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Research Paper

Artistic innovations of sankaradeva: a living tradition in assam today

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ABSTRACT

Srimanta Sankaradeva was not only the preacher of Neo-Vaishnavism (Eksarana Dharma). He was a poet and writer of Assamese literature. He is the organizer and reformer of the Assamese nation. He also studied Sanskrit texts for the purpose of promoting religion as well as literature and culture. He thus enriched the treasury of Assamese literature. He also translated several skandas of the Bhagavad Gita, the Uttarakhand Ramayana, into Assamese. He wrote poems such as Rukminiharan and Harichandra Upakhyan, as well as Bargeet. He wrote plays such as Rukminiharan, Parijataharan, Kaligopal, Kalidaman and Ramvijaya. The Bhakti Ratnakara is one of the greatest theoretical works of Sankaradeva. His efforts laid the foundation for Assam and Assamese spiritual, aesthetic, religious and social identity. The paper is a humble attempt to discuss the contributions of Mahapurusha Sirmanta Sankaradeva to the arena of music, dance, culture and religion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Srimanta Sankardeva was born in 1449 in Alipukhuri, Nagaon. His father's name was Kusumbar Bhuyan and his mother was Satyasandha. He was a saint cum scholar, social reformer, artist. His

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contributions to Assamese culture are unparalleled and incredible. [1] "Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva was a human God within the world and amongst the people of Assam and he's the foremost celebrated name in Assam." (p 65). Sankaradeva's parents died when he was young and his grandmother Khersuti took care of him and raised him. It was under the care of Khersuti that Sankaradeva studied at the toll of Mahendra Kandali. It is said that at the age of twelve he wrote a poem and showed it to his guru. Sankaradeva learned vowels and consonants and impressed everyone by composing the poem on [2].

Devotion to Lord Krishna without the help of vowels
Korotolo Komolo Komolo Dolo Noyono,
Bhobodobo Dohono Gohono Bobo Shayono.

"Thou palm is like lotus, your eyes are like the lotus petals
Thou are the consumer of wordly affections, thou art the sleeper in deep forest"

The foundation of the culture and history of Assam was laid around the philosophy of the great Mahapurusha Srimaya Sankardeva. He established the foundation of culture and heritage in the Kochbihar district of West Bengal under the patronage of Koch king Naranarayan. Later, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva, with the help of his disciples Madhavade, Harideva and Damodar Deva, spread Namdharma from one end to the other. They were the first to establish several satras throughout Assam. He is a poet, artist, singer, musician, painter and playwright. Sankaradeva has played an important role in the cultural, economic and social development of Assam [3].

He also had a significant influence on various fields of social life such as education, music, art, sculpture, Ankia Bhaona and fine arts. He instilled new values in the world of thought and ideas and paved the way for everyone to move to the level of full humanity. Sankaradeva's contributions to social reform and humanism examine the transformational impact on the Bhakti movement of Assam in the 15th and 16th centuries. Sankaradeva, the saint-scholar and promulgator of Eka Sarana Naam Dharma, and his student Madhabadeva, contributed significantly to the social and religious landscape of the region through personal teaching, equality and essential dignity. His philosophy advocated a departure from strict caste hierarchy, evil ritual practices, upgrading marginalised communities, prompting freedom and equality.

2. RELATED WORK

The available realted works on this present topic are scanty and taxonomic. However, some related literatures on the present topic are:

[1] Has stated in his paper "Contribution of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva to Assamese Literature and Culture" that "Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva was an Assamese saint-scholar. Study on his life and works is of great academic importance in Assam. The tutorial, cultural and literature contribution by him still influences the fashionable creative works.

The ideas, cultural contribution and philosophy of Srimanta Sankardeva became an integral an area of the lifetime of Assamese people" (p 65).

[4] Had described in his work "Socio-Cultural Communication of Srimanta Shankardev: An Analysis" that "Shankardev wanted to spread the message of Neo-Vaishnavism through liberalism and humanism in ancient Assam. Hostility was prevailing all over Assam during that period. In order to unite them all Shankardev borrowed the components of all the communities and applied it into his creative works. Shankardev says: Nabachai bhakati jati ajati Krsnara kirtane jati ajati nabache (There is no discrimination in Bhakti There is no discrimination in the Krishna's Kirtana)" (p 937) [5].

Sarma (1992) in his book Makers of Indian Literature: Madhavadeva had mentioned that "Sailkaradeva and Madhabadeva are the two outstanding persons of the sixteenth century whose versatile contributions ushered in a cultural revival in Assam. They are reverentially called mahapurusa (noble souls) in the Vaishnavite tradition." (p.7), [6].

[7] "The Neo-Vaishnavism of Srimanta Sankaradeva: a Great Socio-Cultural Revolution in Assam' in his paper he had mentioned that "Eka-sarana nama dharma" through the neo-vaishnavite movement revolutionized the whole Assamese society. It unites all the people from different caste and communities without any discrimination by breaking down the caste hierarchy. Everyone can chant the name of God by his or her pure heart. There are no hard and fast ritualistic principles for the devotion of God." (p.22) [8].

3. METHODOLOGY

Research methods are detailed measures and procedures used to collect and analyze data, eventually proceeding to the conclusion of a research question or hypothesis. They present a structured framework to guarantee that research is objective, reliable and valid and effective, [9]. In this section, researchers used a variety of methods to collect data, including observation and interview methods. During field investigation, self-questioning approaches may also be followed, [10].

In the research here, qualitative method that focus on investigating and understanding complex phenomena are used to some extent through some degree of data collection, including interviews, focus groups, and observations. The quantitative method is also used, the main goal of this method is to measure and quantify the data using statistical analyses such as survey of Sankaradeva's manuscriptology, collection of secondary sources and analysis of data.

Here the researcher used mixed methods to obtain a more complete understanding of present research. In this section chornological discussions are also followed by the researcher where research designed, research questions, objective review of literature and methods of dadat collections are highlighted. The following methodology describes the framework for the implementation of this research study, [11].

3.1. Objective

The main objective of this study is to explore the significance of Sankaradeva's life and his splendid artistic innovation for the all intensification of Assam.

3.2. Research Question

i) What was the most important social development of Sankaradeva?
ii) How did his teachings and artistic innovations have influenced the modern social structure of Assam?
iii) To what extent does his philosophy contribute to the emergence of bhakti and humanism in the region?

3.3. Research Design

3.3.1. Approach

(a) Intuitive research methods for understanding sociocultural contexts.
(b) Historical analysis for the contextualization of contributions in the social landscape of Assam in the 15th and 16th centuries.

3.3.2. Primary Data

Primary Data for the present works is mostly collected from the Namghar of Assam. Some senior professors from History and Assamese Departments of Gauhati University are also concentrated for data collection.

3.3.3. Secondary Data

The secondary data has been procured from the books, journals and magazines for closer study. Some parts of data are also collected from the Sri Sankaradeva Sanskritik Samaj, Puri Odisha for the present study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Artistic Innovations of Sankaradeva

Sankaradeva was a writer, social organizer and missionary. Therefore, it is important to understand the importance of religion in the life of a person. Therefore, it is important to understand the importance of religion in the life of a person. He also established the Belguri Satra in the north, the Barpeta Satra in the south and Kochbihar. In addition to preaching proverbs, Sankaradeva wrote Angkiya dramas on the model of Sanskrit dramas with elements of Assamese rituals. He wrote Kirtan-Ghosha, Bargeet, Darshan, Bhagavat, etc. [4] had described in his paper that "In the fifteenth century Assam presented a varied picture of diversified culture.

The majority of the people belonging to non-Aryan tribes have their own distinctive manners, customs and religious beliefs and practices. In that period, Saktism was also widely prevalent. The followers of Saktism were practicing some evil practices like animal sacrifices and sometimes even human sacrifices in the name of religious rites and rituals. In such a disturbing condition, Srimanta Sankaradeva created awareness among the common masses against these kinds of evil practices, and spread unified religious ideas that gave shape to a set of new values and social synthesis in Assamese society." (p.4). Sankaradeva, despite being well acquainted in Sanskrit wrote most of his work in Brajavali Assamese so that the mass people of Assam could read and understand them [12].

4.1.1. Here Some Literary Works by Sankaradeva

4.1.1.1. Poetry

(i) **Amrit Manthan**: It is a tale from bhagvata written in the form of poem by the Assamese saint Sankaradeva. Here amrit means 'nectar' and manthan stands for 'churning'

(ii) **Gunomala**: It recounts the plays of little Krishna written in rhyming and sonorous verse by Srimanta Sankaradeva within a night on request of the Koach king.

(iii) **Harichandra Upakhyana**: In this book, the great righteous king Harichandra performed the Rajasuya Yajna and kept his fame in the three worlds. In the end he gave everything to the sage Vishvamitra and left the kingdom and sold his son and wife to a Brahmin for alms.

(iv) **Ajamil Upakhyan**: Ajamil is the main character of a narrative in the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad Purana. The narrative of Azamil has been used in Hinduism to explain that even sinners have hope of being freed from their tendency to commit sins through chanting the heavenly name of God. Srimanta Sankaradeva wrote a book called Azamil Upakhyan based on this story in the Puranas.

(v) **Kirtan Ghosha**: The Kirtan-Ghosha is a poem written by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva about 500 years ago to spread the 'Ek Sharan Naam Dharma' The Kirtan Ghosha is considered to be the best book written by the Mahapurusha in praise of Lord Krishna. .

(vi) **Gopi Uddhav Samvada**: Here Sankaradeva presented the dialogues between Gopis and Udhav known as Gopi-Uddhav Samvada/message. Here Gopi means the milkmaids who were the immense devotees cum lovers of Krishna in Braj (Vrindavan) region.

(vii) **Korotolo Komolo Komolo Dolo Nayono**: The first poem written by Sankaradeva at the age of twelve. The poem was written in praise of Lord Krishna's divine body parts.

4.1.1.2. Translations

Sankaradeva translated Bhagawat Purana into Assamese from Sanskrit (1st, 2nd, 6th, 7th, 10th, 11th and 12th skandha.) He also translated the first and last cantos of Ramayana.

4.1.1.3. Dramas

i) **Kaliyadaman:** It is a drama about the defeat of king serpent Kalia by Lord Krishan.

ii) **Parijatharan:** It is a story about Krishna, his wife Satyabhama and flower Parijat.

iii) **Patni Prasad:** Adaptation of cult of Krishna by the fanatic Brahmins.

iv) Ram-Vijay It is kind of Bohaona ankia drama based on Bal-leela of Rama and it also focuses on Ram-Sita's marriage and his victory over evil.
v) **Rukminiharan:** Sankaradeva tried to preach Vaishnavism and devotion to common people thoroughout the play where he tried to present the mercy of Lord Krishna unto his devotee Rukmini. The play also narrates how Lord Krishna elopes with Rukmini to his divine kingdom Dwarka while defeating her fiend brother, Rukma.

4.1.1.4. Songs

Bargeet: Borgeet is a compilation of bhakti/devotional songs in 15th-16th centuries. The bargeet literary stands for great-song in praise of supreme Hindu Lord Krishna. The language used in Bargeet are most Brajavali language, mixed of Mithili-Assamese. The most famous bargeet written by Sankaradeva are:

Bargeet: Mano Meri Ramo Charanahi Lagu
Tai dekha no aantaka aagu!!
Meaning: Rest my mind, rest the divine feet of Rama.
Bargeet Jayo Joyo Yadava Jala nidhi yadava dhata
Sruto matra khilatrata
Meaning: Glory to Yadava! Glory to Ocean daughter, Laxmi
Glory to the great preserver Lord Krishna the savior of humanity

4.1.1.5. Bhatima

Bhatima is poem of prayer or praise. These are the prayer songs sung by the Bhats. Here bhats means the person who sings song for praise or prayer. Some famous Bhatima that were composed by the jagat guru Srimanta Sankaradeva are:

Jay jogodish ish bhoyohari.
Leela kare bhumi bhar uteri
Meaning: Glory to all mighty! Who lifts the burden of the earth
Jay jay jadukul kamal prokasok
Nasok kansak pran.
Meaning: Jai Jai Yadukul Kamal Prakasha…The destroyer of the life of Kangsa.

4.1.1.6. Dance

Sattriya Dance: It is the dance developed and conceived by Sankaradeva later preserved by the Sattras is now among the classical dance for Assamese and Assam. This is also called as Sankari Dance.

4.2. Contribution in Culture

Srimanta Sankaradeva was the key person who gave a foundation to Assamese culture. He set up Namghar, Satra, Nritya, Bhaona and Borgeet to build up Assamese culture.

4.2.1. Borgeet

Borgeet are songs composed by Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva and his disciple Sri Madhabadeva, the pioneers of the Neo-Vaishnavism of Assam, and sung in a particular style with specific ragas and rhythms. Borgeet are devotional songs praising Lord Krishna. Sankaradeva wrote more than 240 borgeet and some of his famous borgeet are: i) Jaya jaya yādava, ii) Mana meri Rāma caranahi lāgu

4.2.2. Ankia Naat/Drama

There are many different types of dramas written in Brajavali language by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva based on mythological narratives. Ankia naat is basically a one-act-drama/play performed

with live music, dance and costumes. Those dramas are written for awakening the society from slumber and ignorance to unite people under the umbrella of one God. Some of the Ankia Naat are:
Ankia Naat Sankaradeva

i) **Janma Yatra:** This naat is about the stories and deeds of Lord Krishna from childhood, to the killing of evil king Kangsa.
ii) **Kangsa badha:** the play is about how Lord Krishna killed the tyrannical king Kangsa
iii) **Rkumini Haran:** this play is about the elopement of Lord Krishna and Rukmini, the daughter of king Bishmaka of Kundina. This is a Khanda-Kavaya (episodic poem).
iv) **Parijat Haran:** Another Khanda-Kavaya poem cum an act regarding Lord Krishna and Satyabhama, the divine flower parijat, which was under the care of god Indra in heaven.

4.2.3. Satra

Satra is an institution established by Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva and Sri Madhabadeva for the promotion and dissemination of the Nava Vaishnava religion in Assam. Satra is a cultural hub of the Assamese mob. Apart from religious practices, satras are also repositories of old books and other historical resources of Assamese culture such as Bargeet, Satriya dance, Chali dance, Jhumura dance, Dashavatar dance etc. Dutta (2023). "Sattras were established mainly for the propagation of religion. During Sankaradev's stay in Bardowa, a prayer hall was established for preaching religion and later it came to be known as than"

4.2.4. Namghar

Naamghar is word which is made up of two words i.e. Naam (devotional songs) devotion, mercy of God etc whereas ghar means place or a shelter. Literary means the house of prayer. In other words, Namghar is a place of congregational worship associated with the entire Assamese community and the Eksharan community of Hinduism. It is a local temple in Assam. [5] has stated that "The Satras were developed as the socio-religious centers while the Namghar in every village was founded to serve a variety of purposes as a prayer hall, cultural centre, library and a venue of social get-together." (p. 104). There are several Namghar in many villages of Assam, which represent a community of many congregations. Vaishnava sadhakas Damodar Deb, Madhabadeva and Sankaradeva established Naamghar for the Assamese in Assam.

4.2.5. Bhatima

Bhatima is a class of devotional songs of praise, composed by Jagatguru Srimanta Sankaradeva and Sri Madhabadeva. Bhatima means praise and praise. There are four types Bhatima composed by Sankaradeva and Madhabadeva, out of four, three bhatima are composed by Sankaradeva i.e.:

i) **Deb Bhatima:** Praising to God
ii) **Naat Bhatima:** Use of dramas/Naat
iii) **Raj Bhatima:** Praising to King Nara Narayan.

4.3. Results

Sankaradevas' literary works and cultural expressions, and his spiritual leadership, played an important role in mobilizing population support for reform practices that laid the foundation for humanitarian and just social order. He focused on humanism based on compassion and mutual respect. This study highlights the continued relevance of his teachings in contemporary debates on social justice and ethical government.

Ultimately, Sankaradeva not only shaped the religious landscape of Assam, but also set up social reforms and the indelible mark on the broader narrative of humanism. The following results can be drawn from the study entitled Artistic Innovations of Sankaradeva:

a) Sankaradeva's literature expresses a deep sense of humanity. His literature reflected human values such as brotherhood, equality, social unity, equality towards all living beings, compassion and others.
b) The religious and cultural works of Sankaradeva reflect the ideal of building a sophisticated and refined society irrespective of caste and race. The study of his selected literature also reflected the attitude of eliminating the discrimination between men and women, superior and inferior attitudes, jealousy, stereotypes, so-called social conservatism, etc. prevalent in society.
c) In the middle ages, Sankaradeva opposed the masculine conservatism of contemporary society through his writings. Sankaradeva also thought about the physical and mental suffering of menstruating women. Sankaradeva's humanistic and reformist attitude is accurately reflected in his works.
d) Sankaradeva's reformist attitude is also expressed through the creation of protesting female characters and the protest against patriarchy through strong, vocal female characters.

5. CONCLUSION

Srimanta Sankaradeva was at once a preacher, social organizer, good singer, actor, poet, a painter and the creator of the Assamese nation, literature and culture. His new-Vaishnavite had influenced Assamese people to a greater extent which is also known as Eksharan Dharma (Lit. meaning 'Shelter-under one God'). His teachings emphasized unity among people and to take shelter under divine principle. It is true that as long as the Assamese continue to imitate Shankaradeva and Madhavadeva and follow the path shown by them there is no power in the world which can harm Assamese and their culture. Sankardeva's artistic contribution also challenged the caste hierarchy and brought spiritual equality among individuals. His principles and ideas rehabilitated cultural and religious integrity. Thus, Sankardeva's artistic innovations can be considered today as living traditions in Assam.

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Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Nivedita Lahkar	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				

C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Statement

No possible and probable conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Informed Consent

I do confirm the manuscript submission and possible publishment

Ethical Approval

The study does not include experiments with human or animal participants nor any biological materials. This research does not include AI-generated content as research objects, so ethical approval from any board or committee approval is not required for this paper.

Data Availability

This study does not involve AI generated contents, the primary data was collected from the field investigation and this supported research paper writing whereas secondary sources are from the internet and cited. To support the evidence the links are cited in the reference section.

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