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EDITOR
DR. PANKAJ BARAH

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EDITORIAL

Over the last few decades, the human civilization has been facing severe crisis in terms of physical and mental health, climate change, environmental devastation, destruction of homes, forced displacement, mass migration, conflict over water and food, internal and international security, identity conflict and the potential breakdown of society, energy, and transport, etc. These global challenges do not seem to have any quick possible solutions. Religious and spiritual beliefs can help sustain those who are suffering the effects of such a crisis. Faith can also provide the hope needed to sustain a long-term response to the deeper causes of the humanitarian crisis. Approximately 90 percent of the world’s population follows religious or spiritual customs. Research reveals that 80 percent (in the year 2013) of the world population is affiliated with any religion. In principle, religious communities are potentially powerful engines for social transformation.

Recently, the global virus pandemic has profoundly affected the world. Human society has started introspecting what was the real truth and necessities of human life against the materialistic developments, greediness and toxic environment. The philosophies and works of mahāpuruṣa become visibly prominent and relevant during any crisis situation. Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkardēva wrote in a Bargīt-

“pāve pari Hari karoho kātari
prāna rākhabi mora |
bisaya bisadhara bise jara jara
jivana nārahe thora ||

...

athira dhana jana jivana yauvana
athira ehu samsāra |
putra parivāra savahi asāra
karabo kāheri sāra ||”

Literary meaning: “O Lord, I am falling and praying on your feet, save my life. Materialistic life filled with toxins has made my body painful, making it difficult to sustain... Wealth, family are temporary, so are life, youth and this world. Wife and children are all insubstantial...”

In religious belief, a mahāpuruṣa or a saint is recognized to have an exceptional degree of holiness, likeness, or closeness to God. A mahāpuruṣa brings the important questions or problems in the surrounding environment to the table and works in a holistic manner to find some sustainable and long-lasting solutions with deep philosophical insights. Qualities of a mahāpuruṣa influence common people as

well as visionary leaders to develop effective management strategies of an organization, a society, and for the entire world. Such leadership must have the ability to communicate, unify, manage conflicts, innovate, persuade, encourage, and inspire people to take meaningful, productive, and sustainable actions. Mahāpuruṣa Śāṅkardēva was such an inspiring polymath having multifaceted talents, skills, wisdom, and knowledge, who came to this world nearly six hundred years ago (1449–1568 AD).

Mahāpuruṣa Śāṅkardēva's life and reformativ e activism were contemporary to the European Renaissance. One of the central themes of the European Renaissance during the two centuries from about 1350 to 1550, was humanism which emphasized a remarkable spirit of self-discovery and fulfillment, a recognition of human worth, and a dynamic outpouring of intellectual, artistic, and literary activity by going against prevailing medieval systems mostly influenced by religion and church. Renaissance featured a wide range of revolutions that had led to the rapid social and economic changes, new ideas, and applications of the political and international organization, and the scientific discoveries and expansion of Europe. Renaissance and religious reform of the sixteenth century revealed new insights into human-divine relations. There were unique and powerful leaders of each field in European Renaissance except a few polymaths such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. In contrast, Śāṅkardēva's solo contribution to bring holistic reformation in the prevailing medieval society of Assam was more significant than the organized execution of the European Renaissance. Śāṅkardēva was like a one-man army who initially led the revolutionary activities from the front, before he could select, inspire and train a group of disciples. Unfortunately, the heroic contributions of Mahāpuruṣa Śāṅkardēva have not been evaluated, analyzed and dissipated in a scientific manner to the world adequately.

The philosophies of Neo-Vaishnavite movement and eka śaraṇa hari nāma dharma propagated by Śāṅkaradeva has evolved through the reformativ e light of Vedic and post-Vedic literature to sustain over the centuries. It has proven the universality and strength of his wisdom, knowledge, and skills. The political maneuvers of Śāṅkaradeva can throw interesting light into the management policies of modern day socio-political situations. Śāṅkaradeva used literary, musical, and other cultural elements (audio-visual and performing art) in a localized, adaptive, and intelligent manner to propagate panIndian philosophy to the common mass through innovative skill-based education. The most important contribution of Śāṅkaradeva was the remarkable and intelligent, but hidden delivery methods for maintaining physical, mental, and social health. The teachings of holistic health and hygiene practices, the physical activities, mindfulness, spiritual living practices,

environmental ethics of Śāṅkaradeva would open up vast possibilities of scientific research in the coming days.

Śrīmanta Śāṅkaradeva Saṅgha has been engaged in propagating, rediscovering and conducting research on the philosophy, religion, and creations of Mahāpuruṣa Śāṅkardēva. MAHĀPURUṢAJYOTI as the official journal of Śrīmanta Śāṅkaradeva Saṅgha, aims at facilitating multidisciplinary scholars to communicate their research-based findings related to Śāṅkaradeva, his religion, philosophies, and other multifaceted contributions. The volume XXI of the MAHĀPURUṢAJYOTI journal presents fifteen such diversified articles contributed by multidisciplinary experts and scholars. Several of the articles presented in this volume would certainly give scope for further discussions, brainstorming, deliberations for studying Śāṅkaradeva from more and more holistic perspectives.

Acknowledgement: I sincerely acknowledge all the contributing authors for their valuable articles for the Volume XXI of Mahāpuruṣajyoti. My special thanks to all the scholars who helped by providing critical review the submitted articles. I am sincerely thankful to honourable Chief advisor, Padadhikar, Pradhan Sampadak of Śrīmanta Śāṅkaradeva Saṅgha, along with the president, secretary and members of sahitya sakha samiti for their kind advice in editing of this Volume. I owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Jagat Chandra Kalita, Professor and Head, Dept. of Sankaradeva Studies, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya; Prof. Suresh Chandra Professor (Retd. Professor) Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya; Mr. Kailash Das, Dr. Tarun Gogoi, Associate Professor, Hem Chandra Dev Goswami College, Nitaipukhuri, Sivasagar; Dr. Biswajit Kalita, Associate Professor, Suren Das College, Hajo; and Mr. Manoj Kumar Deoraja for their generous help and mentoring in all aspects during the editorial process. My sincere thanks to Mr. Babul Barhoi, Associate Professor, Department of English, Panigaon Omprakash Dinodia College, who painstakingly helped me to typeset the articles with proper diacritical marks. I express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Hiteswar Sharma (MS, MCh.), Director, Mission Smile Assam for preparing the cover page of this volume. I thank the technical support of the **XXX printers for** printing the journal. Finally, I pay deep respect and gratitude to my late father Siddheswar Bora, a schoolteacher, a true follower of Śrīmanta Śāṅkaradeva, who introduced me to the life and philosophy of of Mahāpuruṣajyoti Śāṅkaradeva.

Sincerely,

Tezpur University, Napaam
Tezpur, Sonitpur, Assam (India) Pin- 784028

Pankaj Barah
February/2022

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The World of Vedic Literature

Dr. Dayananda Pathak

Abstract:

About the color and contour of Vedic literature the scholars all across the world appear to be intoxicated. The entire corpus of what we call Vedic range of literature is the autobiography of Indian thought and perceptions of life and living. The word 'Veda' is rooted to Sanskrit word 'vid'(to know). Thus the general meaning of Veda is construed to be knowledge or consciousness. In other words, Veda means the unending storehouse of knowledge and wisdom—both material and spiritual. Veda is a gigantic range of ancient literature. It cannot be ascribed to any single author or group of likeminded authors. Such writings are considered to be divine revelations. So they are called *Apauruṣeya*, i.e., not being composed by any individual human hands. They are handed down from generation to generation in diverse forms. Such writings are also described as *nitya*, that is, permanent and eternal. It is, however, a fact that our ancient sages composed them under the direct inspiration from some divine authority. Some scholars hold the opinion that the process of writing came much later. The composition of the Vedic hymns took place much earlier, and they existed in the form of *śruti* (hearing) and *smṛti* (remembering), handed down from generation to generation as a holistic legacy.

Keywords: Veda, Vedic literature, *Samhitās*, *Upaniṣad*, *Vedāṅgas*

Divergent views

There are different views regarding the time of composition of the Vedas. A group of scholars hold the opinion that the Vedas were composed during 3000- 2500 BC. While another section holds the view that the sacred books are written 5000 years BC. We, however, have the feeling that the opinion of such scholars have some truths and supportive reasons. A single year or century cannot be fixed for Vedic literature. This must also be borne in mind that Vedas are the literary expressions of varied colors, composed in different times of Indian civilization. Scholar like J. Hartel believes that *Rg-Veda* must have originated in Iran, and not in India. Such views and observations have considerably mystified the Vedic period and the literary manifestations of the period.

Vedic literature is stated to have three major periods. The first period refers to the *Samhitās*. The second period refers to the *Brāhmaṇas*. The third period refers to the *Upaniṣads*, *Āraṇyaks*, and *Sūtras*. All the three taken together constitute the vast expanse of Vedic literature. *Samhitās* refers to the bare texts of the four Vedas – *Rg-Veda*, *Sāmveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*. The structure and the volume of

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each Veda is well designed to suit the contents. For example, the *Samhitās* of the *Ṛg-Veda* has about 1000 or 1028 hymns. They are arranged –into ten *maṇḍalas* (chapters), depending upon the name of the sages who composed them. Such *maṇḍalas* are also arranged on the basis of the subject matter.

The *Samhitās* of *Sāmveda* has 1810 hymns. It is often described as a book of chants, meant to be chanted at the time of *Soma* sacrifices. Barring only 75 hymns the rest of the hymns are stated to have been drawn from *Ṛg-Veda Samhitā*. Musical elements tend to make *Sāmveda* is quite interesting to a special class of people. It narrates how sacrifices are to be performed. *Atharvaveda* is often considered to be an extension of the *Ṛg-Veda*. One can notice close resemblances between the two Vedas. *Atharvaveda* contains hymns meant for the control and taming of the evil spirit and demonic powers. It is structured into 20 books with 73 hymns.

Samhitā

Samhitā period is followed by the *Brāhmaṇa* period. This phase is marked by its own distinct features. The *Brāhmaṇas* are commentaries on different hymns. They also explain the significance of sacrifices and about the ways of their performances. Each *Brāhmaṇa* is basically an extension of the *Samhitā*. Say for example, scholars point out that *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* and the *Kauṣītakī Brāhmaṇa* relate to *Ṛg-Veda Samhitā*. Whereas *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa*, *Tāndya-Mahā- Brāhmaṇa* and *Sadvinsa Brāhmaṇa* relate to *Samveda Samhitā*. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is connected to *Yajurveda Samhitā*. Similarly, *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* relates to *Atharvaveda Samhitā*. Such *Brāhmaṇas* make exhaustive narration about sacrifices and ways of making them. Apart from that some of the *Brāhmaṇas* speak volumes about the cultural and social life of the non-Aryans. How a non-Aryan could be Aryanized is also being explained in some of the *Brāhmaṇas*. These *Brāhmaṇas* narrate the specific functions of the specific class of priesthoods, such as *Hotri* priests, *Udgati* priests, *Adhvaryya* priests and so forth. In fact, specific performance is fixed on specific class of priests.

The *Brāhmaṇas*, although considered to be an integral part of the Vedic literature, they are often looked down upon as mere non-sense by a group of scholars. Max Mueller considered them to be mere ‘theological twaddles’¹. Again, according to Dr Winternitz the *Brāhmaṇas* constitute an important segment of Vedic literature. The general readers may not enjoy the *Brāhmaṇa* part of the Vedic literature. But they are considered to be important social documents of the Vedic society and civilization².

Āraṇyakas

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Āraṇyakas, considered to be ‘forest books’, makes the summing part of the *Brāhmaṇas*. This part deals with what may be described as mystic philosophy, specifically covering the sages engaged in serious contemplation in the deep forests, away from the mundane part of human life. The ritualistic part of life is detached in the *Āraṇyakas*.

The *Upaniṣads* virtually strikes the culmination of the Vedic literature in terms of philosophical and spiritual musings. The thoughts embedded in the pages of the *Upaniṣads* mark a significant leap-forward in the history of man’s spiritual journeys. According to Schopenhauer, the great German philosopher, every sentence of the *Upaniṣads* is “deep, original, and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit. Indian air surrounds us, and original thoughts of kindred spirits. And Oh, how thoroughly is the mind here washed clean...”³ He further said, “It (*Upaniṣads*) has been the solace of my life – it will be the solace of my death.”⁴ The philosophical exploration of life as adumbrated in the *Upaniṣads*, numbering 108, mark the zenith of human thought and spiritual consciousness of the highest order. Scholar like Will Durant compares *Upaniṣads* with *New Testament* of the Christendom.⁵ Not to speak of ordinary followers, even persons of eminence like Schopenhauer and Emerson also were deeply touched by the Upanishadic doctrines.⁶

Dr Winternitz feels that the entire gamut of Indian philosophy is rooted to the Upanishadic doctrines. In his words – “In fact the whole of later philosophy of the Indians is rooted to the *Upaniṣads*. Their doctrines formed the foundation of the Vedantic *sūtras* of the Badarayana.”⁷ He also refers to how sages like Śaṅkarācārjya and Rāmānuja got inspired by the philosophical doctrines enunciated in the *Upaniṣads*. All the philosophical systems of beliefs, developed in India at a later time are also found to be firmly rooted to the *Upaniṣads*. This Upanishadic ways of looking at life and universe have given a specific orientation to the Indian mind. The *Upaniṣads* do not plead for a sky-high philosophy. It deals with all the practical and down-to-earth human truths of life. It pleads for a balanced life, wherein even the material aspects of life are also not ignored in preference to spiritual issues. Dr Winternitz further adds saying “The *Upaniṣads* do not contain superhuman conceptions, but human, absolutely human attempts to come nearer to the truth – and it is this which makes them so valuable to us.”⁸

The essence of the *Upaniṣads* covers the best elements of Sufism as developed in contemporary Persia, neo-Platonism of Greek civilization, and also partially to what we find in mystic Christianity. In fact, it anticipated the best parts

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of every human thought, subsequently projected by the different philosophical schools the world civilization ever produced.

Vedic Hymns

The Upanishadic thoughts, however, took time to settle down. The Vedic hymns were considerably unsettled for historical and political reasons. From the Vedic thought pattern to its subsequent Upanishadic expressions, routed through *Brāhmaṇas* and *Āraṇyakas* occupied a major space in Indian history. The growth of Indian thought, and every aspect of Indian civilization, is routed through Upanishadic systems of beliefs. In the language of Amaury de Riencourt “The Upanishadic era represents the zenith of India’s cultural growth.”⁹. But over the past millennia we have not been able to surpass or equal the depth, height and width of the Upanishadic thoughts. Now we have the feeling that India had already enjoyed its best parts of life during the Upanishadic era.

Thought Pattern

The Vedic pattern of thought takes us to a world of joy and celebration of life. We began to learn that life could be enjoyed fully if we remain deeply attached to land, environment and natural human relationships. The Vedic pattern of thought has all been secular. It does not imply adherence to any specific religious order. But over the millennia we move on to the Upanishadic era and step into a world of new spiritual awareness that is crystallized in the *Upaniṣads*. We have begun to feel that mere celebration was not the be-all-and end-all of the Upanishadic teachings. We must also be in a position to have a ringside view of life. What life is all about? Where does it lead us to? What is the shape of truth beyond this apparent truth? These elemental questions of life began to emerge in Indian minds when a phase of maturity started taking shape through Upanishadic thoughts.

By the way, *Upaniṣads* implies ‘sitting near’ – meaning sitting together with truth. That was possible under the situation of nearness between the teacher and the taught directed towards spiritual communion. It is the communication relating to the secret (*rahasya*) of existence. It is the communication of truth relating to the creator (The Supreme Being) and the created ones (being). The *Upaniṣads* is not a single piece of composition by any single author. We have as many as 108 *Upaniṣads* authored by different sages covering a period from 800 BC to 500 BC. Every sage author had his own ways of looking at things. Since it is not a consistent whole, it requires a thorough and intensive study by the serious researchers. Nevertheless, we find a unifying cord that passes through all the 108 *Upaniṣads*. The unifying cord can be described by saying “The universe is the *Brahma*, while *Brahma* is nothing

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but *ātmā*”. In short, *Brahma* is nothing but God, while the soul within man is nothing but God. Thus the soul of every man is a reflection of the Supreme Being.

The idea of the universe in relation to man or any living being is being addressed by each of the 108 *Upaniṣads* in its own language and rhythms. The *Upaniṣad* tells us to assert our existence and also to negate it as and when situation so requires. Every man is advised to behave like *Brahmaṇ* and also as a child. Childlike innocence can lead us to a state of deeper realization that cannot be done by mere erudition. Frederick Nietzsche, the great German philosopher, also reflected on the quality of childlike innocence. The Supreme reality can be felt only under that blessed condition. One cannot go too far only by virtue of intellectual gymnastics as much as we can go by sheer childlike innocence and devotion. They teach us to internalize our knowledge. Only through this process of internalization and deep self-introspection we can feel the reality beyond the apparent reality. Our ancient sages are painted as lost in trance with their eyes and ears closed, and all their sense organs deactivated. They realized the truth of existence only through internalization of thoughts and feelings. The tragedy of ours is that we see ourselves as totally isolated beings. That we are already integrated with the soul divine is outside our normal perceptions.

The *Upaniṣads* believe in transmigration of soul. It is closely linked with the belief in rebirth. The soul is always in the process of migration, from one life to the other. This process is endless until the soul merges with the Supreme Soul. As and when the human soul gets released from the chain of births and rebirths the journey continues. Rājā Janaka wanted to know from Rājarṣī Yājñavalka how to get rid of the chain of births and rebirths. To this the Rājarṣī replied that only by total surrender before the Lord and by liquidation of all material desires one could internalize his thought and get united with the Supreme Being. It is just as a river loses its identity as and when it meets the sea, a person loses his individual identity as and when he gets merged with the Supreme Being.

Vedāṅgas

Vedanta is considered to be the quintessence of the larger Vedic thought pattern. The entire gamut of Indian thought is rooted to this Upanishadic belief. After the Vedas we have the *Vedāṅgas*. They are considered to be subsidiary Vedas. We have six very important *Vedāṅgas*—*Śikṣā*, *Kalpa*, *Vyākaraṇa*, *Nirukta*, *Chanda* and *Jyotiṣa*. *Śikṣā* deals with pronunciation of words, considered to be very sacred in Vedic literature. *Kalpa* deals with religious and social rites and rituals. *Vyākaraṇa* deals with grammar of the language, while *Nirukta* is concerned with meaning of words,

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i.e., etymology. *Chanda* covers rhythms and meters of a language. Finally, *Jyotiṣa* addresses the astronomical issues.

Then we have the *Upavedas* like *Dhanurveda*, *Ayurveda*, *Gandharvaveda*, *Śilpaveda* and so forth. *Dhanurveda* deals with the art of warfare. *Ayurveda* deals with medication. *Gandharvaveda* deals with music and fine arts. *Śilpaveda* deals with art of construction and architecture. The domain of Vedic literature also includes six *darśanas*. They mean six schools of philosophy. They are *Sāṅkhya-darśana*, *Nyāya-darśana*, *Yoga-darśana*, *Vaiśeṣika darśana*, *Pūrvamīmāṃsā-darśana* and *Uttarmīmāṃsā-darśana*.

These *darśanas* are projected to circumvent the philosophical mess let loose by the protagonists of Buddhism against the cardinal spirit of the Vedic philosophy. Believed to have been authored sometime in the 6th century BC when Emperor Aśoka was engaged in disseminating the ideals of Buddhism across India and the south east. The *darśanas* are brief aphorisms or *sūtras*. All the *darśanas* advocate the idea of purgation of soul (*cittaśuddhi*)and unattached work culture (*niṣkāmakarma*). The liberation of the soul called *mokṣa* is possible only through the above ways and means.

Conclusion:

Thus the Vedic literature covered the entire gamut of man's material, physical, intellectual, social, spiritual and human aspects. Post-Vedic literatures touched only some specific issues of life. In short, our all-comprehensive heritage was built up by the vast expanse of Vedic literature. It wanted to build up man with all the qualities necessary for his purposeful, elegant, and decent existence.

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Author details: Dr. Dayananda Pathak was former Assam Civil Servant, Principal of S.D.College, Hajo; former Principal of Pragjyotish College, Guwahati; former Professor of English, USTM, Meghalaya; former Professor of Sankardeva Studies, M. S. Sankardeva University, Nagaon. *E. mail:* dayanandapathak123@gmail.com

Śaṅkaradeva's Universal Humanism

Dr. Deepshikha Mahanta Bortamuly

Abstract:

This article attempts at analyzing the contribution of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva in terms of his universal humanistic traits. An exemplified exegesis has been aimed at pointing out his contribution as a social reformer who worked relentlessly for the upliftment of the contemporary society, making it free of unnecessary shackles of dilapidated conventions and rituals. Due to the overwhelmingly large number of literary productions and the immense socio-cultural as well as moral-ethical-religious reforms that he ushered in, only a cursory glance was possible, highlighting a few basic issues noticed as significant.

Keywords: social reformer, upliftment, universal humanist.

Introduction:

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568) was a genius in the true sense of the term, uplifting the dilapidated, fragmented society of his period and ushering in a new epoch in the history of Assam. It is difficult to write any article on his contribution when one looks at his life and his stupendous achievements, his attempts at bringing in a holistic development of the contemporary society. Rituals, sacrifices, *mantra* and black magic practices shrouded Hindu religious beliefs at that time and religion was projected as a mere set of practices to satisfy gods. Common men found religion costly, distant and difficult yet a necessary part of their social existence. Basic teachings of Hinduism written in the scriptures remained inaccessible to people and whatever the priests chanted made no meanings to the ignoble mass. This opacity helped different interpretive groups to channelize faith in directions they wanted. In this context, it was hugely significant that Śaṅkaradeva summarized and simplified the best way of devotion to God—convincingly depicting God as a friend, philosopher and guide; not someone to be afraid of, but one who would always stand by the needy. *Bargīts*, the devotional songs he wrote are of a high standard in terms of content, expression, diction and elegance. He introduced *bhāonā*, which led to the emergence of drama as a form in Assam. He painted the divine life of the Almighty, he taught people how to make the accompanying instruments for devotional lyrics, the stage props for the plays, mask making and so on. He encouraged people for healthy living and social progress, looking after their spiritual, physical, social well-being. It is impossible to summarize the life and achievements of this visionary soul here in the context of this article, nor is it possible to analyze his teachings and literary excellence. A cursory glimpse at his universal humanistic characteristics and social reformative perspective is attempted here.

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Śaṅkaradeva, an Institution by Himself:

A comprehensive examination of Śaṅkaradeva's life and achievements makes one realize that he was an all rounder who excelled in every field. Instances of his physical strength abound in biographies and the stories – he could swim the swelling Brahmaputra of the rainy season across and back, he could defeat and control a wild buffalo and so on. His extraordinary inborn talent for literary excellence started showing signs with the first poem he wrote while learning only half of the Assamese alphabet, the consonants. He summarized the basic Hindu philosophy and teaching, translating and trans-creating them in a medium easily understandable by the illiterate common mass. He not only wrote lyrics and sang them; he taught people how to make accompanying instruments. He painted God's glory in the form of *Vṛndāvanī Vastra* and *Sapta Vaikuṅṭha*. He established the *sattra* system as well as the *nāmghar* for the propagation, practice and extension of not just religious notions, but good practices for a harmonious social existence.

Eradication of the Fear of God:

Śaṅkaradeva created a wide-ranging literary reservoir in lyrical verse comprehensible by one and all, in which he convincingly eradicated the fear of wrath of God by creating the figure of a very benevolent God. One does not need to know or offer extensive rituals to satisfy Him, nor does He need anything except simple faith. God makes sure that the evils must end, but not at the cost of the good and sincere ones. In *Prahlād-caritra*, Śaṅkaradeva vividly draws a moment after the killing of Hiranyakaśipu by Narasiṃha. Everyone including Brahmā and Lakṣmīdevī are shown to be terrified of the angry Narasiṃha. However, Prahlāda, the young lad addresses Narasiṃha in the following words:

bhayaṅkara kopa dekhiyā tomāra
prabhu mora bhaya nāi/
saṁsāra cakrar nikār dekhiyā

sadāye dhatu uḍāi // (I am not afraid of your terrible look as I get disheartened everyday at the way things turn up in the cycle of life/ *saṁsāra*)

Prahlāda exemplifies and thus summarizes the necessity of pure and sincere devotion, which becomes superior to privileges of birth, wealth, rituals or even *tapasyā*. This sent an extremely significant message to the downtrodden, illiterate, marginalized but larger sections of the society. Prahlāda is acutely aware of his marginalized status, his lack of adequate means commonly projected as necessary to reach God; nevertheless, he is not afraid of addressing the Almighty:

dhana-jana-tapa prabhāve tomāka

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*ārādhibe śakya nāi/
gajendre kevale bhakati karile
parama āpada pāi//
yīto cāṇḍālāra kāya-vākya-mane
sadāye sumare hari/
āche bāhravrata yīto brāhmaṇara
si si śreṣṭha tāto kari//
siṭo mahāgarvi vipre āponāka
pavitra karibe nāre/
bhakata cāṇḍāle āponāko tāre
samasta kula uddhāre.//¹*

Pahlāda is born as an *Asura*, but proves himself to be a wholehearted devotee and thus closest to God, the saviour. He expresses his inability to offer prayers with any privileged position; at the same time, he mentions the examples of others who were rescued and saved by the Almighty in dire distress. Reference to Gajendra, the elephant and the way he was saved by God—strengthens the beliefs and provides rays of hope to the downtrodden in a period of anarchy like that of Hiranyakaśipu. Śaṅkaradeva reiterates the power of simple and whole hearted submission in *Gajendra-upākhyāna* of the *Kīrtana-ghoṣā*. Against these two stands Ajāmila, who never prayed to God except taking the name Nārāyana, which happened to be the name of his son as well. It must have been a surprisingly delightful and assuring narrative for the common people to realize that even a mistaken addressing of God is enough to bring down angels who rescue the souls to heaven, as they did in case of Ajāmila. Thus, Ajāmila’s story is in fact more significant than Pahlāda’s. The latter’s whole hearted devotion is almost impossible to imbibe for the common mass. Nevertheless, the assurance that Ajāmila’s story provides is something that touched every simple soul, acutely aware of the sins committed in lifetime, yet waiting for redemption. *Dayāmaya dayārsāgar*— God is embodiment of forgiveness and a sea of kindness—He was propagated to usher in a new epoch of fearlessness and, therefore, of confidence building.

Ajāmila’s story juxtaposes sharply with the European Christian story of Faust, the most learned scholar of Germany who sold his soul to the devil and is torn to death at the end. The divine help does not come, though he desperately tries at the end, as Christopher Marlowe immortalizes the agony in his classic tragedy:

*O, I’ll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?
See, see where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ! —*

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...
*Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd.
O, no end is limited to damned souls*

...
*My God, my God! Look not so fierce on me!*²

One drop of Christ's blood or even half a drop never reaches the tormented agonized Faustus. Hence, people are warned of crossing the limits or else of a tormented everlasting afterlife in hell. Hell in fact descends through stage devices in Marlowe's famous last scene, and heaven as well, to make the contrast visible and as obvious as possible. To the Renaissance audience, this story epitomized a basic conflict between religious authorities and the new individual ready to transcend the medieval limits of human possibilities. It is pertinent to remember at this point that European Renaissance was possible only after the fear of God's wrath and Church's predicaments got slowly diminished. Minds became opener to see, dream, accept responsibilities and excel.

Towards a Progressive Society

Śaṅkaradeva consciously eradicated conflicts, providing a comfort and solace necessary for the growth of the individual. From the countless stories, myths, narratives that abound in Hindu scriptures and beliefs, the ones picked up and localized by Śaṅkaradeva always provided divine support, not panic. Everywhere it is pointed out that we may commit sins as we all knowingly or unknowingly do, what is important is to understand and surrender. Moreover, God becomes one with the devotee, the *bhakata* and therefore the true *bhakata* does not aspire for even for *mukti* or ultimate freedom of the soul. Śrī Mādhavdeva, the chief disciple of Śaṅkaradeva took forward this aspect, as exemplified in the first *ghoṣā* of *Nāma-ghoṣā*, his magnum opus.

In the chapter on "Vishnava Sāhitya" in *Asamīyā Sāhityar Samīkṣātmak Itibṛtta*, Dr. Satyendranath Sharma extensively analyzes the reasons and repercussions of a Vaishnava Movement in India. He traces it from 7th to 10th century Tamil Vaishnava upsurge till 16th century in various parts of India by the saints and *gurus*. Sharma points out seven characteristic features of this Movement, namely devotion to one God; simplification of the praying practices; egalitarian attitude; encouraging peace, non-violence, love, kindness and other virtues; translation of the classical texts to local languages and thereby enriching the regional languages as well as art and aesthetics; spreading notions of equality and respect for everyone; decreasing the

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aggressive conflicts between the rigid Hindus and equally rigid Muslims through preaching a milder way of religion and thus of lifestyle. Several of these Pan-Indian trends are easily discoverable in the Vishnava Movement that Śaṅkaradeva initiated in Assam.

In simple lyrics that can be remembered and hummed and thus imbibed, he depicted different pictures of the Lord with images, symbols, discourses, narratives, observations that the common mass did not find difficult to imagine and internalize. He worked relentlessly for a casteless, classless, progressive society. He translated the basic teachings of Hindu philosophy to simple lyrical verse in a pan-regional language that everyone can understand. One of his often-quoted lines is:

*kukur śṛgāl gardarbharo ātmā rām
jāniyā savāko pari karibā praṇām*

(Rām or God resides in everyone’s soul, even in that of a dog, fox or a donkey. Therefore, one needs to understand this and show proper respect for every living creature.)

He carefully and frequently reiterated that to be a Vaishnava it is not required to disrespect any other belief but to imbibe universal humanistic characteristics of compassion, love, endurance and firm belief in one’s soul mate God.

In an article on Universal Humanism³, Tone Sveterlj defines universal humanism in the following way:

...“Such humanism continually moves us towards a better comprehension of what “human” means within a universe of divergent cultures, religions, traditions, and races. This humanism is called *universal humanism*, based on the Greek word *kaqolou*, comprising both universality and wholeness.”...

Śaṅkaradeva was a true universal humanist, who brought the diverse groups together to create a larger and more egalitarian society. Here is another stanza that exemplifies it:

*brāhmaṇara cāṇḍālara nibicāri kul
dātāta corata yena dṛṣṭi ekatul
nicata sādhuba yāra bhaila ekajñān
tāhākese paṇḍita buliya sarvajan.*

(A wise man is one who does not take into consideration the caste of the uppermost, the Brahmin or the most marginalized, the *Cāṇḍāla*. He treats a donor and a thief equally. He does not differentiate between an ignoble or an outcaste and a holy man or a hermit.)

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This definition of wisdom makes a marked difference from a tradition of respecting the knowledgeable. Since the scriptures and their interpretation were in the possession of the privileged few, the knowledge of the scriptures is not even considered here as a prerequisite for wisdom. Genuine wisdom comes when one can extend the mental horizon to accept every individual as equal, not submitting oneself to prejudices and presumed binaries.

Nevertheless, this does not negate the importance of the society or social existence, social awareness and social bonding. In fact, societal repercussion of individual behaviour is highlighted through different stories. For instance, in *Symantak-haraṇa*, Kṛṣṇa, the Lord incarnate is depicted to be acutely aware of the impact of misnomers in the minds of the people when Prasena was rumoured to be killed by him:

*khuji napāi bhāika māri Kṛṣṇe nile maṇi/
śuni sarvaloke āka kare kaṇākani//
vekata nakare keho mādhavaka ḍare/
pāileka kalaṅke moka jāni dāmodare//
kimate duryaśa gucāo guṇi bhagavanta/*

...

*diyā moṇi moka mayi neo dvārakāka/
gucoka duryaśa dekhāo lokata pratyay.//*

He is both God and a human being, so He works consciously for the mitigation of a rumour. As long as one lives in a social context, one is bound by social norms and notions, not even God Himself is free of this. Śaṅkaradeva painstakingly exhibits that in His behaviour; Kṛṣṇa shows the proper ways of eradicating misnomers in a socially acceptable manner. Society is thus given prominence and the individual needs to make balanced decisions for individual and social excellence.

Nāmghar as a Community Cultural Centre:

One of his most significant contributions was to create the *nāmghar* or *kīrttanghar* as a community cultural centre. The *nāmghar* spreads sprightliness through activities of singing, painting, mask-making, practicing performance and what not. The necessary stage props were all prepared by the village folks. Skilled expertise grew and sustained through these practices.

Ankiā-nāṭ had a similar initial stage like the Mystery and Morality plays. However, instead of coming out of the religious space to the commercial grounds, they have remained non-commercial ventures till very recent times.

Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barua traces the origin of Greek theatre in the temple of Dionysius and the birth of tragedy as a dramatic form. He explores the emergence of

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Indian classical dramatic productions and thereafter relates Assamese *Ankiā-nāṭ* to the pan-Indian context. *Cihna-yātrā*, the first *Ankiā-nāṭ* by Śaṅkaradeva exhibits a judicious combination of various trends in the then prevalent socio-cultural activities in Assam as well as in different parts of India. In an extensive comparative study, Dr. Barua points out that *Ankiā-nāṭ* was so unique and popular that it was performed in the court of the king of Nepal as well.⁴ He rightly notices that though *Nāṭ-bhāonā* was introduced from a religious backdrop, it soon became an instrument for instruction for the common mass. Barua cites a quote from a critic regarding Elizabethan stage and its influence on the common people. As it has been already mentioned, I have some reservations in a similarity drawn between the two. Dr. Barua succinctly summarizes that *bhāonā* as an institution contains an ideal intermingling of old traditions with new ideas forming a significant part of Assamese community recreations, festivities and thoughts. He concluded by saying that the future of a brighter Assamese cultural existence depends vitally on the realization, reform and timely development of *bhāonā* as an institution.⁵

In a discussion on the emergence of Modern Assamese Drama as a form, Dr. Pona Mahanta comments that Śaṅkaradeva evolved *Nāṭ-bhāonā* tradition in a regular manner at a time when World's greatest dramatist Shakespeare was not even born.⁶

Bapchandra Mahanta worked with an uncompromising research zeal and dedication on various aspects of Śaṅkaradeva's contribution to Assamese society and culture. What makes Mahanta's work unique is the way he connects Indian scriptures quoting from Vedas, *purāṇas* and other classical texts as well as their interpretations by noted scholars in Sanskrit, *Māgadhi*, Bengali and other languages. I would like to refer to one or two of his books written in Assamese so as to open the floor for discussion for scholars from outside Assam.

In a significant publication, titled "*Aitihāsik Patabhūmit Mahāpuruṣ Śaṅkaradeva*" (Mahapuruṣ Śaṅkaradeva in the Historical Context) Bapchandra Mahanta notes (p.160-161)⁷ that Śaṅkaradeva, with his mental agility and determination, physical prowess and administrative excellence that ascribed "*Śiromaṇi Bhūñā*" title on him could have easily ruled as a *Bhūñā* head administrator if he would have wished to. However, he chose the path of a social reformer, renouncing power and wealth and material gain.

In another book named "*Śaṅkaradevar Byaktitva āru Sattra-Vyavaṣṭhā: Brahmaputra Upatyakār Samāj Cetanār Itihāsar Ādhārat*" (Śaṅkaradeva's Personality and the *Sattra*-system in the Light of the History of Brahmaputra Valley Social Consciousness), Bapchandra Mahanta comments (pp. 7-8) that *sattra* as a word was prevalent since Vedic times for contemporary *yugadharmā*, social system,

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literature and the related art and craft for their historic development, which requires a lot to be analyzed in the pan Indian context. In Assam, *sattra* was introduced by Śaṅkaradeva. The main purpose or aim of *sattra* was to pave ways for peace and prosperity with mutual understanding on the basis of *sāttvik* thinking and reasoning. Farmers, artisans, merchants and other professionals had direct relationship with the *sattra*-system as exemplified in Śaṅkaradeva's biographies. (p.20)⁸

Not only the *sattras*, but the villages also functioned in a *nāmghar*-centric way, with the directives of the most experienced, the most devoted persons, who in turn are also the sincerest of the local people. They were given the topmost seats in the *nāmghar*. Work division was also maintained among the *nāmghariā* or the caretaker, the *sātolā*, the *ātai*, the *nāmati* or the one who leads the choir, the *pātheke* or the one who reads the scriptures and explains, the *bilaniyā* or the distributor of the *prasad*, in addition to the *gosāi* or *mahanta* or the *guru*. It is notable at this point that the *prasad* in a *nāmghar* consists of fresh fruit and soaked *chana* and *moong dāl*, along with *kheer* and *lāddu*. What marked the distribution is the fact that everyone is given an equal share and the *prasad* is eaten only after the distribution is declared over; the *bilaniyā* kneels down for any negligence committed to anyone inadvertently. This egalitarian aspect of the community gathering in the *nāmghar* created a sense of harmony and belonging.

Ethical and moral notions were spread through good practices iterated in the *nāmghar*. Lifestyle practices were provided to people in a geographic locality of damp swampy surroundings with heavy rains. Eating fresh, eating clean, maintaining hygiene were taught to the devotees, creating different levels of Bhakatas according to their capabilities, dedication and sincerity of efforts. A form of local self-government evolved through the practices of the *nāmghar*. All the families of the village contribute the first harvest to the *nāmghar*. All disputes are discussed and amicably settled by the elderly with punishments inflicted whenever needed. The punishments vary from a mere kneeling down at the *nāmghar* and acceptance of guilt, to a sort of excommunication not as rigid as in Christianity but rather a social isolation, which is negated whenever the guilty person requests for a pardoning of the wrongdoing. A parent assaulted by an offspring also led to punishment and necessity of public apology. This must have significantly provided a socially acceptable comfortable and respectable space to the elderly in every family.

Conclusion:

As mentioned in the beginning, it is difficult to write any article on Śaṅkaradeva's contribution when one looks at his life and his stupendous achievements, his attempts at bringing in a holistic development of the contemporary society. His

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relentless efforts to make religion a simple way of reaching out to one's soul-mate God as exemplified by various stories from Hindu scriptures, paved way for the unification of the dilapidated and fragmented contemporary society. This article attempted an exegesis of his immense contribution in creating an egalitarian and progressive society. Some textual examples were cited to complement the statements made. Although research work on Śaṅkaradeva abounds in Assamese, here a few prominent critics were referred to validate the basic idea that the article propagates.

In today's world, issues, perspectives, realizations, approaches towards life have changed considerably, so have religious beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, what have not changed are the basic human necessities of love, compassion, fellow feeling and respect for every form of living. The relevance of Śaṅkaradeva, therefore, remains ever pertinent – as a visionary, a genius and a compassionate soul, dedicated towards the upliftment of his society and time through universal humanism. The more we understand, realize and imbibe his notions, the opener will be the minds and the soul, thereby we will be able to think of a “heaven of freedom” as Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore asserted, where “the mind is without fear and the head is held high”.

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Author details: Dr. Deepshikha Mahanta Bortamuly is Associate Professor and Teacher-in-Charge, Department of English, Daulat Ram College, University of Delhi, 110007

E. mail: deepshikha.drca@gmail.com/ deepshikhamahanta@dr.du.ac.in

A comparison of humanism launched by s Śāṅkaradeva and the humanism in Europe

Babul Barhoi

Abstract:

Humanism, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, is a 'term most commonly applied to the cultural movement in Renaissance Europe characterized by a revival of classical letters, an individualistic and critical spirit, and a shift of emphasis from religious to secular concerns.' Later on, the term has been used globally, which emphasized more on the term 'man is the measure of all things'. The term, 'humanism' is considered as one of the most important characteristics of the Renaissance Movement that evolved in Europe during the 14th Century. Though humanism is considered as a transition from religion to secularism, medieval European humanism was not totally secular, it insisted mainly in opposing Roman Catholic sacerdotal rites. It supported individualism, rationalism, classicism, naturalism. Śāṅkaradeva was a contemporary of the European humanists. The present research work on comparative study of the humanist attitudes of Śāṅkaradeva with the European humanists has found many similarities.

Keywords: Humanism, Śāṅkaradeva, Renaissance, Medieval Age, Neo-Vaiṣṇavism

Introduction:

Humanism (especially the Renaissance Humanism) was a revolt against superstitious beliefs of the Medieval Age, which is also called the Dark Age. The Renaissance humanists, therefore, returned to the ancient time in order to uncover the hidden truth. Humanism declares that man is not a plaything of the aerial stars or deities. Man is the lord of his own destiny. No supernal power can influence human activities. Man can perform even impossible works without any aid of such deities or any such mystical power.

The Renaissance Humanism was a movement of return to antiquity; return to the ancient classical literature as well as the original writings of the Bible. The Renaissance humanists were well versed in the Bible and the ancient classics. Many of them translated the Bible to the vernacular. They found many ingredients of humanism there.

The Renaissance humanism can also be called the classical humanism. However, all of the humanists of the period were not classical humanists. It was because the classical literature was a theistic literature. Although classicism, individualism, rationalism, naturalism and absence of superstitions were there in Renaissance humanism, it is not purely humanism as pure humanism is non-theistic and secular.

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Methodology, Materials and Review of Literature:

The history of the Renaissance and the Reformation of Europe is a matter of general knowledge. All educated persons know about them. When a close study on the writings of Śaṅkaradeva was done by this writer for knowing about him, it is seen that there are many ideas which are similar to these movements. Hence a desire of comparative study is felt. Books that are found about these movements are collected. A study on the medieval India about Neo-Vaiṣṇavism is also done for the purpose. Internet sites are also visited whenever required. It comes to the decision that a paper on ‘A Comparison of Humanism Launched by Śaṅkaradeva and the Humanism in Europe’ may be considered valuable to highlight the contributions of Śaṅkaradeva to this part of the world in heralding the modern age as it was done by the humanists in Europe.

Discussions on the findings:

On discussion on the findings about the humanist elements in the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, it can be said that the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism is more or less similar to the Renaissance humanism. Humanism is everywhere in the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism. The important similarities are discussed in points after a few paragraphs.

The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite humanism is mono-theistic. In this sense, it is opposed to superstitions, opposed to beliefs in the heavenly bodies and the deities. But still it believes in God—but only one God. And this God is also none but the Almighty, the Absolute, the Supreme Brahman. Individualism, rationalism, naturalism etc. were also found integrated in the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite humanism.

When we judge Śaṅkaradeva and his vast literary works the saint comes out as one of the most prominent classical humanists of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Movement.

The following points may be put forward in support of our proposition:

- 1. Śaṅkaradeva believed in only one God. As it is already seen that Renaissance Humanism is theistic, it is not totally secular.**

He says:

*kṛṣṇa bine nāi apara deva /
jāniyā kṛṣṇaka kariyo seva. ¹//*

(Translation: There is no other God but Lord Kṛṣṇa. Hence worship only Him)

And,

*jagatare ātmā brahmādiro mai deva /
jāni moke mātra ekacitte karā seva //
moka eri āna eko nabhaje devaka /
sehi bhakti erovāve samaste karmmaka //*

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*sehi eka śaraṇa bhajana anupāma
nuśunai āna eko devatāra nāma².*

(Translation: I am the soul of the Universe and the Deity of the supreme deities like Brahmā. Therefore, knowing this, worship only Me wholeheartedly. Only that kind of devotion can dis-attach one from all earthly attachment which is purely devoid of worship of all other deities but Me. Only that kind of worship is called unique monotheism where the worshiper never agrees to hear the names of any other deity but Me, i.e., Lord Kṛṣṇa.)

Another evidence:

*anya devī deva nakaribā seva
 prasādo nakhāibā tāra /
gṛho napaśibā mūrttīko nacāibā
 bhakti haiba vyabhicāra³ //*

(Translation: Do not bow to any other gods or goddesses but Lord Kṛṣṇa. Do not partake of their offerings, do not enter into their premises, do not look at their idols. These activities will adulterate your devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa.)

This support of monotheism is a step forward in opposition of superstitions and belief in the heavenly bodies and destiny.

2. Humanism was against caste system.

Caste-system is a man-made system based on economy or religion or on social creeds. In Europe, it was also called ‘estates’. The European Reformers as well as the humanists were against this caste system.

Martin Luther said in this context:

“it follows, then, that between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, or, as they call it, between spiritual and temporal persons, the only real differences is one of office and function, and not of estate; for they are all of the same—spiritual estate, true priests, bishops and popes, though their functions are not the same—just as among priests and monks every man has not the same functions. And this, as I said above, St. Paul says (Rom. xii 1 Cor. xii) and St. Peter (1 Peter ii): ‘we being many, are one body in Christ, severally members one of another’. Christ’s body is not double or twofold, one temporal one spiritual. He is one Head, and he has one body....”

Śaṅkaradeva says in this context:

*siṭo cāṇḍālaka gariṣṭha māni /
yāra jihbāgre thāke hari vāṇī⁴ //*

(Translation: A person of the Cāṇḍāla caste (one of the so called lowest and most despicable castes) can be considered as superior person whose tongue recites the name of Hari incessantly to that of the so called other castes.)

*kṛṣṇara kathāta yīto rasika /
brāhmaṇa janma tāra lāgai kika //*

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smaroka mātra hari dine rāti //
*nabāchai bhakati jāti ajāti.*⁵

(Translation: One who is interested in the discourses about Lord Kṛṣṇa is not required to be born in the Brāhmaṇa ancestry. What is more important is to think about Hari (God) incessantly (all days and nights). Devotion has no caste discrimination)

Another example of Śaṅkaradeva's protest against caste system is:

yīto cāṇḍālara kāya vākya mane
sadāye sumare hari /
āche vāhra vrata yīto brāhmaṇara
si si śreṣṭha tāto kari //
yīto mahāgarvvī vipre āponāka
pavitra karibe nāre /
bhakata cāṇḍāle āponaka tāre
*samasta kula uddhāre*⁶ //

(Translation: A *Cāṇḍāla* who memorizes God wholeheartedly with his complete mind, body and words can be considered superior to a Brahmin who adheres to twelve kinds of *vratas* (vows). A proud *Vipra* (priest) cannot ensure salvation even for his own, but a *Cāṇḍāla* devotee of God can ensure salvation not only for himself but also for his complete ancestry.)

The same idea is echoed in the following stanzas:

kirāta kachāri khāci gāro miri
yavana kaṅka govāla /
asama muluka dhobā ye turuka
kuvāca mleccha cāṇḍāla //
āno pāpī nara kṛṣṇa sevakara
saṅgata pavitra haya /
bhakati labhiyā saṅsāra tariyā
*vaikuṅthe sukhe calaya*⁷ //

(Translation: All castes who are considered as despicable or depraved (*pāpī*, sinners) like *Kirāta*, *Kachāri*, *Khāci*, *Gāro*, *Miri*, *Yavana*, *Kaṅka*, *Govāla*, *Asama*, (*Ahom*) *Muluka*, *Dhobā*, *Turuka*, *Kuvāca*, *Mleccha*, *Cāṇḍāla* etc. are purified in the association of the devotees of God. By adhering to devotion, they can overcome the earthly attachments and attain the abode of God easily.)

This attitude of Śaṅkaradeva can be concluded as perfectly akin to Luther's realization of the Bible 'we being many, are one body in Christ, severally members one of another'.

3. Humanism was anti-ritualistic.

It was against the sacerdotal rites. It declares that man is not a plaything of the aerial stars or deities and is the lord of his own destiny. It declares that no

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supernal power can influence human activities. It, therefore, refutes not only the importance of worship of innumerable gods and goddesses but also that of pilgrimages, offerings, sacrifices, idol worship etc. and other means.

A few portions of the texts from Śaṅkaradeva's writings are cited here:

*samaste tīrthata karile snāna /
karile si si tapa homa dāna //
sehise kulīna vedaka buje /
yāhāra mukhe hari nāma sije⁸. //*

(Translation: Only that person has bathed in all the shrines and performed all the Brahmanical rites like *tapas*, *homa*, *dāna* etc. Verily that person is considered as a *Kulīna* (pure) Brahmin who understands the main purport of the Veda, whose mouth utters the name of Hari spontaneously.)

*sūrya grahaṇata eka koṭi dhenu
brāhmaṇaka dei dāna /
prayāga gaṅgāra jalata nivāsa
kare daśa kalpa māna //
ayuteka yajña kare meru sama
suvarṇaka dei dāna. /
eka śata bhāgo govinda nāmara
reṇuko nuhi samāna⁹. //*

(Translation: If one gifts one crore of cows to the Brahmins at the occasion of the solar eclipse and lives in the holy water of the holy shrines of Prayāga, Gaṅgā etc. for a period of ten *Kalpas* (about 43 billion years), the sum of virtues will not be equal to one percent of the name of Lord Govinda.)

*nalāge deva dvija ṛṣi huibe /
nalāge sambhṛta śāstra jānibe //
michāte mare āna karmma kari /
hovanta bhakatite tuṣṭa hari¹⁰ //*

(Translation: One need not require to be either a deity, a Brahmin or a sage; nor does he require to know a lot of the scriptures. All these works are of no avail. God is satisfied only by devotion.)

*yijane yāya hari nāma sevi /
pāchata phure yata deva devī //
yateka tīrtha tāka stuti kare /
tāra vāyu pāpa samasta hare¹¹. //*

(Translations: All the gods and goddesses follow the person who walks forward by chanting the name of Hari. Not only this, even all the holy shrines come to worship him and the pure air of the sound of Hari's name purifies the whole air to the extent the sound is heard.)

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This denying of the sacerdotal rites completely refutes the role of the intermediary class (the ecclesiastics) in the worship of God as it is declared by the anti-Catholic reformists of the Reformation of Europe.

Conclusion:

After the discussions on the findings, it can be concluded that the contributions of Sankaradeva to Humanism as a whole can never be undermined. His literature has an international appeal and it should be counted amongst the contributions of the European humanists.

References:

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- ¹ *Bhāgavata Tātparya*, 6, vide *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*. (ed).Jatindranath Goswami. (2014) p. 558
 - ² *Bhakti-pradīpa*, 29-30(A) vide *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmṛta* (ed.) Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha (1998) p. 774
 - ³ *Śrīmadbhāgavadmahāpurāṇa*, Canto 2, 124, vide *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmṛta* (ed.) Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha (1998) p.255
 - ⁴ *Kīrttana-ghoṣā, Pāṣaṇḍa Marddana, 111(A)*,vide *Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva Vākyāmṛta*, (ed). Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha,(1998) p. 45
 - ⁵ *ibid* , 129(B), p. 46
 - ⁶ *Prahlād Caritra*, vide *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*.(ed).Jatindranath Goswami.(2014),p.104
 - ⁷ *Śrīmadbhāgavadmahāpurāṇa*, Canto 2, 53, 54(A), vide *Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva Vākyāmṛta*, (ed). Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha,(1998) p. 249
 - ⁸ *Pāṣaṇḍa Marddana*,40(B)-41(A)vide *Kīrttana-ghoṣā* (ed).Jatindranāth Goswāmi.(2014)p.25
 - ⁹ *Ajāmila Upākyaṇa*, 38, vide *Kīrttana-ghoṣā* (ed). Jatindranāth Goswāmi.(2014) p. 52-3
 - ¹⁰ *Pāṣaṇḍa Marddana*, 49, vide *Kīrttana-ghoṣā* (ed). Jatindranāth Goswāmi.(2014) p. 26
 - ¹¹ *Bhāgavata Tātparya*, 9, vide *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*.(ed).Jatindranath Goswami. (2014) p. 559

Author details: Babul Barhoi is Associate Professor in the Department of English at Panigaon Omprakash Dinodia College, Lakhimpur, Assam.
E-mail: bbarhoi.9876@gmail.com

Reflection of Śrīmanta Śaṅkardēva in *Kāmrūpīyā Lokagīt*

Mitali Barman

Abstract:

Bargīts were significant amongst Śaṅkardēva's greatest creations, which he created for propagating *Eka-śaraṇa Nāma-dharma*. The combination of music, tune and beats made the *bargīts* more attractive and soothing for the souls. Songs can attract people easily. Therefore, the *bargīts* became a significant tool for propagating *bhakti* way of religion throughout Assam and Noerth East region. There are other *bhakti*-based folk songs composed or orally practiced in Assam. Even many folksongs (called *lokagīts* in Assamese) are influenced greatly by the Neo-Vaishnavite ideas and Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva's life and philosophies. The folksongs otherwise known as *lokagīts*, sung in the *Kāmrūpīyā* variant of Assamese language are called *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīt*. There are many *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts* related to Śaṅkaradeva *prevailing* among Assamese folk lives. Describing Śaṅkaradeva's birth and introducing his life, his contributions towards Assamese society are the main subject matters of most of those songs. Śaṅkaradeva is even attributed by the folk poets, as an incarnation or *Avatāra* of the supreme god in few of the folksongs. Apart from these, there are also many *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts*, which are composed keeping in view of the Neo-Vaishnavite ideas propagated by Śaṅkaradeva. Discussions and researches have been carried out focusing on Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's literary creations, his Vaishnavite philosophies and his influences on Assamese societal life. However, nothing has been analyzed critically on the influence and contributions of Śaṅkaradeva and his *Eka-śaraṇa Nāma-dharma* in Assamese *lokagīts*, to be specific in *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts*. This article discusses the above-mentioned topics based on field based data and comparative analytical findings.

Keywords: Śaṅkaradeva, *Eka-śaraṇa nāma-dharma*, Neo-Vaishnavite, *bargīt*, Assamese *lokagīts*, *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts*

Introduction:

Śaṅkaradeva was the original and perhaps the finest polymath for the region he lived. He was an author, a scholar saint, a poet, a playwright, an artist, a musician, a religious preacher and a pioneer and a great social reformer at the same time. The Vaishnavite religion propagated by this great saint had united the whole Assam region by a sense of unity, a chain of togetherness. The books, songs, and dramas he authored mainly for the purpose of spreading Vaishnavism are splendid sources of

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inspiration for all Assamese people even today and perchance will remain same for many future generations. The influence of this architect of the united greater Assam, who united Assamese folks and the nation through his religious movement, also called *Eka-śaraṇ Dharma* is now prevalent in the Assamese society.

The literature, which is prevailing orally through the eras among generations after generations, is called folk literature. Assamese society is also enriched by various kinds of folk or oral literature. This literature mainly exists in folk societies in the forms of folksongs, folktales or traditional parables, proverbs etc. Rhythmic poetry or songs can be remembered easily. Adding tune and music to poems make them songs. Any kind of human emotion can effectively be expressed through songs by adding music to them. Songs are popular for their rhythmic nature. Therefore, when it comes to any kind of revolution, be it religious movement or movement of independence, in many instances the organizers or founders of those revolutions used songs and music as a tool to propagate their philosophy and ideas among common mass. Songs can create ripples in many hearts at the same time. Working in this same principle, the *bargīts* composed by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva had also played a great role in the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam.

There are philosophical ideas in everyone's mind though these may vary in proportions. The *bargīts* are full of philosophical thoughts and beliefs. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva had flooded the Assamese society through the waves of Neo-Vaishnavite *bhakti* movement. Almost each and every Assamese person is influenced by Śaṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's philosophy to various extents. Hence, one can find reflections of Vaishnavite ideas in the folksongs prevailing in Assam in the era of Śaṅkaradeva and even in the songs created after his departure. Influence of Vaishnavite ideas and greater Indian philosophical overtone can be found in the *Kāmṛūpīyā lokagīts*, *Govālparīyā lokagīts*, *dēhbicārar gīts* etc., which are the various kinds of folksongs from Assam. The folksongs sung in the *Kāmṛūpīyā* variant of Assamese language are called *Kāmṛūpīyā lokagīts*. Assamese people have learnt them through oral traditions and these songs are passed through generations till today and no one can tell with surety who exactly composed them. The subject matters of these *Kāmṛūpīyā lokagīts* were mainly extracted either from various *purāṇas* or from societal lives of commoners. Hence, apart from descriptions of various life events either simpler or greater, happiness and sorrow, love and affection or separation, one can find detailed narration of the virtue of *bhakti-rasa* too in these folksongs.

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Discussions on the Findings:

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva as well as Śrī Mādhavadeva, Śrī Harideva and Śrī Dāmodardeva are also mentioned in various *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts*. *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts* related to Śaṅkaradeva can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of those folksongs, which were created by anonymous common bards of Assam describing about Śaṅkaradeva and his life and works. The second group consists of those *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts* which were directly or indirectly influenced by Śaṅkaradeva's Vaishnavite philosophy. Let's explore both these groups:

1. *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts* composed describing about Śaṅkaradeva and his life:

There are various folksongs prevailing in the Kamrup region of Assam, which were mainly composed having Śaṅkaradeva as the main subject.

1.1 Most of these folksongs introduce listeners about Śaṅkaradeva's life and his contributions towards Assamese society; how the great man had been brought up by his grandma Khersūtī after the untimely demise of his parents, how he studied in Mahendra Kandali's school (*tola*), how he met his best disciple Mādhavadeva in Dhuwāhatā Belguri and how he had united the Assamese society through propagation of Vaishnavite religious philosophy, all these points are described in the following *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīt*:

*o guru śaṅkardev he
o guru janama labhilā
mṛtyumukhī asamīyāk dharmajñāna dilā he
ki o, piṭṛ-māṭṛ duiku guru sarute herāilā
khersūtīr pālanate dāṅgar-dīghal hailā¹*

(O, Guru Śaṅkaradeva / O, Guru you took birth/ You gave knowledge of religion to the dying Assamese / Guru, you had lost both parents early/ Grandma Khersūtī brought you up)

In the same song the unknown bard had also described how the great man had united Assamese society.

*ki o, asamīyār māje nāchileka ekatār jarī
tumi prabhu bāndhidilā sabāke sādari²*

(You know there was no harmony among Assam dwellers / O, our Lord, you have knitted all together)

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It is mentioned in many folksongs about the contributions of the great man towards Assamese society: How Śaṅkaradeva had oozed out the main extracts from the complex Sanskrit scriptures and composed his works in his own simpler words and spread the knowledge among common people, how he had removed untouchability and bridged the gaps among different castes and religions, how he had composed *bargīts* and *bhāonā*, how he had authored the poetic marvels like *Kīrtana* and *Daśama*, how he had persuaded people to avoid idol worshiping of various gods and goddesses and propagated Vaishnavism, all these points were covered in many *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts*. In one such song, the anonymous poet had said:

*sāhityar bhāṣā gaḍhi aspr̥śyatā dūr kari
bhāonā kari sabāha pātilā/
dharṃar nāme diṅgā sāji bovāilā bhāratbhūmi
bargīte brahmāṇḍa bhedilā//
bāraskandha bhāgavata kāvyagīta bhaṭimāka
vidhe-vidhe lokaka śikāilā/
svargar amṛt āni piyāilā lokaka tumi
kṛṣṇa yaśa karilā pracār.//³*

(By composing the language for literature, by removing untouchability/ By staging *bhāonā* you have organized fairs and festivals/. By creating a boat of religion you sailed all over the great Indian land/ You have permeated the universe through the *bargīts*./You taught the ignorant folks bit by bit/ The poetic marvel of twelve chaptered *Bhāgavata* epic/ You had brought the nectar from heaven for common people to drink/ That is the extract of Kṛṣṇa's fame which you spread.)

1.2. Lokagīts where Śaṅkaradeva is depicted as an incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa:
In a few of the *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts* Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva has been depicted by the common village bards as an incarnation of the supreme Lord. They believed that Śaṅkaradeva took human shape to rescue their world from sins.

For example:

*śaṅkar guru he bhailā avatār
ibāro kariyo prabhu jagata uddhār
ibār karuṇā karā dayār ādhār.
guru śaṅkar he.⁴*

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(O Śaṅkar guru, you are Lord's incarnation/ O Lord, please bestow salvation of the world for this time too/ For this occasion also show your mercy, Oh supremacy of kindness/O, guru Śaṅkar.)

The common bards expressed through their songs that after Lord Kṛṣṇa left this land of mortals at the end of *Dvāpar yuga*, unethical and unreligious vices as well as unjust had crippled the land from all directions. Also, people started worshiping secondary deities and were doing so by wrongful means like sacrificing blood of birds and animals. People forgot to recite *Harināma* and they were devoid of the right path.

This situation was described in one of the *lokagīt* as follows:

*vipathe pravarte kali kāle yata jana
tāka uddhārite īśvarar bhailā mana.
hena vimariṣi hari guṇiyā manat
kusum bhūñār grhē bhailanta bekata.
nāmat śaṅkaradeva prabhu bhagavanta
tāhāra mahimā kēvē nāhi pāvē anta.*⁵

(All people are misguided in the epoch of Kali/ Lord wished salvation for them/ And keeping that in mind/ Lord Hari has incarnated at Kusumbar Bhūña's abode/ His name is Śaṅkaradeva, he is the Lord/ None could measure for sure all his divine glory.)

However, Śrī Śaṅkaradeva, who had shown people the correct way of *bhakti*, is sometimes depicted also as the servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa in some *lokagīts*. A folksong in this regard goes like below:

*jaya guru śankara kṛṣṇara kiṅkara
gururūpe janama labhilā
dekhāilā bhaktira patha śikāilā bhāgavata
alpamati lokaka tarilā.*⁶

(Victory be upon guru Śaṅkara/ He who is the servant of Kṛṣṇa/ He took birth as guru/ Showed everyone the path of *bhakti*/ Taught everyone the *Bhāgavata*/ And thus he saved the ignorant ones.)

In many of his compositions the great man had described himself as the '*Kṛṣṇara Kiṅkara*' (Servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa). Hence the common bards also described him with that epithet in many instances. The simple village poets of Assam had also understood that there was no other way to salvation than taking solace in the path shown by saint Śaṅkaradeva. He was also compared with the *Kalpataru*, the all wishes fulfilling divine tree. These allegories can be found in the following *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīt*:

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*tumi vine guru vāramvār ān nāhi jāno
karā dayā kamalalocan
agatira gati guru kalikālar kalpataru
tayu pāve paśilo śaran.⁷*

(There is no other guru we know beyond you even if we try to recall again and again/ Hence please be kind, O, the lotus eyed one/ You are the path of fallen ones, the guru/You are the divine tree *Kalpataru* in this era of Kali/ We all take shelter at your feet.)

2. *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts* influenced by Śāṅkaradeva's Vaishnavite philosophy:

2.1. The Dungeon of Illusions in this Temporary Materialistic World:

Śāṅkaradeva wrote in his *bargīt*, “*athira dhana jana jīvana yauvana/ athira ehu saṅsāra/ putra parivāra sabehu asāra/ karabo kāheri sāra*”⁸ that Human beings live in this perishable world for just few days as they are born with a mortal body. From the day of birth, many relations like parents, children, siblings etc bind people. All these are webs of illusions. After death their relatives in cemetery cremate the mortal bodies of people. Hence one should get rid of all kinds of illusions and should just be deliberate to realize the supreme inner soul by reciting *Harināma*, that is, how one can attain salvation. This philosophy of Śāṅkaradeva is well depicted through some thought-provoking allegories in *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts* by the folk poets. They have said through folksongs that a beautiful swan may leave some of its falling feathers behind while flying away, but those feathers have no values without the bird itself. The folk poets compared the human soul to that flying swan and further said that when the soul leaves the mortal body, the body becomes useless like those fallen feathers of a beautiful swan that has flown away. Hence one has no other paths but to take shelter in a guru's feet that is like God. One *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīt* in this regard goes as like:

*uri gailā rājhaṅsa pari gailā pākhi
sio dēhā pari railā yamunāra bāli⁹*

(As like the swan that has flown away leaving its feathers behind, in the same way the mortal body is lying still at Yamuna river's bank)

2.2 Calling upon the Supreme Lord seeking the path to get free from the dungeon of illusions:

This materialistic and fragile world is like a deep jungle surrounded by vicious webs of attachments and illusions. People are submerged in materialistic pleasures and are always chased by the time demon. However, there is only one way

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to get rid of this prison like situation and that way is to recite and listen to *Harināma* by completely submitting oneself to Hari, the Supreme Lord. This particular philosophy is the main subject matter of the *bargīt* entitled “*gopālē ki gati kaile*” which was composed by Śrīmanta Śāṅkaradeva. This same philosophy of Śāṅkaradeva got reflected in the words of the folk poets of *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts* too. As Śāṅkaradeva had compared this materialistic world to a “dense jungle (*gahan ban*)”, the same way the folk poets had compared it to a “deep forest (*bhava aranya*)” in their folksongs.

Śāṅkaradeva wrote:

*phandilo māyāra pāše kāla vyādhe dhāyā āše
kāma krodha kuttā khedi khāy.*¹⁰

(The shackle of illusions imprisoned me while the time demon is chasing fast/ Desire and Anger are the two dogs approaching too fast to bite me)

This particular philosophy of Śāṅkaradeva has also got reflected in *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīt* when the folk poet said:

*kāma-krodha-lobha itini kukure
gāvar māṅgaka khāya,
lobh-krodh-māyāi sadā nācharanta
bhaye dhātu uri yāya.*¹¹

(Desire, Anger and Greed are the three dogs/ Who are eating my flesh/ Greed, Desire and Illusion are not leaving me anytime/ And I am losing my vital breath in fear)

Towards the end of that *bargīt* the great saint had pleaded by submitting himself in the feet of Hari, the Supreme Lord to rescue him from the shackle of illusion (*māyā*). The exact line that Śāṅkaradeva wrote is “*tuvā hari lāgu gora, mora māyā pāśa chora*¹²(I fall on your feet, oh my Lord Hari/ Please free me from the shackle of illusion)”. In *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīt*, folk poet also said in that same tone, “*kr̥ṣṇar caraṇa hṛdaye dhariyā/ hovā bhava nadi pār*¹³(By submitting your devotion in Lord Kṛṣṇa’s feet, you should cross the realm of this deep materialistic river)”

There is no end to the divine glory of merciful Lord. Hence through *lokagīt* the folk poet prays to the Almighty Lord in the following way to keep him always in the shelter of Lord’s feet.

*ikulo nāpāilu guru he mai sikulo nāpāilu
māj sāgare pariyā prabhu mai jāji haiyā railu
guru moke dayā nachāribā
prabhu moke caraṇe rākhībā
mai bar pātakī pāpī, guru caraṇē rākhībā*¹⁴

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(I didn't belong to this bank nor could I reach other, Oh my guru/ I got lost in the middle of the sea and float as an abandoned clump of mass/ Oh my guru, please don't deprive me of your mercy/ Oh my Lord, please keep me at your feet/ I am a fallen sinner/ Please keep this sinner always at your feet.)

2.3. Description of *nāmghar* in the *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts*:

The concept of *nāmghar* (a place for religious worship without any idol, a social gathering and community meeting place) is a unique and impactful contribution of the great saint towards Assamese society. This is the backbone of Assamese social life back from that time to till date and it has played a great role in *Eka-sarāṇa* religious movement. *Nāmghar* has taken the shape of lifeline for rural Assamese way of living and one can safely conclude that it is one of the main foundations of the very existence of Assamese society.

There are more than a few *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts* where *nāmghar* and its related components like *maṇikūṭ* (the central portion of *nāmghar*), *thāpanā* (the arrangement of offerings to Lord Kṛṣṇa), *Gāyan-Bāyan* (The musician and singer), *bhāonā-sabāh* (kind of staged play and fair), *khol-tāl* (Drums and cymbals), *ghoṣā-bargīt* (Songs of praise for divinity of Lord) are described in details.

Example of such a *lokagīt* is cited below:

śaṅkardēur nāmghar bhakatar barghar
mājat āche kīrttan puthikhan
o hari, mājat āche kīrttan puthikhan
maṇikūṭar siṅhāsan tāte āche nārāyaṇ
gondhāi āche tulasī candan
*o hari, gondhāi āche tulasī candan*¹⁵

(The *nāmghar* by Śaṅkaradeva is the main hall of worship for the devotees/ There, in the middle, is the great book called *Kīrttana*/ The throne in centre is called *maṇikūṭ* where Nārāyaṇ exists/ And everywhere there are great fragrance of basil leaves and sandalwood)

In an another stanza of that same *lokagīt*, the bard sings:

ki o khole-tāle dabāi-kāñhe ghoṣā-pad-bargīte
caudiśē karē rajanjan/
śaṅkarē volanta vāñī hari vinē nāhi gati
*saṅsārat nāmē param dhan.*¹⁶

(There is resonance in all directions/From the combined sound and music of drums and cymbals, from kettle-drums and discs, from the recitation and singing of *ghoṣā-*

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pad-bargīt/ Śaṅkar has told there is no path other than of Hari, the Supreme Lord/
In this world *nāma* is the only worthy wealth)

There are other such examples also as follows:

nāmghar śuvani bātorā paduli
bhakatār śuvani mālā
maṅikūṭ śuvani candratāpekhanī
*vantir śuvani śalā*¹⁷

(Beauty of *nāmghar* lies in its majestic entrance/ Ritual floral necklace is the grace of a devotee / Beauty of *maṅikūṭ* is its canopy/ So also an earthen lamp is glorified by its wick.)

The context of *nāmghar* is also got mentioned in another *lokagīt* entitled “*Śaṅkarē bolē vāṇī*” whose subject matter was the demise of the great man from this earthly abode. The bard imagined in this song that Śaṅkaradeva would be dying soon, Śrī Śaṅkaradeva had called his followers and delivered various advices and directions to them. In this folksong an interchangeable word *kīrttanghar* is used instead of *nāmghar*.

In the imagination of the village bards of Kamrup, as if Śaṅkaradeva himself was saying through that song:

ki o, kīrttanghar pālibā vanti jvalābā e,
hāi hari nārāyaṇ nārāyaṇ he
o śūnya nakaribā bhūmi he bāpugaṇ
śunāsave mora vacan
o śaṅkarē vole vāṇī bhakataka māti āni o
hāi hari nārāyaṇ, nārāyaṇ o
*o āji mor dēhār nāi bhāl he bāpugaṇ*¹⁸

(Oh my followers, please continue the tradition of *kīrttanghar* and always light the sacred light/ Oh my Lord Nārāyaṇ, Oh Nārāyaṇ / Please don't empty the earth, my followers/ Listen to my words/ Śaṅkar had called all the devotees and said/ Oh my Lord Nārāyaṇ, Oh Nārāyaṇ / Today I am not keeping well, Oh my followers/ Listen to my words.)

2.4. The illustration of divinity of *Harinām* in *Kāmṛpīyā lokagīt*:

This great polymath from Assam had transformed *Harināma* as a means of release of people from this chaotic epoch of Kali. The devotees recite *Harināma* by clapping their both hands. The common people believe that *nām-guṇ*, is the best way of worshipping the Lord. It is also told in *Kāmṛpīyā lokagīt* that Śaṅkaradeva had

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brought that sacred and pleasant *Harināma* from *Vaikunṭha* (Lord Vishnu's abode) to earth for the salvation of the people of the land called Bhārata. The song goes as follows:

*śaṅkara mādhava he nāmare pātilā khelā/
o vaikuṅṭhare parā harināma āni
bhāraṣṭe pracār karilā//
ār, ādite harirnām vaikuṅṭhe āchile
nāmare pātilā khelā/
ār dēvatā sakale tāṅka guputa karilā
nāmare pātilā khelā//
ār śaṅkara svarūpe tāṅka namāi ānilā
śaṅkara mādhava he//¹⁹*

(Śaṅkara and Madhava have staged this game of *nāma*/ They had brought *Harināma* from *Vaikunṭha*, the abode of Viṣṇu/ And transmitted it in the land called Bhārata/ Oh you know, at first *Harinām* was there in *Vaikunṭha* / They have staged this game of *nāma*/ The gods had hidden it/ But they have staged this game of *nāma*/ He had brought it to earth as Śaṅkara/ They are none but Śaṅkara and Madhava)

Śrī Guru Śaṅkar who is like the “*karuṇā sāgar*” (sea of kindness) has shown the people of Bhārata (India) the path of salvation by making them to ride a boat named Rāma, whose oar is Govinda and that boat is tied together with innumerable sails named *nāma*. In the eyes of folk poets, Lord Brahma and Lord Viṣṇu themselves are the sailors of that boat and sitting in the middle of that boat Śaṅkaradeva is reciting *nāma*, i.e., the praise for Supreme Lord. One *Kāmrūpiyā lokagīt* goes like below in this regard:

*āge hailā brahmā pāchē hailā viṣṇu
duijane naukār kāṅḍārī/
mājate bahiyā śrī śaṅkar guru
nāmare lagāilā śārī//
o hari śrī guru śaṅkar karuṇā sāgar
nāmare pātilā khelā/
hari nāmarkhel, sajāi drdḥbhel
kalira lokanistārilā./²⁰*

(Brahmā at the front and Viṣṇu behind/ Both of them are the sailors/ Sitting in the middle is Śrī Śaṅkar guru/ Who is creating a queue of *nāma*/ O Hari, Śrī guru Śaṅkar is a sea of kindness/ Who has created this amusement called *nāma*/ And by creating

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a strong raft from this tree called *Harināma*/ People of Kali *yuga* can attain salvation by crossing the sea of material world)

In another *lokagīt* the divine power of *nāma* is described as below.

*nāmar mahimā harir kimān śunibā
nāmate mukuti pāya mora hari hari nāmate mukuti pāya
kalira lokara taribār hetu nāma vine gati nāi he.*²¹

(How much you want to hear about the divine power of *nāma* of Hari/ One can attain salvation through *nāma*. Yes, one can attain salvation through *nāma*/ To get rescued there is no path other than *nāma* for people of this Kali epoch)

If it is said in one *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīt* that just by recalling *Harināma* one can achieve salvation. It is said in another that they who always chant *Harināma* can easily get rid of illusions of this materialistic world and hence one should never hesitate to recite *Rāmanāma* (*Harināma* and *Rāmnāma* are used as synonyms as *Hari* and *Rāma* are used as alternate names of Lord Viṣṇu whose super-most incarnation is considered as Lord Kṛṣṇa). In some folksongs it is told that though there is a sacred treasure like *nāma*, still many people hesitate to recite Hari's *nāma*; still many sinners don't go near to the great *Bhāgavata*, which is the ultimate source of knowledge. However, in front of their eyes, the pious ones are always benefiting from *Bhāgavata*'s unending source of wisdom. In the *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts* the *Bhāgavata* is compared to an enormous tree that bestows fruits of knowledge unremittingly to the mankind. It is also told through some of the folksongs that sinners are always suffering due to their ignorance towards *Bhāgavata*. One *lokagīt* in this context goes like this:

*he nāma āchē thālī bhari
bhakata āchē bahi/
nalay harir nāma pāpe āche vēḍhi
nalay harir nāma māyāi āche vēḍhi //
bhāgavat br̥kṣaḍāli o, ai mor avināśī phal/
o santa-sādhuī pāri khāy pāpī nājay tal//.*²²

(There is plateful of *nāma*/ The devotees are sitting around/ The ones who are surrounded by sins won't recite Hari's praise/ The ones who are surrounded by illusions won't recite Hari's praise/ The giant *Bhāgavat* tree is bestowing fruits of knowledge unremittingly/ The pious ones are plucking and eating them but sinners are not even going near.)

None of the ways, be it *yoga-yajña* (spiritual or ritual exercises and sacrifices), *dāna-mantra* (donation and chanting), *upavāsa* (fasting) or *tīrtha-*

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bhramāṇa (pilgrimage), is the supreme way to meet Kṛṣṇa who is the Supreme Lord. Instead, one should worship Kṛṣṇa in their heart by listening or singing *Harināma* (spiritual songs praising Kṛṣṇa) while clapping with their hands. This central religious philosophy propagated by Śaṅkaradeva, that one should worship the shapeless Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa alone, is capable of bestowing salvation and that is also only through *nāma*; it is also described in *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīt* as mentioned below:

*īśvara kṛṣṇaka save hṛdayate dharā
kṛṣṇanāma lai mukhe saṅsār tarā he
o nāma dharibā cāpari ko neribā
harināma amṛta samān he.*²³

(All should hold Lord Kṛṣṇa in their hearts/ By reciting Kṛṣṇa *nāma* loudly one should leave this material world/ Always sing the *nāma* without stopping clapping/ *Harināma* is like nectar)

Conclusion:

It is sung in *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīt* as:

*śaṅkar guru āmāre jagat guru āmāre
lukāi āchā dekhā nedā maṅikūtar bhitare*²⁴

(Śaṅkar guru is ours, he is the universal guru for us/ He who is hiding inside the *maṅikūta* and not showing us.)

Though we have preserved our guru Śaṅkaradeva as the treasure of our *maṅikūtas* (the holiest place inside the *nāmghara* i.e. a kind of Assamese worship house) still, to make Vaishnava traditions and philosophy propagated by Śaṅkaradeva worldwide, we need to emphasize on spreading his noble ideas among all people irrespective of their races, religions or languages. Only a few of the *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīts* are discussed here which are directly or indirectly influenced by Śaṅkaradeva's life and his teachings. Apart from this, the influence of Śaṅkaradeva in other forms of folksongs from Assam can also be studied in separate subjects of discussion. There is even scope of research on how Śaṅkaradeva's Vaishnavite philosophy had influenced the invaluable *Jikir* and *Jāri* songs of Assam which were mainly composed by an Islamic preacher named Shah Milan or Ājān Fakir. Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was an institution by him whose peripheries were so vast. There are many researches and discussions done about few aspects of him and his teachings, but still there are scopes for much more, many aspects are not yet explored.

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Author details: Mitali Barman is an Assistant Professor, Department of MIL & Literary Studies, University of Delhi.

E-mail: mitalibarman@gmail.com