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“A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE TEACHINGS OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA AND THE VAISHNAVISM OF ASSAM: ITS PRESENT AND FUTURE IMPACT IN THE SOCIETY”

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ABSTRACT:

The Bhagavad Gita is one of the most important religious book of Hindus. Although thousands of religious books and commentaries are there in Hinduism, but none surpass the reverence which is given to Bhagavat Gita , its because lord krishana has spoken on many paths like Bhakti yoga(path of devotion), karma yoga (path of performing your duties in a righteous and detached way), Jnana yoga (path of knowledge) and so on. So the seeker can focus on the teachings from Bhagavad Gita which suits him and can make quick progress on the path. Bhagavat Gita is a heart to heart conversation between two friends in the middle of a battle field, but during this intimate talk they have taken the role of a guru and disciple. The guru is lord Vishnu and disciple is his dearest friend Arjuna who needs guidance in the middle of war which is going to be fought between brothers, friends and guru-disciple. It's a very touching, grave and serious moment. On one side there is dharma which needs to be protected and other side stand his loved ones, family members, friends, guru and elders who need to be slayed to protect the dharma. Now Arjuna is totally confused and heartbroken. He does not want the kingdom which comes by protecting the dharma and by killing the loved ones. So warrior prince Arjuna is dejected and is in great dilemma. He is seriously thinking of quitting the battle. But lord Krishna reminds him of his duty as a warrior and also uplifts his consciousness with his spiritual discourse in the form of bhagavad gita. For thousands of years, this special talk has helped millions of seekers who ever read purpose of his life and solution his problem.



Vaishnavism is the branch of Hinduism in which Vishnu or one of his incarnations (usually Krishna or Rama) is worshipped as the supreme God. In Addition to the Vedas, vaishnavites especially revere the Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavad Purana, the Vishnu Samhita and the Gita Govinda, among others. These text focus especially on Vishnu or his incarnation Krishna and Rama. Vaishnavism is one of the major Hindu denominations along with Shaivism, Shaktism and Samrtism. It is also called Vishnusim, its flowers are called Vaishnavas or Vaishnavites and it considers Vishnu as the supreme lord. The Vaisnavite movement of Sri Sri Sankardev was the reaction against the sacrificial ceremonies of Hindu religion. Sankardev wanted to remove some prejudices from the society that existed in the society at that time. So he created a new religious movement based on the prayer of the different incarnation of lord Vishnu, called Vaishnavism. This movement brought a renaissance like revolution in the history of Assam's religion. This Vaishnavite movement of Sankardev brought a change not only in religion but also in cultural of society. Arts and music are being development in the form of Borgeet, Ankiya Naat and Bhauna etc.

This paper would put some lights on the main teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and the Vaishnavism of Sankardev. This study will help us to modify our attitudes towards these philosophies, so that we can get

much more fruitful result for the welfare of the society. To up hold the finding this study descriptive method is used. The study is qualitative in nature and the data has been collected from different primary and secondary sources.

KEYWORDS: *Bhakti yoga, Karma yoga, Jnana yoga, incarnation, worshiped, sacrificial ceremonies, prejudices, renaissance, revolution, cultural development etc..*

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the most notable countries where much more importance is given on the religious aspect of human being. As a result of it, various scriptures and commentaries have been created among them four Vedas, the Uparishads, the Brahmasutra, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata etc. The Bhagavad Gita is the part of the "Bhisma Parva" of the Mahabharata. This book is composed of the incidents that took place just before the war between Kauravas and Pandavas at the place of Kurukshetra field. After the Vedas and Upanishads, there arise many Bhakti movements in India. They are Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism etc. The Vaishnavism of Assam was founded by the legend seer of Assam Srimanta Sankardeva an Madhavdeva. Sankardeva Vaishnavism is based on the teachings of Bhagavad Gita. But there are some similarities and difference among Vaishnavism of Sankardeva an Gita. Sankardeva founded his vaishnavism sect in the later part of fifteenth century which was carried out later by Sri Sri Madhavdeva. This Bhakti movement is liberal in nature which does not believe in any nature which does not believe in any type of casteism or untouchability. Sankardeva wanted to remove some prejudices from the society that

existed in the society at that time. So, he created a new religious movement based on the prayer of the different incarnation of Lord Vishnu, called Vaishnavism. This Vaishnavite movement of Sankardeva brought a change not only in religion but also in cultural of society. Art and music are being developed in the form of Borgeet, Ankiyanaat and Bhauna etc.

There is a relation between the fundamental teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and the Vaishnavite Philosophy of Sankardeva. For example: The Karma of Bhagavad Gita is defined on the basis of the capability of human beings but not on the basis of caste by birth. In the same way, Sankardeva said that anyone can become his disciple and read the Holy books of Vaishnavism irrespective of his or her caste by birth. Like this way there are lots of points which are found as common between the Bhagavad Gita and Vaishnavism of Sankardeva.

Thus Sankardeva's Bhakti movement turned the profile picture of Assamese religion and culture. It has a great impact in the society.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

It is obvious that the Bhagavad Gita and the Vaishnavite Philosophy have been discussed since early time. The karma and its different aspects, the Vaishnavite liberalism and anti-

sacrificial principles are being discussed. There is some discussions on the common elements of the both Bhagavad Gita and the Sankari Vaishnavism. But here it is tried to discuss about the relation between the fundamental teachings of Bhagavad Gita and Sankari Vaishnavism with the impact of it in our society. So this will be a new discussion in this regard. A comparison of their same teachings towards the formation of the society is significant point of discussion which is included here with its consequence in our society. Here importance is given in the critical treatment of the fundamental teachings of Bhagavad Gita and Vaishnavism which will become exceptional in the field of discussion. The discussion will also include the spiritual impact of Bhagavad Gita and Vaishnavism in the present materialistic society. The decision of having a research on above mentioned topic is done because a big research gap is found in the comparative study of the fundamental teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and the Vaishnavism with relation to its impact.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

A society needs almost all things of this world for its existence. It has demand in various aspect like social, material, mental, psycho-physical, spiritual etc. As a part of spiritual demand of our

life or society we need to fulfil it through some discussions, realization etc. So, there has been a discussion on the spiritual part of our life since our origin people had much more discussions on the Vedas and Upanishads in early time. Due to some anti-social methods present in those scriptures, an another movement called Bhakti movement was originated. People felt the need of the study of new Bhakti movement, so they widely accepted it.

In the same way, the people of Assam also realized the need of the Vaishnavite movement, so they widely accepted the Vaishnavism of Sri Sri Sankardev. The Bhagavad Gita is also widely embraced by the people of India as it has great teachings that are relevant to our society. Present world has become a machine like process where a lonely and creative thinking with spirituality is lacked behind. Some luring materials are created due to which people don't have time for spiritual thinking or realization. In this form of society, this comparative study between Bhagavad Gita and Vaishnavism will somehow attract the present generation towards spiritualism. As this discussion will find out the impact of the Bhagavad Gita and Vaishnavism in the society, it will enlighten the way to go towards the proper goal of our life.

There are various moral teachings in Bhagavad Gita and Vaishnavism. These teachings will help our next generation to be attracted towards it and follow it. Present world cannot believe in a rigoristic religion or in spiritualistic philosophy, nor only in scientific methods where no spirituality is there. So, the society needs a spiritual-scientific view which can be embraced by people of present age, and this is there in the study of the fundamental teachings of Bhagavad Gita and Vaishnavism. That's why there is a great need of the discussion of this topic.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The study encircles the fundamental teachings of Bhagavad Gita of Vaishnavism of Sri Sri Sankardev. It would try to have a comparative study over the two spiritual philosophies. The discussions will also include the impact of the fundamental teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and Vaishnavism Philosophy in our society. The discussion will try to discuss the usefulness of the teachings of Bhagavad Gita and the Vaishnavite Philosophy in our society. There are lots of teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. A single hymn (Sloka) comprises lots of teachings. But in this discussions some particulars hymns will only be taken for discussion as it is impossible for anyone to discuss all of them. It will be tried here to give importance on those teachings of Bhagavad Gita and Vaishnavite Philosophy which are very much necessary for the present situation of our society. The discussion will include the various aspects of the Vaishnavite Philosophy like the establishment of Satra, Namghar, Ankiyanaat, Bhauna etc. All these have great socio-moral and spiritual teachings to our society. Due to the great need of the Bhagavad Gita and the Vaishnavism of Sri Sri Sankardev, most of the persons of Assamese an Non-Assamese community have accepted the Philosophy. So, all these elements would be discussed in the topic.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The following are the prime objectives of the study:

1. To acquaint the people about the main teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and the Vaishnavism of Sankardeva. It will enable the people to have sympathetic view towards each sect of different religion.
2. To discuss the impact of the Bhagavad Gita and the Vaishnavism of Sankardeva in our society. This discussion will help us to modify our attitude towards these Philosophies so that we can get much more fruitful result for the welfare of our society. This study will try to have a discussion to focus the good aspects of the fundamental teachings of the Bhagavad Gita an Vaishnavism.
3. The discussion would also aim to see that the future perspective of the effect of the Gita and the Vaishnavism. It will help our next generation to form a positive attitude towards these Philosophies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

For have a total understanding of this studies both primary and secondary data have been collected. To uphold the finding this study descriptive method is used. The study is qualitative in nature

and the primary data has been collected from observation, interview, case study of the slokas of Gita, and the religious text, kirton Ghosa, Dosham, Nam Ghosa, Borgeet etc. The secondary data has been collected from various scriptures, religious, commentaries, documents, journals, newspapers, reports and records about the topic etc.

TEACHINGS OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA:

Bhagavad Gita literally means "The Lords Song i.e.; the Philosophical discourse of Lord Krishna to persuade the reluctant Arjuna to fight. One of the greatest contributions of India to the world is Holy Gita. In the battle field Arjuna was strutted, when he saw his relatives as the opponents to motivate him the Bhagavad Gita is preached in the battle field Kurushetra by Lord Krishna to Arjuna as a counselling to do his duty while multitude of men stood by waiting Krishna gave education to perform his duty as a prince, as a warrior to as a righteous man to fight against evil and restore peace and order. The central teaching of the Gita can be beautifully sentence of summarized in this of Annie Besant. It is meant to lift the aspirant from the lower levels of renunciation, where objects are renounced, to the loftier height where desires are dead, and where the yogi dwells in the calm and ceaseless contemplations, while his body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that fall to his lot in life." The real meaning of education is to impart knowledge. True education would provide children not only an intellectual stimulation, but also a real purpose in life. The Bhagavad Gita is the Holy Grail of education because it is the essence of all doctrines and Philosophies. It is providing the purest knowledge and gives direct understanding of the self realization.

The important metaphysical point of teaching in Gita is being, Gita advocates of the unreal there is no being and of the real there is no non-being. The soul is eternal, unborn indestructible, undiminishing, all pervasive, unthinkable, and immutable, unmanifest. Soul cannot be killed by sword, it cannot be diminished or destroyed by fire, air or rain. Neither soul is born nor it dies, it is out and out imortable and everlasting. He, who find the ultimate reality seated equally in all beings and unperishing with the perishing bodies see truly. Devotion is defined as disinterested service to God. So it is a form of karma. The Lord himself lifts up his devotees from the "Ocean of birth-and-death." Too low of God becomes the divine an supreme low.

According to Gita, "True knowledge is that which teach us to see God in each soul." The Lord says that supreme of all purest knowledge and its essence that knowledge was derived from the detailed study of Vedas and different kinds of Upanishads. The Bhagavad Gita specially stresses on the importance of the soul. According to Bhagava Gita, the objectives of Education is to development and modification of personality, development and modification of personality, development of internal consciousness and intellectual and reasoning ability importance of duties in life. The Bhagavad Gita teachings are stands not only for the renunciation of action, but also for the renunciation in action. It is emphatically stated that samnyasa does not mean the renunciation of action, but of interest, desire and attachment. The moral of Bhagavad Gita entails upon the discipline of the life and performance of one's duty without attachment to the result in sat vie way. Gita also discussed about Nishama Karma, Svabhava and Svadharma, ways to attain the highest goal and synthesis of jnana, karma and Bhakti marhgas.

TEACHINGS OF THE NEO-VAISHNAVISM OF SANKARDEVA:

Srimanta Sankareva (1449-1569), an immensely gifted genius, blessed this pristine land of Assam in the 15th and 16th centuries with his theological teachings, blended with various colours of social and cultural elements. However, this valley on either side of the mighty Brahmaputra was not a set stage for him to let the essence of Bhakti movement flow smoothly. The people in this region were curled in the wreaths of Tantraism, illiteracy, lingering amidst caste discriminations and socio-political segregation and conflicts. Faith, culture, society and the prospect of a future of a greater integrated nation were in a Pandemonium. Sankardeva not only spread the cult of Bhakti Movement in Assam but also enriched the people socially, culturally and laid the foundation of a greater Assamese nation. Assam presented a very grim scenario in pre-vaishnavite period. Spiritually looked wanting in religion and

socio-political rivalry and opportunist purpose worsened the conditions of the people. This condition is called a low ebb in faith society, culture and prospect of a strong future nation. The greater Assam of Su-Ka-pha was a blurred vision. Shankardeva and his neo-vaishnavite movement started by Srimanta Shankardeva created an unprecedented zeal for the cultural and religious reformation in Assam in the 15th century. It is regarded as an epoch making phenomenon in the history of Medieval Assam. Srimanta Shankardeva undertook two arduous pilgrimages. India was in the grip of Bhakti movement. Shankardeva has been deeply impressed by the nature and working of the neo-vaishnavite movement carried on by the sects of Ramanuja, Madhavacharya, Nimbaraka and Ramananda in different parts of the country. His contemporary neo-vaishnavite saints were Ramananda, Kabir and Chaitanya. His "Eka-Saran-Nam Dharma" with all its Philosophy and doctrines as well as rituals and cult has contributed a lot to find out the true spirit to create vibrant society based on peace, respect, good will and Honesty. It initiated a new change in the socio-religious sphere of the Hindu Society and consequential changes in its value system and equality of relationship. The main motto of this movement is to create an egalitarian civil society based on the shared values of fraternity, humanism, equality and democracy.

Srimanta Sankardeva was not only a religious prophet. He led the Assamese society to socio, cultural and spiritual wellbeing. An embodiment of intellectual and cultural renaissance, it was Srimanta Sankardeva, who set the path of scientific and progressive pursuits. His leadership to the path of enlightenment was so very potent and pervasive that even today we feel the undercurrent of his teachings in our day-to-day life. His preaching on religion, compassion, brotherhood, non-violence, oneness and integration are driving forces for us even today.

Comparative Study between the Teaching Neo-Vaishnavism of Sankardeva and Bhagavad Gita:

Assam Vaishnavism of Srimanta Sankardeva covers the main tenants of the major Upanishads and the teachings of the Bhagavata-purana and a few other vedantic texts. The Bhagavad Gita is said to be the essence of the Upanishads, In Assam Vaisnavism of Sankardeva the Bhagavad-Purana has been acknowledged as the supreme scripture under various contexts:

"The Bhagavata is the supreme Vedanta among the four Vedas, eighteen Puranas and other sastras. Sages sanaka and sanands in quest of yoga and knowledge discovered in it the essential truth." The Bharanata-sastra is the essence of all the Vedanta's. It is also called the crown jewel of all religious scriptures. Besides the Bhagavata-Purana, Sankareva and Madhavdeva appear to have collected certain elements from certain other puranas like Padma-Purana, Vishnu-Purana, etc.

The teachings of the Bhagavad Gita have great influence on the teachings and writings of the two great propounders of Assam Vaishnavism, Sankardeva and Madhavdeva. The Bhagavad Gita is placed in the Mahabharata in the Seventh Parvan and was composed when a sanguinary war between seven akshauhini and eleven akshauhini troops was about to be waged. The extraordinary circumstances in which the Lord delivered the teachings of the Gita to his friend and disciple Arjuna may raise doubts in the minds of common men as to the authenticity of the Gita, But such doubts are blind to the character of knowledge proper and its process of spiritual communication, vyasa, the author of the Gita, was not present in the war-field. Never the less, he was amply competent to recount, as did Sanjaya, everything going on in the battle ground of the holy Kurukshetra with the help of his spiritual insight. The Gita claims to embody the essence of all the Upanisadic teachings and is thus a superior prasthan of Hinduism and is indeed true redanta or the end of the Vedas.

The fundamental teachings and tenets of Assam Vaishnavism of Sankardeva and Madhaveva are in harmony with the Gita although Bhagavata Purana exercises greater influence on the teachings and thoughts of Assam Vaishnavism.

Vyasa was the author of both the Mahabharata and Bhagavata-Purana which were the authorise completion of spiritual progress. There need not be anything in the two works that lack in mutual harmony and coherence. The Gita shows the synthesis of Jnana (knowledge), Karma (deeds) and Bhakti (devotion) as the fundamental art of life. But the Bhagavata-Purana vindicates the priority and predominance of devotion over janana and karma.

As a light of the lamp cannot be had in spite of having the lamp and the wick without the necessary oil, so also true knowledge dews upon life, when knowledge and action restfully upon one-pointed devotion.

Assam Vaishnavism is based upon absolute devotion to God with a spirit of self abnegation so as to realize in the end that we live, move and have our being in and for God alone. Total surrender to God, absolute dedication to the service of God and his creatures, to feel the presence of God everywhere as the in-dwelling spirit, to see God in everything and everything in God, and to listen to and chant the Names and qualities of God with absolute devotion are some of the basic tenants of Assam Vaishnavism. Shankardeva narrated in beautiful Verses the puranic stories to establish the power of absolute devotion to God in his masterly work kirtana-ghosa, and Madhaveva expounded in beautiful verse forms his spiritual experiences and the Philosophical basis of the bhakti cult in his great work Nama-ghosa.

Assam Vaishnavism on Neo-Vaishnavism is a religion forth common man of this age. The object of worship and devotion is Krishna who is pure knowledge and consciousness, absolute truth and perfection, everything else is the product of maya as his act of sport. The qualities and names of Krishna, the quality less and formless are beyond the three guans maya or prakriti and all the rest are subject to maya. This being so, Assam Vaishnavism solely relies on Nama-dharma and absolute surrender to a service of God and his create being.

Madhavdeva incorporates many of the aphorisms of the Bhagavad Gita into his Nama-ghosa and these are in consonance with the basic teachings of Assam Vaishnavism. Sankardeva an Madhavdeva did not work only for the spiritual uplift of the people, but they also fully appreciated and contributed amply towards growth and development of the socio-cultural life of the Assamese people and the humanity at large. The Assamese Vaishnavite literature, rich and varied unique in style and languages is made up of comprehensive literacy and artistic, genius of the authors. The literacy heritage of this age comprises prose, poetry, drama, songs etc, with destination characters of their own. The holy songs traditionally said to be twelve score in number called the Bargits (great songs on noble members) indeed great works of art conspicuous by their composition, rhyme and melody with 'Vishnu-Krishna' as their main them continue to attract all and are sung by the cowherds in the field the boatman in the river and the young and old alike in the households. The bhonas, sutradhari dances ,satriya dances etc, are types by themselves and indeed symbolic in their own way, amply eloquent of the creative genius and spiritual wisdom of Sankardeva and his host of worthy devotees.

Sankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavism like the Upanishad and the Gita emphasizes detachment (Niskama) as the key to the individual and social welfare, healthy social relationship and attainment of the final goal (Paramartha). The Gita emphatically states, "One who gives up all desires and frees oneself from all cravings attachments and egotism (pride) attains, supreme Bliss." Again states "when all the desires which abide in his heart are cast away, the mortal becomes immortal. Here he attains Brahman."

Sankardeva's religion thus puts equal stress upon the highest of Upanishadic teachings. His religious teachings emphasize the basic moral code to weave out the way to emancipation from all mundane sufferings. Bhagavad Gita and Assam Vaishnavism gives importance on the following: Detachment is means to success, because it leads to self-control, self-knowledge, firmness of conscience and viewing unity in things and beings when wisdom is associated with modesty, the wise sees of unity in things consider a Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, a chandala as equal and who sees Vishnu is everywhere in the universe attains release even when alive. We should look upon all living creatures as equal to our own self. This is indeed the highest of all means.

Assam Vaishnavism of Sankardeva is (Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma) derived mainly from the Bhagavata-Purana; it is in accord with the essence of the Upanishads. This religion is claimed to be simple but most effective and is indeed the most suitable and the only religion meant for the people of this age.

"Nam vine nahi kalita gati
kalira loka huive papamati
anyatra dharme nahi adhikara
janiba kalita namese sara"
(Kritana-ghosa)

- There is no way other than Nam in the Kali age, for the people of this age are evil-minded and they are not fit for any other religion. Remember Nama (Name of God) to be the essential in the age of Kali. Again, on the authority of the Bhagavata. (Chap. XII) it is further stated in the kirtana-ghosa:

"Jnanato karmato kariyo nara
Hari-kritanata kara adara
dwadasa skandhata ehise kalia
tathapi murhara bodha nabhaila."

- Oh man, prefer chanting of the name of God to Jnana (knowledge) and karma (action). The fools failed to understand this although only this fact was stated in the twelve chapters of the Bhagavata.

CONCLUSION:

The teaching of Srimanta Sankardeva is becoming more relevant day-by-day. His democratic attitude, non-violent philosophy, humanism and wonderful creative literature, art and culture have enriched the knowledge system of present period also. Srimanta Sankardeva was not a professional researcher or teacher but he sacrificed his life in toto for searching knowledge and teaching people.

The Bhagavad Gita is based upon the fundamental principle of human nature and hence it will always be source of inspiration to human beings. In the present age many Philosophers, politicians and scientists have been inspired by Bhagavad Gita. The Gita introduces our inner personality. The intellect which reasons and discriminates the mind, is the centre of emotions and impulses. After reading the Bhagavad Gita, one can understand that it is our valuable historical asset of knowledge and it demands deep study and interpretation. The moral teaching especially ethical actions that run through the whole of the Bhagavad Gita are not only an emergence need of our country, but of the world community. We can enrich our philosophical, sociological, anthropological and psychological understanding through the readings of the Bhagavad Gita. In the Bhagavad Gita, much effort has been made to equate Karma yoga, Jnana yoga and Bhakti yoga, in which meaning of education is fragrant. One can get fruit from the Bhagavad Gita according to his/her intention and level of understanding.

Sankardeva's concept of Bhakti and Neo-Vaishnavite faith has multifaceted contributions towards the morally demoralized and socially and politically disintegrated medieval land of Assam. Of course he has been deeply influenced by the different thinkers, philosophers and saints who were the principle contribution to the growth and development of cult. On the basis of his experienced gathered from these personalities and the study of scriptures especially Bhagavada Gita.

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