



Teachings of Srimanta Sankardev towards Societal and Humanistic Development: A Retrospect

Guptajit Pathak

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of History
Assam University (Central) Silchar-788011, Assam, India

Abstract:

The paper speaks about the Teachings of Srimanta Sankardev towards Societal and Humanistic Development. Assam is the abode of different ethnic groups with its various cultures and speaking different languages and dialects. The mix Assamese identity was initiated by the Saint Srimanta Sankardeva with his Neo-Vaishnavite Movement. The movement developed innovative institutions of Satra, Namghar and Thana which began to serve not only as the gadget spreading the trust, but helped to maintain and to stabilize Vaishnavism by making it as an indispensable part of Assamese social and cultural existence. Despite the fact that, Neo Vaishnavism was a religious movement, however, it has identified the culture of Assam has its bearing on the livelihood. As the doyen of cultural rebirth and forerunner of Bhakti Movement, Saint Sankardeva took on the conventional fundamentals of the society and pioneered cultural initiatives like Mask Art, Bhaonas, Sattriya Dance and Borgeet etc. which really defined the Assamese identity with its vibrant viewpoints of richness. Sankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavism has given the birth to a novel Cultural patriotism highlighted on a nationwide identity shaped by socio-cultural traditions and language, not on the notion of universal ancestry or race.

Key Words:

Teachings, Srimanta Sankardev, Societal, Humanistic, Development

Introduction:

Saint Srimanta Sankardeva was an Assamese saint-scholar. Study on his existence, teachings and works are of immense academic significance in Assam. The tutorial, artistic, pragmatic, economic, cultural and literature involvement by him still persuades the elegant creative works. The notion, understanding, cultural attachment and values of Sankardeva became a vital area of the lifetime of Assamese people. As a result, the investigators have felt the obligations to appraisal about the works of Srimanta Sankardeva within the meadow of Assamese literature and culture in relevancy with its educational significance to uplift the moral, spiritual, psychological, value based thought, character formation and personality development of the long run generation of the people.

Review of Literature:

To rationalized the statement of the problem the following literatures are connected to our research.

1. It is understandable that, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Vaishnavite viewpoints have been discussed since early time. The *Karma* and its different aspects, the Vaishnavite liberalism and antisacrificial principles are being discussed. There is some discussions on the universal elements of the both *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Sankari Vaishnavism*. However, here it is tried to talk about the relation between the fundamental teachings of *Bhagavad Gita* and *Sankari*



Vaishnavism with the impact of it in our society. As a result, this will be a new discussion in this regard.

2. S.K. Chatterjee, N. Roy and some other have highlighted their views in regards of acculturation. They have taken into consideration that the Aryans were more cultured people than other tribes who entered India prior to Aryans. The Aryan imposed their cultural principles either by overthrowing or by preaching their religion.
3. "The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement and Satra-Institution of Assam", by Dr. S. N. Sarma, "Katha-Gurucarita" by Upendra Chandra Lekharu, "Sankaradeva and his times" by Dr. Maheswar Neog and "Sankaradeva" by Dr. Banikanta Kakati are of great value in the meadow of societal impact on harmonization and peace restoration of Sankaradeva.
4. According to *Bhagawat Gita*, there is no other sacred than knowledge. The whole thing starts from knowledge and everything ends in knowledge.
5. According to S. K. Chatterjee, Sankaradeva was the utmost planner of Assam by bringing in a purer spiritual life and the circumstances resulted his influence from being spread into other parts of India as a religious leader he is unquestionably one of the greatest India has produced and he deserved to be mentioned with Sankaracharya, Ramanujacharya Basavappa, Ramananda, Kabir, Chaitanya, Mirabai, Guru Nanak and Tulsi Das.

Statement of the Problem:

The works and teachings of Srimanta Sankardev have great value towards Societal and Humanistic Development. His Neo-Vaishnavism concept amalgamated the entire Assamese society. However, the teachings and philosophical ideals of Srimanta Sankardev towards societal and humanistic development cover the fundamental aspects of livelihood pattern which is a vital topic for research.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To review the teachings of Saint Srimanta Sankardev within the sphere of Societal and Humanistic Development.
2. To appraise the tutorial significance of the contribution of Sankardev within the world of literature and culture.
3. The vision and mission of the present research is to initiate a detailed study towards the understanding of Sankardev's contribution as a communicator for Societal and Humanistic Development.

Research Questions:

1. Is there any importance in the teachings of Saint Srimanta Sankardev within the sphere of Societal and Humanistic Development?
2. Is there any significance on the tutorial aspects of Sankardev within the world of Assamese literature and culture?
3. Is there any vision and mission towards the understanding of Sankardev's contribution as a communicator for Societal and Humanistic Development?

Significance of the Study:



Srimanta Sankardeva was a secular saint for the people of Assam. The religious preaching, multidisciplinary teachings and vital activities of Sankardev contributed too significantly in shaping the Assamese Culture and literature. Study of his existence and teachings are of enormous academic significance in the history of Assam.

Delimitation of the study:

The delimitation of this study is as under:

1. The study is delimited to the resources obtainable to the investigators relating to Srimanta Sankardeva.
2. The study is identifying the contribution of Sankardeva within in the field of societal formation and humanistic development.

Research Methodology:

The research paper covers some lights on the main teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Neo-Vaishnavism of Saint Sankardev. This study will assist us to adjust our viewpoints towards these philosophies, so that we can get much abundant upshot for the welfare of the society. To uphold the finding this study descriptive and analytical method is used on Shankardev's systems of communication which made him a successful development communicator. The study is qualitative in nature and the data has been collected from different primary and secondary sources. Some information is additionally collected *Kritan Ghosa* of Sankardeva and books written about Sankardeva by some well-known authors.

For the primary sources write-ups and compositions of Shankardev including his books, songs, poems, dramas, slokas of Gita, religious text, *kirton Ghosa*, *Dosham*, *Nam Ghosa*, *Borgeet* etc. and observation, interview, case study also followed to make the research ideal. The researcher has done content analysis of some books on Shankardev written by various authors. Secondary data are collected from various scriptures, religious, commentaries, documents, journals, newspapers, reports, magazines, edited books, reference books, paper clips, periodicals, records and web documents for supportive evidences reflecting Shankardev's communication practices and abilities.

Results and Discussion:

1. Focus on all-round Development:

Shankardev determined to focus on the entire development of the society. He took the Assamese culture to a whole new level through his songs, dance, drama, and literature. Through his songs, dramas and other compositions he changed the prospect in Assamese literature from mediocre to exceptional. He travelled throughout Assam and established *Namghars*, *Satras* and *Thanas* in order to unite the people of the region. He had a good relation with *King Naranarayana*¹ of Coch Behar where he was assigned a respectable place



in the King's court. Shankardev passed away in Bheladanga at the age of One hundred and Twenty.

¹ *Naranarayana was ruler of undivided Coch kingdom in 15th century A.D. and the son of Bishwa Singha.*

2. **Shankardev's Utilization of Sadharanikarana:**

Throughout that period all creative works such as literature, songs, etc. was written in Sanskrit, which could only be understood by a small fraction of the population. For this reason, Sankardeva composed his brilliant literary works in *Brajawali* language which was composed of several languages spoken in the region. Despite being well-versed in Sanskrit, Sankardeva composed only one of his books in Sanskrit and the rest were all written in Brajawali and Assamese so that the common people could read them. Therefore, he continued the ancient Indian tradition of Sadharanikarana.

Sadharanikarana/Saralikarana essentially refers to the scientific method of trans-generational communication conceptualized by the ancient facets of India to ensure the continuity of undiluted understanding flow by establishing commonness among the contributors of a communication method through the practice of simplification (Bhattacharyya, 2013, p. 72). Therefore, Sankardeva's inclination of *Brajawali* and Assamese languages over the Sanskrit language shows that he too efficiently utilized the ancient Indian tradition of Sadharanikarana for successfully conversing with the masses.

3. **Harmonious Amalgamation of Sources from Different Groups:**

Sankardeva wanted to extend the message of Neo-Vaishnavism through liberalism, tolerance and humanism. Antagonism was prevailing all over Assam during that period. In order to amalgamate them all Sankardeva borrowed the works of all the communities and applied it into his creative, artistic and pragmatic works.

Sankardeva says:

"Nabachai bhakati jati ajati

Krsnara kirtane jati ajati nabache"

(There is no favoritism and bias in Bhakti

There is no unfairness and inequality in the Krishna's Kirtana)

"Kukkura candela gardavaro atma ram

Janiya savako pari kariva pranam" (Kirtan)

(There is God even in a dog and a Chandala

So one should bestow respect to everyone)

Sankardeva has mentioned numerous times in "*Kirtana*" and other works that everyone is equal regardless of caste or class. He still considered a dog or any other living being to be equivalent to a human being.

Damodardeva states in his *Sankardeva Charit* that there was no favoritism in Sankardeva's Eka-Sarana-Nam-Dharma. The whole thing is measured to be identical and a part of *God*, and there is no place for doubt:

"Kisu vinni nai jana ake nam dharma

*Nakara sansay buji lowa nam dharma"
(284, Damodordeva, Sankardeva Charit)
(There is no prejudice in Nam Dharma
Acknowledge the Nam Dharma with no uncertainties)*

It was a great concept applied by Sankardeva so that everybody has a common value for each other which would help them connect better. In this way Sankardeva created a mutual perceptive and link between all the communities.

4. **Base of Group Communication Platforms:**

Sankardeva established the *Namghara*, *Satra* and *Thana* as a stage for message among all communities and classes of people. Namghar has played a significant role in unifying Assam. The *Satras* were developed as the socio-religious and cultural centers while the *Namghar* in every village was founded to serve a variety of purposes of a prayer hall, cultural centre, library and a venue of social get-together.”(Chakravarty, 1998, p. 104)

Thana is the hub of the Saint Sankardeva where he stayed for long time for ideal teachings. In Sankardeva Thana, Patbausi Satra, Barpeta, Assam, the Saint stayed for long 18years 6 months and 9 days. Sankardeva integrated folk aspects such as the ones from *Ojhapali*, *Dhulia* and *Putula-nach* in his dramas. Namghars, Satras and Thanas were not just spiritual institutions, but also a focal point message.

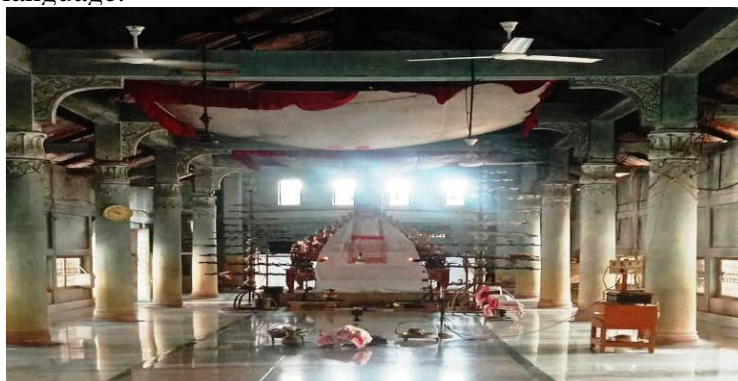
5. **Significance on Joint Effort:**

Sankardeva thought in collaboration and the influence of group communication and wanted people to solve their troubles by conversing with each other. In his *Anadipaton* Sankardeva has highlighted on group communication by conditioning that all responsibilities can be accomplished simply and fruitfully if people communicate and converse it in a group.

*"Nana karma koribak kore aalasn
Ako korma sthir nohe taak buli mon"
(63 Sankardeva Anadipaton)
(Converse with others before doing a mission
A job done alone does not gratify the spirit)*

6. **Unity in Diversity:**

Sankardeva did not simply amalgamated Assam, but also linked Assam with the rest of India. At the age of thirty-four he visited for a twelve-year-long pilgrimage when he went numerous pilgrimage places all over North India. He cultured a great deal about the traditions of all these places which aggravated him for his famous teachings. Saint Sankardeva translated the *Ramayana* and *Bhagwat Gita* among many other books into Assamese language.





Inside the Srimanta Sankardev Than, Patbausi Satra, Barpeta, Assam

7. **Research and Knowledge Management System:**

Knowledge Management System is characterized as production, compilation, distribution and use of knowledge. Knowledge is reposed in the shape of books or any such reading objects and collected and conserved in the libraries and archives. Knowledge is disseminated to the user in the course of the development of teaching, learning, performing arts, visual arts delivering reading writing resources etc.

8. **Knowledge Production:**

Saint Sankardeva produced knowledge by research act and artistic systems and did research by following the methods like literature investigation, analytical method, observation method, experimental method, survey method, and the case study method.

9. **Literature Search:**

Sankardeva explored all the Vedic literatures in Sanskrit language during that time. He searched the *four Vedas*, *eighteen Puranas* and fourteen *Sastras* of different subjects like Grammar etc. and had a large equals from where he collected the contemporary literature of the time. It is noted that, *Jagadish Misra*, a Sanskrit scholar from *Srikshetra* (Puri, Orissa), who arrived to present him the '*Bhagawata Sastra*'² when he was at Bardoa, Nagaon, Assam.

² *The book is the Bhagavata-Bhavartha-Dipika, the commentary on the Bhagavata by Sridhara Swami.*

10. **Knowledge Dissemination System:**

The Namgharas, Satras and Thanas were the main point of knowledge dissemination in the knowledge management system of Sankardeva. The followers, believers, social leaders, artists and still the politicians also visited these Namgharas, Satras and Thanas and they were served information and facts by the *Pathak* (Reader), *Namgharia* (Chief of the Namghar) or *Satradhikara* (Head of the Satra) or any well-known facts people.

11. **Artistic Exploration:**

Sankardeva was a great artist. People always remembered him not only for the quality and unique style but also for creative innovations. He went many pilgrimages of India for the cause of spiritual ideals.



Wooden Mask using for Bhaona during Sankardeva's Times: Preserved at Srimanta Sankardeva Than, Patbausi Satra, Barpeta, Assam

12. **Bhakti Theory:**

The main vision and mission of Sankardeva to observe *Bhakti theory* is to exchange *Saktism* to *Neo-Vaishnavism*. Books of Sankardeva focused his Bhakti theory of *Bhakti Pradipa*, *Anadi Patana*, *Nimi Navaridha Samvada*, *Bhakti Ratnakar*, *Gunamala* etc.

13. **Establishment of Satra, Namghar and Than:**

By establishing Sattra, Namaghara and Thanas Sankardeva established universal brotherhood and inter peace harmony among the common people. These focal points provide academic knowledge. Sattra include two chief categories- *udashin sattra* and *Grihastri Sattra*. The Namghar is a prayer-house where the followers, present because the congregation, symbol the name of God. Thana is Sthana for the cause of wide-spread spiritual teaching for all round development.



View of Srimanta Sankardev Than, Patbausi Satra, Barpeta, Assam



Residence of Kalindri Aai (Sankardeva's Wife) at Srimanta Sankardev Than, Patbausi Satra, Barpeta, Assam

14. **Drama and Song:**

Saint Sankardeva symbolized the starting of the Assamese drama in fifteenth century which highlighted as *Angkia Naat*. It is an exclusive type of dance-drama. Basically, *Angkia Naats* are the absolute work of art with *slokas*, *bhatimas*, *dance*, *songs* and *dialogues*, focusing to create a sort of phenomenal exquisiteness.

All the beautiful songs are composed by Sankardeva and Madhavdeva are observed as *Borgeet* in Assamese Society for its elevated importance and status. *Borgeet* are a number of the primary classic devotional songs.



Key Findings for the Study:

The highlighting findings of the paper are-

1. Sankardeva dedicated all his works and teachings for societal formation and humanistic development.
2. Sankardeva abolished caste system from the society in order to amalgamate the society.
3. Sankardeva believed in cooperation and joint effort which is an important facet of development communication.
4. Sankardeva had an enormous leadership quality and he convinced the people smoothly through his communicative powers.
5. Sankardeva expanded his philosophy towards the development of the people.
6. Sankardeva established Namghars , Satras and Thanas, so that people from diverse society integrated with one another.
7. Sankardeva pioneered the Bhakti movement in Assam in order to present a unified system of trust and confidence to everyone.
8. Sankardeva respected the aptitudes and capacity of people and inspired them to work with him. This is the motive why the scheme of Shankardev's Satras and Namghar's expanded to immense triumph and created a reciprocal perceptiveness among the people.
9. Sankardeva used a mixture of medium of communication. He used both verbal and non-verbal communication. He used to embrace gatherings to converse with people and used to discuss individually.
10. Sankardeva promoted events of Satras and Namghar's in public places all the way through paintings, bhaonas and Satriya dances. He used to write down his philosophies and written many books based on his principles and thoughts so that it is reachable to the masses.

Conclusions:

The contribution of Sankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavism has its great impact towards societal and human development. The Satras, Namgharas and Thanas have contributed enormously in the development of integration and socialization of the evolution of the Assamese Identity. The decision-making formation and procedures of the Satra were explored in the standpoints of its place in the Assamese Society.

The vital responsibility of Saint Sankardeva in Assamese society is of great value in the contemporary society. His implausible role to the areas of literature and culture make him Mahapurusha for the people of Assam. It is astonishing to observe such an amalgamation being carried out by a single man more than 550 years ago. Sankardeva was overwhelmed by the effortlessness and effortlessness of the Bhakti movement and determined to launch it in Assam.

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