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PERSONAL IDENTITY IN ŚAṆKARADEVA'S PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This paper explores the multi-dimensional theory of **personal identity** within the philosophical framework of *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva* (1449–1568), the progenitor of the *Ekaśaraṇa-Nāma-Dharma* tradition in Assam. By situating *Śaṅkaradeva*'s thought amidst both Western philosophical inquiries—ranging from Lockean psychological continuity to Olson's animalism—and classical Indian perspectives such as Advaita *Vedānta*, Buddhism, and *Nyāya*, the study delineates a unique Neo-*Vaiṣṇava* approach to selfhood.

The investigation reveals that *Śaṅkaradeva* rejects the dissolution of the self into an undifferentiated absolute, instead positing a metaphysical foundation of eternal, individual souls (*jīvas*) that remain ontologically dependent on *Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa*. The paper argues that personal identity in this tradition is not a static substance but a transformative process. It identifies four critical pillars of identity:

1. Metaphysical continuity of the unchanging *ātman*.
2. Moral-psychological persistence through *saṃskāras* and *karma*.
3. Relational identity established through *dāśya-bhāva* (servitude) and *prema* (divine love).
4. Communal identity forged within the egalitarian structures of the Satra and Namghar.

Ultimately, *Śaṅkaradeva* offers a synthesis where the "self" is realized not through isolation, but through the redirection of consciousness toward the divine and the community, replacing birth-based social identity with a devotion-centric understanding of personhood.

Keywords : Personal Identity, *Ekaśaraṇa-Nāma-Dharma*, *Bhakti*, *Ātman*, *Jīva*, Neo-*Vaiṣṇavism*, Metaphysics of Self, Communal Identity, *Kṛṣṇa* Consciousness.