anya yata mana-kām. 704*

[Drink, drink, drink ye the Name of God full of ambrosial sweetness. Shake off, ye, all desires of the mind, at a distance.]

*Vicāri dekhasa, pāmar Manāi e
Iha para loke Harise suhrd bandhu. 719
Majiā rahasa, suhrd Manāi e, ...
Govinda bola Manāi, Mukunda bola Manāi:
Hari guna-nām apār ānanda sindhu. 720
Brahmā-Hare yāt saran pasay, ānar kon barāi 722*

[Search and find, thou vile Mind, God is the only cordial friend in this world and beyond. Keep thyself immersed, thou friendly Mind, in the shoreless sea of joy that the Glories and Name of God is. Say Govinda, O Mind! Say Mukunda, O Mind! He of Whom (gods) Brahma and Hara seek shelter, what remains for others to boast?]

FOUR

TRUTH ABOUT SANKARDEW'S TWELVE YEARS' TOUR

By the desire of the people, Sankardew, as the Chief of the Bhuyas, led them from Āli Pukhuri to Tembuāni (Bardowā), the original place of residence of their forefathers (Ram. vs. 1604-14). This was in 1469, and it is here that he came by a black stone having the image of the four-handed Visnu. He placed the image in his prayer-house with the distinct purpose of converting average people to the Vaisnavite faith as they were all addicted to worship of the goddess (Ram, vs. 1615-18).

In 1470, he introduced the Fākuā festival with a view to propagate Vaisnavism on a wider scale, and when this came to a successful termination he called Jayanta and Madhawa, the two younger brothers of his grand-father, who earlier held the charge of his hereditary office of Siromani Bhuya, and expressed his desire to lead the life of a religious teacher transferring the secular affairs to them once again. The two elderly members of the family took a note of it and rather thought it fit and proper to bind this young religious enthusiast in the silken tie of matrimony (Ram, vs. 1653-55).

Sankardew was married to one Suryawati who conceived on the ninth day of Baisāg, and a daughter, Manu, was born to them about 23 December, 1471. On the second day of Āswīn, 1472, her mother died, and Sankardew's cup of sorrow was now full to the brim. His own mother died on the fifteenth day of his birth and his father followed her when Sankardew was a lad of five years. And his wife now died leaving their first child in its ninth month. He wanted, as we have seen, to shake off secular affairs even one year earlier; but the time was then not fully ripe. In Agrahāyan, 1478, Manu was given in early marriage (Ram, vs. 1820-22), and leaving his son-in-law, Hari in the charge of his office and home Sankardew presently left for a long tour on a Saturday with a large retinue (Ram, vs. 1836-54 ff).

The biographers have given all details of their journeyings and have made no secrets of anything. And if we read between their lines we find that it was not really a pilgrimage, at least in its orthodox sense, and if it is to be called a pilgrimage at all in any extended meaning, it must have been a camouflage of it. For having already initiated people to his *Ekasaran* faith, he could not make obeisance to those external objects, at least in spirit. There is of course no point why such Bhaktas (saints) should not go to such places of pilgrimage even if not for their own urge. They had sometimes positive duties to go there and to quote *Nāradiya Bhakti Sutra*, "Sat tirtham kurvanti tirthāni" (they turn the places of pilgrimage into better ones).

The biographers detail that Sankardew with his retinue came to the Ganges after two months and twenty one days and then made for Gayā, where they stayed for three nights. Once more they came to the Ganges for ten days and then reached Puri after twenty one days (Ram, vs. 1849-1931). Instead of Sankardew making any obeisance, Gangā herself is described as praying to Sankardew: -

*Tayu dāsi kinkari jānāhā Nārāyan:
Pavitra kariba mok āilā ehi thān. 1915*

...

Sankarak Gangā devi bahu stuti kare. 1927

[Know me, O Narayan (Sankardew), to be Thy female slave. Thou hast come to purify me.
(Thus) the goddess Ganga offered long prayers to Sankar (-dew).]

Even traditions do not venture to suggest that Sankadew ever cared to get into the temple of Jagannath where he had been twice. It is said that he saw the image just standing at the door. And what had been the idea of his party seeing him there? It is voiced by Mahendra Kandali himself: -

*Mahendra Kandali bole kino mor Sankar:
Jagannāth same duiro tulya kalewar. 1907
Jagannāth prabhu pāse yāo kika lāgi:
Nicinilo Sankarak āmi mandabhāgi. 1908*

[Mahendra Kandali says, Oh, what our Sankar (-dew) must be. His person is the same as that of Jagannath. Why should we have come to Jagannath at all? Unfortunate as we had been, we could not know Sankar (-dew) earlier.]

Nor is it purely sentimental and physical. Sankardew's astounding scholarship and dynamic personality touched every intelligent person who came by. They were as eloquent in their praise as his own admirations of Jagannath: -

*Pāndāgane bole sunā dvitiya Thākur:
Jagannath tumi same nuhika bidur. 1948
Mukhya Pāndāsava lāg nere Sankarar. 2126
Brahma-Purānak cāi Sankare kahanta:
Yena mate Jagannātha sāksāt bhailanta,
Sisawa brtānta kathā suniā samasta:
Ksanaprāy gaila din savāre manata. 2127*

[The Pandas said, 'Listen to us, O Second Jagannath, you are not separate from him (the first)'. The prominent ones among them would not leave his company. Sankar (-dew) would describe, in interpreting Brahma Purana, how Jagannath came to be met. Listening to all these descriptions, days would pass as moments as it were.]

Bhusan Dvija exactly confirms: -

*Brahma Purānak cāi Sankare kahanta:
Ksanaprāy yāy din savāro manata. 135*

[As Sankar (-dew) would interpret Brahma Purana, days would pass as moments for all.]

Ramananda Dvija further corroborates: -

*Mās cāri pānca taita karila bancan:
Mahanta buliā save kare ādaran.
Pāndā samastara āge karanta bekata. 219
Yatek pandit āche Oresā purar:
Mahā sneh bādhi gaila lage Sankarar. 220*

*Rātri-dine sāstra-byākhyā kariā thākanta:
Ksatrabāsi loke yena amṛta piyanta. 221*

[(Sankardew) stayed there for months four or five. People used to respect him as Saint that he had been. (Sankardew) would interpret the glories of Jagannath according to Brahma Purana before all the Pandas. A great adoration of Sankar (-dew) began to grow among all the scholars that were there in Orissa. He would interpret the scriptures day and night and the inhabitants of Ksatra (Puri) would drink nectar as it were.]

From Puri Sankardew is said to have travelled to Brndaban with a fraction of his followers while others returned home. After five fortnights in their journey they met Rupa and Sanatana: -

*Rupe bole cāi / ki karo Gosāi / tumi jagatar nāth. 2021
Ek Nām Dharma / ān nāhi karma / kahicho ek saran:
Tayu ājnācay / dhari Kṛpāmay / kahilo nij vacan. 2023*

[Rupa says looking (at Sankardew): ‘What can we do, O Lord! You are the Saviour of the world. We preach the same Nām Dharma and self-surrender to the One, leaving off all rituals, by your command, O the compassionate one, but in our words.’]

Thence Sankardew, now with only four companions, returned and made for Uttarabāhini Ganga where he stayed for a night. Then he came to Barāh Ksetra where he entered the fortieth year of his life. Thence again he made for Prayag, Puskarini and Mathura in which last place he is said to have stayed for six months. Last of all, he left for Dwaraka on the Caitra Bihu, Sunday, and then going to Gokul he completed his long twelve year’s journey.

Ramananda mentions further that Sankardew also visited Setukhanda, Baranasi and Badarikāśram during his journeys. Any way, Sankardew must have returned from this long tour about 1490 A.D.

These and such details about his long and wide travels must remove any misgivings in ignorant minds about the consistency of Sankardew’s teachings that pilgrimage as such is futile, and to consider bathing as purification from sins is un-Vaisnavite. So it stands. Uncritical critics of Sankardew, who have nothing like personal acquaintance even with the early biographies, lose sight of the fact that he preached his faith even before he set out on his extensive travels, and that there is absolutely no room for imagining that he ever came under the influence of anybody during his travels. On the contrary, it is found that Sankardew wielded immense influence in all religious and cultural centres of India with the result that he had a good number of converts even in those places that may be detailed in the next chapter. It may suffice to say here that a study of Sankardew’s works alone must open the eyes of unbelievers to the faith that scholars of his rank and file are hardly come across throughout the contemporary Vaisnavite India. But he wrote them all in the vernacular of his State; and that even then his astounding scholarship reached some responsible quarters where it roused unprecedented enthusiasm. We quote a few instances in this regard too in the next chapter.

Assam has since fallen into a deep depravity so-much-so that the people usually startle now at their own shadow. Sankardew had himself been the centre of radiation of all energy. He had no need to go out in search of light. The early biographers and Sankardew’s own works are

eloquent as to how Sankardew had himself been a moving institution of learning, if only there were ears to hear. He had intuition and practical sagacity enough for doing what he did. He did not imitate anything. Imitation is apish. There is no founder but finds, no genius but creates. And his achievements are proofs in themselves of his exceptionally high attainments.

FIVE

MAHAPURUSIYA CONVERTS ALL OVER INDIA

There are several specific examples to show that Sankardew's so-called pilgrimage was in fact a tour of universal conquest by scholarship. Sārvabhauma Bhattācārya, a great contemporary and disciple of Sankardew, in his colophon of *Svarga Khanda Padma Purān* records: -

*Sārvabhauma Bhattācārya jyotīsat sār:
Devi-upāsak āchiloho durācār. 168
Sankarar sange bahu bādak karilo:
Bāde bhange huyā sāstra padhibāka gailo.
Kāsīdese Visweswar Cakravarti nām:
Cāri Ved padhiloho taite anupām. 169
Panca barsa taite Veda sāstrak padhilo:
Anek sāstrak siki jnānak labhilo. 170
Eka dinā Guru mot kariā sāsvat:
Kahilanta gopya kathā jānilo manat.
Purva dise nij sakti Hari awatār:
Nij yas dharma kirti bhakati pracār. 171
Nāmat Sankar haiba sudra kule jāt...
Tāhāna carane karo sata namaskār. 172*

[I am Sarvabhauma Bhattacarya, well-versed in astrology. I was a vile worshipper of goddesses. I had long argued with Sankar (-dew). Being defeated in (scriptural) debate, I went (abroad) to study scriptures (further). (There was a teacher) in Kasi (Baranasi) Visweswar Cakravarti by name. There (under him) I studied the four Vedas so excellently. For five years I read the Vedas and (other) scriptures there. I acquired knowledge by reading many sacred books. One day (my) teacher took me into confidence and revealed to me that secret as I came to know: 'God in His own power has incarnated Himself in the Eastern Country to propagate His own fame, cult and Love. He must be Sankar by name and born in the Sudra class. I bow down a hundred times at his feet'.]

So Sarvabhauma returned home and presently became a disciple of Sankardew. He begins his rendering of *Svarga Khanda* by paying respect to Sankardew not only as his Guru, but also as an incarnation (vs. 1, 164-65 ff). Then he gives a detailed account of the disciples of Sankardew scattered in different cultural centres of India which he visited: -

*Tarkabhānu Vidyāpati Bhattācārya bar:
Rāghawa Ācārya Bibhusana ye Bhudhar. 174
Kaviratna Vidyāratna Umā Bāsudew:
Saraswati Srikānta Gajendra Mahāsew:
Rāmcandra Krsnadatta Visnu Nārāyan:
Gopāl Jaiminidew Dewa Janārdan. 175
Tārāsawe āpon kusal cintā kari:
Sankarak Guru māni bhajilanta Hari:
Surya Vipra Kālidās Bhānu Harihar:
Caturar Cudāmani jnāni Ratneswar. 176*

Jyotisa-pradhān Sivakām Narottam:
Candradhar Suryadhar Surya Sarmā nām.
Musha rājā Ratnakhari Vijaykhari nām.
Dharmakhari Vajrakhari Mihir Srirām. 177
Sriguru Ganes ye Siwa Sarmā nām:
Udita Udaykhari Dibākar nām.
Sarvakāle grah-upāsak sarvajan:
Sankarak Guru māni lailanta saran. 178
Ksatriyar Mahārāj Rup Sanātan:
Sankarak Guru māni laileka saran. 179
Jagadise svapna dekhi pāndāk kahilā:
Bhāgawat laiā Purva disak larilā. 185
Yateka kahilā rup sava dekhilanta:
Bhāgawat diā tāt saran lailanta. 186
Mahā santa Sila Santa Visnupuri nām
Brahmānanda āge kaila purva guna grām.
Sankara svarupe Hari haiba awatār:
Tānka lāgi dibā Ratnāwali grantha sār. 189
Mohor pranām cāri sloka di pathāibā:
Tumio tāhāka bhakti kariā bhajibā: 190
Brndāban nāme ek Mahanta āchilā:
Sankarak lāg pāi tehanto bhajilā. 191
Ramākānta nāme sisya Mathurā purata:
Sankarak Guru māni saran lailanta.
Rādhā nāme ek santa āchil Gokule:
Sankarak Guru māni sio bhakta bhaile. 192
Sanyāsi Trijāta nāme Vajrat āchil:
Sankarak Guru māni Harik bhajil.
Gopināth nāme santa Puskar Tirthata:
Sijaneo Sankarak Guru mānilanta. 193
Jagannāth Pāndāsut Visnudatta nām:
Rāmānanda Haridew Jaimini Srirām.
Krsna Yadunāth nām ehi das jan:
Sankarak Guru māni lailanta saran. 194

Like Ramcaran, Sarvabhauma also clearly says that Sankardew lived for 120 years deficient by one: -

Eka bām chay vimsa barisa bhailanta:
Tathāpi kisora svabhāwaka nerilanta. 206

Nor is Sarvabhauma the solitary instance of a contemporary Vaisnavite poet recording facts of Sankardew's influence abroad enumerating the disciples of Sankardew everywhere in cultural centres of fifteenth century India.

Ramcaran details another similar account. There was a Brahman named Kanthabhusan who completed in Kāmarupa the study of four Kalāpas and had been to Baranasi to study Vedanta. He read under a professor named Ram Bhatta, residing in the hostel beside his quarters. Kanthabhusan had a copy of Sankardew's rendering of the Bhagawat as *Nimi Nawa*

Siddha Sambād, and he used to recite it aloud before it was dawn. Ram Bhatta listened to the verses attentively and came to the hostel early in the morning: -

*Rām Bhatta bulilanta Kanthabhusanak:
Kaita pāilā tumi Bhāgwatar padak. 1434
Uttama pathana āka kone biracilā:
Kanthabhusaneo suni bulibe lāgilā.
Āmār desat āche nāmat Sankar:
Param mahanta agragani Vaisnawar. 1435
Tente karichanta Bhāgwatar padak.
Suni Rām Bhatta Guru pāilā ānandak.
Punarbār Guru sambudhiā bulilanta:
Sunā Kanthabhusan tumi mahā bhāgyawanta. 1436
Mohor vacan Karna pāti sunioka:
Punarbār Sankarar pāsak yāyoka. 1438
Sankarat janāibāhā mor namaskār:
Kalit Vaisnava Visnu sarva sāstra sār. 1439
Ehi buli āni Ratnāwali pustakak:
Ehi puthikhāni dibā Sankara hātāt: 1441
Sambudhi buliba lailā Kanthabhusanak. 1440
Param gaurave Sankarar hāte dilā:
Rām Bhattar stuti-nati samaste kahilā. 1445*

[Ram Bhatta enquired of Kanthabhusan, ‘Where have you come by this verse-rendering of the Bhagawat? Who has made this supreme text?’ Kanthabhusan began to reply: ‘In our country there is a Saint, the foremost among Vaisnavas, Sankar (-dew) by name. It is he who made these verses from the Bhagawat’. Ram Bhatta was glad to hear this. Again the teacher addressed him and said, ‘Kanthabhusan, you must be highly fortunate. Listen to me, and go back to Sankar (-dew) once more. Tender my salutations to Sankar (-dew). In the Iron Age a (true) Vaisnava is Visnu (Himself): it is the essence of all scriptures’. Saying so he got the book **Ratnāwali** and said to Kanthabhusan: ‘Give this book in Sankar’s hand. (Kanthabhusan) gave the book in Sankar’s hand with great joy and tendered all salutations of Ram Bhatta to Sankar (-dew)’.]

Like Sarvabhauma again, another Vaisnavite poet, Purusottam Thakur, son of Narayan Thakur, gives a comprehensive list of Sankardew’s disciples abroad, confirming his predecessor Sarvabhauma, in his *Guru Gunmālā*: -

*Rādhādās Santa : Guru mānilanta;
Saran lailanta : Hari bhajilanta. 91
Trijāta Sanyāsi : Teho Brajabāsi;
Guruk upāsi : Bhajilanta āsi. 92
Gopināth Santa : Karmi āchilanta;
Saran lailanta : Hari bhajilanta. 93
Setur khandata : Viswanāth Santa;
Guru mānilanta : Saran lailanta. 94
Rāmbhadra Santa : Param Mahanta
Karma edilanta : Hari bhajilanta. 95
Krsnakānta Santa : Param Mahanta*

Guru mānilanta : Hari bhajilanta. 96
Gangādhara Santa : Param Mahanta
Guru mānilanta : Hari bhajilanta. 97
Rudrapada nām : Teji āna kām:
Guruk pranām : Bhajilanta Rām. 98
Sridhar āchanta : Param Mahanta;
Saran lailanta : Hari bhajilanta. 99
Rām Bhatta Santa : Guru mānilanta;
Saran lailanta : Hari bhajilanta. 100
Visnudatta nām : Āti anupām;
Kailā Parasurām : Guruk pranām. 101
Visnupuri Santa : Param Mahanta;
Brahmānanda Santa : Saran lailanta. 102
Rup Sanātane : Gurur carane;
Parama yatane : Pasil sarane. 103
Āno yata santa : Saran lailanta;
Tāk kahi anta : Kone karibanta. 104

That Sankardew's fame as a scholar and reformer was quite wide-spread all through contemporary India is proved by yet another fact related by the early biographers. One Jagadis Misra of Trihut went to Puri to read the Bhagawat there for approval of his scholarship on the subject. But it so happened that he felt that he was ordered by the deity there, in a dream, to read the Bhagawat before Sankardew at Kamarupa, who had of late earned fame enough as 'living Jagannath' by interpreting scriptures at Puri. So Jagadis came to Sankardew and prayed to him to fulfil his desire. We quote in the next chapter all that was said and done.

In spite of the established fact the Sankardew already made verses of the songs of the Bhagawat, offered corrections on the interpretations of Jagadis and suggested findings on the Bhagawat, it is pity that there should be 'scholars' to say that it was the first occasion for Sankardew to have come by the Bhagawat! The approach of Jagadis as a novice and the compliance of Sankardew as a veteran scholar of the Bhagawat should leave no room for vagaries of fancy on the point.

SIX

FURTHER PROOFS OF ADMISSION OF SANKARDEW'S SCHOLARSHIP

Brāhmanar kārunyaka suniā Sankar:
Manata harise pāche dilanta uttar. 2174
Kāli ārambhibā Mahā grantha Bhāgawat:
Git pad kari mai āchoho purvat. 2176
Etahante bhaktasawa āsiā mililā:
Dewa-grhe pasi mahā nāt ārambhilā. 2177
Jisawa arthaka kahe Gitā Bhāgawate:
Sawe artha byakta huyā āchaya gitate. 2178
Anantare nāma dharilanta bhaktagane:
Amrta barise yena Brāhmanara mane. 2179
Prathama skandhara parā dvādas paryanta:
Padhilanta Vipre byākhyā kari Bhāgawata. 2180
Parama harisa mane padhe Viprabar:
Dosana siddhānta denta āpuni Sankar. 2181
Mahā grantha Bhāgawata tattvaka bicāri:
Sankare kariche pad mahā yatna kari. 2182
Jagannātha ājnā Vipre kari sirogot:
Padhilā harise bāhra skandha Bhāgawat.
Daivaki Nandane Sankaraka amsa māni:
Pathāilanta Vipraka sunila sawe prāni. 2183

[Sankardew, having heard the entreaties of the Brahmana, now made reply with joy in mind: 'Do start (reading) the great work of the Bhagawat tomorrow. I have made songs and verses (of it) long before'. Meanwhile the devotees came and gathered, (and) entering the temple, started the great drama (of God's Glory). Purports of Gita and the Bhagawat are all revealed in the songs themselves. Then the devotees began singing the Name of God (and) it appeared in the mind of the Brahmana as showering of nectar. From Canto I till Canto XII, the Brahmana read making interpretations of the Bhagawata. The Vipra used to read with a mind full of joy (and) Sankara Himself offered corrections and findings. Having searched the truth of the great Bhagawat, Sankara (-dew) already made verses with extreme care. By taking command of Jagannath on his head, the Brahman gladly read the Twelve Cantos of the Bhagawat. The son of Daivaki, admitting Sankar (-dew) as a part of Himself, despatched the Brahman (and) all people have heard (him read the Bhagawat).]

Besides the gists, as in the *Kirttan*, Sankardew rendered about eight books of the Bhagawat including the last four. He also rendered the Ramayan Uttar Kanda. But none of these renderings were entire translations, literal or word for word. Sankardew picked up only such things from them as were found suitable for his aims and objectives. This proves his vast erudition and original judgement. Besides the Bhagawat Sankardew used all important Puranas for his purpose and utilized them one with the other, and none exclusively. His *Hariscandra Upākhyān*, one of his earliest and extremely popular epics, was taken mainly from the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*, as his *Uddhawa Sambād* was from the Bhagawata in main. His *Rukmini*

Haran Kāvya, also early, and highly popular, was mainly from the *Harivamsa*, but *Bhagawat* was also brought in, as he himself informs us at the outset: -

*Eke Harivamsa kathā amrt sāksāt:
Āro Bhāgawata kathā misra dilo tāt.
Duyo kathā padabandhe karicho milāi:
Yena madhu misra dugdhe ati svād pāy. 5*

[Harivamsa by itself is nectar sure. And I have mixed matter of Bhagawat in it. I have made the verses by mixing the two, as milk becomes more tasteful when mixed with honey.]

His *Bhakti Pradip* is taken from *Garuda Puran* for preaching his faith. His *Anādi Pātan* also tells its own story: -

*Mahā Bhāgawat pad amrt sāksāt:
Bāman Purān kichu misra dilo tāt.
Dui kathā nivandhilo ekatre misale:
Madhu same dugdha yena ati svād bole. 6*

[The verse of the great Bhagawat is nectar itself. I have mixed a little of Baman Puran. I have utilized both of them in a mixture; for milk mixed with honey is considered very tasteful.]

Any one who would dub Sankardew as ‘a mere translator’ should take a note of the above-mentioned facts and yet another. Rāmānanda, an early biographer of Sankardew, makes a categorical statement about Bhagawat, by saying: -

*Tini skandha cāi / bicāriā pāy / ek skandhe sehi kathā:
Bācak-baniā / sadāgare yen / ek thāi kari tathā. 3417*

[What is to be found by searching as many as three skandhas (of the Bhagawat) has been put in one Skandha (by Sankardew), just as the most skilful merchant would gather (the selected gems) together.]

Thus it is that though Sankardew’s *Anādi Pātan*, complete in 300 verses, originally belongs to Book Three of the Bhagawat, different poems of it ends with such lines in prose: “Iti Sri Bhāgawata Mahā Purāna Caturtha Skandha prathamah (dvitiyah, trtiyah āru Caturthah) adhyāyah”.

Sankardew rendered the first part of Book Six of the Bhagawat as *Brhat Ajāmil Upākhyān*, and gave a gist of the Book Eight of the Bhagawat as *Bali Chalan* in 616 verses. But he has re-inforced it with *Bamana Puran*: -

*Mahā Bhāgawat kathā sunā sarva jan:
Astam skandhar sār Balik Chalan. 4
Bhāgawat kathā ito amrt sāksāt:
Bāman Purān kichu misra dilo tāt.
Duyo kathā nivandhilo kari ek thāi:
Yen madhu misra dugdha svād bādhi yāy. 5*

Nimi Nawa Siddha Sambād, complete in 427 verses, is a similar rendering of Bhagawat Book Eleven.

His *Kirttan-Ghosā* is really a *Kāvya-Kos*, consisting of about 30 epics, big and small. It is an original work with matters related from the Bhagawat and other Puranas.

Sankardew leaves behind the legacy of a vast and great literature himself besides that of Madhawdew and a galaxy of other Mahapurusiya writers, the like of which is not to be found anywhere else. Over and above his contribution to Indian philosophy and literature in general, his making of first prose and first drama in a modern Indian language with the invention of the first stage long before it was done even in England, his songs in general and Bargits in particular, are really a contribution to Indian music of modern times, hardly paralleled by other Vaisnavite singers of India. Even allowing that there may be other great poets, great playwrights, great reformers, social and religious, and anything else that Sankardew had been, it will certainly be difficult to find another great personality in history who had been great in every field of culture and whose influence on literature and society continues unabated for half a millennium years, so potent and so strong. So we may still join Madhawdew in his right praise of Sankardew's virtues which he correctly assessed more than five hundred years ago: -

*Jaya Guru Sankara / sarva-gunākara / yākeri nāhike upām:
Tohāri caranaka / renu satakoti / bāreka karoho pranām.
Darasita sundara / gaura kalewara / jaichana sura parakās:
Sakala sabhāsada / ranjana yākeri / darasane pāpa binās.
Binā anga-bhusana / pekhi susobhana / gahina gambhira dhirmati:
Āyata kamala / nayana bara sundara / bayana cāndakohu jyoti.
[...]
Tribhubana bandana / Daivaki nandana / yo Hari mārāla Kamsa:
Jagajana tārana / Dewa Nārāyana / Sankara tākeri amsa.
Māyā nara-tanu / dhari Hari-bhakati / kayali bahu paracār:
Sava nara pāpa / payodhi majjala / tāhe kayali uddhār.
Ava nisa cāri / Veda bicāri / bekata karu Hari-nām:
Yākeri bayane / milāi gāi / pāy manoratha kām.
Pandita māni / Veda byākhāni / garaba kayali sava cur:
Gita-kavitva guna / Sankara Dewara / kiriti gayu bahu dur.
Sri yasa dāna / māna bhuta dāyā / sava guna sampanna thika:
Bhakataka bhakati / dāne karu guru / dāyā tanaya adhika.
Nija kula tāri / bhakati bistāri / bāndhala Hari-guna setu:
Kali yuge pāpa / payodhita sava nara / tārana kārana hetu.
Bhakati bhāndāra / dvāra sava chudi / mukuti kayali udās:
Eka Sarana Hari / Nāma-Dharamakahu / rājā karu parakās.
Ki kahaba Sankara / Dewara mahimā / jāni anta napāy:
Yākeri caranaka / renu sire parasi / mukuti-sukha sukhe pāy.*

[Glory to Guru Sankar (-dew), the mine of all virtues, Who bears no comparison. I bow down a hundred crores of time at the dust of His Lotus Feet. Majestic to look at, he is with a body reddish white, as though the Sun-god has emerged into view. The attraction is he of a whole assemblage, at whose sight sins are destroyed. He looks so attractive even without any ornament; grave; majestic; sober. His eyes are very beautiful like lotuses in bloom; his face

sheds the lustre of the moon... Sankar (-dew) is the counterpart of God Narayana who came for deliverance of the people on earth, worshipped by the three worlds, son of Daivaki, the killer of Kamsa. He assumed a false human body to have spread devotion to God, so vast. All people immersed in the sea of sins (and) he has rescued them. He has searched the four Vedas thoroughly and found out (the gem of) God's Name (for purification). (Any body) singing it with his mouth can get his wished-for object. A venerable scholar, he crushed the pride of all by (re-) interpreting the Vedas. The songs and poetic genius of Sankardew with accompanying fame have spread far and wide. He had beauty, fame, gifts, rank, kindness for all life, all in-tact. As the Guru he taught devotion to devotees, and loved them better than his sons. By delivering his line of people, spreading *bhakti*, he built the bridge of God's Name so that in the Iron Age all people could cross the sea of sins. He has opened all avenues for the store of *bhakti* and has made people indifferent (even) to salvation. He has brought into light the ***Eka-Saran*** (self-surrender to the One) ***Nām-Dharma*** (the religion of reciting the Name of God) which is the king (of religions). What should I speak of the greatness of Sankardew, for I found no end of that knowledge. Only by touching the dusts of His Lotus-Feet with the head one can feel the bliss that salvation alone may give.]

SEVEN

EK-ŚARAN NĀM-DHARMA - WHAT IT MEANS

*“Sarva dharmān parityayya māmekam saranam vraja:
Aham tvām sarvapāpebhyoh moksaisyāmi mā sucah
Gītā. 18 / 66*

[Seek shelter in Me alone by leaving off all (other) religions. Grieve not, I will relieve you from all sins.]

This is the quintessence of the **Gīta**, and the final message for all people of all times and of all climes. This is also the purport of Mahapurushism which, on that ground, is called **Ek-Śaran** (self surrender to the One and to the One alone). “Ek Dew, Ek Sew, Ek bine nāi kew” (One God, One shelter, none else but One) are the watch-words of this faith. It is monotheism uncompromising. As a matter of fact, there can be no compromise of true principles. So it is that Sankardew wrote: -

*Anya devi-dew / nakaribā sew / prasādo nakhāibā tār:
Murtiko nacāibā / Grho napasibā / Bhakti haiba byabhicār.*

[Bow not to other gods and goddesses. Enter not the house where it is worshipped. Cast not a glance at the images. Partake not of their offerings, lest thy devotion to the One should be polluted.]

Uddhawa Sambād, probably the self-same work with which Sankardew initiated the first batch of his learned disciples, observes: -

*Vede yene kay tāk sunā prāna-sakhi:
Māyāmay dewa-dharma savāko upeksi.
Kewale āmāt mātra laibeka sarana:
Haibe karma-mala tyaji tevese prasanna. 31
Mai bine Vede kichu āna nabakhāne:
Jānio Vedar tattva artha ehimāne. 32*

[(Krsna says to Uddhaba) ‘Hear me, dearest friend, what the Vedas say: Avoid all religions that relate to worship of gods and goddesses, for they are illusory. Take shelter in Me and Me alone. Then alone people may be free from the consequences of their work. The Vedas speak nothing else than Me. Know this to be the purport of the Vedas’.]

In *Hariscandra Upākhyān*, the next earliest work of Sankardew, he directly uses the mythological story of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purān* for propagating his staunch monotheism. King Hariscandra sat down to perform a great sacrifice; but trouble arose when his priest Vasistha asked him to start with the worship of Ganes, which the king flatly refused to do: -

*Param Purus Hari tānka edi āge:
Kibā gune Ganesak pujibāk lāge. 25
Visnut arpibo yata pujā yajna dān:*

Visnu byatireke dewa najānoho ān. 26
Vasistha lailanta ār rsit sammati:
Ganesak edi pujilanta Laksmipati. 30

[Hari is God Supreme. For what reason should I worship Ganes first in preference to Him? I will offer all sacrifices to Visnu (God). I know no other God but Him. Vasistha consulted other sages. Visnu (God) was worshipped leaving off Ganes.]

Bhakti-Pradip, another early work of Sankardew, stresses on this *Ek-Saran* more strongly: -

Anācār kari aparādhi mor nuhi:
Ān dewa puje yito sei mor drohi. 35
Yito mahā meleccha khāy kukurak māri:
Tāto kari apavitra sito ahamkāri. 36
Dekhi bur diba lāge nāi tāt citra:
Cāndālaro asprsyā sehise apavitra. 37

[One cannot be guilty in My estimation by violating moral rules, but one becomes accountable to Me by worshipping other gods or goddesses. Such self-centered persons are more impure than very vile people who eat the flesh of dogs. There is no wonder that one has to take bath at the sight of such people, for they are untouchable even for those who are outcaste.]

And he supports this view by one story from Garuda Puran.

Mahapurisism is also called *Nām-Dharma* on the ground that it stresses on constant recitation of the **Nāma** (Name) of God in prayer. In his *Prahlād Caritra* Sankardew enumerates nine methods of bhakti: -

Srawan kirttan / smaran Visnur / arcan pada-sewan:
Dāsya sakhitva / vandan Visnut / kariba deha arpan. 341

[Hearing, singing, thinking, worshipping, prostrating, behaving as a slave or as a friend, by invocation or by dedicating the body.]

Of these nine methods, Sankardew extols **Kirttan** (singing) as the most suitable. It is because in it all the other eight methods join in greater or lesser degree. In singing **His Glory**, we ourselves hear, think, worship and prostrate (mentally) and so forth. So prayer is considered to be most useful in every religion. Sankardew extols *Kirttan (Nām)* in endless ways; in the *Pāsanda Mardan* he says: -

Kariā kalit kirttan āti:
Pāwe Vaikunthak cautrisjāti. 73
Satya yuge kari dhyān Samādhi:
Tretāt samasta yajna ārādhi.
Dvāpare puji nānā bhakti bhāwe:
Kalit Kirttane si gati pāwe. 74

[All the thirty four castes of people can attain God's Region in the Iron Age by **Kirttan**. Salvation that had been attained through meditation in the Golden Age, through sacrifices in the Silver Age, through worship in the Copper Age, can be attained through **Kirttan** in the Iron Age.]

*Sito cāndālaka garistha māni:
Yār jihbāgre thāke Hari vāni. 112
Sehise kulin Vedak buje:
Yāhār mukhe Hari Nām sije. 113*

[That Candali is glorious who has the Name of God in the tip of his tongue. He alone is pure and is versed in the Vedas in whose mouth God's Name is fructified.]

In the *Ajāmil Upākhyān*, Sankardew pushes his point deeper and declares finally: -

Kali yuge āra / anyatra dharmata / kāro nāhi adhikār. 207

[In the Iron Age no body has any claim to any other religion (save *Kirttan*).]

More beautiful still, Sankardew says (in *Ekādas Skandha*, 19315-317): When a person goes uttering the Name of God, other gods and goddesses follow invoking him. The five kinds of salvation become incarnated and each of them prays: 'Do accept me, O Father'. God's Name is strong in destroying sins. 'The satan of vice flies trembling on hearing Nām thundering'.

Sankardew gives a scientific analysis as to how **Nām Kirttan** acts and reacts on the mind for spiritual uplift. In the *Nāmaparādh*, he describes the seven stages: -

*Prathame dahibe pātakacay:
Kariba mahā punya abhyuday:
Karāwe bisayat birakati:
Krsnat bādhiba prem-bhakati. 65
Opajāiba ati Vaisnawa jnān:
Māyāk kariba dahi niryān.
Caitanya-murti Purnānanda Hari:
Thaibeka tente-ere kari. 66*

[First, (*Nam-Kirttan*) will burn out the sins. (Second), it will arouse great merits. (Third), it will create aversion for worldly pleasures. (Fourth), it will develop loving devotion to God. (Fifth), it will give birth to the mood of a Vaisnawa. (Sixth), it will extinguish illusions from the mind. (Seventh and last), it will merge (the devotee) in God Who is all life and all joy.]

As to whatever be the mood of a Vaisnawa, Sankardew gives a negative definition in *Pāsanda Mardan*: -

*Sarira sawak Mai bole citte:
Mamatā kare putrabhāryā-bitte. 132
Tirtha buli kare jalat suddhi:
Pratimāt kare dewatā buddhi.*

*Vaisnawat nāi isawa mati:
Garuto adham Krsna badati. 133*

[To call this corpse of a body Me with all one's heart; to be attached to the son, wife and self; to make purification in water calling it pilgrimage; to consider an image to be a god, are unlike a Vaisnava. (He who does so) must be worse than a bull, says Krsna.]

Thus we are confirmed that Mahapurushism is really “a genuine life process and not an intellectual speculation”. It provides not so much of a gymnasium for dialecticians as it affords scope enough, as a practical religion, for the stormstricken man of the world to find a true shelter. No only so, it gives him that eternal bliss or *amrtam*, attainment of which is the real goal of all life.

EIGHT

THE ESSENCE AND PHILOSOPHY OF MAHAPURUSISM

If lacking in noise of a mere dialectician, Sankardew has his faith founded on the rock of practical spiritual experience so deep with its philosophy again strong and clear as crystal to minds not opaque in themselves, Sankardew begins his master-piece, the holy *Kirttan*: -

*Prathame pranāmo Brahma rupi Sanātan:
Sarva awatārar kāran Nārāyan*

[First of all I bow to the Eternal Narayan Who in the nature of Brahma (Ego) is the cause of all incarnations.]

As we may see, this makes Brahma an intermediary, and not as “Etat param Brahma veda, nātah para astiti” (*Taittiriya* Up. II, 8; also *Prasna* Up, VI, 7) – “Then there is Brahma (Ego), and nothing beyond it”. Thus the originality of Sankardew’s philosophy must strike us presently. Then we come to the prayer, highly significant, in the same work: -

*Namo namo Mādhaw Vidhir vidhi-dātā:
Tumi jagatar gati mati pitā mātā.
Tumi paramātmā jagatar Isa eka:
Eko bastu nāhike tomāta byatireka. 520
Tumi kāryya kārana samasta carācar:
Suvarne-kundale yen nāhike antar.
Tumi pasu paksi surāsur taru trna:
Ajnānat mudhajane dekhe bhinna bhinna 521*

[Twice do I bow to Thee, O God, the Giver of Law to the Ordainer (Brahmā) himself. Thou art the Deliverance, the Intellect, the Father, the Mother (all in one) of the world. There is nothing else than Thee. Thou art the Effect, the Cause, the whole Universe, as there is no difference between gold and gold-earings. Thou art all beasts and birds, gods and demons, trees and creepers. It is for sheer ignorance that dullards see them different.]

Is it Sankaracarya’s Absolute Monism or Ramanuja’s Qualified Monism? Certainly it is neither this nor that. It is Sankardew’s own philosophy. It is of course not the world-soul of Pantheism, nor the Absolute of bare Philosophy: for Sankardew was certainly much more than a philosopher if only there were eyes to notice it. His conception of Godhead is that of one Who is ever living and loving, and the force with which the world is connected with God is both centripetal and centrifugal. Or as Tennyson says in his *In Memoriam*: -

*“The same God who ever lives and loves,
One God, one Law, one Element;
One far-off Divine Event
To which the whole creation moves.”*

According to Sankardew, *jiwas* (Life) are not entirely exclusive nor inclusive of God, like sparks of fire. They neither are nor were born; but they are contained in bodies as fire in

wood. Again, like fire which is yet different from the wood, is Life (*jiwa*) different from the body which alone has the so-called birth and death. Then what happens to life when the body is no more? The same thing that occurs to ether confined in a pot when the pot breaks. As the ether suffers no loss, so does life. As a lamp means the contact of fire with wick and oil, and its extinction only means the ceasing of such contacts, so death means only the cessation of contact of life with the body. Also, an extinction of the lamp cannot mean annihilation of fire which is ever present as light (or heat), so death does not mean destruction of life, but simply means that life in a body has merged in Universal Life which is ever present. So Life (*Jiwātmā*) or the Great Life (*Paramātmā*) is in the body, but is not of the body (*Dvādas*, vs. 204-210).

Sankardew's *Anādi Pātan* gives an account of Mahāpurusiyā cosmogony. It tells us how in the arc of descent, life has come down from Brahma through Prakriti with the enveloping medium of this body and the physical world, and how Mind came to be born out of Māyā which alone is responsible for this conception of the so-called universe. Sankardew puts it excellently: -

*Hridayat thāki kare bhāl manda kām:
 Eke Man cāri rup sunā tār nām...
 Nānā karma karibāk kare ālocan:
 Eko kārye sthir nohe tāk bole Man:
 Samkalpa vikalpa dharma kare ālocan:
 Buddhi nām buli tāk jānibā laksan.
 Samasta karmak mai karo buli māne:
 Ahamkār buli tāk jānibā āpone.
 Nānā sad karmak karay nitya nitya:
 Niscay jānibā Rājā tār nām citta...
 Manar kalpanā mane samasta samsār:
 Jāgan svapan nidrā tini brtti tār.
 Āche Man samasta prānir sarirat:
 Iswarar pratibimba lāgiche manat.
 Tāke buli Jiwa Man-ere bhinna nui:
 Ek pinda bhaila yene lohā agni dui.
 Mane duhkha pāile Jiwe bole mai pāo:
 Mane yaika yāwe Jiwe bole mai yāo.
 Mane yibā kare Jiwe bole mai karo:
 Manar marane Jiwe bole mai maro.
 Yena surya bimba lare jalar lagat:
 Jal sthit bhaile bimba thāke purvavat.
 Manar karmak Jiwe mor buli māne:
 Karma pāse bandi Jiwe ehise nidāne.
 Ātmār prasange Man howe acetan:
 Manatase āche ito caidhyaya bhuvan.
 Mane pāp mane punya manese narak:
 Manese kariche bhin āpon parak.
 Yatek indriyagan Manar adhin:
 Manarese ājnā pāli thāke rātri-din.
 Mane opajay jānā Manese maran:
 Manusyar Mane Moksa-bandhar kāran.*

*Yata dekhā dewa-dharma Manar pravandha:
Tāwe bandi thāke Jiwa, nerāi karma-bandha.*

[(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 Heart which does all good deeds from day to day...This world as a whole is the creation of the mind. Waking, dreaming and sleeping are the three faculties of the mind. Mind is there in the body of every being. 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 am I' says Life. Whenever the mind dies, 'So die I' says Life. It is like the reflection of the sun that moves or remains as does the water. Life is ensnared by the consequences of its own actions of this or the previous birth only because the mind thinks them to be its own doing. Mind is inanimate in reference to the soul. The fourteen universes are there only in the mind. Mind makes vice, mind makes merit, mind makes the hell. It is mind that makes people near and distant. All the organs of sense are subservient to the mind. They obey the commands of the mind day and night. 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.]

So we are placed at the threshold of the arc of ascent. Everything returns to its source. Life that shot from Him must go back to Him - "God Who is our Home". We must rid ourselves of the tribulations of the cycle of birth and rebirth. And how can we do it? We must free ourselves from the consequences of our action by which we are ensnared. "No joy but has its sorrow, that is life", said by Mephistopheles in *Faust* can none-the-less be denied. This escape from the consequences of our actions can only be effected by getting rid of the tyranny of the mind which is a creation of *maya*. Sankardew chalks out a clear path for this getting out, and we have only to follow.

NINE

BHAKTI - A MEANS AND AN END IN ITSELF

“Om trisu satyesu Bhaktireva gariyasi Bhaktireva gariyasi” (*Nāradiya Bhakti-Sutra*) - declares Narada after a careful inquiry into the respective merits of Knowledge, Ritualities and Devotion: ‘Of the three truths (Jnan, Karma, Bhakti), Bhakti is decidedly the most glorious, aye, Bhakti is decidedly the most glorious!’ It is in itself an admission of the other two paths of *Jnan* and *Karma*, and of their leading to the goal; but preferability of the path of *bhakti* is claimed on the ground that it is the path and the goal in one. The Gita speaks of the respective merits of each; but it is the **Bhagawat** that shows *bhakti* as the golden path among the three.

As earlier said God and life (*jiwa*) are one in species with the only difference that God is beyond and *jiwa* is below maya: “Māyā-mugdha bhavet jīwah: Māyā-muktah Sadāsiwah”. God has infinite power while man’s power is limited. God is therefore able to afford shelter and man is apt to seek it. *Bhakti* is this seeking of shelter.

Bhakti bifurcates itself into *viddhā* (selfish) and *suddhā* (selfless), and the former again subdivides itself into *karmaviddhā* (ritualistic) and *jnāna-viddhā* (intellectualistic). Ritualistics are called *bubhuksu* (hungry) for they make sacrifices, gifts etc. in order that they may feed themselves better; and Intellectualistics are called *mumuksu* (salvation-seekers) who take recourse to meditation etc. *Suddhā Bhakti* (selfless devotion) is characterised by being *ahaituki* (love for love’s sake), *apratihata* (un-interrupted), *krcchrahina* (non-tyrannising), *abyabhichari* (unadulterated). Sankardew preached *Suddhā Bhakti*. Even in his earliest work, *Uddhawa Sambād*, he advocates *bhakti*: -

*Nachāde karmik soke-dukhe prati dine:
Jnānato nāhike gati Bhakatit bine.
Āne najānay ito Vedar bicār:
Eteke Bhakati-path sammat āmār. 36*

[Ritualists are under tribulations of grief and sorrow from day to day. There can be no deliverance from them even by acquisition of knowledge without the aid of Bhakti. Laymen are ignorant of the true verdict of the Vedas. So the path of Bhakti is the one that I approve.]

Still later he is more eloquent: -

*Jagatar dharma karma karok sakale:
Moke ātmā buli yadi jāne yoga bale.
Tathāpi pavitra tār nohe tanu citta:
Neday mrtyu bhay jnāni karmi kadācīta. 49
Napāway mok yāg-yog yajna-dāne:
Mahā mantra japi koti sata tirtha-snāne.
Napāwe āmāk ekādasi upabāse:
Nakaray basya mok param sanyāse. 59
Ān karma kariā michāte mare loka:
Bhaktar sangese samyaka jāne moka. 60
Dewato tirthato kari bhakatese bar:*

Bhakatak bhajile gucay karma-jar. 65
Thākoho sarvadā mai bhakatar pās:
Yei bole sei karo yena nija dās. 71

[(Krsna says) “Let any body do all virtues and rituals that there be in the world; let him know Me as the soul by dint of *yoga*: Yet his body and heart cannot become pure. For the intellectualist and ritualist can never escape the fear of death. None can attain Me by sacrifices, meditations and gifts, not by murmuring great incantations, not by bathing in a hundred crores of pilgrimages. None can attain Me by observing fasts on *ekadasi*, nor can great renunciation of the world overwhelm Me. Men mortify themselves in vain by making rituals. It is really the congregation of *Bhaktas* that can know Me. Superior to the gods and better than pilgrimage are the *Bhaktas*. All vices accompanying performance of rituals are removed when one is devoted to *Bhaktas*. I am always in the company of *Bhaktas* and I do their bidding as though I have been their own slave.”]

The vast and varied Mahāpurusiyā literature is too eloquent with the praise of *bhakti* to need further illustrations. The question is sometimes raised by erudition or sophistry as to Sankardew’s attitude towards salvation, though it is stupid in itself in view of the glare of the Mahapurusiya literature on the point. As has already been seen, Sankardew preached only *Suddhā Bhakti* (Love for Love’s sake) and seeking of salvation belongs to the opposite campaign of *viddhā bhakti* (selfish love). Again as has already been quoted, the five *muktis* dog the selfless devotee crying, ‘O father, pick me up’. They come unasked and as a matter of course. Even refusing, he cannot avoid it. True it is, Sankardew sometimes says: -

Bhāi mukhe bolā Rām, hrdāye dharā rup:
Tevese mukuti pāibā kahilo svarup.

[Oh brother, utter the Name of God with the mouth, and think of His form in heart: then alone you will secure salvation, I tell you the right thing.]

It is a mere inducement for the dullard. The *Bhakta* who is to be adored is he “who is averse even to salvation” as has already been quoted from the first verse of *Nām-Ghosā*. Has not Sankardew himself declared in his *Bhakti-Ratnākar*?

Tomār Bhaktar mukhe tayu kathāmṛta:
Srawan karita napāy yito mukutita. 222
Kadācit sito mukutit bāncā nāi. 223

[I never care for salvation in which one is deprived of drinking the nectar of Thy Glories from the mouth of Thy *Bhakta*.]

Also in his *Kirttan* Sankardew declares: -

Nalāge lina mukutika tathā:
Nāhi Hari-pada-pankaja yathā. 114

[I refuse the salvation in which, being merged in Thee, I miss Thy Lotus Feet.]

“Think of His Form in thy heart”, said Sankardew, to be sure. The question is again raised, does Sankardew say that God has the average (human) form? The reply is strongly negative, for has it not been distinctly said in the *Nām-Ghosā*: -

*Yatek prākrt / ākār barjit / bhailanta yihetu Hari:
Sehi hetutese / Nirākār nām / āchanta Isware dhari. 162*

[God is called form-less as He is devoid of average form.]

Similarly He is called *nirguna*, for He is above the average qualities of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. But it is certainly beyond average conception to feel anything like that. So the *Nām Ghosa* gives a clarification on this point too: -

*Param durbodha ātma-tattva / tār jnān arthe Hari yata:
Lilā awatār dharātumi Kṛpāmay:
Tāhān caritra sudhā-sindhu / tāt kridā kari Dina-bandhu
Cāri purusārtha trnar sama karay. 640*

[The philosophy of Self is highly unintelligible. In order to appraise of it all-merciful God assumes sham incarnations. Characters of such incarnations are nectrine seas. By plunging in them the Friend of the Poor makes the four efforts (*Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksa*) as simple as the grass.]

Thus while the philosophy of Brahma taught by the Upanisads is not totally denied, and while Mahāpurus is conceived by Sankardew even as beyond Brahma, he admits sham incarnation as necessary gradual steps for realisation of the philosophy of Self. It may be for the intellectuals to meditate Nirguna Brahma as *so'ham* (He is Me), but Sankardew totally discards this path of Jnana as too difficult for the average people, if not sheer unpractical. Sankardew also discards the path of Karma (ritualities) as slippery and unsuitable, but wholly advocates the path of Bhakti (Love) which is not only highly suitable and universally practicable, but is also quite easy and practical. Not only so, but as the *Nām-Ghosā* declares: -

Nirgun Krsnar / gunak prakās / karilā Sri Sankare. 357

[It is Sri Sankar (-dew) Who has revealed the guna (virtues) of God Who is Himself *nirguna* (above virtues).]

Gunas (virtues) are earthly which God is certainly not. Sankardew has interpreted *Nirguna*, that is incomprehensible, in terms of his *Gunas* or Glories Which are quite comprehensible and yet not earthly. In *Nām-Ghosā*: -

*Tayu gun-Nām Hari / kewal nirgun mātra
Āwar samasta gunamay:
Eteka jāniā Hari / tomar Nāmak mātra,
Karilo sār / Kṛpāmay. 74*

[O God, Thy *gunas* of *Nām* (or Glories) alone are *nirguna* (non-earthly or eternal), all else are *gunamay* (earthly or ephemeral). Knowing this, O the merciful One, I have considered Thy *Nām* (Glories) as the soul (of reality).]

So in Mahapurushism the *saguna* or *nirguna* forms of worship meet and are blended into one, and we come once more to *Nām-Dharma*, which Sankardew extols in a hundred ways. “Yataye paramā, dharamā karamā, savakahu rājā nām”; “Dewaka upari, rājā Mādhawa, dharam upari Nām” (*Kāliya Daman*). In the *Bhakti Ratnākar*, he says about his conception of Godhead:

*Paramātmā Hari / Bijnān-murati / nirākār, nirāmay:
Nitya Niranjan / Ānanda svarup / deh-indri nāhikay. 764
Tathāpi sunay / bacan bolay / bastuk sawa dharay. 765
Gatiko karay / basiā thākay / kāhāko karanta hat:
Jagatar kartā / pālay sawāko / samhāre sawa jagat.
Srajiā jagat / sadā thāke tāt / āti udāsin bhāwe:
Nāhike ākul / samsārar dose / tāhāk eko napāwe. 766*

[God is the Soul Supreme. He is science personified. He is without form and devoid of defects. He is ever spotless. He is joy incarnate. He is without body and devoid of organs of sense. Yet He hears, utter words, catches hold of things. He moves, sits, and kills whom-so-ever it needs. He is the master of the world. He preserves all and annihilates the world. He makes the world, and keeps there very indifferently. He has no anxiety. Vices of the world do not reach him.]

So Sankardew’s God is not a do-nothing king. He reigns and also rules.

TEN

MAHAPURUSIYA PRACTICE AND WAY OF LIFE

For a full appraisal of the effects of Mahapurisism on the society, one must be well-informed of the social and political conditions of Assam about the fifteenth century. On the political side we find the Cutiyās and the Bārabhuyās, the Kachāries and the Āhoms, the Koces and the Mughals, besides minor tribes, always at strife with one another. On the social side we find that besides Saivism and Sāktism, Buddhism and Vaisnavism, many sub-religions as totemism combined with primitive beliefs of the non-Aryan tribes were struggling either for supremacy or for their mere existence. Sāktism now forming a curious mixture of Aryan and non-Aryan practices and beliefs culminated in human sacrifices till comparatively recent times, perpetrated openly in temples probably as in Kāmākhya as it was definitely in the Copper Temple at Sadiyā which is therefore called the Eastern Kamakhya. Besides the Vaisnavite biographies of post-fifteenth century, the two famous Sanskrit works *Kālikā Purān* and *Yogini Tantra* give a horrible picture of the times.

Over and above these, Āin-e-Ākbari is there to show another view of the society, mainly about the *Bhogis* who as victims, doomed to be sacrificed before the goddess, were allowed full licence to do whatsoever they desired as desperate souls. A few facts like these may suffice to picture the society which may be better imagined than described.

Sankardew and his apostolic successor Madhawdew were staunch sāktas themselves by birth, and so they were perhaps destined to attack the fort of corruption from within. Sankardew studied the scriptures and society alike. He searched, found and applied the remedy. It was revolution to be sure; but he revolutionised it and tried to make the war as peaceful as possible.

There had been a good deal of similarity in conditions of pre-Sankardew Asam with pre-Buddhadew Bharat. Both the great reformers saw the danger of adulteration of spiritual food. Morality had been replaced by formality of religion, and purity of personal life was gone for good. Both tried to restore purity of personal life by reinstating morality. Merit supposed to be earned by proxy was discouraged. It would not be enough to profess a religion. One must live his religion. So self-purification was strictly enjoined. God is not to be made a scare-crow. Buddhadew really omitted God from the temporary daily routine of a Buddhist life in stressing on Dhamma having an ethical sense equivalent to the Indo-European word *Rta*, having a physical sense of 'order', and to the Sanskrit word *Satya* having a theoretical sense of 'truth'.

Sankardew did not omit God from the daily routine of a Mahapurisiya life, but equated God with the sum-total of all life making his religion seem like the one: -

*“He prayeth best who loveth best
All creatures great and small.”*

So in the Kirtan we find Sankardew would advise his followers to practise: -

*Karma-bandha edāiba pravandha yār āche.
Vaisnawar sanga sito laiba prathamat:*

Mohor caritra sunibeka Bhakatat: 1875
Mor nām kirttan kariba sarvaksane:
Hridayat mor rup cintiba yatane. 1876
Samasta bhutate vyāpi ācho mai Hari:
Savāka manibā tumi Visnu buddhi kari. 1877
Brāhmanar cāndālar nibicāri kul:
Dātāt corat yen drsti ekatul.
Nicat sādhu yār bhaila eka jnān:
Tāhākese Pandit buliā sarva jān. 1878
Bisesat manusyaganat yito nare:
Visnu buddhi bhāwe sarvadāy mānya kare.
Irsā asuyā tiraskār ahamkār:
Save nasta howe teve tāvaksane tār. 1879
Dekhi sakhigane jāno hāse āsi bedi:
Mai sādhu ito cor hena lajjā edi.
Kukur cāndāl gardabharo ātmā Rām:
Jāniā savāko padi karibā pranām. 1880
Samasta bhutat Visnu buddhi nohe yāwe:
Kāya-bākya-mane abhyāsibā eibhāwe.
Visnumay dekhe yito samasta jagate:
Jiwante mukuta howe acira kālāte. 1881
Sakala prānik dekhibeka ātma sama:
Upāy madhyat ito āti mukhyatama. 1882

[For him who desires to secure emancipation from the consequences of the actions of past life, he must at the outset attach himself to a Vaisnava. He must hear about My Deeds from a Bhakta. He must recite My Name every moment. He must carefully think of My Form in his heart. I am pervading all elements as Hari. So pay respect to them as if each of them is Visnu. Never seek ye the caste of a Brahman or Candal. Have an equal eye on a donor and a thief. One who has an idea of sameness in between a rogue and a saint, know him, ye all, to be a (true) scholar. Particularly those who respect off and on each man as Visnu Himself, have their jealousy, enmity, condemnation and pride destroyed forthwith. Leaving off (such hesitations as) ‘my friends may make a laughing-stock of me by seeing all this’, (and) such delicacies as ‘I am a saint’, ‘He is a thief’, prostrate (in your heart) before all knowing that Ram (God) is the soul of the dog, the outcaste and the donkey (alike). Practice like this physically, orally and intellectually until you realise Visnu in every element. One who sees Visnu in all the world secures ones 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).]

In the *Prahlād Carit*, Sankardew re-iterates the same practical and ethical means of attaining deliverance: -

Samasta prānik pujā Visnu buddhi kari. 360
Krsnar carane haiba yimate bhakati:
Sunā sāvadhāne tāk sthir kari mati.
Visnu bhakatar sanga laiba prathamate:
Guru māni susrusā kariba bhālamate. 376
Laiā upades Mādhawak ārādhiba:
Yateka sukrti māne Krsnata arpiba.

*Krsna-kathā srawanat suddha haiba man:
 Sarvadāye karibāhā Krsnar Kirttan. 377
 Krsnar caran cintibāhā hridayat:
 Āchanta Iswar Hari samasta bhutat.
 Hena jāni prānādhik kariba satkār:
 Tevese Krsnat rati haibeka tomār. 378
 Harir sewāt kichu nāhike prayās:
 Āpuni laibanta Hari hridayat bās. 379
 Samasta bhutate dekhibāhā Nārāyan:
 Āta pare āna dharma save bidamban. 383*

[Revere every being considering it as Visnu. Listen with careful and rapt attention how you may acquire love at **Krsna's Feet**. First of all, attach yourself to a devotee of Visnu. Obey and serve him as your preceptor the best way you can. Adore Madhawa by following his advice. Dedicate all your good deeds to **Krsna**. Sing the Glories of **Krsna** off and on. Think of Krsna's Feet in your heart. God is there in each and every element. Knowing it to be so, pay respect to all as more than your life. Then alone you will have attachment to **Krsna**. You have not to strain hard in serving **Krsna**. Hari will settle in your heart of Himself. See Narayana in every element. Any religion else than this is useless.]

Not only in religious philosophy and literature, but also in social organisation Sankardew made his mark that is unparalleled in history. The present Asamiyā society and its high culture are Sankardew's own creation, and they are almost intact all through these long five centuries. He has left a society and culture that perhaps stand amongst the highest in India. His religion, conspicuous by the absence of any duality or female figure like Ramanuja's Laksmi, Ramananda's Sita, or Caitanya's Radha, stands not only unadulterated but also undecaying.

It is of course a fact that not long after Sankardew, Mahapurisism has lent itself to Dāmodarism and Haridewism and into four *Samhatis*; but they are only offshoots and branches that make the parent tree simply more embracing and wide-spread, accommodating newer tastes and adjusting itself to newer circumstances. The parent Mahapurisism may therefore seem to suffer change, but really has not suffered loss.

Curiously enough, Mahapurisism preached five centuries back almost anticipated the present movements of society like untouchability, but were far more sincere and thorough in its reform. It never went down, but got up, to meet those who had been below in society. Sankardew, a thoroughgoing and skilful reformer, did not try to kill the serpent of caste system, but simply removed the poison out of it. He gave us the very kernel of democracy when in his holy *Kirttan* he declared: -

*Kariā kalit Kirttan āti:
 Pāwe Vaikunthak coutris jāti. 73*

[The people of thirty four castes can attain Paradise by reciting the Name of God in the Iron Age.]

*Sito cāndālak garistha māni:
 Yār jihbāgre thāke Haribāni. 112*

[That untouchable is to be considered glorious who has the Name of God in the tip of his tongue.]

*Cāndālo Hari Nām lawe mātra:
Kariba ucit yajnar pātra. 119*

[An untouchable is fit to be the priest in a sacrifice only if he often recites the Name of God.]

*Krsnar kathāt yito rasika:
Brāhman janma tār lāge kika.
Smarok mātra Hari din-rāti:
Nabāce bhakati jāti-ajāti. 130*

[What for needs he be a Brahman who is an admirer of the Glories of God. Let him recite the Name of God day and night, Bhakti will not care for caste high or low.]

So untouchability, in the gross sense of the term has really been unknown in Asamiyā society, at least since the time of Sankardew. Percentage of literacy may not still be high enough in Asam; but education and culture, in the real sense of the terms, must be among the highest in India within the Asamiyā society. And the Vaisnavite propaganda of Sankardew, for which illiteracy could be no bar in any way, must be held responsible for it. Sankardew included, besides Kaibarttas, Kachāris, Miris, Gāros, Nāgās and such people, a Muhammadan, Cand Khā by name, among his dearest and supreme disciples, five centuries ago.

ELEVEN

THE FUTURE OF MAHAPURUSISM

From the foregoing discussions the conclusion appears irresistible that Mahapurisism has also a bright future. It is quite likely that it will play the same smart role in the coming millenniums as it has played in the last half millennium since its inception in “the elevation of human nature and the stoppage of its course towards degradation, the formation of human character on a strong rational foundation, the improvement of the general form and tone of society, race and civilization, the cordiality of human relations, the refinement and dignity in human behaviour, the liberal and sound education of all, the release of all higher energies towards the cause of culture and humanity, in short, the propounding of higher ideals of life.... as the true mission of all religions instead of creating sects and committing themselves to certain set creeds and practices and forms”.

A very long life for Mahapurisism like that of Buddhism, for instance, is vouchsafed even in these stormy days of changes and uncertainties, more particularly in an almost anti-religious atmosphere of the present moment, because of the all-universal character of Mahapurisism. First of all we may refer to its universal applicability which is thus extolled by Madhawdew: -

*“Hari-Nām kirttanat / Nāhi kāl des-pātra
Niyam samyam eko vidhi:
Harit saran laiā / kewal Harir nām
Kirttan karante howe siddhi.” N. G. 29*

[For singing the Name of God there is no limit of time, clime fitness, rules, restrictions or laws. Achievement is secured simply by seeking shelter in God and singing His glories.]

The universal character of Mahapurisism is also evident in its broad principles. The fact of Sankardew having Muhammadan disciples is itself a pointer to the truth that it is quite in harmony with all true religions of the world only if Mahapurisism be still freer from formalities and technicalities that often overwhelm religions. Mahapurisism is priestless as it is casteless, and one is free to work out one’s own salvation. The Guru has only to show the path correctly by precepts and examples. The proxy system being condemned, a Mahapurisiya has more to live his religion than profess it. Mahapurisism is divorced from pitfalls of creeds and greeds, not allowing it to be “degenerated into trade in the name of God, holiness and salvation”, the fate of most religions.

Tripitakacarya Dr. Late Beni Madhav Barua appears to be thinking also of Mahapurisism when he spoke of “Buddhism - its Modern Appeal”:- “One thing is certain, namely, that the days of the priest-ridden and creed-infested institutional religions are numbered, if they are not dead already. Modern youth may care only for that religion which is both universal and personal, and which is compatible with science and reason. There must be no ‘close-fist’ (ācārāya mutthi) or trade-secret, no monopoly of divine business in any privileged class. If religion is to stand, it must henceforth show an open heart and follow an open-door policy”. (*Ceylon Lectures*, p. 283.)

Mahapurisism, is thus a definite denial of Inge's definition of religion that it is "the joint produce of the simplicity of the first fool and duplicity of the first knave", for no fool and no knave has any place in it. It is also a reply to modern youths who may "have begun to doubt its (religion's) utility except in enslaving the human spirit and creating divisions between communities, sects and sects". Sankardewite and post-Sankardewite Asam like Buddhadewite and post-Buddhadewite Bharat, Christian and post-Christian Europe and Muhammadan and post-Muhammadan Arabia etc., bear historical evidence to the truth that no true religion is there in the world but emancipates and puts an end to slavery of the spirit.

Mahapurisism is not incompatible with science and reason, as religions are usually supposed to be; but really suggests a new line for co-operation between them. In his *Essays of a Biologist*, Julien Huxley concludes his essay on Religion and Science (also quoted in *Ceylon Lectures*) saying: "A chapter in the history of Earth closed with the appearance of man. In man, the Weltstaff had been made able to think and feel, to love beauty and truth - the cosmos had generated soul. A new chapter then began, a chapter in which we are all characters. Matter had flowered in soul. Soul is now to mould matter. That moulding of matter by spirit is, under one aspect, science; under another, art; under still another, religion. Let us be careful not to allow the moulding forces to counteract each other when they might be made to co-operate".

Thus, curiously enough, Sankardew of fifteenth century India seems to have anticipated all these twentieth century movements, social and intellectual, for which Mahapurisism proves itself not only not time-barred but a truly progressive religion progressing "the dateless and irrevoluble circle of its own perfection, joining inseparable hands with joy and bliss in over-measure for ever", as spiritual progress must be. This is however not to say that Sankardew has said the last word on religion. Far from it. As Sir Muhammad Iqbal says in his *Religious Thoughts in Islam*: "...there is no such thing as finality in philosophical thinking. As knowledge advances and fresh avenues of thought are opened, other views and probably sounder views are possible". So we can only say that Mahapurisism has been found catholic enough to accommodate what appears to be opening of "fresh avenues of thought".

The all universal character of Sankardew's teachings is also vouchsafed by his literature written in Asamiyā and Sanskrit. Not only are his instructions conspicuous by the absence of anything that might be born of narrowness of sect or creed, but those synonyms of God as Hari, Narayan, Krsna etc. if now replaced by such words as God or Allah can serve to suit instructions in Christianity, Islam etc. As in his personal life so in his teachings Sankardew had so many things in common with Buddhadew including the Saranas and excluding, of course, omission of God's Name in the routine of daily life. Sankardew emphasised application of morality against formality in daily life almost equally with Buddhadew.

So Sankardew is one of the world teachers and Mahapurisism one of the universal religions of the world and the world grows richer and happier by a true acquaintance with them. In view of the immensity and vastness of the subject, the forgoing pages may serve only as a bird's-eye-view, and the humble efforts here may be deemed amply rewarded only if they happen to awaken something of admiration or curiosity in the subject.

TWELVE

WORKS OF SANKARDEW AND MADHAWDEW

Mahapurism is happily supported by a vast and strong Mahapurisiya literature in Assamese and Sanskrit, unparalleled in India, potent and creative enough and losing little of its vitality in the course of the last half millennium since its inception. This great literature, also styled as Neo-Vaisnavite Asamiyā literature, really inaugurated a new era into the social and political, cultural and religious life of the State, the like of which is hardly to be seen. One can only feel the change as in breathing in a new celestial atmosphere, but can scarcely describe it. Asam after Mahapurism is, as England after Christianity, a cosmos after chaos, a beautiful creation with no more of any unstable equilibrium. Its social and cultural structure is as permanent as the rock on which it is founded. Sankardew provided the alpha and omega of it.

Sankardew Himself is the Phoebus in the Solar System of the Neo-Vaisnavite renaissance of Asam in all the various fields of activity inclusive of the literary. The interesting poem “Karatala kamala kamaladala nayana” written without any vowel, except of course ‘a’, is attributed to the first year of Sankardew’s school-life, and perhaps also of his teens, and may be dated 1462. It is a splendid description of **Krsna** Who exhibits lotuses in His Hands, Feet and Eyes etc.

Hariscandra Upākhyān Kāvya is known to be his first regular Kavya “planting the four boundary pillars for Vaisnavas”. It is said to have been written not long after leaving his school and may be dated 1467. *Cihna Yātrā*, an One-Act Opera, using the stage with scenes as is done today, was Sankardew’s next literary adventure distinctly assigned to 1468. Unfortunately this literary piece is not preserved to us, but his contemporary biographers like Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya and Ramcaran Thakur give us vivid and life-like description of this one-Act play with its tremendous effect on the thousands of audience. *Uddhawa Sambād*, a small epic of 177 verses in all, may also be assigned to 1468, as it was almost simultaneous work with *Cihna Yātrā*, having been written to initiate the first batch of his disciples.

Rukmini Haran Kāvya appears to be the next work which Sankardew wrote. It affords a solitary instance of Sankardew ever introducing himself as “Kavi Sankar” which shows that he was yet a novice as a religious reformer and also probably a poet probationer. But these two of his earlier *kavyas* enjoy tremendous popularity despite or perhaps because of it.

Bhakti-Pradip (Garuda Puran), one copy of which was presented to Bhavananda Saud *alias* Narayan Thakur, one of the first and foremost disciples of Sankardew, must also be another early work. Whether the word ‘Kavya’ is attached or not, all the words, without exception, deal with supremacy of Love and self-surrender for the One, discarding other gods and goddesses.

Odesā Varnan is also quoted as one of the early works of Sankardew, although it is now thrown in the appendices of the *Kirttan-Ghosa*. It was a verse-rendering of the *Brahma Puran* which was most probably done after Sankardew’s twelve-years’ tour all over India. It is stated that when later Sankardew did not approve and would rather destroy it, Madhawdew requested him to add two more poems on the glorification of *Nam* and preserve *Odesa Varnan* in the appendix as has been done now.

These may cover all the works of Sankardew written before his happy historic meeting with Madhawdew.

After careful consideration and thought, we feel that “Prathamate karilanta *Kirttanara chanda*” stated by Daityari Thakur and since oft quoted, may not be taken literally to mean that the *Kirttan-Ghosā* was anything like a maiden voyage of Sankardew in the ocean of literature, which it cannot afford to be. K.G. is actually an anthology of more than two dozen epics of various magnitudes, by Sankardew himself, beginning with *Caturvimsati Awatār* and really completed by *Sri Ksrnar Vaikuntha Prayān* followed by appendices including *Odesā Varnan*.

In the *New Light on History of Asamiyā Literature* (pp.183-84), we have assigned our reasons for thinking that the compositing of K.G. probably commenced some time in the last decade of the fifteenth century, not long after Sankardew’s historic meeting with Madhawdew at Dhuyāhāt (Belguri) in Upper Asam, which is definitely a grand landmark in Asam’s history.

The important *addenda* of *Uttarakānda* by Sankardew and *Ādi Kānda* by Madhawdew to the original five cantos of the Ramayana by Madhaw Kandali may be called the first milestone in their literary collaboration.

As fully vouchsafed by the biographers, Sankardew actually rendered the *Bhagawata* into Asamiyā poems and songs before Jagadis Misra of Trihut came to Sankardew to get his approval and earn consequent merit as a reader of the Bhagawat. Even before he commenced reading the Bhagawat, Jagadis heard the devotees sing the poems and songs of the Bhagawat in the prayer-house of Sankardew. So some epics of K.G. were already composed before Sankardew met Jagadis and even before he met Madhawdew. All the parts were completed only some time before his great exit, which is proved by the fact that they were scattered throughout Asam before they were collected by Ramcaran Thakur, the nephew of Madhawdew.

Sankardew took the theme of his *Rukmini Haran Kavya* from *Harivamsa* and incorporated the *Bhagawata* into it, and calls it a compound of milk and honey, which is Sankardew’s own. His *Anādi Pātan* consisting of 300 verses, is from *Bhagawat*, Book Three; but he incorporates *Baman Puran* into it, and calls it again a compound of honey with milk, also Sankardew’s own.

Brhat Ajāmil Upākhyān from Book Six, *Bali Chalan* from Book Eight of the Bhagawat, by Sankardew consist of 375 and 616 verses respectively, and are shaped by him to suit his own theme. He also rendered Book Ten (Part One), better known as *Dasam*, Book Eleven in 427 verses as *Nimi Nava Siddha Sambād*, and Book Twelve as a gist in 539 verses. The remaining parts of the Bhagawat as those of Book Ten, were allowed or ordered by him to be completed by other great Mahapurusiya luminaries like Ananta Kandali.

The exquisite *Totay*, “Madhu-Dānawa”, composed ex-tempore in Sanskrit by Sankardew before Maharaj Nara-Narayan, and his grand *Gun-Mālā* written in the exquisite Kusum-Mālā metre in 376 verses at the request of the king, his great anthology *Bhakti-Ratnākar* in Sanskrit, are among the most illustrious works which Sankardew himself penned in verses.

Among his other literary contributions are Sankardew's celebrated *Ankas* (dramas in One-Act) and his *Bar-Gits* (Noble Songs) all in sublime language and Ragas, being conspicuous by the absence of any Raginis whatsoever. *China Yātrā* was followed, not immediately perhaps, by *Patni Prasād*, which was played at Barpeta in the funeral ceremony of Madhawdew's mother. Then came *Pārijāt Haran*, *Kāliya Daman*, *Rukmini Haran*, *Rām-Vijay* and probably a few more. But we must be warned that like some epics there are some dramas too, distinctly spurious and unfortunately attributed to Sankardew. *Bargits* by Sankardew, as extant, are comparatively few in number, as *Katha-Guru-Carit* clearly states how of the original 240 Bargits a good majority was burnt by wild fire that caught the houses.

Madhawdew, almost equally prolific, wrote a similar number of epics, dramas and *Bar-Gits*. His *Bhakti-Ratnāwali* like his *Nām-Mālikā* is a verse-rendering of an illustrious Sanskrit work; but is yet held in very high estimation by the Mahapurisias.

Nām-Ghosā, considered to be Madhawdew's masterpiece, is still mainly translation in a large part of the most celebrated verses of the *Gita*, *Bhagawat* and other Sanskrit works; but they are so woven together into His own composition that it makes an amalgam quite his own and a piece of literature as original, so-much-so that the *Ghosā* occupies a place in the religious Asam analogous to the one occupied by the *Gita* in the religious India. So the Mahapurisias of Asam, who never allow any image in their prayer house, instal either the *Ghosa* by Madhawdew, or the *Kirttan* by Sankardew, and in default would instal either the *Ratnawali* by the former or *Dasam* by the latter on the altar.

Among his dramas, the most celebrated are *Cor-dharā*, *Pimparā-Gucowā*, *Bhumi-Lotowā*, *Bhojan-Vihār*, *Arjun-Bhanjan* (*Dadhi-Mathan*) etc. Among the suspected dramas are *Keli-Gopāl* and *Rās-Jhumurā* where some foreign matter was probably interpolated if they are not spurious as a whole. Like *Rām-Mālikā*, a spurious work attributed to Sankardew, *Ādi Carit*, *Amulya Ratna*, *Gupta-mani* are such wicked works that were attributed to Madhawdew, either to make some illegitimate things legitimate or to villify some creeds or personalities.

Madhawdew's *Bar-Gits* are of course considerable in quality and quantity alike.