

ISSN 2277-2901 Mahapuruṣa Jyoti

MAHĀPURUṢAJYOTI

A PEER REVIEWED ENGLISH RESEARCH JOURNAL
OF ŚRĪMANTA SAṆKARADEVA SAṄGHA

VILUME- XXIV
2025

Editor

Dr. Babul Barhoi



ŚRĪMANTA SAṆKARADEVA SAṄGHA
NAGAON, ASSAM
2025

MAHĀPURUṢA JYOTI: A peer reviewed English research journal of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, Volume XXIII, edited by Dr. Babul Barhoi and published by Sri Kushal Thakuriya, General Secretary, Śrīmanta Sankaradeva Sangha, February, 2025

© Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha

Editorial Board

Editor : Dr.Babul Barhoi
Members : Sri Biswajit Kalita
: Sri Narendra Mahela

Price: Rs. 200/- (Rupees two hundred only)

Printed at:

Editorial

MAHĀPURUṢAJYOTI, an ISSN Peer Reviewed English Research Journal of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha has been published annually since the year excepting issue in the COVID-19 period. The journal aims at disseminating the contributions of Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva in the global arena.

Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, the greatest Assamese ever born in Assam, has already achieved wide acclamation in the global perspective. He is now acclaimed as the greatest personality that India has produced. He is the builder of Assamese nation, Assamese culture, Assamese literature and many more.

What is more important is that recent study on Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva has revealed that he was the pioneer of many recent thoughts that were foretold by him some 500 years ago. Recent global problems like global warming, sustenance of endangered species, pollution, youth unrest, social, moral and spiritual degradations of human society etc. could have been successfully addressed by following the suggestions of the great saint of Assam. The religion he propagated, *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*, can be considered as the purest form of all religions, not only of India, but also in the global consideration. It is the most scientific religion free from all superstitions and all the criticisms of the nihilistic and atheistic philosophy.

Therefore, Śaṅkaradeva is now studied in many parts of the world. In United Kingdom, there is UAAUK (United Assam Association of the UK), In Australia, there is Assamese Association of Australia, in the United States of America, there is Assam Association of North America (AANA) and OAKOKHO. In all these associations, Śaṅkaradeva and his philosophy is studied with great interest. Moreover, there is also Society for Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva (SSS), an international community set up in the year 2011, who has also been engaged in spreading the saint's ideology and messages around the world. It has also a website planned as an encyclopaedic source

of information about Śaṅkaradeva. Its website is Sankaradeva.com. The organisations of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha has also been spreading rapidly in India and in many parts of the world. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha has also set up a University and its branches are also set up in several parts of Asaam. The Government of India has also been setting up Śaṅkaradeva Seats in JNU, PNU and in many other universities of India.

In this purview, MAHĀPURUṢAJYOTI is planned to create a field of valuable and original research work on the contributions of the great saint and to spread his messages globally in order to mitigate the present impending global problems. Attempts to prepare a website of the journal have also been already completed. With the help of your valuable suggestions and cooperation, we wish to proceed further to enlist the journal as a UGC Care listed one in the succeeding few years.

Although it was declared to the resourceful authors of the journal to publish the present issue as a Special Issue, it has not become possible to do so as desired. The editor has also to express his inability in publishing several valuable articles because of some technical difficulties. The editor solicits those authors to forgive him, if possible.

The editor has also to confess very humbly that although there are several very efficient and resourceful persons in the Saṅgha who had been publishing MAHĀPURUṢAJYOTI regularly with much dexterity, this editor, who do not know even the ABC of editing research journal and even a very novice among the authors also, is conferred the herculean responsibility. This issue, is therefore, not at all a credit of this editor to boast of. He must acknowledge his indebtedness to all those who are associated in publication of this issue. Professor Dr. Jagat Chandra Kalita, Former Head, Department of Śaṅkaradeva Studies, Mahapurusa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Visvavidyalaya, Nagaon and President Literary Committee, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, Professor Dr. Suresh Chandra Borah, Former Head, Department of Śaṅkaradeva Studies, Mahapurusa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Visvavidyalaya, Nagaon, Mr. Kushal Thakuriya, Chief Secretary, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, Professor Manash Pratim Borah, Secretary, Literary Committee, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, Professor Dr. Ratul Chandra Borah, Former Resistrar, Mahapurusa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Visvavidyalaya, Nagaon, Professor Biswajit Kalita, Department of

English, Hojai College, Nagaon, Mr. Narendra Mahela, Rtd. Professor, D.H.B.K College and the valued authors of the issue are the to name as some prominent personnel whose common effort has resulted as the present issue of MAHĀPURŒAJYOTI.

gopīnīra dhana vrajara jīvana

mohana rama govinda/

parama sādare śire tuli dharu

tayu pada aravinda//

Panigaon
Lakhimpur
5th February, 2024

Editor
Dr. Babul Barhoi

CONTENTS

1. Unique Features of Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva: 7
Dr. Indira Saikia Bora
2. *Tāla* System in Śaṅkarī Music of Assam and *Bhaṅgī Bājanās*: 21
Dr. Sarangapani Bordoloi
3. Traditional Assamese Theatre 33
Dr. Sailen Bharali
4. Is Śaṅkaradeva a Feminist? Re-visiting Distinctiveness of Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's Bhakti-Centric Position of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* as Complementary to one Another: 36
Dr. Archana Barua
5. The Transformation led by Śaṅkarī Teaching System: An Analysis: 55
Sri Golok Ch. Bora
6. Hinduism and the Doctrine of *Eka Śaraṇa Nāma Dharma*: 68
Dr. R.C. Borah
7. Śaṅkaradeva Studies as a Prospective Academic Programme within the Purview of Indian Knowledge System with Special Reference to NEP 2020: 72
Moyuri Bora
8. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's Ideal Society: 82
Mr. Suraj Chetry

9. The Concept of Bhakti in the Teachings of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Sri Caitnyadeva: A Comparative Study:
Mouchumi Borgohain 91
10. Śaṅkaradeva's Neo-Vaiṣṇavism: The Way to Greater Assamese Society:
Dr. Pragati Prasad Bora 97
11. The *Bargūt* Heritage: A Gift from Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva:
Karabi Kanta Deka 105
12. Presence of Equality and Universalism in the *Nāma-ghoṣā*:
An Analytical Study:
Dr. Prasanta Barik 110

Unique Features of Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva

Dr. Indira Saikia Bora

Abstract

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was born in the family of a ruling Bāra Bhūṇā, Chief of Bardovā in Nagaon District in śaka 1371 (1449 AD). Having lost both his parents very early in life, he was looked after by his grandmother. He was destined to guide and carry the message of *bhakti* to the masses, more particularly in North East parts of India, which evolved out of the Neo-Vaiṣṇava Movement. The impact of his life and works, however, has not been fully realized in other parts of India, for which his name is rarely found in the galaxy of religious leaders India has ever produced.

This by no means minimizes his position as a great leader of men and thought. However, compared to other saints of contemporary India who have successfully guided the Neo-Vaiṣṇava Movement in different parts of the country in different forms, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is unique in many aspects. He is not merely a religious leader, but an institution by himself, the harbinger of total revolution in socio-religious and cultural life of the people. He is at once a successful householder and an able administrator, a saint preacher and a philosopher, a great poet-litterateur and linguist, an artist-musician and painter, a successful dramatist introducing open-air-theatre for the first time in the sphere of dramatic performance and a prominent actor, and also a great social reformer, all combined in one, which is a very rare and distinguished career to be found in contemporary Indian society. This paper is intended to highlight some of the unique features of the religious faith founded by the great saint and philosopher.

Key-Words: Śaṅkaradeva, Neo-Vaiṣṇava Movement, *bhakti*, *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*

1. Introduction:

At the time when Śaṅkaradeva was born, as depicted in the *Guru-caritas*, Assam was passing through a state of political turmoil, social confusion, religious catastrophe and spiritual decadence, when the law of *vāmānaya* (i.e., the left hand practices, implying extreme ritualistic practices not excluding bloody sacrifices and resorting to the *pañca-makāra* rituals etc.) or *pāṣaṇḍānāya* was the order of the day. Thus, Śaṅkaradeva faced with a very obnoxious situation, where religious life was at the lowest ebb, both spiritually and morally. A scholar of sound knowledge and profound intelligence as he was, Śaṅkaradeva could not remain blind to such social inequalities and perverting religious practices. His whole spirit revolted. He wanted to put an end to this extremely suffocating atmosphere created by this disgustingly amoral religious trend. He sought a way to redeem the society from the deep morasses by restoring proper *dharma*, purging it of the manifold evils afflicting the society for a considerable length of time, and to give it a new direction of hope and inspiration towards remoulding and consolidating the fabrics of Assamese culture.

2. Objectives:

The objectives of the research paper are:

- a. To have a study of the philosophy of religion of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva.
- b. To show the distinctive features of *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva.

3. Methodology:

This research paper is a qualitative study of the philosophy and social revolution of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. The sources of the data are secondary data collected from books, journals, net surfing and research works on Śaṅkaradeva study.

4. Findings and Discussion:

The emerging Neo-Vaiṣṇava Movement, that was pulsating with a new vibration of spiritual thinking in the whole of northern and western India, might have fired the imagination of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva, who was already a renowned poet composing lyrics in adoration of Lord Viṣṇu and rendering them into Assamese Viṣṇuite poems from the *purāṇas*, might have noticed this new

development appreciably. A person of profound intelligence and knowledge, he must have derived inspiration from the new trend, to devise a comprehensive plan for building a lasting foundation for the *bhakti* movement in his homeland so as to liberate the people from the clutches of sacerdotal ritualism and obnoxious practices. But, a keen observer and a great thinker as he was, Śaṅkaradeva used his rare talent in devising a novel way, (distinct from those of other leaders of Neo-Vaiṣṇava Movement of the time), what he thought would suit his people. In his scheme of things, he discarded the path of *sannyāsa* and *jñāna-bhakti*, professed by some of the champions of the Neo-Vaiṣṇava Movement. In this respect, he is unique in so far as his technique is concerned. He chose the path of *Nirguṇa Bhāgavata Bhakti*, free from any and all sorts of sacerdotal practices. *Bhāgavata Bhakti* implies the system of *bhakti* (devotion) as described in the *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa*, the characteristics of which is delineated in the following verse:

*sa vai puṁsā paro dharmo yato bhaktidharokṣaje”
ahaitukyapratihatā yayātmā samprasīdati // (Bhāgavata 1.2.6)*

The *Bhāvārthadīpikā*, of Śrīdharsvāmi explains it thus:

“*tatra yat prathamam pṛṣṭam sarvaśāstrasāram aikāntikam śreyo vruhīti tatrotram- sa vai iti./ ayamārthaḥ dharmodvividhaḥ pravṛttilakṣaṇo nivrtilakṣaṇaśva/ tatra yaḥ svargodyarthaḥ praṛttilakṣaṇo so'paraḥ/ yato dharmāt kṛṣṇe śrvanādasadilakṣaṇa tṛptirbhavati sa paro dharmāḥ, sa evaikantika śreya iti/ kathambutā? ahaituki hetoḥ phalābhisandhānam tadrahitā, apratihātā vighnairanahbibhūtā//”¹*

The meaning of the above verse: That certainly is the sublime religion for men, (religion) from which is created the devotion to Lord Viṣṇu, Devotion which is without any motive, unobstructed and constant and by which the soul becomes deeply pacified.

Here it is shown that religion is of two kinds: *apara dharmā* and *para dharmā*. *Apardharma* is one, the object of which is liberation, while *paradharmā* creates devotion to Kṛṣṇa seeking nothing in return (*ahaituki*), even liberation. *Ahaitukibhakti* is an end in itself, that which does not result in anything but devotion. This *paradharmā* is same as the *Nirguṇa Bhāgavata Bhakti*.

¹ p. 8

Bhāgavatabhakti, upheld by the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, is preached by Śaṅkaradeva. The term *bhakti* is differently interpreted by different authorities. Ramanuja defines *bhakti* as constant and unflinching remembrance of the Supreme, thereby implying Absolute love. To him *bhakti* and meditation (*upāsanā*) are one and the same. To Śaṅkaradeva *bhakti* is utmost devotion to one indwelling (*antaryāmī*) loving God, identified with Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, more particularly the Kṛṣṇa aspect. He held that the paths (*mārga/pantha/kāṇḍa*) of *jñāna* and *karma* are ineffective so far as the ultimate goal is concerned. Some salient features of the faith propounded by Śaṅkaradeva are:

1. It is monotheistic in character, i.e., the worship of one Absolute God in place of many and that one is identified with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, recognized as the manifestation of the Absolute Brahma Itself (*Kṛṣṇastu bhagavānasvayam*), to whom the devotee is expected to seek absolute shelter or refuge with utmost resignation (*ekānta śaraṇa*).
2. Śaṅkaradeva delinked *bhakti* from any objective representation of God, including that of Kṛṣṇa, preferring, instead, to give to the *Śrīmadbhāgavatapurāṇa* itself the place of pride and veneration.
3. Of the nine forms of *bhakti* (*Bhāgavata* 7/5/23)² Śaṅkaradeva preferred *śravaṇa* (listening with single minded attention) and *kīrtana* (ceremonial chanting/recitation), with great emphasis on the *dāsya* attitude of *bhakti*, in which the relationship of the devotee to God be that of a faithful slave to his master.
4. He gave great emphasis on *sat-saṅga*, i.e., association of holy men, meaning true (*ekānta*) devotees (*bhaktas*).
5. Śaṅkaradeva freed his order from class and caste prejudices.
6. He democratized his faith based on universal brotherhood and fraternity.
7. Śaṅkaradeva, in spite of being a great Sanskrit Scholar, preferred to use the language of the masses (Assamese) as the medium.
8. He employed the media of music, dance and drama, paintings etc. i.e., all aspects of fine arts, in addition to the vast literary works, both original and translation, for popularizing his tenets to good effect. In fact, Śaṅkaradeva's faith is based on the

²*Śravaṇamkīrtanam viṣṇoḥsmaraṇam pādasevanam/arccanamvandanam
dāsyausakhyamātmanivedanam/*

philosophy of ethics (*sadācāra*) and culture.

9. In the matter of organization, he introduced and emphasized the need of some centres of religious gathering, like the *nāmgḥars* (hall for congregational chanting, i.e. *pāth-prasaṅga*) with the *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa* placed in the sanctum (*guru-āsana*).

The result is the *Eka-śaraṇa Harināma Dharma*, otherwise called *Eka-śaraṇa Dharma* or simply *Nāma-Dharma* or *Mahāpuruṣīyā Dharma* in popular parlance. It is a faith, free from all sorts of complicated and elaborate ritualistic practices prescribed by the *smārta tāntric* texts which were the prevailing norms of the time. The source of the *Nāma-Dharma* or *Mahāpuruṣīyā* faith is the *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa* and *Śrīmadbhagavad-gītā*. The *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa* extols Viṣṇu-Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, amongst a multitude of Gods and Goddess as the sole worshipful deity and celebrating His name and attributes (*nāma-yaśa*) in the company of learned devotees (*sat-saṅga*) as the only and the best of religions for mankind against the practice of worshipping millions of Gods and Goddesses with much paraphernalia and fanfare including bloody sacrifices,. After a deep study of the *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa* and the other relevant Vaiṣṇava *śāstras*, besides his personal experience about the religious trend in other parts of India, Śaṅkaradeva took the task of propounding and propagating the *bhakti* faith based on *naiṣkarmavāda* of the *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa*. He derived the concept of *Eka-śaraṇa* from the *Śrīmadbhagavad-gītā*. *Eka-śaraṇa* is absolute and unqualified self-surrender to one Godhead (*Mahāpuruṣa*), i.e., Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, forbidding the worship of any other God or Goddess, or desisting from following any other path as stated in the *Śrīmadbhagavad-gītā*, giving more emphasis, at the same time, on the listening and chanting (*śravaṇa and kīrtana*) of the Lord's *nāma* (i.e., the name and attributes of the Lord), with single-minded attention and utmost devotion; there is no priest, no rituals to be performed. *Mahāpuruṣiāism*, thus is a way of life, a faith, rather than to be called a cult or sect. Thus, in the respect of the concept of monotheism, i.e., the worshiping of one Absolute Godhead, Śaṅkaradeva derived his inspiration from the *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa*, as in the following verse:

*yathā tarormūlaniṣecanena tṛptyanti tatskandha bhūjopaśākhā/
praṇoprahārācca yathendriyāṇām tathaiva sarvārhaṇamacyutejyā //*
(*Bhāgavata* 4.31.14)

{As the branches, leaves and foliage of a tree are nourished by pouring of water only at the root of the tree, as the limbs of the body are nourished by putting food only in the stomach, so all Gods and Goddesses are satiated by the worship of the Acyuta (Viṣṇu)}.

Śaṅkaradeva was attracted to the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* cult from his school days. In spite of the fact that he was born and brought up in a *śākta* atmosphere, while yet learning the alphabet, he composed a poem in adoration of Viṣṇu only in consonantal wordings (*Vākyāmṛta* 735) without using any vowel, where we first notice the fundamental principle of his doctrine. According to his biographers, Śaṅkaradeva initiated his first batch of disciples to his new faith soon after his return from the twelve-year long itinerary. The successful performance of his open stage pantomimic drama, the *Cihna-yātrā* presenting the seven *Vaikunṭhas* against the backdrop of painted drop scenes, drawn by himself, and accompanied by *rāga* music and dance has earned him great fame, so much so that it gave him recognition as the manifestation of God, Viṣṇu. The show had drawn large crowds towards him. This event in the early intellectual and spiritual life of Śaṅkaradeva had far-reaching effects in as much as it had ushered in the beginning of a new religio-spiritual culture which paved the way for the progress and efflorescence of the *Neo-Vaiṣṇava-Bhakti* Movement in north-eastern India. Since then Śaṅkaradeva attracted more popular support to his doctrine which was free from any discrimination in the caste and class dominated society, and his movement grew from strength to strength. Śaṅkaradeva prescribed a simple mode of religious worship against the elaborate and complicated ritualism prescribed by the *śruti* and *smṛti* texts. The fundamental concept of his faith is, as indicated elsewhere, based on the principles of *Eka-śaraṇa* of the *Śrīmadbhagavad-gītā* and the *Naiṣkarma-vāda* of the *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa*. When Arjuna was greatly stricken with horror and deeply perturbed by the fear of transgressing of the varied instructions and interdictions (*vidhi-niṣedha*) of the *śrutis* and the *smṛtis* vis- a-vis the consequent evil effects that the ensuing the Great War might entail, Lord Kṛṣṇa by way of consoling His dear friend, asked him to abandon all such duties and surrender himself whole heartedly to Him (Kṛṣṇa) as the sole refuge, keeping deep faith in him for redemption of all sins deriving from any moral turpitude.

sarvadharmān parityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja

ahaṁ tvāṁ sarvapāpebhyo mukṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ // (Gītā-18/66)

“Abandoning all duties (varieties of *dharma*) come to me alone for shelter. Be not grieve, for I shall release thee from all evils.” (tr. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan)

Here the expression *sarvadharmān* is explained by Śāṅkarācārya as *sarvadharmān parityajya sanyasya sayvakarmaṇi tyetata*, meaning all duties implying all instructions and interdiction (vidhi-niṣedha) of the *śrutis* and the *smṛtis*, both spiritual and ethico-moral as prescribed by the *Dharmaśāstra* texts. Similarly, the expression *māmekam śaraṇam vraja* is explained by Śāṅkarācārya as: *māmekam sarvātmanam samam sarvabhūtastham īsvaramacyutam garbha-janma-jarā-maraṇam vivarjitam ahameva itvevam śaraṇam vraja, na matto 'nyadastitya badhārayaitrtha*.³

Śāṅkaradeva explains the same in his *Bhakti-ratnākara* in a similar way:

*śrīmadbhāgavadgītāyā sāramudghṛtyātiguhyamāha madbhaktayā evasarva
bhaviṣyatīti niścayena bidhikaikaryatyaktvā madekaśaraṇo bhava.
karmatyāganimitram pāpam syāditi śokam mā kārṣo. ahaṁ madekaśaraṇam tvāṁ.
(Ratnākara 13/7)*

Śāṅkaradeva renders the verse into Assamese as:

*sarva dharma eḍi eka śaraṇa sāksāta
sudṛha viścāse sakhi laiyoḱa āmhāta/
nakaribā bhaya herā karo aṅgikāra
samasta pāpate maṇi karibo nistāra// (Bhāgavata, 11.190-191)*

In this context of the above discussion, Chapter 18, *śloka* 66 of the *Śrīmadbhagavad-gītā* can also be taken note of. Kṛṣṇa while persuading Arjuna to surrender himself to Him (Kṛṣṇa) argues that one taking refuge in Him is sure to attain the highest goal, what is needed is an unflinching devotion to Him. (*Gītā*

9.34)⁴

In the *Śrīmadbhāgavatapurāṇa*, Kṛṣṇa imported similar advice to Uddhava also:

*tasmāttvamuddhavotsṛjya codanām praticodanām/
pravṛttam ca nivṛtam ca śrotavyam śrotameva ca//
māmekameva śaraṇamātmānam sarvadehinām /
pravṛttam ca nivṛtam ca śrotavyam śrotameva ca//*

(*Bhāgavata* 11.12.14-15)

Hence, Kṛṣṇa while giving advice to Uddhava on *Nirguṇa Bhakti*, asks him to give up the ways of the *śruti* and *smṛti*, as well as the injunctions and interdictions (*vidhiniṣedha*). Kṛṣṇa says, He is the soul of all those having physical form. (*dehinām*) when He is satisfied all are satisfied in all ways, he (Uddhava) should take sole refuge in him (Kṛṣṇa) without any fear of any kind.

Śaṅkaradeva explains the same in his *Bhakti-ratnākara*:

*yasmātdevambhṛto bhajanaprabhāvata tasmādevam kurvityāha / codanām śruti
praticodanā smṛti yadvā vidhiniṣedhamapyutsṛjya / dehināmātmānamiti ekamiti ca
sarvasya māmedam sattvam kathitam/ mayi prite ke itare no prasannā
sarvātmabhāvena sarvātmakabhāvanayā / mayā īscareṇa rakṣakenāthayaḥ syā
bhava. (Ratnakara 13.5-6)*

Śaṅkaradeva himself rendered the above two verses into Assamese

*eteke uddhava tumi tejā vedapantha/
yivā jānā śunā save erā āno grantha//
eke mota mātra tumi laiyoka śaraṇa/
nakaribā bhaya mai karibo rakṣaṇa//
satye bolo uddhava bāndhava tumi marma/
moka yāve najāne tārese āna karma// (Bhāgavata 9.188-9)*

The *Eka-Śaraṇa Hari-Nāma Dharma*, the faith propounded by Śaṅkaradeva is a unique feature in the history of Hindu religious system. So far no religious leader of India is found to have given so much importance to *śaraṇa* as a means to the ultimate spiritual end.

⁴*manmanābhava madbhakto madyājīmam naskuru/ māmevaiṣyasi yuttvaivamātmānam
matparāyaṇḥ//*

The word *śaraṇa* derived Sanskrit root *śr+lyut* meaning ‘taking shelter, refuge, protection’ etc. alternatively it means protection, help etc. In the *Mahāpuruṣīyā* context the term connotes ‘taking or seeking absolute shelter or refuge for God’s protection’. In other words, it implies Absolute surrender. Thus *Eka-śaraṇa* is Absolute surrender to one and only one (*ekamevadvītyam*) Godhead, identified with Lord Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, the Lord Absolute, without a second.

Explaining the essence of the verse (*Gītā*:18/66), Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says ‘We should willingly yield to His pressure, completely surrender to His will and take shelter in His love. If we destroy confidence in our own little self and replace it by perfect confidence in God, He will save us, God asks of total self-giving and gives us in return the power of the spirit which changes every situations.’

An afflicted soul may seek refuge. He takes shelter (*śaraṇa*) either (i) in the formless, immutable and undifferentiated Supreme Being (*para-brahma*) by deep meditation and abdication, (ii) in the all pervading, all powerful, blissful personal God, the soul of all things and persons. But the former path is arduous and more difficult. For submission to a *nirguṇa-brahma*, which requires deep concentration and abdication, is more difficult for an afflicted embodied soul (*dehavadbhiḥ*), because the *nirguṇa-brahma* does not offer any easy hold to the mind of the embodied beings, creatures and the path is also arduous. The common being can attain the same result by deep meditation and abdication (*dhyāna* and *vairāgya*), by the more easy path of devotion (*bhakti*) to a blissful personal God by directing one’s energies, thoughts, will and feelings. This personal God (*saguṇa-brahma*) is identified with Viṣṇu/ Kṛṣṇa, who is omniscient and omnipresent, and residing in every living creature as its life force, (*antaryāmī, āmi yata jīva tomāra pālana hari hari hari, hari e, tumise pāliyā phurā huyā antaryāmī*) (*Ghosā 810*)

In the context of Śaṅkaradeva’s *Mahāpuruṣīyā* order, Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa is identical with *para-brahma*, the Supreme entity. Thus to seek shelter in Him by a single-minded devotion is *Eka-śaraṇa*.

It may be noted that the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the *Padmapurāṇa* (*Svargakhaṇḍa*) and the *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa* constitute the so called *Prasthānatraya* of *Mahāpuruṣīyā dharma* from which Śaṅkaradeva derives the basic concepts of *śaraṇa*, *nāma* (name) and *satsaṅga* (*bhakat*) respectively, of his doctrine.

In historical sequence, Buddha appears to be the first to use the word *śaraṇa* in the

sense of taking refuge, and it was he who first introduced the mechanism of *śaraṇa*. In Buddha's scheme of things, when a lay devotee is initiated into the order, he seeks refuge in the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *saṅgha* each of which is a distinct entity.

But the system introduced by Śaṅkaradeva is unique in its contents and purpose. Here a proselyte is to go through the process of taking *śaraṇa* in the four reals (*cāri-vastu*), viz., *Guru* (the preceptor), *Deva* (the deity), *Nāma* (God's name) and *Bhakata* or *Bhakta* (devotees), in that order. It may be recalled here that in the earlier stages of *śaraṇa* was confined to three reals (*vastu*) only, viz., *Nāma*, *Deva* and *Bhakata*. It was Mādhavadeva who added *Guru* as the fourth element. The *Guru* element here represents none but the propounder of the order, i.e., Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva himself, when Mādhavadeva declared:

śrīmanta śaṅkara hari bhakatara
jānā yena kalpataru/
tāhānta vināi nāi nāi nāi
āmāra parama guru// (Ghoṣā 375)

Thus, in *Mahāpuruṣīyā* faith, we have only one *guru*, and the only one for that matter. The fourfold *śaraṇa* is organically related, and thus in reality, it is one in four. Symbolically, the *guru* (preceptor) first showing the *jīva* (life, representing the proselyte), the wretchedness of its existence being afflicted by the three afflictions (*tri-tāpas*), prescribes the only panacea of complete surrender to God (*deva*); but as the *nāma* of God is more potent than God Himself. The proselyte beseeches God to grant him the privilege of seeking shelter in his *nāma*, for God is where His name is, i.e., Lord Hari and his *nāma* are one and inseparable:

āpuna nāmara saṅga nachāranta hari/
yei nāma sei hari jānā niṣṭha kari //(Ghoṣā 524)

Thus, *śaraṇa*, is organically related to *nāma*, i.e., the name and attributes of the Lord. Again, *nāma* is of no significance without *bhakata* (*bhaktas*, i.e., devotees; the *bhaktas* are considered the foremost of all, for God Himself has declared in no uncertain terms that the *bhaktas* were no different from Himself, nay, the *bhakata* is His true preceptor, and God is subservient to the devotees.

*devato tīrthato kari bhakatese pūjya*⁵
also, *devato tīrthato kari bhàkatese vāra/*
bhakataka bhajile gucaya karma jaḍa/(Bhagavata 11.181)

Thus, the true significance of *śaraṇa* in Śaṅkaradeva's system is one's complete surrender amounting to unswerving devotion to One Supreme God. According to Dr. B. K. Kakati, 'Eka-śaraṇa system is not a religion of bargain and barter between God and man'. Thus *śaraṇa* implies complete surrender to one God, Kṛṣṇa, without asking anything in return, even *mokṣa*, *muktito nisprha...* (*Ghoṣā* 1) except the privilege of devotional recitation of his name (i.e., *hari vine āna dhana save akāraṇa*) (*Ghoṣā* 551)

Some people confuse *śaraṇa* with *dikṣā*.

Śaraṇa is quite distinct from *dikṣā*, both in content and its application, *dikṣā*, in fact, is related to the practice of *karma*, i.e., ritualism, whether Vedic or tantric. Vaikuṅṭhanātha Dvija, a Brahmin biographer of Śaṅkaradeva, in his *Gurucarita* states that a person who practices *Karmavidyā* (Priesthood) has to receive *dikṣā* from a *guru* (i.e. expert) in the line.

Such an idea may be had from Śaṅkaradeva's writing viz., *Nimi-Nava-Siddha-Saṁvāda* of the *Bhāgavata*.⁶ The Assamese rendering in the words of Avihotra Siddha, the worship of Viṣṇu in images according to the tantric formula is described. Śaṅkaradeva states that *bhakti* is utmost devotion to the Absolute, i.e., Lord Kṛṣṇa. It is selfless and complete resignation without seeking any material gain (*niṣkāma*), not even *mokṣa*, as stated in the very first verse of the *Nāma-ghoṣā*. Śaṅkaradeva also rejects the worship of God in any physical form, implying *ācāraupāsana*. Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* is completely and unmistakably bereft of both *karma* and *jñāna*. Śaṅkaradeva gives emphasis on the *dāsyā* aspect of devotion, which conceived of man's relationship to God as that of a faithful slave to his master. It is a significant feature which distinguishes Śaṅkaradeva's *Mahāpuruṣīyā* faith from the contemporary Vaiṣṇava systems of India.

⁵ *Nimi-Nava-Siddha-Saṁvāda*-152

⁶ *Nimi-Nava-Siddha-Saṁvāda*-218-229

As the expression *Eka Śaraṇa* implies, Śaṅkaradeva's *Mahāpuruṣīyā* faith is free from any concept of duality of God-head. In the *Mahāpuruṣīyā* faith Viṣṇu is worshipped in His essential nature as the unqualified and formless (*nirguṇa-nirākāra*) the Supreme Lord of the Universe, He is one without a second. In the *śaraṇa* system, the devotee maintains direct communion with the Lord without the need of any intermediary's help. In the *Eka-śaraṇa* system there is no room for class or caste consideration. However, emphasis is given on ethico-moral aspects, i.e., personal cleanliness, physical, mental and spiritual.

Impersonality or universality is another important feature of Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy, that is, his *Mahāpuruṣīyā* faith. He depicted man's life and destiny with reference to the cosmos itself, feeling and thinking as a citizen of the whole universe. A true man of culture, i.e., a real *bhakata* identifies himself with the interest and values of the whole humanity, with envy or hatred towards none. According to him the universe is divine and all living beings are equal. It is said in the *Kīrtana*:

*kukura śrgāla gadarbharo ātmā rāma/
jāniyā savāko pari karibā praṇāma// (Kīrtana, 1823)*

Śaṅkaradeva's religious philosophy is more concerned with the cultural and ethico-spiritual refinement of the individual. He considered religion as an art which purifies human life and gives an insight to lead an enlightened prosperous life. Śaṅkaradeva also repeatedly declared this tenet, as in the expression *parama maṅgala harinama dharma*.

Finally, as can be seen from the above discussion, Śaṅkaradeva was a versatile genius, his unique religious order, the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*, is a revaluation of the whole Assamese way of life, remoulding and consolidating the whole fabric of social life. Whether as an able administrator or as an organizer, as a religious preacher or as a social reformer, as a saint or as a philosopher, as a litterateur or as an artist, he stands equally great. His *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*, is a sort of ethico-spiritual culture that leads an individual from the crude mundane state to a higher plane that of moral and intellectual refinement. He (Śaṅkaradeva) laid the foundation of a unified society by bringing all communities, high or low in the prevailing circumstances to the fold of his order. The orderliness, unity and integrity that still mark the Assamese rural life with the *nāmghar* as the centre of

inspiration, an outstanding social institution known to India, have the inherent strength to withstand all tides and tribulations.

5. Conclusion:

In short, the present Assamese society and its high culture are Śaṅkaradeva's own creation, He gave the Assamese people and its culture a new life and vigour, and also a new direction, so much so that it had got an identity and a personality of its own within the ambit of the great Indian culture. He forged an abiding sense of unity among the various communities of the Assamese people, while integrating them in the mainstream of Indian nationalism, in as much as he brought India close to Assam.

Besides, his religious teaching is not confined to the Assamese society alone, it is universal, and for whole mankind. It is, therefore, no wonder that Śaṅkaradeva is called by his grateful followers belonging to the cross section of people not only as a *Mahāpuruṣa*, but also as the *Jagat-Guru*, the universal preceptor. □

Works Cited:

1. *A Creative Vision: Essays on Śaṅkaradeva and Neo-Vaiṣṇava Movement in Assam*, Srimanta Sankar Kristi Bikash Samiti, Guwahati, 2004.
2. Borkakati, S.K. *Unique Contributions of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradev and His Religion and Culture*, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, 2006.
3. Goswami M., editor. *Bhagavat Bhāvartha Dīpikā: Śrīmadbhāgavatapurāṇam with Sankrit Annotations*. Publication Board, Assam, 2005.
4. Kāntimālā. *Bhakti-ratnāvali*. Edited by Saikia Bora, 2014.
5. Mādhavadeva *Nāmaghoṣā*. Edited & Published by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, 1991
6. Neog, Maheswar, editor. *Guru-Carit-Katha*. Guwahati University Publication Department, 2003.
7. Rajkhowa, J.P. *Śaṅkaradeva: His Life, Preachings & Practices*, 2003.
8. Saikia B. I. *Vaiṣṇava Sāhityar Adhyana*. 2005.
9. Śrīdharswāmī. *Subodhini: Commentary of Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. Edited by M. Goswami, 2005

10. *Śrīmadbhāgavata Mahāpurāṇam*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur.
11. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. *The Anādi-Pātana*. English prose rendering by G. Baruah, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, 2014.
12. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva: *Kīrtana-ghoṣā*. Edited & Published by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, 1991
13. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva: *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyaṃṛt*. Edited & Published by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, 1998.

Tāla System in Śaṅkarī Music of Assam and Bhaṅgī Bājanās.

Dr. Sarangapani Bordoloi

Abstract:

The *Śaṅkarī* music of Assam has a unique *tāla* system with some specific *tāla* theory originated from Indian classical music along with its own features which has different *tāla* patterns more than 60 in number. The *tāla* system follows specific laws for the formation of different kinds of *tāla* patterns applied in it with some structural compositions, viz. *gā-mān*, *ghāt*, *cok*, *sañcār* etc. and their classifications, viz. *mūl-tāla*, *upa-tāla*, *miśra-tāla*, *bhaṅgī-tāla* etc. The *bhaṅgī* or *bhaṅgī-tāla*, actually the *tāla-prastāra* (elaboration or ornamentation), has vigorous use in songs, dances, dramas etc. in the form of *gītar-bhaṅgī* viz. *bar-bhaṅgi*, *maju-bhaṅgi* and *saru-bhaṅgi*, *nācar-bhaṅgī*, *goṭnācarbhaṅgī* and *āṅkarbhaṅgī* (*paraveśar-bhaṅgī*, *prasthānar-bhaṅgī*, *yuddha-bhaṅgī*) etc. The different *bhaṅgīs* can be considered only as *tāla-prastāra* or the extension of a *tāla* by the help of creating different ornamented *bol* patterns like *ghāt*, *bhāṅganī-ghāt*, *cok*, *gā-āmān*, *thāk-tāl*, *sañcāra*, *cāhinī*, *dhemāli*, *bhaṅgī-bājanā*, *rāmdāni*, *gītar-nāc*, *melā-nāc* etc., etc. The following paper is a description of the same that the author has prepared from his practical study of *Śaṅkarī tāla* system.

Key words: *tāla* system, *Śaṅkarī* music, *bhaṅgī-bājanā*, Assam.

1. Introduction:

There is a unique *tāla* system in *Śaṅkarī* music, which has a specific *tāla* theory with some remarkable musical characteristics. The *tālas* (rhythms) of *Śaṅkarī* music prevailing in different *sattras* and *nāmaghars* of Assam are more than 60 in number which follow certain characteristics of Indian classical music along with their own distinct features. One cannot get a perfect idea of its characteristics and elements without any study of its formation and classification, constituents, style of application etc.

2. Objectives:

The objectives of this research work are:

- a) To have an authentic study of *Śaṅkarī tāla* system.
- b) To find out the variations of the same those are prevailing in the different *sattras* and *nāmaghars* of Assam.

3. Methodology:

The authentic documents in this regard are: different literature by Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and their followers, *Caritas* (Hagiographies on Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva), *Vādyapradīpa* of Yadupati as text and direct observations of practices of *Śaṅkarī* music prevailing in various *sattras* and *nāmaghars* of Assam at present.

4. Discussion and Findings:

4.1 Formation and Classification of *Śaṅkarī Tālas*:

To constitute a *Śaṅkarī tāla*, the basic component is the *kalā*. According to Yadupati, *tāla* is constituted by *kalā*. Yadupati defines *kalā* with a reference to the *Sanata Kumārīya Tantra* which states that the *tāla* is constituted by *kalā*.⁷ As held by Yadupati, *kalās* are of different kinds, viz. *laghu*, *guru*, *druta*, *yugma*, *śaśī* etc. At present these ancient terminologies are not in use. However, when we examine the *tāla* composition, their presence is clearly found. As referred in the *Vādyapradīpa*, *Śaṅkarī* music applies the musical terminologies of *śāstra*, i.e., terms of Indian

⁷*Vādyapradīpa*, 2/ 62-63

classical music as mentioned above, but also used the terminologies of local or ethnic music, such as *cāt*, *cāpar*, *ghātani*, *ghāt* and the like.

As referred by Yadupati, Nārada imparted this knowledge of music to Gautama which he got from Kṛṣṇa, as mentioned in the *Gautamīya Tantra*. Nārada explained to Gautama the different variations of *tālas*, which are *ekonapañcāśa*, i.e., forty-nine, in number. Out of those *tālas*, Yadupati deals with only twenty-six in his *Vādyapradīpa*; some of which are also applied in the present day *Śaṅkarī* music.⁸

As narrated by Yadupati, *Śaṅkarī* music considers the *tālakriyā* or its *mātrā* by using the term *mān*, i.e., *tāla-māna* (the total number of time units in one cycle of a *tāla*). *Śaṅkarī* music applies the term *bhāga* in respect of *aṅga*. It also refers to the variation in *kalā*, i.e., *kalā-bheda* to constitute a *tāla*.

So, from the above discussion, it can be concluded that a *Śaṅkarī tāla* is constituted by the definite number of *kalā* or *mān* (*mātrā*). The *mān* or *mātrās* are divided into different *aṅgas* or *bhāgas*. These *aṅgas* or *bhāgas* determine the basic *laya* or metre of the *tāla*, which is done by *kalā-bheda* or by creating variations in *kalā* or *mān* (*mān*, the colloquial use against the term *māna* in Assamese) of different *bhāgas* or *aṅgas* of a *tāla*.

a. Structural Composition of *Śaṅkarī Tālas*:

Śaṅkarī tāla has generally three basic components: *gā-mān*, *ghāt* and *cok*. The *gā-mān*, *gā-bājanā* or *mūl-bājanā* is widely accepted concrete audible form of a *tāla*. It is the basic or standard pattern of a *Śaṅkarī tāla*, which forms its main body, and is repeated generally when the song is sung. Apart from songs, *gā-mān* is also used in dances and orchestral performances of *khol* and *cymbals*, i.e., *gāṇikā* or *yorā*. In case of some minor *tālas* of *Śaṅkarī* music there is no *gā-mān*. The *gā-mān* resembles the *ṭhekā* in *tāblā* of Hindustani music.

The *ghāt*, *ghetā* or *ghātā* is the extended and ornamented form of a *tāla* created by *prastāra* in *bols*, following its *mārga*. Generally, there is more than one *ghāt* attached to each of the principal *tālas*. The first one is known as *mūl-ghāt* or *gā-ghāt* (main *ghāt*) and subsequent ones are called *bhāṅgani-ghāts* (derivative *ghāts*).

⁸ibid. 1/20

There are also two more divisions of *bhāṅgani-ghāt*, they are *chorā-ghāt* (short or part) and *pūrā-ghāt* (full scale). The *chorā-ghāt* is small and *pūrā-ghāt* is elaborate. Another type of *ghāt* is *lanā-ghāt* (the graceful *ghāt*). Sometimes a special type of *ghāt* is played after *cok*, which is called as *cokar-ghāt*. The *ghāt* resembles *tukḍa* and *paraṇa* in *tāblā* of Hindustani music.

The *cok* or *cak* is the shorter audible form of a *tāla* created by following its *mārga*. In composition of the *cok* or *cokar-bājanā*, importance is given on its respective *jāti*. In *cok* part the behaviour of the *jāti* of a *tāla* appears to be prominent. So, it is also called *jā-mān* (*jāti-mān*) or *mān* in short. The *cok* means ‘sharp, quick and pungent’. In *cok* part the *laya* increases markedly.⁹ It may be compared to *relā* in *tāblā* of Hindustani music.

The *cok* is found not only in singing but also in the vigorous application of *cok* is noticeable in *cāhinī* and *dhemāli*, in different dance items related with different special occasions and the dances of *Aṅkīyā* dramas. In some *sattras* of Bardova origin, eleven different *coks* are performed, which are called *cok-marā* or *cok-govā* after *bar-dhemāli* or with *ghoṣā-dhemāli*. Every *cok* has its own identity by its name, like *pāji-kaṭā*, *khol-piṭā*, *hāt-diyā*, *ragar-diyā*, *calanā* etc. In the *Aṅkīyā bhāonā* performances of a song, some extension or elaboration of *bol* composed in *khol* is performed at the last part along with *cok* for specially dancing purposes of the actors and actresses, which are called *jāmānar-bājanā* as a long extended part of *tālayati* or *bar-yati*.

b. Classification of Śaṅkarī Tālas:

The *Śaṅkarī tālas* can be classified into four different classes. These are: a). *mūl-tālas*, b) *upa-tālas*, c). *miśra-tālas* (*yugma* and *yauga-tālas*) and d) *bhaṅgi-tālas*.

a) *Mūl-tālas* (Main or Primary *tālas*):

The principal *tālas* which have their specific identity are called as *mūl* (main)-*tālas*. Normally, the main *tālas* have all the structural components, like, *gā-mān*, *ghāt* and *cok*. It is also noticed that every *mūl-tāla* is used in different songs, music, dance and dramas independently. The following *tālas* of *Śaṅkarī* music can be considered as

⁹Maheswar Neog.

mūl-tālas:

i. *eka-tāla*, ii. *pari-tāla*, iii. *rūpaka-tāla*, iv. *chuṭkalā* or *chuṭikalā-tāla*, v. *domāni-tāla*, vi. *yati* or *bar-yati-tāla*, vii. *dharam-yati-tāla*, viii. *dahbāri* or *daśbāri-tāla*, ix. *viṣama* or *saru-viṣama-tāla*, x. *bar-viṣama-tāla*, xi. *āṭhtalā* or *āctalā-tāla*, xii. *kharmāna-tāla*, xiii. *racaka* or *rakta* or *hrasra-eka-tāla*, xiv. *gañjala* or *śuddha-gañjala-tāla*, xv. *jorphalā-tāla*, xvi. *pat-pari* or *nācar-eka-tāla*, xvii. *mānacok-tāla*, xviii. *jāmān-tāla*, xix. *dovāj-tāla*, xx. *nāndī-eka-tāla*, xxi. *chaibāri-tāla* and so on.

b) *Upa-tālas* (Minor *tālas*):

The *tālas* which are derived from *mūl-tālas* by a slight modification of their *mārga* or patterns are called *upa-tāla* (minor-*tālas*). In respect of their applications, the *upa-tālas* are generally used as subordinates to the *mūl-tālas* in songs, dances and dramas. Among the *upa-tālas* some of them have no *gā-mān*, as such, some of them have only the *gā-mān*, but the *ghāt* and *cok* are not in use. They are basically applied as the minor *tālas* with other *mūl-tālas*. The following are some of the *upa-tālas*, prevalent in different *sattrā* traditions: i. *ūn-yati-tāla*, ii. *khan-yati-tāla*, iii. *repan* or *saru-yati-tāla*, iv. *māṭh-yati-tāla*, v. *ṭhekechā* or *ṭhekec-yati-tāla*, vi. *oloṭā-āṭhtalā-tāla*, vii. *melā-āṭhtalā-tāla*, viii. *obhoṭā-jorphalā-tāla*, ix. *obhoṭā-dahbāri-tāla*, x. *yati-jāmāna-tāla*, xi. *oloṭā-gañjala-tāla* and so on.

c) *Miśra-tālas* (mixed *tālas*):

The *tālas* which are created by mixing of two or more *tālas*, are called *miśra* (mixed) *tālas*. They are sometimes called *yautha-tāla* also. The *miśra-tālas* are again divided into two sub-divisions, viz. a. *yugma* (binary)-*tālas* and b. *yauga* (compound)-*tālas*.

i. ***Yugma-tālas***: The *tālas* composed by the addition of two *mūl-tālas* are called *yugma* (paired)-*tālas*. It is noticed that in practice, the *yugma-tālas* are mainly used with songs in *prasaṅga*. Some examples of *yugma tālas* are: 1. *rūp-gañjala* or *rūpak-gañjala-tāla*, 2. *yor-viṣama-tāla*, 3. *rūp-domāni-tāla*, 4. *viṣama-domāni-tāla*, 5. *ār-viṣama-tāla*, 6. *ār-rūpak-tāla*, 7. *pari-yati-tāla* and so on.

ii. ***Yauga-tālas***: The *tālas* which are created by the admixing of two or more *tālas*, where the original *tālas* almost lose their distinct identity and by which a different *tāla* appears, is called *yauga* (composite) *tāla*. These *tālas* are mainly applied in different *naimittika prasaṅgas* with dances. These *tālas* are:

i. *tinimāni-tāla*, ii. *cārimāni-tāla*, iii. *pācmāni-tāla*, iv. *cārikhanīyā-tāla*, v. *rūp-gañjala-śuddha-gañjala-tāla* etc. are some examples of *yauga tālas*.

d) Bhaṅgī-tālas (ornamented tālas):

In the performance of different dances related to entrance, exit, battle etc. of the dramatic characters in *Aṅkīyā bhāonā*, performance of *barḡīs* and some special dance units within various *nitya* and *naimittika prasāngas*, some special *bājanā* or musical compositions are created and played in *khol* by the elaboration of *tālas* on the basis of ornamentation of their *gā-bājanā*, *ghāt*, *cok*, *jāmāna* etc. Every such composition is done on the basis of one or more *tālas*. This type of *tāla* elaboration is called *bhaṅgī-bājanā* or *bhaṅgī-tālas* or *bhaṅgī* in short.

The *bhaṅgīs* are basically of two types: a. *gītar-bhaṅgī* and b. *nācar-bhaṅgī*.

a. Gītar bhaṅgī (ornamentation of *bols* in song): In the *sattras* of Lower Assam, like Barpeta Sattrā, there are some such *bhaṅgīs* which are accompanied with songs. These *bhaṅgīs* are called *gītar bhaṅgīs*. There are five such *bhaṅgīs*, all of which are in *pari-tāla*. These are: *saru-bhaṅgī* (number one), *saru-bhaṅgī* (number two), *māju-bhaṅgī* (number one), *māju-bhaṅgī* (number two) and *bar-bhaṅgī*.

b. Nācar bhaṅgī (ornamentation of *bols* in dance): The *nācar-bhaṅgī* is also mainly of two types: i.e., 1. *goṭ nācarbhaṅgī* and 2. *āṅkar bhaṅgī*.

1. Goṭ nācar bhaṅgī (*bhaṅgī* of pure dance): There are some dance numbers in the *sattras* of Kamalabari origin which are post-Śāṅkarī addition, composed in the style of *bhaṅgī-tāla*. But these are known as *goṭ-nāc* instead of *bhaṅgī-nāc* or *bhaṅgī* in excluding the *nādu-bhaṅgi-nāc*. The *goṭ-nāc* has mainly three parts; i.e., *rāmdāni*, *gītar nāc* and *melā nāc*. Different *goṭ-nācs* preserved in Kamalabari Sattrā tradition are: *jhumurā-nāc*, *nādubhaṅgī-nāc*, *cāli-nāc*, *rajāgharīyā cāli-nāc* and so on.

2. Aṅkar-bhaṅgī (*bhaṅgīs* of *aṅka*): The *bhaṅgī-bājanās* of different dances related to dramas are called *aṅkar-bhaṅgī* (*bhaṅgīs* related to dramas). It is also called *nātar-bhaṅgī*. The *bhaṅgīs* of *aṅkas* can be divided again into three types: i.e., i. *praveśar-bhaṅgī*, ii. *prasthānar-bhaṅgī* and iii. *yuddhar-bhaṅgī*.

i. Praveśar bhaṅgī (entrance dance): Every character of *aṅkīyā* drama enters into the stage in dancing mode. The dances related to entrance of different characters are called *praveśar-nāc* (entrance dance). These are sometimes called also *praveśar-bhaṅgīs*. Different *praveśar-bhaṅgīs* are as follows:

1. Sūtra bhaṅgī: The dance or *bhaṅgī* of *sūtradhāra* or *sūtradhārī* in his first entrance is called *sūtra-bhaṅgī*. This *bhaṅgī* is composed normally in

cuṭā-tāla and *cuṭkalā tāla*. It is composed in *rūpaka-tāla*, *cuṭkalā-tāla* and *ekatāla* also in some traditions. In *Ankīyā* dramas the *sūtra-bhaṅgī* is a special type of dance composition in comparison to other *bhaṅgīs*. The *sūtradhāra* dance consists of various dance elements viz. *nṛtta*, *nṛtya* and *nāṭya*. In the *nāṭya* part also the *sūtradhāra* performs all the four divisions of *abhinaya*, viz., *āhārya*, *āṅgika*, *vācika* and *sāttvika*.

In the *nāndī* part, the *sūtradhāra* performs a benedictory song called *nāndī-gīta* along with dance. It is composed in a special type of *ekatāla*, the *mātrā* number of which is six, and so it is called *nāndī-ekatāla*.

2. Goṅsāi-bhaṅgī: The *bhaṅgī* related to characters like, Kṛṣṇa, Rāma etc. who are considered as divine characters, is called *goṅsāi-bhaṅgī*. In Kamalabari Sattrā tradition the *gōsāi-bhaṅgī* is composed in *tāla cuṭā*, while, in some *sattras* of *Puruṣa-saṁhati* the *gōsāi-bhaṅgī* is composed in *ekatāla*.

In *ankīyā bhāonā* and *jhumurā*, the role of Śrī Kṛṣṇa represents its different age groups from childhood to youth, viz. *śīśu* (child), *bālaka* (teen) and *yuvā* (young). Different *bhaṅgīs* of *praveśa* for them are *lavaṇucuri-nāc* or *bhaṅgī* for child, *bālaka-kṛṣṇa-bhaṅgī* for teen and *goṅsāi-bhaṅgī* for young Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The *gōsāi-bhaṅgī* as already mentioned, is commonly used to all the entrance dances for young Kṛṣṇa, Rāma and other characters representing God.

3. Gopī-bhaṅgī: In *ankīyā* dramas the heroine and her chums enter in a special dance called *gopī-bhaṅgī*. The *tālas* for *gopī-bhaṅgīs* are varied in different traditions. In Kamalabari tradition it is composed in *ekatāla* and *cuṭātāla*. In Batadrawa it is composed in *ekatāla* and in some other *sattras*, it is composed in *cuṭkalā tāla*.

4. Rajā-bhaṅgī or *rajā-praveśa*: The entrance dance related to characters representing a king is called *rajā-praveśa* or *rajā-bhaṅgī*. Almost all *rajā bhaṅgīs* are composed in *paritāla*.

5. Ṛṣi-bhaṅgī: The *bhaṅgīs* which are specially composed for *Ṛṣis* and *Munis* (sages) are called *ṛṣi-bhaṅgīs* or *ṛṣi-praveśa*. These *bhaṅgīs* are mainly composed in *paritāla*. Sometimes some special kinds of *bhaṅgīs*

are applied for sages like Durvāsā, Yamadagni etc., which are composed in two other *tālas*, viz. *cuṭkalā* and *ekatāla*.

6. ***Vīr-praveśa*** or ***vīr-bhaṅgī***: The *bhaṅgīs* for heroes are called *vīr-praveśa* or *vīr-bhaṅgī*. All of them are composed in *paritāla*.

7. ***Dūt-bhaṅgī*** or ***dūtārpraveśa***: The entrance dances for a *dūta* (messenger), a *praharī* (guard), a *duvarī* (gate keeper) etc. are called *dūtārpraveśa* or *dūta-bhaṅgī*. These *bhaṅgīs* are mainly composed in *cuṭātāla*, *racakatāla* and *rūp-gaṅjal tāla*.

8. ***Rākṣasar-praveśa*** or ***rākṣas-bhaṅgī***: The *bhaṅgī* related to *daitya* (demon), *rākṣasa* (orge), *Cāṇḍāla* (cremator) etc. is called *rākṣasarpraveśa* or *rākṣas-bhaṅgī*. These types of *bhaṅgīs* are composed mainly in *cuṭātāla*, *racaktāla* and *rūp-gaṅjal tāla*.

In *aṅkīyā* dramas different types of characters of animals like *bāṅdar* (monkey), *ghoṅrā* (horse), *hariṅā* (deer) etc. and birds like *garuḍa*, *jaṭāyu* etc. enter into the stage with an entrance-dance like other characters in some specific *bhaṅgīs*. Some such *bhaṅgīs* are:

9. ***Bānar*** or ***bāṅdar-bhaṅgī***: The *bhaṅgīs* related to characters that represent monkeys like, Hanumān, Bālī, Sugrīva etc. are called *bānar-bhaṅgī* or *bāṅdar-bhaṅgī*. Such *bhaṅgīs* are generally composed in *cuṭātāla* and *racaktāla*.

10. ***Pakṣī-bhaṅgī***: The *bhaṅgīs* which are composed specially as entrance dance for different bird-characters like, Garuḍa, Jaṭāyu etc. are called *pakṣī-bhaṅgīs*. These types of *bhaṅgīs* are basically composed in *racakatāla* or *rūp-gaṅjal tāla*.

It may be noted that the *bhaṅgīs* related to gods & goddesses, heroes and heroines, sages, pious kings etc. have got more importance than those of other characters. Generally, these *bhaṅgīs* have a song with the lyrical description of the characters. But the minor and less important characters perform their entrance dance

in the *bhaṅgīs* without any song or lyrical part. Thus, the positive characters get importance in the stage; while negative one is do not enjoy it.

ii. Prasthānar or payāṅnar-bhaṅgī (*bhaṅgī* of exit): As in the case of the entrance dance, the exit of a character in *aṅkīyā bhāonā* from the stage after completing his or her course of acting in a scene is also done through dance. The compositions for exit dance for different types of characters are depended upon the type of the roles, mode and feelings, sentiments of the dramatic sequences etc. The exit-dances are called *prasthānar* or *payāṅnar-bhaṅgī*. Different *bhaṅgīs* of *prasthāna* are mainly composed in *ekatāla*, *cuṭātāla* and sometimes in *paritāla*.

iii. Yuddhar-bhaṅgī: In *aṅkīyā bhāonā*, the dramatic events of wars are shown very significantly. The incidents of war between two groups or two characters or more are performed with the help of dancing mode. These types of demonstrations are called *yuddhar-nāc* (dance of war or fight) or *yuddhar-bhaṅgī* (*bhaṅgī* of war or fight). Normally, *yuddhar bhaṅgīs* are started with *paritāla* and ended in *racaktāla* or *raktatāla*. The *yuddhar-bhaṅgīs* are of different kinds as follows:

1.Samadala-yuddha: These types of *bhaṅgīs* are composed to show a battle between two groups. These are called *samadala-yuddha* (group-fighting). These *bhaṅgīs* are generally composed in *paritāla*, *ekatāla* and *cuṭātāla*.

2.Dhanu-yuddha (battle with bow): When two characters dance in a fighting mode with bow as their weapon, the *bhaṅgīs* are called *dhanu-yuddha* (fighting with bow). Different kinds of bow-dances are performed by different characters by applying various kinds of *sañcāras* or elaborations. In different expansion or elaborated *bol* patterns played on *khol*, the actors perform different dance poses applying various kinds of *bhari-mān* or *cārī* (foot stepping). When there is a song in a bow-dance, which starts with *paritāla*, then the elaboration of the *bhaṅgī* is done through *racaktāla* or *raktatāla*, which ends with *racak* or *ekatāla*.

3.Gadā-yuddha (battle with maul): When two characters fight with *gadā* (maul) as their weapon, the *bhaṅgī* is called *gadā-yuddha* (battle with maul)

or *gadā-bhaṅgī* (*bhaṅgī* of maul). The *gadā-bhaṅgīs* are generally composed in *daśbāri* or *dahbāri-tāla*, which ends with *ekatāla*.

4.Asi-yuddha (battle with sword): When two characters fight with *asi* (sword), the *bhaṅgī* is called *asi-yuddha* or *asi-bhaṅgī*. The *asi-bhaṅgīs* are composed in *ekatāla*.

5.Khāṇḍā-bāru-yuddha (battle with big-sword): When two characters fight with *khāṇḍā-bāru* (big sword) the *bhaṅgī* is called *khāṇḍā-bāru-yuddha* (battle with big sword). These types of *bhaṅgīs* are generally composed in *cuṭātāla* or *yatitāla*.

6.Malla-yuddha (wrestling): When two characters give up their weapons and start to fight free-hand, the *bhaṅgī* is called *malla-yuddha* (wrestling). It is generally composed in *ekatāla* or *yati* (*yati-jāmān*) *tālas*.

- **Jāmān or yati-jāmān**: In the tradition of *Puruṣa-saṁhati sattras*, the *praveśar-bhaṅgī* and the *yuddha-bhaṅgīs* consist of special elaborative compositions called *jāmān* or *jāmānar-bājanā* (composition of *bols* in *jāmān* or *yati-jāmān*). The *jāmān* is an elaboration by the ornamentation of *bol* or *bājanās* (strokes and beats). This is only the *tāla-prastāra* with various ornamented *bol* patterns as the *bols* of a *cok* part of a *tāla*. Generally, *bājanās* of *jāmān* are composed in *yatitāla*. So it is also called *yati-jāmān*. The *jāmān* is performed in *paritāla* and *cuṭkalā-tāla* also. In *jāmān* portion of a *bhaṅgī*, whether it is of *praveśa* or *yuddha*, the characters perform various elaborative poses and footsteps by which it becomes very long and more interesting too.
- **Viṣama-bhaṅgī**: In Kamalabari tradition there is another *bhaṅgī* with the name of *viṣama-bhaṅgī* which is performed in *prasaṅga*. It is a *gītarbhaṅgī* with dance composed in *viṣama* (*saru-viṣama*) *tāla*. In some special occasions, some special *bhaṅgīs* are applied in *aṅkīyā bhāonās* to make the dramatic events more interesting. The *dhanu bhaṅga nāc*, *kālir śīrar nāc*, *kharmānar nāc* etc. are some such examples.
- **Dhanubhaṅga-bhaṅgī**: The *dhanu bhaṅga bhaṅgī* is performed as warm up dance in the *svayamvara-sabhā* (marriage ceremony) of *Sītā*, when *Śrī Rāmacandra* becomes ready to break the *hara-dhanu* in the drama *Rāma-vijaya* or when *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* makes himself ready to jump into the *Kāliya-hrada* to dominate the *Kāliya-nāga* (serpent king *Kāliya*), in the drama *Kāliya-damana*.

- **Kharmānar-bhaṅgī:** In the end of an *aṅkīyā drama*, the *sūtradhāra* and all other characters perform a dance with the last song before *muktimaṅgala-bhaṭimā*, which is normally in the *rāga kalyāṇa* and especially in the drama *Pārijāta-haraṇa*, it is in the *rāga-pūrvī* and the *tāla-kharmān*. So, the *bhaṅgī*, which is composed in *kharamāna-tāla*, is called *kharmānar-bhaṅgī*. The last part of the song, i.e., *bhaṇitā*, is performed elaborately with different variations of *bol* patterns in its *cok*. This long item makes the finishing of an *aṅkīyā drama* very amusing and delightful.

5. Conclusion:

The term *Bhaṅgī-bājanā* (in respect of musical compositions in specific rhythmic patterns) or *Bhaṅgī-nāc* (in respect of dance numbers, which are composed in specific rhythmic patterns) or shortly as *bhaṅgī* (for all; whether it is song, music or dance) stands only to mean the *bhaṅgi-tāla* which can be considered only as *prastāra* (the elaboration, expansion) is applied vigorously in *Śaṅkarī tāla* system. The vast musical compositions, which are played on *khol* with the help of ornamentation and elaboration of *bājanās* available in the nature of *ghāt*, *bhāṅganī-ghāt*, *cok*, *jāmān*, *thāk-tāl*, *sañcāra*, *cāhinī*, *dhemāli*, *bhaṅgī-bājanā*, *rāmdāni*, *gītar-nāc*, *melā-nāc*etc. are indicative of massive use of *tāla-prastāra*. The *tāla-prastāra* or rhythmic expansion in the nature of *ghāt*, *cok*, *jāmān*, *thāk-tāl*, *bhāṅgī* or *bhaṅgī-bājanās*, different *cāhinī*, *khāndi*, *sañcāras* and *dhemāli-bājanās* and their extensive uses in different performances through proper practice can uplift the *Śaṅkarī* music to a significant height.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bora, Mahim (ed.) : *Sankaradevar Nat*, Prakashan Parisad, Guwahati, 2017
2. Bordoloi, Jogeswar: *Tal Taranga*, Jorhat, 1996
3. Dev Goswami, Keshavananda: *Sarttiya Sanskritir Ruprekha*, Banalata, Guwahati, 1973
4. Dev Goswami, Keshavananda: *Sattra Sangeetar Swarnarekha*, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati, 1980
5. Devi Kotoky, Binapani (ed.): *Nandi*, Sattriya Academy, Jorhat, 2008

6. Goswami, Narayan Chandra: *Sattriya Sanskritir Swarnarekha*, Bidya Bhawan, Jorhat, 1984
7. Hazarika, Chandra (ed.): *Ankiya Nat Rup Ras aru Tattva*, Bedakantha Books & Publications, Jorhat, 2021.
8. Mahanta, Golap: *Khol Anka*, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, 2016
9. Mahanta Jagannath: *The Sattriya Dance of Assam*, Sangit Natak Academy, 2016
10. Medhi, Kaliram(ed.): *Ankawali*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati, 1997
11. Neog, Maheswar: *Sankaradeva and His Times: Early History of Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Assam*, Lawyer's Book Stall, 1998
12. Neog, Maheswar and Das, M.(ed.): *Rhythm in Vaishnava Music of Assam*, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati, 2008
13. Neog, Maheswar & Changkakoti, Keshav: *Sattriya Nrityya aru Sattriya Nrityya Taal*, Assam Prakashan Parishad, 1973
14. Saikia, R.R & Bordoloi, M(ed.): *Bhaona Darpan*, Sankalankosh Samiti, Jorhat, 2003

Traditional Assamese Theatre

Dr. Sailen Bharali

The Traditional Assamese Theatre consists of plays written by Śaṅkaradeva and his successors in the early 16th century (Śaṅkaradeva possibly wrote his first play in 1518). These plays are popularly known as *aṅkīyā nāṭas* and their staging is known as *bhāonā*. The term *aṅkīyā nāṭa*, however, is coined much later. Śaṅkaradeva and other playwrights did not use it. What appeared as the name of in their plays was either *yātrā* or *nāṭaka* or *nṛtya*. In the medieval biographies the word *aṅka* had been used to denote these plays. Obviously, *aṅka* means *nāṭa*. Therefore, the term *aṅkīyā nāṭa* is not only a subsequent coinage but also a misnomer. Anyway, it has now become an accepted term and it is by this term that these plays are known throughout India.

The immediate precursor of the traditional Assamese theatre introduced by Śaṅkaradeva appears to be *ojā-pāli*, the most popular and distinctive Semi-dramatic art form that existed even before the advent of Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva is said to have improved this institution and given birth to classical Assamese drama. But Śaṅkaradeva, as we know from his creative works, was an outstanding Sanskrit Scholar. He translated five cantos of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and one canto of the *Rāmāyaṇa* into Assamese and above all, he wrote a book named *Bhakti-ratnākar* in Sanskrit. It was, therefore, quite natural that Sanskrit dramaturgy had exercised some influence on him. The influence is traceable in the performance of the preliminaries which is an integral part of *bhāonā*, in the use of the Sanskrit *śloka*s and *nāndī* which open the plays and in the introduction of the role of the *sūtradhāra* to guide and

conduct the plays. But Śaṅkaradeva's aim was to reach the common man. His aim was to carry the message of *bhakti dharma* to the common people. Therefore, in his attempt to make the drama accessible to common man he made numerous changes in the Sanskrit dramaturgy and in doing so he took help of the indigenous art forms like *ojā-pāli*. (All great people think alike, but they do not follow the same route). For example, the functions of the *sūtradhāra* in an *aṅkīyā bhāonā* are more akin to those of an *ojā* in *ojā-pāli* than the *sūtradhāra* of the Sanskrit drama. The *sūtradhāra*, undoubtedly is the most important character in an *aṅkīyā bhāonā*. The word *sūtradhāra* was obviously drawn from the Sanskrit drama. But unlike his Sanskrit counterpart, the *sūtradhāra* in the *bhāonā* appears on the stage after the preliminaries are over and remains on the stage from the beginning till the end of the play and conducts the whole show with songs, dances and commentaries. Like the *ojā*, the *sūtradhāra* in the *bhāonā* is a singer, a dancer and a director all combined in one. There are again striking similarities between the *ojā* and the *sūtradhāra* even in the type of dress used by them.

In the stage craft also, Śaṅkaradeva did not follow the rules of Sanskrit drama. For example, the introductory musical performance at the beginning of the play is known as *nāndī* in Sanskrit drama. In the *aṅkīyā bhāonā*, Śaṅkaradeva has replaced the word by a more familiar term *dhemāli* (merry-making) for the understanding of the common man. The *dhemāli* is performed by *gāyana-bāyanas* who are singers and dancers. The musical items they use are *khol* (small drum), *tāl* (eymbals), *dabā* (big drum) and *kāli* (pipe instrument).

Bhāonā is not performed in the proscenium. In earlier times, it was performed in the *nāmghars* (prayer hall) and in the community hall of the *sattras* (*Vaiṣṇava* monasteries). If the gathering was expected to be large, shift arrangements were made by extending all the sides of the *nāmghars*. The extended area was called *rabhāghar* (temporary shed). At the end of the *rabhāghar*, there was the *guru-āsana* (the seat of the Almighty). The audience could sit on all sides. But neither the performers nor the audiences were allowed to sit with their back to the *guru-āsana*. The actors came from the *co-ghar* (green room) situated near the *nāmghars*. They waited there till their entrance to the stage was announced by the *sūtradhāra*.

The *aṅkīyā nāṭas* were written to popularize Vaiṣṇavism. They were regarded as means to an end. The emphasis obviously was on the religious effect rather than on the dramatic requisites. In other words, the dramatic requisites were subordinated to the main objective of rousing *bhakti* (devotion) in the audience. Songs and dances which dominate the play were all oriented towards that end. Perhaps for the same reason the plays were written in a mixed language, *vrajāvali*, which is a special mixture of Assamese and Maithili. He might have done that to maintain the dignity of the theme and characters of his plays and at the same time to enhance the lyrical sweetness of the language. Songs and dances occupy the major part of the play and dialogue which is introduced to elaborate the lyrical sentiments in prose. They play only a secondary role. The part played by the *sūtradhāra* leaves little scope for incorporating dialogue in a play and his narrations and explanations help in producing a kind of alienated effect as is done in the epic theatre of Brecht.

It is unfortunate that this important art form had been neglected for quite a long time. Western influence exerted its profound influence on the Indian stage since the middle of the nineteenth century. Almost all the playwrights fell victim to the norms of western proscenium. As a result, indigenous theatre was completely neglected. It is, however, gratifying to note that there has been a revival of interest in folk and traditional theatre during the last four decades. After trying with all the *avant garde* experiments of the west for more than one hundred and fifty years, it has been realized that Indian theatre and for that matter Assamese theatre must thrive on its own. Instead of producing pale copies of the West, it has to search for the idiom rooted in Indian tradition. The idea has led to the exploration of native elements. Playwrights and producers have engaged themselves in developing a theatre indigenous in character. They have absorbed in their productions elements of folk and traditional forms. Accordingly, Assamese theatre has taken over many elements of *aṅkīyā bhāonā*. Attempts have been made to bring about synthesis between the western proscenium and *aṅkīyā bhāonā*. Not that all these attempts have been successful. But in some of the productions, the traditional elements have been successfully utilized. Thanks to Sangeet Natak Academy for its encouragement to young playwrights and producers trying to apply the devices rooted in Indian heritage of performing arts.

Bibliography:

1. Baruah, Birinchi Kumar. *Ankiya Nata*
2. Bharali Sailen, *Asamiya Lokanatya Parampara*
3. Kakati, B.K. *Śaṅkaradeva*
4. Medhi, Kaliram. *Ankavali*
5. Neog, Maheswar. *Sri Sri Sankaradeva*
6. Neog, Maheswar. *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*

Is Śaṅkaradeva a Feminist?

Re-visiting Distinctiveness of Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's Bhakti-Centric Position of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* as Complementary to one Another.

Dr. Archana Barua

Abstract:

Is Śaṅkaradeva a Feminist? Expecting Mirabai to be a feminist is inappropriate as calling Gautama Buddha a Gandhian or Jesus Christ a civil libertarian. Similarly, it is odd to see a Mediaval Bhakta Saint's women welfare oriented position to be assessed either as pro Feminist and thus commendable or as anti-Feminist positions and thereby as lacking in stature and quality, is definitely a mis-match because the context-wise or the two positions will require different approaches to be made as for Śaṅkaradeva. Even then this question is often raised in various contexts: "Is Śaṅkaradeva a Feminist"? When this question is asked what exactly it should mean or what it means and why we have to see Śaṅkaradeva as a feminist, either finding pro-feminist concerns in Śaṅkaradeva too, or as targeting Śaṅkaradeva and the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Bhakti ideals as anti-feminist when we interpret feminism in a very limited binary way of man versus woman, patriarchy versus matriarchy, male versus female kind of dichotomous ways? The author will refer to two ways of addressing some women related reformist positions in Śaṅkaradeva using what many others have used a feminist lenses to it, either to asses Śaṅkaradeva too as a good

feminist or as its other kind, to be critiqued by a feminist as anti-feminist. On the other hand, we have to keep it in mind that from basically a Theistic a *bhakti* centric position of Śaṅkaradeva *prakṛti puruṣa duiro niyantā mādhav*, both men and women are essentially subservient to that support and shelter at the kind and compassionate center of that Ultimate Reality, God as Viṣṇu Kṛṣṇa here, who alone is above all men and women and others.

Key words: Śaṅkaradeva, *bhakti*, Feminist, Viṣṇu, Neo-Vaiṣṇavite, Brahmanical

1. Introduction:

Śaṅkaradeva in Assam did not propose a feminist project for empowering more or less any one of the genders, male versus female taking these as individual counterparts in binary relation by all ways of seeing all in a dichotomous way, but it talked about the need for basic dignity of both man and woman also as both are ideally to re discover their dignified status as *amṛtasya putraḥ* when God Himself has entered into to all *jīvas*, males or females (*jīva aṅśe praveśilā gāve gāve*). Besides it is not a position of men versus women, but to empower all those marginalised sections who are the victims, despite being men or women, even all *jīvas* that are alive, the non-living ones also, space place, all can be sanctified as a stone too can be turned into *padaśilā!*

Understanding feminism as a revolution in thinking style that questions conservatism and a kind of patriarchal mind-set that treats women as always subordinate to men, as an object to be manipulated by the subject that is man, Dr. Borkakati in his article, “Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva: The Pioneer of Feminism,” states that Śaṅkaradeva is already a feminist when similar questions are raised today mostly by feminists. That this *bhakti* saint thus remains the best spokesperson for the cause of women and thus a feminist in the true sense of the term, Dr. Barkakati writes: ‘So, being the harbinger of feminist ideology, protector of women rights, and honour Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is undoubtedly the earliest greatest name in the field of Assamese literature and culture’ (Borkakoti, 2018).

2. Objectives:

The objectives of this paper are:

- a. To discuss Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva as a feminist.

- b. To delineate the position of women in Medieval Assam
- c. The role of women in the Medieval period
- d. The role of Śāṅkaradeva in ameliorating the position of women.

3. Methodology:

The paper is prepared on the basis of secondary data that are collected from various studies on Śāṅkaradeva, religion, philosophy, medieval history of India, and from net surfing. Findings of the study on the selected objectives are discussed and analysed in different sub-headings as stated hereunder.

4. Findings and Discussion:

4.1. Feminist Grievances against Sankaradeva's Sahadharmīnī concept as Gender and Caste biased within a common Patriarchal system:

Dr Simashree Bora submits that representation of female devotion within Vaiṣṇavism is based on gender and caste norms legitimizing structured inequalities through institutions. Bora finds that representation of female devotion within Vaiṣṇavism is based on gender and caste norms legitimizing structured inequalities through institutions. On the whole, “This article investigates how certain prevalent narratives of three women unravel complexities related to Vaiṣṇava legacy and gendered devotion within the monastic order.” She comments: “From the very beginning Neo-Vaiṣṇavism rested on caste and gender politics”. A careful study of the entire gamut of Vaiṣṇavism reveals that through true means of devotion people of lower caste could also attain *vaiṣṇavajñāna*, knowledge of a devotee otherwise denied by the Brahmanical order. However the approach towards women was discriminatory in nature: *strī śūdro kare jadi āmāta bhakati / tāhāku dibāhā iṭo jñāna māhāmati*, (“If when a *śūdra* offer his *bhakti* to me he is also worthy of great knowledge”). Dr Bora cites from Dr. Tilottam Mishras submission that Śāṅkaradeva was not willing to initiate woman that shows his patriarchal male bias in certain matters including the derogatory way of clubbing “*strī* and *śūdra* (in *strī śūdro kare jadi āmāta bhakati*), together in a discriminatory way. Shimasheee Bora finds that that Neo Vaiṣṇavism, influenced by Vedic Hinduism, was unfavourable to women and their position within the sphere of religious institution” (Bora 2019).

Interestingly what is meant by Vedic in Śāṅkaradeva differed from what the ritualistic and also the *jñānamārgī* path identifies as the essence of the Vedas, the

caste based *smṛti guided* discriminations that could be made by *smārtas* and Brahmanical custodians of the ritualistic path of the Vedas. Rather, the Śāṅkaradeva's innovative re-discovery of the lost theistic path in Vedas, that one re-discovers the *vedara guputa vitta nārāyaṇa/ īśvara bhakti path* being the essence of the Vedic path for Śāṅkaradeva. *Bhakti-patha* remains the essence of the Vedas which is not the ritualistic *svargaprāpti* oriented follow ups of various rituals. Thus we have to understand that more than others it was Śāṅkaradeva who sternly protested against the women discriminatory positions in any religious text including some ways of interpreting the Vedas. That is also evident in the *karma-mārga* and the *Jñānamārga* as well. Śāṅkaradeva made it clear that what he means by the Vedic path is the Centrality of the *bhakti-patha* in Śāṅkaradeva over *jñāna* and *karma-mārgas*.

Late *satrādhikār* and a great *Mahāpuruṣīā* scholar, Narayan Chandra Goswami shows the anti-vedic reformist position of the *bhakti-dharma* of Śāṅkaradeva as well as in Buddha, if any one identifies the Vedic path only with the ritualistic path of the Vedas!

In the *Gītā* we find:

*yāmimam puṣpitām vācam pravadantyavipaścitaḥ/
vedavādaratāḥ pārtha nānyadastīti vādinah//
kāmātmānaḥ svargaparā janmakarmaphalpradām/
kriyāviśeṣāvahulām bhogaiśvarya gatim prati//
bhogaiśvaryaprasaktānām tayāphrtacetasām/
vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhīyate// (Gītā 2.42-44)*

The Assamese version of the *śloka* is as follows: ‘O *Pārtha*, immature and unwise people being deluded with flowery and pleasing verses of the Vedas deem achieving heaven (*svarga*) as the highest pleasure and the sole objective of life. They remain desirous of *Īśvara's* nearness taking recourse to the path of animal sacrifice, ritual sacrifices such as *yāga-yajña* and others. Being covetous, (*kāmanāparāyan*), heaven being the sole destination, their *cittas* were attracted by these *jñāna-karma* and result oriented pleasing words and acts alone and they were always attached to enjoyment and wealth only. These unwise persons are never dedicated to Prameśvara in true sense. This verse from the *Gītā* is very significant. The Veda-

interpreters and followers in its literal-mundane sense severely condemned here. The subsequent *śloka* confirms it thus: ‘*traiguṇyaviṣayā Vedā nistraguṇyo bhavārjuna*’ (*Gīta* 2.45). In other words, *triguṇātmakata*, (*sattva-raja-tama*) is equivalent to *sakāma-vāda* of Vedic *pravṛtti* path of *sakāmakarma* and so leaving these be oriented to the *niṣkāma path* is beyond the path of *triguṇakarma*. Mādhavadeva says about it: ‘*tinigunamayī veda gaṇa pariharā, govālira ghare gaiyā brahma cini dharā*’.

In the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* chapter eleven Kṛṣṇa’s advice on forsaking the path of *śruti-smṛti* is as follows:

*tasmāt tvam uddhaba otsrījya codanām praticodanām/
pravṛtīmcha nivṛtīmcha śrotavyam śrutameva ca//*

‘ O Uddhava, You forsake *śruti-smṛti*, the path of desire or of renunciation, these *śrotavya –śrouta* all these, and take full shelter in Me, the sole refuge of all embodied ones, only then you will overcome all fear.’ (*Goswami 1997*)

Besides, It was not Śaṅkaradeva who clubbed *strī* and *Śūdra* to exclude from the path of *dharma* and *mokṣa* but he quoted these lines as it is from the *smārta* Scholar Śaṅkarācārya and similar other *smārta* commentators of the *Brahmasūtra* that *śravaṇādhyānārtha pratiṣedhat tadadhigamasya cātdavyapadeśāt* is prohibited for the *Śūdras*. Such fruits shall be received only by those who study Vedas via *upanayana*, etc. (*pustakādipaṭhitasvādhyāyajan yo’rthāvabodhona śūdrāṇām phalāyakaalpate*). There is also a prohibition against women on reciting *mantras*, because one needs to be initiated and no rite of initiation has been specified for women. So it is not a direct prohibition, but is a deduced position based on the absence of certain enabling procedures. This is better viewed as women not having the responsibility of learning Veda, reciting all of what was learnt at once a month for forty years (*svādhyāya*) etc. It does not mean exclusion from worship etc. Instead of a *mantra*, *ślokas* are to be used while worshipping etc. The teaching of Veda is also made available through the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *purāṇas* etc. (Śiva Senani, 2007). The *smṛtis* also prohibits the *Śūdras* from hearing the Veda, their studying the Veda, and their understanding and performing Vedic rites. The prohibition of hearing the Veda is conveyed by the following passage: ‘The ears of

the *Śūdras* who hear the Veda are to be filled with (molten) lead and lac,' It is like Śaṅkara's cutting hands of the outcastes and then saying "I will accept you as my *guru* if you feed me", many others wonder! (Mahanta 1998). Now going through the above sayings by him, we find that both are mutually exclusive sayings. A *Cāṇḍāla* or a *Śūdra* (obviously his opinions are same for *Cāṇḍālas* as well as they are outcastes) requires to learn Vedanta to have *Brahmajñāna* but at the same time Śaṅkara is reluctant to let them study Vedanta to develop discrimination by which an outcaste can become a *Brahmanjñānī* (attain a firm knowledge he is none other than Brahman). Isn't it a deadlock condition, or hypocrisy, or wickedness? Is it like cutting hands then saying "I will accept you my *guru* if you feed me"? many others wonder!

And now, against such discriminatory nature of the *smārta* rituals, especially against the *strī* and the *Śūdras*, Śaṅkaradeva follows *Ekanta-bhakti* centric *Sanātānī Dharma Patha* which has its origin in the *samasta vedara sāra* and the *Purāṇar Sūrya* the *Bhāgavata Śāstra*. Śaṅkaradeva cites from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* with Sridhar Swami's commentary on the two *ślokas* that a *bhakta* is exempted from the regulations of *karma* observances, and is free from the debt of gods in which an ordinary householder is bound (Goswami 1997).

varṇāśrama dharma yata yara yena bidhi āche
tārese kevale adhikāra/
harināma kīrttanata nāhike niyama eko
etekese dharma māje sār// (Ghoṣa 119)

Śaṅkaradeva's act of rendering the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and the other scriptures into vernacular medium was in his strong support for all those deprived ones in Hindu caste society and thus taking a position that differs from Brahmanical orthodoxy and conservatism. His Vaiṣṇava creed enjoined upon the placing of a religious manuscript on the altar (*thāpanā*) either for congregational prayer in a *sattra* or for family adoration in a domestic sanctum. In many *sattras* the original Sanskrit *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* is also recited by the *Bhāgavatī* or the *sattrādhikāra* which is followed by recital of the vernacular rendering. Thus the *sattra* institution released a second wave of awakening by bringing the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* to the doorstep of every Assamese people and at the same time by bringing the Sanskrit learning to the

popular level. This resulted in a great awareness in the *sattras* and villages to make transcripts of the original manuscripts. The women-folk and the unlettered masses feel enlightened and became acquainted through the religious discussions held regularly as a part of daily routine, with the ideals and teachings of pan-Indian thought. Women were given due honour and they thus acquired sufficient knowledge in scriptures. An evidence was the maid Chandarī who could defeat a group of opponent scholars coming to argue with Śāṅkaradeva on the validity of his new found faith. The lady who was washing clothes on the bank of the river, recited some verses explaining the main tenets of the *Gītā* in simple Assamese and at that the pedant *paṇḍits* were amazed to listen to that. As a result of that they vanished away. The story is narrated in a biographical account. Another example is that the lady on another occasion, indicated the exact location of the *Kalpataru* tree to Śāṅkaradeva who said to have forgotten it in the painted scene prepared by him (Barkakati, 2018).

Śāṅkaradeva, influenced by Aryanised cultural traits that began with plough cultivation, was a liberal supporter of a society in comparison with traditional society of Bengali *śaktā*-tantric Brahmanical route. It reached upper Assam late. Kṛṣṇa says that the central message of *bhakti* in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* is also by-passed by some others if already determined to find what one looks for in any text, and so the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* is open for various interpretations as per one's perspective. But Śāṅkaradeva had never diluted the *bhakti*-centric core principles of this *purāṇa* and some other *bhakti*-centric texts. Through the illustration of Rādhikā Śāntī's heroic episode, Śāṅkaradeva could spread the catholic and egalitarian message of equality of all as per the dignity of labour that remains noble and exemplary in all occasions. Dr. Arupjyoti Saikia comments: "The public celebration of Rādhikā Satī's legend invested the community with a much needed solidarity and political legitimacy. It not only reaffirmed the status of the *Kaivartas* as an integral part of the Assamese Vaiṣṇava tradition—and thereby the Assamese *jāti* (nation), but also ensured their legitimate position within the Assamese peasantry" (Saikia, 2014).

In fact, Śāṅkaradeva used his entrepreneurial powers to show the masses that no human being was superior just on the basis of his or her birth as an upper caste family. The only determining factor is the quality of job that he or she performs. Dr. Arupjyoti Saikia writes, "In the 1920s, as the *Kaivartas* began to mobilise themselves, they drew their ideological inspirations from a Gandhian campaign for an

egalitarian society with equal status for upper and lower castes. It was not an easy task. In places like Guwahati or Barpeta, they often faced resistance from upper caste associations. For instance, a leading Assamese nationalist and Hindu reformer Gaurikant Talukdar's purification movement opposed the social mobility and aspirations of the *Kaivartas*.... The mobilization of the *Kaivarta* community was further reinforced through the public celebration of community festivals and historicizing of community legends from 1920s. One of the illustrative examples was the festival of Rādhikā Satī. The resurfacing of this legend from being an obscure narrative embedded within the biographical annals of Assamese Vaiṣṇava saints of being a public festival indicated the changing dynamics of the *Kaivarta* community. As a legend, this narrative, revolving round the heroic deeds of a *Kaivarta* woman in the time of Śaṅkaradeva who successfully found ways to help agricultural fields from being inundated by flood water became crucial to the community as it tried hard to prove its social importance, uplift the *Kaivarta* woman from their lowly social status and resist challenges from the upper castes. The public celebration of Rādhikā Satī invested the community with a much needed solidarity and political legitimacy” (Saikia, 2014).

“The real underlying struggle is known to have been between the great feudal lords who worshipped Śiva and his consort goddess as against the smaller but more enterprising entrepreneurs who opted for Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa.” (Kosambi, 1956). “Sītā means 'furrow' and the heroine of the epic had some of the attributes of an agricultural goddess. According to the story she was not a natural daughter of King Janaka, but sprang from the plough while he was working in the fields. The story evidently looks back to a time when the tribal chieftain was ready to lend a hand with the work of the tribe.” (Kosambi, 1956)

Within this caste liberal agriculture-related Aryanization process could be provided a dignified status to all *bhakata* Vaiṣṇavas as *hari bhakatas* that comprised of the Brahmins, the *Daivajña*, the *Kāyastha*, the *Kaivarta*, the *Keot*, the *Kachari* and also many others from commoners, as well as cultivators, small artisans, craftsmen, and others. From all others the *Ahoms*, the *Kachari*, the *Chutia* the *Moran*, etc. added the *prajāgharāyā* man-force to the *bhakti* movement. This agriculture-orientated social cultural life Bihu, kṛṣi-centric Kṛṣṇa culture, and family-orientated values gave

dignified status also to householders who were also community-centric *nāmghar*-orientated, an average Assamese village-orientated society.

4.2. Feminist grievances:

However Sharing their common grievances Dr Simashree Bora cites from Dr. Tilottama Mishra's submission that Śaṅkaradeva was not willing to initiate woman that shows his patriarchal male bias in certain matters including the derogatory way of clubbing '*strī and Śūdra*' together in a discriminatory way" (Bora, 2019).

This is also a distorted position that Śaṅkaradeva was reluctant to initiate women along with kings and *karmakaṇḍī* Brahmins (not all Brahmins) because women were discriminated against men as well as Brahmins—as different or higher in caste status than others and thus approving the Brahmanical pattern of discriminatory caste structure. But he had restriction in giving initiation to women which is clear from his own statement made before king Naranārāyana, who wanted to get his initiation. Śaṅkaradeva replied that he never wanted to be *guru* of the Brahmins, the Kings and the women. He feared that a woman would not be able to observe the tenets of his religion going against the will of her husband, as laws lay down by him were very strict. Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* is not an easy path for all others to follow, unless one remains fully convinced of its truth and remains a crusader for the *dharma*'s sake, ready to bear all difficulties on *dharma*'s way and under no circumstances the chaste and loyal *bhakti* to *Eka Deva* be compromised. As Dr Banikanta Kakti submits: "To renounce the world for one's religion is said to be easier than to live for it in the world. Śaṅkaradeva chose the difficult path of living up to his faith in the world, and what is still more difficult, to persuade the world to live up to it. To the exhausted kingdom without inner vitality and external cohesion, he threw out a gospel of absolute surrender to One, the *Eka Śaraṇa* religion. It was a difficult religion for contemporary Assam where every woman was looked upon as a miniature incarnation of the *Devi* and every hill-top as a petrified god or a goddess. It is often misunderstood even now. The *Eka Śaraṇa* system is not a religion of barter and bargain between God and men or of sacrifice and easy recompense; it is one with exclusive emphasis on slow spiritual regeneration, on growth of a new spiritual outlook by laying flesh and spirit in the hand of the Lord. Life once surrendered,

given over to the Lord, can no longer be lived according to the desires and impulses inherited from old Adam. They are to be governed by higher laws and purer manners. Śaṅkaradeva himself once drove out a follower (*Vyāsakalāi*) from this fold, because he secretly offered worship to the goddess of small-pox when his son was ill. All this sounds harsh and fanatical. But the new life is a life sold out to God in absolute faith and devotion and it requires supreme courage and sacrifice to live it in the new context of ideas. This was the programme of new life he placed before his fellow beings. It was a difficult ideal but it had its own appeal. Once devoutly begun, it unfolded its inherent sweetness and light which became its own allurements.”(Kakati 1921)

It was said that Śaṅkaradeva was sceptical about the independent entity of women. He thus wrote in *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa Kāvya*, '*Svābhavate tirī jāti, nohe svatrantarī*', independence is not the nature of women. Śaṅkaradeva was reluctant to initiate women along with kings and *karmakandī* Brahmins (not all Brahmins) who were not be able to part with *pravṛttimārga* in order to be an *Eka Śaraṇīyā Bhakata* in *nivṛttimārga*. That was the reason for this initial reluctance, not because women were discriminated against men etc. As *bhakti* path is not for renouncer monks who separate *karma* from *dharma*, *saṃsāra* from *mokṣa*, *grhī* from *sannyāsī*, also men from women, rather taking both *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* as ever dependent on Hari. Śaṅkaradeva never considers individual and separate space for the two in a binary manner. For him such freedom and independence is possible only when both of them are related persons, the husband and the wife act as real *sahadharmīs* (*tirīye puruṣe haibā ekamati, tebese sijibe hari bhakati*). In the initial stage of the propagation of the new faith, wives were making their husbands free from their duties in order to make them enable to attend the *nāmkīrtana*. It is related in the *Kathā-guru-carita* that an old couple of a village, Sundari, in lower Assam, arranged among themselves that the wife would manage the household duties and the husband would attend daily the *nāmkīrtana* held by Gopāl Ātā and his disciples during the day times and would recite the verses to his wife in the evening. One day, however the old man failed to recite the verses, at which, his wife refused him food and drink till he would go back and learn the verses. The poor man then went to the *sattra* and related his plight to a disciple, who felt pity on him and taught him the verses again (Sonowal, 2011).

However, he did open the door for women to receive initiation and positions of authority that opened the door for women being entrusted important roles even to his wife Kālindī Āi, initiating her into the *dharma patha* as his own *ardhāṅginī*, and that his own grand-daughter-in-law became the head of a major *sattra* (Barua,1964). “Śaṅkaradeva's wife, Kālindī Āi, also commanded a special position in the Vaiṣṇava order. Mādhavadeva and all other disciples of Śaṅkaradeva held her in high regard. She had survived till she was hundred and forty years old. At her death bed, she had instructed the assembled Vaiṣṇava apostles to write a biography of her husband, which was very faithfully done by them. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva initiated many women in his *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*. He advised the married couples to offer *bhakti* to God together. Therefore, women played a crucial role in propagating the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*. Kālindī Āi, the second wife of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, initiated devotees after the passing away of the saint. Such a thing was not possible in any other religious order in those days” (Barkakati, 2018).

The pious lady Dayal, wife of Telikṛṣṇa, acted as a *medhi* over one hundred and twenty queens and could recite the *Namghoṣā* and the *Kīrttana* in a very sweet tone. Besides, there were women who could show evidence of their mental and intellectual calibre and could claim rightly an honoured position in the Vaiṣṇava order. Most prominent among them was Kanaklatā alias Lakṣmi Āi, who was the first of the three wives of Caturbhuḡ Thākura, a grandson of Śaṅkaradeva. She was a very accomplished and efficient lady. She contributed greatly for the propagation of the Vaiṣṇava faith. She was also the first woman to become the head of a *Mahāpuruṣā Sattra* who even appointed other persons as *sattra heads*, *medhis* and in other positions. After her husband's death, Kanaklatā proceeded to the Ahom Kingdom along with some other female members of her family and settled at a place near Bardovā, which henceforth came to be known as *Āibheti*. She had initiated many people of the locality to the Vaiṣṇava faith and deputed twelve disciples, six Brahmins and six non-Brahmins to different parts of Assam to propagate the new faith. The twelve *sattras*, established by these twelve apostles, came to be known after her name as *Kanaka-bārajanīyāsatra* which was later extended with another twelve disciples, now known as *Saru-bārajanīyāsatra*, the earlier one is now called *Kanaka-‘Bar-bārajanīyās*. Kanaklatā later moved to the north bank of the Brahmaputra for spreading *dharma* among the larger section of the people and

following her other granddaughters-in-law and also the grand-daughters of Śaṅkaradeva who established *sattras*. “The monasteries established by the latter were called *Śrī Śaṅkar Jīyarī Vāmsar Satra*, meaning 'monasteries founded by Śaṅkaradeva's female descendants’”(Sonowal 2019).

Simasree Bora finds caste and gender bias in Neo Vaiṣṇavite positions on women and she writes: “Within a patriarchial structure women were seen only as a part of the household domain and their devotional agency was completely pushed to the margins.” Along with his, sons and chief disciples of the heredity and the male line played a crucial role. Mādhavadeva created a new path for devotion after Śaṅkaradeva’s demise. But due to gendered pattern the female line got less representation. Besides, an array of myths and legends exist pertaining to the lives of the Vaiṣṇava *Gurus* and their legacies, often attaching divine attributes to them. This article investigates how certain prevalent narratives of three women unravel complexities related to Vaiṣṇava legacy and gendered devotion within the monastic order” (Bora 2019).

Once sent by the *gurus* to represent light of Śaṅkaradeva's basic ideals, carrying with him a copy of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* that Śaṅkaradeva had kept, Vamśīgopāl Deva, despite facing all odds, continued following his mission and fighting successfully against the hostile elements, he could make Eastern Assam almost safe for the Vaiṣṇavas. Remaining underground to save himself from the oppression of the Ahom king as well as to survive somehow fighting against the so-called *Bauddhas* in disguise (*pseudo-Buddhists*), who even tried to poison him to death. Pītambar Dev Goswami writes about Gopaldeva that he established the same *Bhāgavati Śuddha Vaiṣṇava Dharma* in perfect harmony with other subsets, showing respect and concern for the *Guru*’s family by offering his help and support whenever needed. According to Dr. M. Neog the Ahom King Jayahvaj Singha, also helped Āi Kanaklatā when her representative Dāmodar Ātā approached him. It would have been a very difficult task of re-discovering ancestral *sattra* unless the royal permission and assistance had been obtained. So, in all these matters she was guided in a proper way by *Jyeṣṭha Gurus*, including Dāmodardeva. Permission was obtained and assistance was also provided and, that is how, finally *Bardova Thān* was re-discovered and re-established. However, the kings of the time also became strongly interested in the

affairs of the *sattrā* also to maintain their control over the people. In the *Movamarīā Sattrar Camu Burañjī* this matter is also recorded how the divisive tactics by the royal order remained instrumental in *samhati* divisions in subtle ways: “Among Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Mādhavadeva and his successors, Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Mādhavadeva’s most favourite disciple Śrī Gopāl Deva is usually known as the founder *guru* of the *Kāla Samhati* sect although these *Samhatīs* were not the individual creations of these *dharmācāryas* by themselves. The main person behind *Samhati* division is Maniram Dewan only...”! (Deva Goswami, 2009).

In this background we have also to understand, as Dr Neog says, only with Āi Kankalatā’s daughter’s line onwards that the heredity centric politics began and that naturally led to some differences leading to subsets despite sharing many commonalities in these. (Neog 2005). There was no man-woman discrimination here, otherwise Śaṅkaradeva’s own grandson would not have dared to make her the *dharmādhikāra* unless this liberal atmosphere was there in a household that we have seen the centrality of women, from Khersuti Āi to Chanderi the maid. These women folk were equally raised a state of unimaginable intellectual height, who, at a time worshipped in *tantra* only with *pañca makāra* way glorifying not as living dignified devotee like individual but taking body as text, to be used as per dictation of rituals. This was not again a male versus female way of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva’s male bias against women’s body and controlling these as their property.

Talking about women’s position from deterioration to finally elimination, Tilottama Mishra writes that although Śaṅkaradeva was successful in counteracting Brahmanical Hinduism and the *tantric* cult with an egalitarian attitude, in case of women, his attitude was marked by a strange intolerance “(Mishra,1985). Śaṅkaradeva pointed out the evil influence of women and wealth and how a devotee should avoid these two. (Sharma,1966:65) . Yet, he also warned of the dangers of female sexuality, since their sexual power has the potential to “intoxicate man” and “close his better senses” (Murthy, 201–202). The scholar continues: “According to one significant anecdote, Mādhavadeva was invited to visit the great hill of Kāmākhyā Temple, the most important *Śākta Tantra* center in Assam and the seat of the goddess’ *yoni* or sexual organ. The saint refused to enter the deity’s shrine, however, stating simply that it is not proper to “see the private parts of one’s mother”

.Indeed, it was in part because of the rapid success of the Neo-Vaiṣṇava movement and its fierce critique that *Śākta Tantra* largely declined as the dominant religious and political force in the region, losing royal patronage and continuing primarily on the margins of mainstream Assamese spiritual life (Urban, 147–154).

These are protests against making body as object only toward restoring lost divinity in all embodied subjects, *bhakat* and *bhakatani* like possible divinity when one greets the other as *Hari Bhakata*, sacred in profane also in both *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* all as *Harir Sevaka*.

The reformist position of the *bhakta saint* was a need of the time to address the much debased *tantric* deviations of the time and so more than individualistic esoteric rites and secrecy of *rahasyavāda*. Śāṅkaradeva focused on *śuddha bhakti* and public, transparent and democratic dimension of *bhakti*. Besides, it is not a position of men versus women, but to empower all those marginalised sections who are the victims, despite being men or women. Various customs and traditions absorbed by the Hindu society gave full and active participation to its women. Both Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva composed hymns, known as *bargīts*, 'noble songs' or 'songs celestial', to differentiate these from the sensuous and passionate music of any other kind that might distract the path of *nirguṇa bhakti* for the attainment of joyous experience of *bhakti-rasa*, in ones' servitude and complete dedication of oneself at the lotus feet of *Eka Kṛṣṇa Deva*.

Bhakti-dharma is the path of the householder as Śāṅkaradeva himself a twice married *bhakta sant* who valued *saṁsāra dharma*. Mādhavadeva also, though himself was a celibate, never encouraged celibacy for *bhakatās*. For Śāṅkaradeva, family, marriages and *saṁsāra* are also *dharma*s as important as *mokṣa*, and as his is not the path of *sannyāsa* or monasticism as usually interpreted wrongly even by some of his feminist critics. Here for him, as God is both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*, so as in the *Gītā*, *saṁsāra dharma* as *niṣkāma karma* remains *dharmic* parallel to *mokṣa*. A co-traveller with his *guru* on his difficult path of meeting all kinds of obstacles on one's way, when one has to be a path maker, Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva remains an outstanding figure in the history of the *bhakti* movement in Assam. They two formed the soul and a great part of the limbs of the Vaiṣṇava movement.

This was also the position adhered to by the female devotee, the first *bhakta* poet Padmāpriyā, the daughter of Gopāl Ātā. Like her spiritual mentor her father and spiritual Guru Gopāl Ātā and the spiritual legacy of the other *gurus*, Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, Padmāpriyā dedicated herself to the similar path of *niṣkāma karma*, the path of *prabṛtti* to be channelized to Hari *bhakti* oriented *nivṛtti patha*. She also warned of the dangers of female sexuality if separated from the divine spark *jīva* form as equal and sacred in both men and women, is dehumanised when separating it into different parts to be the power source that can be manipulated by *tantrikas* for example in *tantra*. She thus opposed similar sensuous lustful body centric *prabṛttimārga* values as the abode of *śṛṅgārarasa* only at the exclusion of all other subtle sensitive values in her. Similarly the religious text also refers to those who talk of women and consume alcohol and says that their lives are futile.

strī madya māmsa sevāra kathā
kai mare kai janma kabṛthā (Mahanta 2016)

Writing about Padmāpriyā Meeta Deka (2013:19) Says: “Her writing eulogised the preceptor as well as her father”. Imbued with a strong sense of spirituality she also wrote on the transient nature of life, against sexual pleasure and materialism. Her writings reflect patriarchal domination, where the son, husband and wealth occupy a predominant position in one’s life. Padmāpriyā’s strong sense of protest arose, as some may be said from her own experience of defying marriage. She was married to a man who was a *śākta*, but due to their differences, she left her husband and returned to her father’s house at a very early age (Mahanta 1987). Through detachment (*vairāgya*) from *samsāra* she formed a strong female devotional voice and transformed the religious sphere into a spiritual one. Many claim that through her ‘personal rebellion’ she broke the norm of existing religiosity rooted in hierarchical social relations and male devotion. Padmāpriyā’s notion of defiance and language of aspirations were well expressed in the following verse:

putra pati dhan akāraṇe,
yene jala bimba hāse
ei āche nāi sabe habe chāi
sakalo kāle garase

jīvana yauvana sabe akāraṇa
yene saponara nidhi
micha dukjha lagi Brahmaka tiyāgi
nabhaila kichu siddhi.”

(Mahanta, 2016)

(Son, husband and wealth are like reflections on the water .Now here and now gone – time will reduce all to ashes. Life and youth are like dreams; sorrow and sacrifice are meaningless.)

It was a protest against making women only as a *yoni* as a power source only or as womb only that will rear male child only for *vaṅsarakṣaka* or an widow who is to be burnt in funeral fire of the husband. Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva’s legacy made Padāmpriyā find re-shelter at her father’s home again who gave her new joy of life also giving a pen on her hand to create as Sarasvati herself. Padāmpriyā, the daughter of Bhavānipriyā Gopāl Ātā, is thus credited to be the first Assamese woman poet who composed even *bargīts*. As Dr. Barkakati submits:“She took active part in religious activities along with her father. She also composed devotional hymns. She even trained the devotees. Contrary to such a heritage of respectability and active participatory role for women in *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*, even the so-called communists of India did not include a single woman in their politburo till the twenty first century. So Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was more progressive than the so-called progressive intellectuals of the modern era.” Does it justify to say that Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva pushed women to the realm of domesticity only dichotomising men from women, thinking mind related men from only machine kind of doing activity oriented women also as equal to ‘wealth ,body, and mindless machine kind mindless thing’ only.

More than making women a goddess who thereby remains all perfect and a super person, Śaṅkaradeva glorifies care and empathy based reciprocity between the two. Dr. W.L. Smith notes with appreciation on Śaṅkaradeva’s uniqueness among other *bhakta saints* of India in his portrayal of Sītā’s character in vernacular medium that keeps room for a strong Sītā who can equally be in charge of her own situation thereby taking a strong position against the injustice shown by Rama, her husband and the Lord on earth. Bhaben Barua refers to Rabindranath’s emphasis on similar

kind of mutually loving-caring and sharing bond that actually remains the ideal concept of *Sahadharminī* that was there in an early kind of liberal patriarchy in the Vedas that also was transformed into rigid and discriminatory way of subjugating one to the other mostly the female to the male counterpart during a *smṛti* based Brahmanical tightening of castes and its preference for male child that also led to degradation of women's situation in the transformed and dehumanised kind of patriarchy that came away from its earlier ideal goal. However, as illustrated here as in Śaṅkaradeva, for Rabindranath too *sahadharminī* is an ideal mutual complementary way.

In this background, Śaṅkaradeva advocates liberal ideals where not only the woman, the wife, has to be the object while the husband or the male figure remains the master

The Sītā of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's *Uttarākānda Rāmāyaṇa* makes sarcastic comments at Rama when he banished her:

*“Awe Rāmasvāmi sukhe bhunjantoka rājā
Mari jāomai nimākhiti banamāje”*

(Uttarākānda Rāmāyaṇa / 23) (Smith, 2004)

Here the above sarcastic comment given by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva in the mouth of Sītā in his writing means that she did not accept her banishment and she taunted the capacity of Rama to banish her. Even when later Rama sent Hanumāna and others to the *aśrama* of Vālmiki for bringing her back, she spoke with revenge and with harshness that there would be nothing more than acting as a shameless woman on earth if she now followed Rama as her trusted husband even when he failed to protect her. She will rather despise being called Rama's wife. Sītā also said that she would have given up her life in Lanka and that it could have been a better decision, especially when she had known Rama to be so cruel to her.

But whereas Sītā takes leave of Rama after expressing love for him in the original *Rāmāyaṇa*, in Śaṅkaradeva's version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* part, she takes leave of Rama angrily. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva deviated from the scriptures of the *sanātana*

religion by depicting the character of Sītā in a protesting and revolting image. Here he created a progressive trend of his own, which we cannot find easily in any other scriptural form in that period. We can see that Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, through his religious expression and devotional steps, implanted the concept of feminism into this trend.

For Śaṅkaradeva as well as in Rabindranath Tagore, both *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, both males and females are complementary, relational to one another, there is no disconnected individuals separated from one another in isolation. Tagore writes about this complementary *sahadharminī* role of both male and female counterparts thus: “I am *Chitra*. No goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self.” The incident of Sītā entering into the bosom of mother earth after again facing trial in the court of Rama on her return to Ayodhyā is there both in the original *Rāmāyaṇa* as well as Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva’s portrayal of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

āura yena nuśuno rāmara ito nāu
phātdiyā basumati pātāle lukāu
(Uttarākānda Rāmāyaṇa / 381)”

In the vernacular version of the story by Śaṅkaradeva, in great contrast from the Vālmiki’s original *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rama is overwhelmed by guilt at having abandoned Sītā:

henaya priyāka mai tejilo kamane /
caṇḍāla buliyā garahibe yibā śune //
ehibuli rāmācandre karanta vilāpa /

“How can I abandon such a wife? Whoever hears of it will condemn me as a *Caṇḍāla*. In these words, Rama lamented”. (W. L. Smith, 2004).

Bibliography:

1. Borkakoti, S.K. *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva: the Pioneer of Feminism*, 2018
2. Bora, Dr. Simashree, “Revisiting Past and Unveiling Gendered Legacy: History and Representation of Women in neo-Vaishnavism of Assam”. Zubān, New Delhi, 2019
3. Goswami, Sri Narayn Chandra, “Letters to the Editor’, on *Buddha Avatar: Gariyashi* 5th year, No. 3, December 1997, pp.4-5.
4. Siv Senani <https://groups.google.com/g/bvparishat/c/eVU28G2DBNc?pli=1>
5. Mahanta, Bapchandra. “Sankardevar Darsan”, *Gariyashi*, 1998 September 12, p. 19-20)
6. Saikia, Arupjyoti. *A Century of Protests: Peasant Politics in Assam since 1900*, Routledge, Delhi, 2014. Pp.273-274
7. *Kosambi, D.D.: Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956
8. Kakati Banikanta, “A New Life, Letters and a State”, *Sankaradeva : Vaisnava Saint of Assam*, Natesan and Co., 1921
9. Sonowal, Lalit “Neo-Vaisnavism and The Status of Women in Assam”
10. JETIR, June 2019, Volume 6, Issue 6
11. Barua, B.K. *History of Assamese Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya
12. Academy, 1964.188
13. Devagoswami, Sri Purosottamananda, “Sri Sri Puranimati Mayamara Satrar Samu Itibritta” *Puranimati Maymora Satra*, Jorhat.
14. Neog, Dr Maheswar. *Śaṅkaradeva*. National Book Trust, New Delhi: 1967.
15. Misra, Tilottama. “Social Criticism in 19 century Assamese Writing”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 (2) 1588 to 1566, 1985
16. Sarma, Satyendranath. *A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam, 1200-1800 A.D.* Gauhati: Pratima Devi Publication, 1989.
17. Urban, Hugh. B. “The Path of Power: Impurity, Kingship and Sacrifice in AssameseTantra.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no.4. (December, 2001): 777-816.
18. Mahanta, Rebat Chandra. *Axamor Vaishnav Yugar Pratham Mahila Kabi Aai Padmapriya*, Nagaon, Janagana Press, 2016
19. Deka, Meeta. “Woman’s Agency and Social Change: Assam and Beyond”, *Sage studies on Indias North East*, New Delhi, 2013

20. Smith, William L. *The Wrath of Sita: Sankaradeva's Uttarakanda*, The Current Piece is reproduced from MahapurusaJyoti, Journal of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, VolVI, 2004. (2023)
21. Dr. Rijumoni Gogoi, "Feminist Ideology and the AnkiyaNaats of SrimantaSankaradeva A Selective Study", International Journal of Research Culture and Society ISSN(O): Volume – 7.

The Transformation led by *Śāṅkarī* Teaching System: An Analysis

Sri Golok Ch. Bora

Abstract

The *gurukula* system of education in ancient India was transferred to ancient Assam, Kāmarūpa in the form of Sanskrit education, which can be traced at least from the period of Kumār Bhāskar Barman. At the end of 12th century, the last king of Pāl dynasty died and thereafter Kamarupa was in anarchy due to absence of any royal powers. Some local rulers including *Bhūñās* were there. A few of these rulers were found to be patronising Sanskrit education. This early 13th century is, therefore, identified as the beginning of formal (Sanskrit) education in Assam (Sastri 34). *Guru-carit-kathā (GCK)* flashes a picture of education flourished in pre-Śāṅkarite, Śāṅkarite and post-

Śaṅkarite times. In this paper, it will be tried to highlight some features of the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva, which will reflect that Śaṅkaradeva established a new system of teaching in the midst of old Indian system of education.

Key Words: *cātraśāl*, Sanskrit, Mādhavadeva, Śaṅkaradeva, *Guru-carit-kathā*

1. Introduction:

In pre-Śaṅkaradeva Kāmarūpa, there were some institutions named *chātraśāl*, which acted as the main centres of education. These were maintained by some renowned scholars, mainly qualified in Sanskrit language and literatures. *GCK* traces that the fifth fore-father of Śaṅkaradeva, Laṅḍādeva received education in a *cātraśāl* under one Master Kauśik (*GCK*. 09). Since Laṅḍābara and his son Caṅḍibara lived at Kanaujapura (*SHT* 65) in thirteenth century and has migrated to Gauḍa and finally to Kamatāpura-Kāmarūpa (Bezbaroa 4) and only the year of birth of Caṅḍibara's son Rājdhara could be estimated roughly as 1358 A.D (Neog 7). Laṅḍābara must be educated in Kanauja in thirteenth century itself. Notwithstanding, Śaṅkaradeva was educated at Mahendra Kandali's *chātraśāl (ṭol)*, Mādhavadeva received his education at Rajendra Adhyāpaka's *ṭol (GCK.128)*. Mādhava learned seven Grammars (*vyākaraṇas*), *Bhārata*, *purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata* within one year with his sharp memory and profound talents. He was also trained in *Kāithāli vidyā* and was engaged as an accountant (*Majumdār*) in the royal affairs at Bāṅḍukā. When Mādhava once went to Bāṅḍukā through Bhella, he had to stay at Śālkocā nearby the *chātraśāla* of Devadatta Adhyāpaka. Mādhava observed that the students read lexemes, verbal roots, euphonic combinations etc. loudly and unitedly. Hari Ātai, one assistant (*āldharā*) of Kṛṣṇāi Ātai, was sent to a *ṭol* of Yādavendra Bhattacārya situated at Śrīhāṭi in the north bank of the Brahmaputra. He studied grammar, poetry and *kośa (vyākaraṇa, kāvyā, kośa)* at that *chātraśāla*.

Mādhava took every initiative to teach the new generation in both formal and spiritual subjects. He taught his nephew Rāmacaraṇa all possible subjects from Sanskrit grammar to religion. Apart from that, he taught Śaṅkara's son Haricaraṇa, grandson Purosottama, Paramānanda, Acyut Guru, Saru Guru, Laxmaṇ Ojā (*GCK.1120*). They learned *pad, payār, ghoṣā, kīrttan, gīt, bhaṭimā, Bhāgavata* etc.

But since, Purosottam wanted to learn *vyākaraṇa*, *Amar kāvyakoś*, *tantra*, *nīti*, *saṃhitā*, *Veda*, *Vedānta*, *upaniṣada* etc., he went to the *chātraśāla* of Jaibar of Pāṭaki (GCK 1124).

Maheswar Neog in his book *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times* points out some features of *chātraśāla* education. He observes that there was a tradition of introducing education to a student admitted in *chātraśālas* or *ṭolas*. One day, a date is selected by astrological calculation for a student to give him a slate (*phali*) and to start writing letters and pronounce (*māt ākh*) it. In due course, textbook is given (*puthi diyā*) to him. According to *carit puthi*, the curriculum of *chātraśāla* encompasses four *Vedas*, fourteen scriptures, eighteenth *parva* of *Mahābhārata*, eighteen *saṃhitās*, fourteen grammars (*vyākaraṇa*), eighteen *tantras*, eighteen *kāvyas*, and eighteen *kośas*. It is said that Śaṅkaradeva completed this core curriculum in the *chātraśāla* of Mahendra Kandali apart from other scriptures (GCK. 60). The students have to observe certain duties apart from their studies. They have to sweep and wipe the ground of the school. Śaṅkara was exempted from that duty as he was sworn as a brilliant student (*ojā chātra*) of the group (GCK. 50). At the completion of the course, the students have to beg from house to house by chanting special hymns of blessings called *cat phurā* or *caitra gowā* and to collect their master's fees (*guru-dakṣiṇā*) (GCK. 885). By observing this *cat phurā* or *caitra gowā*, a student returns to his master with presents of cloths and coins, and then takes good bye from the *guru*.

Neog also states: Apart from the *chātraśāls* of this area, the education centres at Vārāṇasī (GCK. 320), Haridvār (GCK. 885), Nadiyā-Śāntipur (GCK. 12, 350, 472) etc. attracted students and scholars. Naranārāyana and Chilārāi studied at Vārāṇasī; Mahāraj Naranārāyana himself composed meaningful Sanskrit verses (GCK. 336) and the great scholar (Mahāpaṇḍit) (GCK. 215) Chilārāi wrote commentary on *Gīta-govinda* of Jayadeva, named 'Sāravatī' in Sanskrit itself. Kaṅṭhabhūṣaṇa went to study *Vedānta* with the seer Brahmānanda of Vārāṇasī after losing a scholarly debate with Śaṅkaradeva (GCK. 319-21). There were masters having scholarly titles like *Bhaṭṭācārya*, *Kandali*, *Adhyāpaka*, *Ṭhākura* etc. Someone like Dhilāi Bāmuṇ spent his half of life in studying at *chātraśāla*. (GCK. 736). There were superior teachers like Rāghava Ācārya, the disciple of Mādhava Kandali, who had the capacity of even supervising professors like Mahendra Kandali.(GCK. 50).

Under such an environment Śaṅkaradeva was born and brought up. But after his return from the first pilgrimage, he finally started a system of instruction by establishing a *nāmghar* at Bardovā. He started writing *Kīrttanās*, rendering *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, prayer songs (*bargītas*) and then dramas. And this practice of writing continued up till the end of composing the drama *Rāma-vijaya* when he finally left his writing pen (*gurujane tāte kāpkāṭhi eriche*,) (GCK. 384). Through all these writings, he attracted people to learn the stories of the scriptures and their essences. Through the *kīrttanās*, Śaṅkaradeva taught people both to sing and hear stories of Kṛṣṇa in terms of lyrics enriched with meters, similes, etc. Most of the people could memorize those for their lives and some portion of them could even read the scriptures. Thus, they became literate and educated by grasping the meaning and applying the morals in life. Regarding dramas, from the time of *Cihna-yātrā* up to *Rāma-vijaya*, people took part in it, either in acting, singing, playing instruments or in costumes (*āhāryas*). They all became artisans and the common people as the spectators became aware of righteousness of life through enjoyment. Not only the disciples, but most common people were also attracted by the singing of prayer songs (*bargīts*). These were spread from one to another by memorizing and were spread to remote places, and thus, they promulgated the creed of Śaṅkaradeva. In this way, greater common people became literate with the knowledge of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, the *Gītā* and the *Vedas*, *Vedantas* etc. through chanting, singing, reciting, hearing the *Kīrttanās* and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*.

On the other hand, the formal *chatraśāla* or *ṭola* education was not accessible to the common people as only higher caste students had the access to these Brahmanical institutions. Śaṅkaradeva, himself being a *kāyastha*, got admission in the Mahendra Kandali's *ṭola*, because of their higher status of *Bārabhūṇā* family hierarchy.

Though, brought up in a *śākta* tradition, Śaṅkaradeva developed a monotheistic mentality from the very beginning of his school education. His first ever composition of the poem the *karatala kamala* shows this tendency, which became outspoken, when the master Mahendra Kandali asked him to prepare for learning on worshipping the goddess Durgā Śaṅkaradeva directly opposed to learn the *Durgā ṛc* (*śotra*, hymn), of course, by showing his loyal inability to collect oblations like

pigeon bird etc., as directed by the master, he dared to request him to teach Kṛṣṇa *rc* only. Gradually, Śaṅkaradeva developed negative attitude towards Vedic rites and rituals promoted by the *chātraśāla* or *ṭola* institutions and after starting his own education system, he was strict to forbid his disciples to accept those education. We have an example of Hari Ātai, who became a residential student of Jādavendra Bhattāchārya's *chātraśāla* and when Paḍiyā Ātai goes to give him ration, he discovers that the teacher Yādavendra holds there the sacrificial rites by immolating ducks, pigeons, goats etc. in winter. He then immediately brought back Hari Ātai to Hariḡra of Kṛṣṇāi Ātai as that is a crime to disobey the doctrine of their master Śaṅkaradeva. But he could not evade from the punishment, and faced detachment from the companions of fellow disciples (GCK. 595). Śaṅkaradeva was very strict to his disciples in keeping the words of initiation and he strictly advised them: "Let don't worship other gods and goddesses; Don't see their idols, don't approach to that worshiping house and even don't eat oblation offered to the deities. If you do so, your devotion will lead astray" (*Bhāgavata 2.1.124*).

2. Objectives:

The objectives of the paper are:

- a. To find out the kind of education that the pupils were imparted during the medieval period in Assam.
- b. To highlight the nature of education that Śaṅkaradeva preach during his period by revolting the traditional Brahmanical education system.

3. Methodology:

The paper adopts an analytical qualitative method of approach. The data collected for finding the result are mainly secondary data like books, articles, internet sources etc.

4. Findings and Discussion:

The findings of the data collected are analysed and discusses in the following sub-headings:

4.1. *The Concept of Śaṅkarī Teaching:*

Śaṅkaradeva, by promulgating a monotheistic *bhakti* cult, has made Assamese people mentally unique and Lord Kṛṣṇa oriented. This has been reflected in his language, literature, art, culture, sculpture, thought processes and so on. There are not any areas in dance, songs, instruments, fine arts, sculpture, architecture etc., in which this monotheistic thought process has not been reflected. In brief, Assamese people has attained the *upaniṣadic* truth of the 15th-16th centuries by embracing the greatness of devotion to Kṛṣṇa by transgressing all the stages of folk-religion, Brahmanical religion and so on (Saikia 253).

We can see that every village in Assam has one or more *nāmghars*. These *nāmghars* are the nerve-centres of social life and spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. There are no such institutions seen outside other than in Assam. A major part of the history of Assamese people has been covered by the *nāmghars* and *sattras* since 15th-16th centuries. The temples had no access for the common people and non-Brahmins. But since the doors of *nāmghars* are open to all, its relation to social life is naturally inevitable (Saikia 253).

These are some reflections of Assamese society and culture and it can be realised that the overall character of this bearing is the long-lasting effects of Śaṅkarī teaching since 15th-16th century AD. The system by which these enduring teaching outcomes have been realized is called the Śaṅkarī Teaching System.

4.2. *The System of Śaṅkarī Teaching:*

This system is not the same as the modern institutional system. This is different from the Vedic or *gurukula* system as witnessed in the ancient Indian education system. This is also not the same as the institutional Sanskrit education system which was run in temples in south India and the *chātrāśāla* or *ṭola* institutions in eastern India, found especially in West Bengal and Assam. In fact, the place of education was transferred from the *ṭolas* to the *thānas* and *nāmghars* by Śaṅkaradeva and then to *sattras* from the time of Mādhavadeva. The main reason of transfer of education from the *ṭolas* to the *nāmghars* is that the *ṭolas* were the centre of Vedic learning of rituals, which mainly promoted *karmakāṇḍa* though they included

Sanskrit language, literature, *itihās*, *kāvya* etc. This fact can be ascertained by the learning of Śaṅkaradeva himself in the *ṭolas* of Mahendra Kāṇḍali when the former refused to learn verses on deity Durgā (*Durgā ṛc.*) from the later. (GCK, 54)¹⁰. Dr. J.C. Kalita observes: “For this type of elements in the *ṭola* education system, Śaṅkaradeva did not find it congenial for carrying his religious ideals. Therefore, he built a new system of education of his own ideals with inclusion of music and dance, which was even, mostly different from the old Indian education system itself. The old Indian system, which prevailed in Assam in the time of Śaṅkaradeva was totally dominated by Brahmanism. The right to education was even reserved to the men only, that was also only for the male Brahmins and noble class *Kāyasthas*. Though the boys of noble *Kāyasthas* had the access, they could never be recognised as the best (*ojā*) student. When Mahendra Kāṇḍali, being enamoured by Śaṅkara’s talent, recognised him as the best student, other offended students approached Rāghava Acārya to protest it (GCK. 50). On the other hand, that education was Vedic ritual based. This nature of that education system can be ascertained from the act of Mādhavadeva, when he argued with Śaṅkaradeva in favour of sacrifice, being educated in the *ṭola* of Rājendra Adhyāpaka. Śaṅkaradeva introduced a universal, caste-distinctionless education system, free from existing class and caste-based restrictions and in conformity with his own humanistic and monotheistic ideals. There is no place for goddess of education (*Sarasvatī*) or no need of worshiping an obstacle-remover god (*Ganeśa*) in that system. His creed had no place of worshiping deities other than lord Kṛṣṇa. His education system is open to all castes and creeds irrespective of gender and ages, as his religious opinion is also:

*nāhi bhakatita jāti ajāti bicāra/
kṛṣṇa bhakatita samastare adhikāra//*¹¹

That means, there is no caste consideration to practice *bhakti*, and all people have the right to worship Lord Kṛṣṇa. Śaṅkaradeva’s teaching is based on the principles like: “*brāhmaṇara caṇḍālara nibicāri kūl*”. This is the foundation of a

¹⁰ *āru ekadinā kāṇḍaliye bole dekāgiri durgar ṛc, sikhāo: māh cāul jarā purā hāh pāra ki povā ānā capāi: urujane bole ka ’t pām nisikoñ kṛṣṇastavakai diyā:*

¹¹ J.C. Kalita, ‘Śaṅkarī Sikṣā Paddhati’, an Article in Assamese: translated by the author.

rigorous social movement. This movement had created a broad mindedness in the people of even Mongoloid based social structure.

The formal education system of the time was maintained by the *chātraśāla* or *ṭolas*, in which Śaṅkaradeva himself and his chief disciple Mādhavadeva were educated. But, due to the sacrificial rites that were advocated and practiced there, Śaṅkaradeva developed his own system of education as mentioned above. He first introduced this education in the *nāmghar* (*Harigr̥ha*) institution which was a kind of mass education. In fact, Śaṅkaradeva took the responsibility of education of the people who came under the umbrella of Neo-Vaiṣṇavite creed. He adopted a new technique of teaching other than the formal system of “introducing slate (*phali diyā*)” in the *ṭolas*¹². GCK states that this method of Śaṅkaradeva was known from the story of Lakṣmaṇa Ojā. When Lakṣmaṇa approached Śaṅkaradeva, the latter allows him to read Book XI of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* first. After getting proficiency in Book XI, Śaṅkaradeva asked him to memorize the verses of Book X of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. When he becomes well versed, Śaṅkaradeva taught him the art of storytelling in the style of singing, i.e., performing *ojā-pāli*. Śrīrām Ātā matched as the supporting assistant (*pāli*) to him. They regularly performed this *ojā-pāli* art under the supervision of their master Śaṅkaradeva, and thus, Lakṣmaṇa became an exponent (*caṅkavarty ojā*) of this *Śaṅkarī* art. This is the method, Śaṅkaradeva applied to make a lay man expert in reading and performing *kīrtana*, *ojā-pāli* etc. From this kind of observations, Dr. M. Neog has remarked, “Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva imparted education to their own kith and kin as well as followers, not only in the three R’s but also in the performing arts.” In this way Śaṅkaradeva taught them starting from singing to learn letters, words, sentence and finally verses.

4.3. The Nature of Śaṅkarī Teaching:

4.3.1 The School of Śaṅkarī Teaching:

The institutions or schools of *Śaṅkarī* teaching are *nāmghars*, *thāns* and *sattras*. “This education system has no separate school and teacher, no separate prayer house (*upāsanā gr̥ha*) and no extra amusement system. The religious ideology of Śaṅkaradeva’s beliefs in Supreme Brahmaṇa to whom the Universe and beings are

¹²GCK., Introduction, *vidyā-sikṣār prasār*

submerged, likewise, all learnable lessons and all kinds of knowledge required for this life and beyond life, practical knowledge for living etc. are compiled in one basket called Śaṅkaradeva's teaching. Therefore, this teaching system is most useful for the household people. So, this education system has no age limit, rather this is more useful for the adult people.” (Kalita, 2024).

4.3.2. *The Tenure of Śaṅkarī Teaching*

The education is life-long, there is no formal examination, no certification, no convocations.

4.3.3. *The Nature of Knowledge in Śaṅkarī Teaching:*

In his article ‘Śaṅkarī Education System’ Dr. J. C. Kalita lays: “The main objective of pursuit of knowledge in this system is to realize the Supreme Reality and Truth so that one can safely elude from the illusion of this world. It is worth mentioning that though the system aims at spiritual end of life, yet it does not promote an anti-work culture, rather it promotes a peaceful and cultured life with high aesthetic sense of dance, songs, dramas, poetry, painting, sculpture etc. and necessary vocational education. On the other hand, it is not believed that the knowledge is self-sufficient without the blessings of God like the realization of righteousness, or acquiring knowledge is also dependent on the sincere devotion to God. Initially it is a knowledge-based work-oriented education system, but its ultimate aim is not to ensure enormous enjoyment of material wellbeing, rather to release people from the binding of birth-death cycle and lead them to attain absolute emancipation. Considering this aspect, the Śaṅkarī teaching system can be termed as *Mahāpuruṣīyā* education system as the Śaṅkarī creed is also called *Mahāpuruṣīyā* ideals.” (Kalita, 2024).

“Though absolute salvation is the target or destination, Śaṅkarī education system has no provision of sufferings to achieve (*kṛcchrasāadhan*) it like some other cults, rather it is an incredible education system which enables the people to realize the divine bliss in this world itself, by providing immaterial happiness arising out of amazing songs and dances, heart illuminating literature, stunning dramatics and so on”. (Kalita, 2024).

4.3.4. *The Curriculum of Śaṅkarī Teaching:*

The curriculum of this education system is the whole literatures composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. The core curriculum is *Kīrttan-ghoṣā*, *Daśama*, *Nāma-ghoṣā*, *Bhakti-ratnāvalī*. This curriculum has some specific syllabi, which are stated below:

- (i) *Philosophy*- Indian Vedānta philosophy is the working force of all literature of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. This is inbuilt in other cultural and moral teachings also.
- (ii) *Bhakti*- the core concept of Śaṅkarī Teaching is the *bhakti*, devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa as well as to the people, who are the non-dual miniature forms of God.
- (iii) *Literature*- By the study of scriptures people learn poetry like *capaya*, *ṭoṭaya*, *bhaṭimā* and verses. They also, learn meters, figures of speech, simile, metaphor etc. from reading and hearing scriptures, which are beautifully applied by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva in their poetry and verses. Grammar is also integrated there.
- (iv) *Musical recital*- Musical beauties of *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*, *Nāma-ghoṣā* and other scriptures are important features of Śaṅkarī teachings. People have to follow proper tone, rhythm, pronunciation in reciting scriptures like *Kīrttan-ghoṣā*, *Nāma-ghoṣā*, *bargīts*, *bhaṭimā*, *ṭoṭay*, *capay* etc.
- (v) Remembering those verses and lyrics of *bargīts*, *bhaṭimās* is a good qualification of devotees under Śaṅkarī teaching system.
- (vi) *Value or Moral education:*
All scriptures of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are full of values and moral education. The lesson of loyalty, faithfulness, brotherhood, mutual respect etc. are practiced by addressing *Bāp*, *Āi* in the *nāmghar* itself. (Kalita, 2024).
- (vii) *Music, dance*- The ground exercise (*māti-ākharā*), the initial lesson of Śaṅkarī dance, the classical notation formats (*rāgas*) of songs (*bargīt and aṅkīyā gīt*), different gestures (*bhangimā*) of Śaṅkarī dance, the typical beats (*tālas*) of main Śaṅkarī leather instrument (*khola*), the art of acting, the art of mask making, the techniques of preparing bow, arrow etc., the

techniques of preparing colour (*heṅgul*, *hāitāl* etc.) all these teachings are practiced in the *nāmghars*. (Kalita, 2024).

- (viii) *Drama*- Dramas are important parts of *Śaṅkarī* teaching and learning system. The six dramas composed by Śaṅkaradeva and six *jhumurās* composed by Mādhavadeva are the treasures of *Śaṅkarī* dance, music, art and culture.
- (ix) *Spiritual education*- The real thrust of *Śaṅkarī* education is the spiritual development. Spirituality means the faith on Supreme Reality. It is not necessarily the external religious ritual. Śaṅkaradeva's creed is more spiritual, than religious as it promotes only *bhakti* as a religious rite, which moulds people with moral inclination towards the world. *Śaṅkarī* scriptures are full of spiritual contents.
- (x) *Education in Sattras*- Arithmetic, alphabets of Assamese and Sanskrit in *Sācīpāt* and *tulāpat*, *khanikari vidyā*, *kākatī vidyā*, *bharālī*, *medhi*, *muktiyār*, *khāṭaniyār*, *hāṭimatā*, *nāmghariyā*, *nām-lagowā*, *pāṭhak*, *bhāgavatī*, *sūtradhār*, *likhak*, *ojā-pāli* and many other professions are the subjects of education.
- (xi) *Art and sculpture education*- This is called *khanikari vidyā*, which encompasses the works of altar (*thāpanā*), the throne (*āsana*), *thagā*, *karaṇi*, painting on wall and sculpting on posts of *nāmghar*, making masks and *cōmukhā* and painting on these etc.

4.4. *The Teacher in Śaṅkarī Teaching system:*

The foremost teacher of this system is Śaṅkaradeva himself as he started preaching his doctrine right from the event of playing the drama *Cihna-yātrā* or from his first *Harigṛha* at Bardovā. He has been declared by Mādhavadeva as the supreme *guru* of the *Śaṅkarī* education system, mainly by his *Guru-bhaṭimā*, a song sung in the praise of his master. He also praises his master by composing various verses in his *Nāma-ghoṣā* (Kalita, 2024). After Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva had to play the role of teacher of the *Śaṅkarī* system, to promote his master's ideology and keep it alive. After Mādhavadeva, their apostles have been disseminating this education system till today.

Presently the teachers of this system are found in the form of *dharmācārya* (*sattrādhikara*, *padādhikāra*, *śaraṇācārya*, *bhāgavatī*, *pāthak* etc.), scholars, *nṛtyācārya* (*Śaṅkarī* dance exponents), *gāyaṇa* (*Śaṅkarī* music experts), *sūtradhārī* or *Śaṅkarī* drama experts, *Śaṅkarī* mask making sculptors, *Śaṅkarī* make-up artists, *Śaṅkarī* drama dress designers, *bāyaṇa* or *Śaṅkarī* instrument (*khola*, *tāla*) players, *Kīrtana-ghoṣā* singers (*nāmācārya* or *nāma-prasaṅga* expert), *bargīt* singers, *khanikars*, painters and so on. These kinds of professionals have been engaged in *sattras*, *nāmghars*, educational institutions or in cultural centres.

Very recently, school, college and universities have opened departments of *Śaṅkarī* music, dance and dramas. Experts in *Śaṅkarī* literature and culture have been engaged as teachers in these institutions.

4.5. Teacher-Pupil Relation:

Śaṅkaradeva has shown his utmost concern on the importance of the teacher-pupil relation and realized how the success of a teaching-learning system may be dependent on a faithful and respectful relation between these two. Though many examples may be cited to justify this concern, the most important example can be drawn from his doctrinal scripture *Bhakti-ratnākara*. Śaṅkaradeva has started this Sanskrit scripture by the introductory chapter named *Bhaktijñānapradaguruḥ pūjyatam*, where the conceptual and practical worth of *guru* and veneration to *guru* is established by the *ślokas* from Sanskrit scriptures like *Śrīmadbhāgavata* and with their explication in Sanskrit itself (Kalita 2024). Mādhavadeva has cited example of adoration to *guru* by his life-long bearings and by composing many other verses on the essence of a real teacher (*guru*).

5. Conclusion:

From above analysis, it is apparent that prior to the introduction of modern education system by the British during 19th century, Assamese society was mostly governed by *Śaṅkarī* teaching. Though the present society is highly influenced by modern education, the inner character and the cultural life of Assamese people have been greatly reflected in terms of the values implanted by the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva. The most important inclusions of modern education are the Science and

Mathematics. The most important objective of science education is to develop scientific temperament in the people and the most important objective of mathematics is to develop logical thinking in men. Both these objectives are seen in the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva in the form of Vedāntic treatment, socialistic view, simplicity in worshipping, avoiding superstitions, embracing class and casteless society, belief in attributes of men rather than race and so on. Thus, the transformation led by Śaṅkarī teaching in medieval Assam has been proved as the working spiritual force even in this modern time.

Bibliography:

1. Barua, Birinchi Kumar, History of Assamese literature, Sahitya Academi, 1964, 6th Print, 2016
2. Bezbaroa, Lakshminath, *Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva*, Bani Mandir, 2003
3. Chutia, Sonaram et al Ed. *Mahapurūṣ Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmṛta*, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, 1998
4. Dutta Baruah Harinarayana Eds. *Daiyari's Sankar-Madhav Carit*, Dutta Baruah Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 2016
5. Kakati, Banikanta, *Banikanta Racanawali*, PBA, 2018
6. Kalita, J.C., *Śaṅkarī Siksha Paddhati*, an article published in the souvenir, *Bhakati Bhandar*, 2024, on the occasion of 576th Birth Anniversary of Guru Srimanta Śaṅkaradeva, Editor, Pratibha Deka.
7. Lekharu, Upen, Eds. *Kathā Guru Carit*, Dutta Baruah & Co. ,1987
8. Neog, Dr. Maheswar, eds, *Guru Carit Kathā*, G.U. Publication Division, 2003
9. Neog, Maheswar, *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*, LBS Publications, 2017, reprint2021
10. Neog, Maheswar, *Sri Sri Śaṅkaradeva*, Chandra Prakash, 1999
11. Saikia, Dr. Nagen, *Asamīyā Mānuhar Itihās*, Katha Publications, 2017, reprint 2021
12. Sastri, B.N. *Sanskrit in Assam through the Ages*, translated by Kiran Sharma, Asam Sanskrit Mahasabha, Guwahati

Hinduism and the Doctrine of *Eka Śaraṇa Nāma Dharma*

Dr. R.C. Borah

The epithet Hindu is derived from the name, the early Indians gave to the Indus River- SINDHU. The Persians pronounced it Hindu. The original name of India as found in their religious scriptures is Jambudwip or Bharatavarsa. After the Muslim invasion there was a revival of the Persian name the form of Hindusthan and the inhabitants of the country were called Hindus that is those who observed the indigenous religious traditions (A.L. Basam). The doctrines of Hindu Philosophy are collectively called by one name, Hindu Religion, whereas Hinduism means a religious system (Borwanker, 1938). Hindu religion and Hinduism are so closely connected that people often mistake one for the other. The doctrine of Hindu Philosophy is the same as they were and will remain the same. It is the Hinduism which has made the Hindu religion a complex system of more rituals to be adopted by the Hindus. Hinduism today is so complex that common people have been bewildered and there is no common way of worshipping god and no common opinion about their religion.

The real spirit of Hinduism right from the Vedas through upanisadic age of the *Gītā* upto the age of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* remains almost the same. It is the ritualistic aspect that has undergone various changes, most of which have no connection with the real spirit of Hindu religion. Even in the *Ṛgveda*'s time, it was declared that the Supreme is one, learned call it by different names. It was *ātmān* or *Brahman* in the upanisadic age and in the *Gītā* it is Śrī Kṛṣṇa who is the subject matter of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. Therefore, like major religions of the world, the Hindu religion is also basically monotheistic.

In the *Ṛgveda*'s time, there was no indication of image worship the religion. Though it was not completely monotheistic, there were passages in the hymns of the *Ṛgveda* which indicate that the unity of Godhead was realized by the Indo-Aryans (Bonwanker, 1939). During the age of the *Yajur-Veda*, mechanical form of religion based on complicated system of elaborate ceremonies requiring the service of highly skilled priests replaced nature worship. Priesthood was not so much prominent in the Vedas, however, the Brahmins built elaborate system of rituals and ceremonies on the basis of fairy tales and nursery stories about the denizens of heaven. The Brahmins receive payments in cash and they enrich themselves as well as their Kinsmen. Thus the first privileged class in the Indian Society came into being to promote and preserve culture. Their sole concern was to device means for perpetuating class dominance. Not satisfied with advocacy of their cast superiority as described in the Vedas, the Brahmins produced a new series of sacred books (?) called *Brāhmanas* to strengthen their hold on the society. The most remarkable thing about the *Brāhmanas*, however, is that they have elevated them with the gods!..... Morality finds no place in these systems (Bajaj, 1975).

There is significant material in this *Samhitās* to show that the Vedic hymns were produced and composed by men, but the Brahmins ignoring the evidence tried to present the Vedas as divinely revealed knowledge. The divine or non-human origin of the Vedas is of a much later period (Joshi, 1975). The Brahmins were responsible for the re-organisation of the Hindu religious system or unknowingly hold the doctrines that were contrary to the doctrines of Hindu religion. The so called priestly class had formed a kind of religious aristocracy, which it wanted to retain for all time to come. The priestly class was the sole authority of the religious scriptures and the

people of the lower order were denied education and it was the whole and sole cause why the Hindu priests dared to interpolate the scriptures even contrary to Vedic dictate. Some *śloka*s were interperated in the *Manu-smṛti*, which is the source of social inequality and disharmony among the Hindus. The teachings of the *Manu-smṛti* were quite contrary to the teachings of the Vedas. But the supremacy of *bhakti-mārga* over that of *jñāna-mārga* and *karma-mārga* as declared in the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* was left in the oblivion (*Gītā* 9.34, 9.30-31, 12.66, 8.55). The ultimate reality is a personal God of grace. *Bhakti* is the favourite and the most adequate way to attain *mokṣa* (salvation). This supreme doctrine of the Hindu religion is found in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. This supreme scripture is the outcome of all the knowledge and is complete and most correct Hindu religious scripture. The *bhakti* religion of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* is prominent in the *Gītā* although in some passages God is the Impersonal *Brahma* of the predominantly monistic upanishadic philosophy (Winternitz 1962). This most sacred scripture the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* was composed by Vyāsa, where he decried the ritualistic ceremonies like *tap*, *jap* etc. and stressed on *bhakti-mārga* only.

The *Bhāgavata dharma* or *Vaiṣṇava* religion was at first adopted by the *Ālvārs* in the 7th to 10th century by the Dravidians in South India. This fresh and vital religion did not aid in the ascendancy of Hinduism in South India and exerted a strong and lasting effect on Hinduism as it exists today. This *Vaiṣṇava* movement spread almost all over India. There was neither any caste barrier, nor any intermediary priest between God and devotee and bartering system in the name of religion was abolished. In Assam, Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva preached *Vaiṣṇavism* and this faith of Hindu religion is known as *Eka Śaraṇa Nāma Dharma*, in the 15th century. Śaṅkaradeva studied all the Hindu scriptures and started his social reformation on the basis of his faith. He composed scriptures mostly in the local Assameselanguage. Moreover, he translated most of the portion of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* from Sanskrit to Assamese. His most important work is the *Kīrtana-ghoṣā*. He used songs and drama for propagation of his faith. The main features of *Eka Śaraṇa Nāma Dharma* are:

1. Worshiping of only one personal God who is Lord Kṛṣṇa.

2. Mode of worship is *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* and entire ritualistic section of the Vedas are rejected by Śaṅkaradeva as it does not conform to the doctrine of *bhakti*.
3. Śaṅkaradeva stressed on the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* only.
4. There is no casteism, untouchability etc.
5. Acquisition of *bhakti* in the company of *Sat-sang* (pious company)

Mahāpuruṣa Mādhabdeva was his dearest disciple, who was equally brilliant and a prolific writer. He also composed several books, devotional songs. Amongst the scriptures the *Nāma-ghoṣā* is the most prominent one which is his *magnum opus* and a great wealth to us and for the entire mankind. Both of them fought a lifelong struggle to rescue the people from the cobweb of Brahmanical rites who exploited the mass people. *Nāma-dharma* is basically different from other pan-Indian *bhakti* movements.

Conclusion:

It may be concluded that on the fertile soil of the Vedas, the Geeta, the Bhagavata Sankardeva formulated his unique interpretation on Hinduism and founded his Bhakti cult, *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* (Das, 1994). If anybody would go through Hindu religion considerably, he would find the elements of universal religion on in it, but to carry strong conviction to the common people, it is necessary to remove the disabilities that have been introduced. Śaṅkaradeva had removed these disabilities about five centuries back. He had united all the people of N.E. region of India including all the tribes and formed a classless society. This is the only pure fraction of Hindu religion which is also the *Yugadharmā*.

Bibliography:

1. A.L. Basham, *The Wonder was India*, New York, 1954
2. V.A. Borwankar. *Complexing of Hindu Religion*, 1939
3. S.V.Mecasland, G.E. Cairns and D.C., *The Religious of the World*.

4. P.N. Bajaj, 1975, *The Role of Bhagavata Gita in Indian History* Sterling Pub. Pvt. Ltd.
5. Laxman Sastri Joshi, *Origin of the Vedas*, 1962
6. A.C. Bose, 1970, *The Call of the Vedas*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay
7. W. Winternitz. *A History of India*, 1962
8. P.C. Das. *Hindusim as Interpreted by Sankardeva*. 1994

**Śankaradeva Studies as a Prospective Academic
Programme
within the Purview of IKS
with Special Reference to NEP 2020**

Moyuri Bora

Abstract:

The National Education Policy 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century that aims to address the many growing developmental imperatives of our country. This Policy proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the educational structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the goals of 21st century education, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), while building upon India's traditions and value systems. It lays emphasis that education must develop not only cognitive capacities of individual learners— both the 'foundational capacities' of literacy and

numeracy and ‘higher-order’ cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem solving – but also social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions. The Para 4.27 of the policy document declares that “Knowledge of India” will include knowledge from ancient India and modern India, and a clear sense of India’s future aspirations with regard to education, health, environment, etc. It is a fact that Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was a versatile genius who still remains in the heart of the people and occupies a very distinct place in the domain of social, cultural and religious history of Assam throughout the ages. He was the architect of modern Assam, who had a deep understanding of the Vedas, the Vedānta, the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. On the basis of his understanding of these scriptures he propounded a faith of his own which is known as *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*.

Key Words: *NEP,2020, Indian Knowledge System, Śaṅkaradeva Studies*

1. Introduction:

Education plays a very powerful role in nation building, deciding the future of the nation and destiny of its people. It has a long-lasting impact in terms of growth and development of the nation and citizens. The National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP-2020), which replaces the National Policy on Education,1986, is an inclusive framework aiming at transforming the entire education system from elementary to higher level with an immense scope to revamp the education system of the 21st century India. It lays particular emphasis on the development of the creative potential of each individual. It is based on the principle that education must develop not only cognitive capacities—both the ‘foundational capacities’ of literacy and numeracy and ‘higher-order’ cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem solving—but also social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions. The policy document of the NEP 2020 envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is, Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower. It also envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy of the institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and constitutional values, bonding

with one's country, and a conscious awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world. The vision of the policy is to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen.

In Para 4.27 of the National Education Policy 2020, there is a mention about the "Knowledge of India" which include knowledge from ancient India and modern India, and a clear sense of India's future aspirations with regard to education, health, environment, etc. These elements will be incorporated in an accurate and scientific manner throughout the curriculum wherever relevant; in particular, Indian Knowledge Systems, including tribal knowledge and indigenous and traditional ways of learning will be covered and included in most of the branches of learning. Then there is a detailed discussion about the NEP provisions and initiatives relating to promotion of Indian languages, arts and culture in chapter 22.

It is a fact that Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was a versatile genius who still remains in the heart of the people and occupies a very distinct place in the domain of social, cultural and religious history of Assam throughout the ages. He was the architect of modern Assam, who had a deep understanding of the Vedas, the Vedanta, the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. On the basis of his understanding of these scriptures he propounded a faith of his own which is known as *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*. He dealt with all the branches of culture and social structure to fulfill the needs of the people of Assam. He was all and all was in him. He was a scholar, writer, poet, lyricist, composer, playwright, singer, musician, philosopher, sociologist, educationist, environmentalist and theorist and so on. He established the *sattras* and the *nāmghars* which are not only religious institutions but also a network for the development of communication. His literary and artistic contributions are regarded as the living tradition of Assam. To understand this great soul and to apply his teaching in our practical life, we must study his contributions in immense detail with lots of dedication and utmost scientific approach. At the same time, study of his life and works has great academic and scholastic importance. It is worth mentioning that during the last several decades, lots of dedicated scientific studies have been done in

Assam by eminent personalities of different disciplines and backgrounds from various angles. In due course of time, it has become a separate disciplinary field which is termed as Śāṅkaradeva Studies. It is multidisciplinary in nature and dedicated to the life and works of the great saint. There are lots of scopes for inclusion of Śāṅkaradeva Studies as an academic programme within the purview of Indian Knowledge System as suggested by NEP 2020. It is worth mentioning that the programme which is dedicated to this great soul will surely benefit the future generation. The aim of this particular study is not merely to discuss the works of the great saint but to discuss the contributions of other eminent personalities throughout the ages that mainly focus the philosophy of the great saint which is known as Śāṅkaradeva Studies in the academic sphere.

2. Objective of the Study:

The objective of the study is to focus on the contributions of different eminent personalities of Assam to the Śāṅkaradeva Studies and its relevance to the NEP 2020 under the purview of Indian Knowledge System.

3. Significance of the Study:

It is not necessary to mention that throughout the ages Mahapurūṣa Śrīmanta Śāṅkaradeva has become an integral part of the life of Assamese people who had contributed to all spheres of life and learning. He was not a person, he was an institution. The aim of this study is not to evaluate the works of this great saint. The real objective is to investigate the contributions of different eminent personalities of Assam to the field of Śāṅkaradeva Studies. This author will try to focus them on multidisciplinary angles.

4. Limitation of the Study:

It is true that during the last several decades lots of dedicated scientific studies have been done in Assam and outside Assam about the life and works of Śrīmanta

Śaṅkaradeva. It is not possible to include all these works in this study because of time constraint and word limitation. It will be limited to the works of some selected personalities only.

5. Methodology of the Study:

This paper is chiefly an analytical research based on secondary sources of data. The pertinent data have been gathered from different books, research papers, articles published in journals, magazines, dissertations, thesis, websites etc. For analyzing the collected data, the descriptive method has been adopted.

6. Discussion:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 focuses on the traditional knowledge of India that is both sustainable and strives for the welfare of all. In order to enhance the knowledge power of the century, it is imperative that one should understand the heritage, the country and teach the world the 'Indian way' of doing things. In other words, this new education policy lays special emphasis on the promotion of Indian languages, Arts and Culture. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's contributions to all these spheres are immense and far reaching. His primary works and the subsequent studies done on the life and works of the great saint are real evidence of this fact. The particular movement in that direction was started by Lakshminath Bezbarua during the Jonaki era which is regarded as the Romanticism in Assamese Literature. Through his literary works, he tried to establish Śaṅkaradeva among the masses by bringing him out of the monastic sphere. The legacy was continued by his contemporaries and still it is going on. All these studies have tried to present the multi-faceted genius of this great saint from different angles and as a result his multi-dimensional personality emerges out as a saint, religious reformer, a social engineer, a humanist, a cultural icon, a dramatist, a singer, a composer, a poet, an educationist, an environmentalist, an entrepreneur, a scientist and so on. Later on it is termed as Śaṅkaradeva Studies which has great academic and scholastic importance in the present scenario. It is multidisciplinary in nature. Considering the far reaching impact of the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva and the systematic and scientific studies done till today, there are lots of scopes for introducing Śaṅkaradeva Studies as an academic programme within the purview of Indian Knowledge System. Now, let

us discuss the contributions of some of the selected eminent personalities in the field of Śaṅkaradeva Studies.

Lakshminath Bezbarua in his biographical works *Śaṅkaradeva* (1912) and *Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva and Śrī Śrī Mādhavdeva* (1914) depicts the life of Śaṅkaradeva from a modernist point of view. He also put emphasis on the *Vaiṣṇava* faith and the philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva. This work served a revivalist purpose in strengthening the Neo-*Vaiṣṇavite* base of the modern Assamese society. It must be accepted that he was the pioneer of Śaṅkaradeva Studies, who established the saint on the academic field both inside and outside of the state. Banikanta Kakati in his book *Śaṅkaradeva* (1923) provided vital information pertaining to the life and works of Śaṅkaradeva. The role and multidimensional activities of the *nāmghars* have also been discussed by him. He commented that the *nāmghars* are something like village parliaments. Their affairs are conducted on a purely democratic principle; every household in the village had an equal voice in the management of affairs. Hara Mohan Das in his book *Śaṅkaradeva, A study* (1945) has discussed Śaṅkaradeva and his great contributions with immense details. The biographical account of Śaṅkaradeva from his ancestors to his last day of life, his precious teachings, philosophy, and ideologies, the *sattra* culture in Assam with reference to its impact in Assamese society, his great literary contributions, and his contributions towards arts and crafts are discussed elaborately in this book. Nabin Ch. Bhuyan in his book *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Saṅkar-Mādhav* (1949) discusses the life and philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. He discusses the greatness of these two great saints of Assam in eight articles dedicated to various aspects of Neo-Vaiṣṇavaism preached by them. We can have a better idea about the life and philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva after reading this book. Maheswar Neog in his scholarly and important work *Śrī Śaṅkaradeva* (1949) discusses about the life and works of the great saint from different angles. This book is divided into six parts. The first four parts are related to Śaṅkaradeva's life and last two parts are about his literary, linguistic, social, political, cultural and philosophical contributions. The first four parts are narrative and last two parts are analytical.

Sonaram Chutia, commonly popular as *Vaiṣṇava Paṇḍit*, in his very first book *Nāma Dharma Prakāśa* (1954) discusses *Śaṅkarī Culture* and *Mahāpuruṣī Dharma*

in the light of the philosophy of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. He was a noted literary figure of Assam and his contributions to the domain of Śaṅkaradeva Studies cannot be forgotten. He composed various books and scholarly articles in different magazines which were highly influenced by Śaṅkarī Culture and *bhakti* preached by Śaṅkaradeva. Satyendranath Sarma in his doctoral thesis *Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Movement and the Sattra Institutions of Assam* (1955) was published later by Gauhati University in book form which describes various aspects of *sattra* institutions established by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. We also have an idea about the religious background, political aspects and social structure of that time from this scholarly work. Birinchi Kumar Barua (1960) in his book *Śaṅkaradeva: Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam* describes how the contemporary social life, economic condition and other relevant aspects had influenced the creative attributes of Śaṅkaradeva. Dimbeswar Neog in his book *Jagat Guru Śaṅkaradev* (1963) gives us an idea about the philosophical aspects of Vaiṣṇavaism preached by Śaṅkaradeva through the discussion of his life, genius qualities and authorship. Bap Chandra Mahanta in his book *Mahapurūṣa Śaṅkaradeva* (1964) discusses all the aspects of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva including his life, literary contribution, philosophy, religion, his social engineering, cultural contributions etc. He dedicated his whole life to the study of Śaṅkaradeva and contributed a lot to the field of Śaṅkaradeva Studies. Maheswar Neog in his book, published by Gauhati University, *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times: Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam* (1965) gives a very scholarly account of all the aspects of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. This particular work discusses the life and works of the great saint and his contributions to the various spheres of literature, culture, philosophy and society. Dimbeswar Neog in his very valuable work in Śaṅkaradeva Studies *Yugnāyak Śaṅkaradeva* (1967) discusses Śaṅkaradeva and his contributions to various fields of Assamese society with immense details. This book is regarded as milestone of Śaṅkaradeva Studies. Chakradhar Mahanta through his book *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradevar Dharma aru Paramparā* (1973) tries heartily to show how the *bhakti*-cult was spread or propagated by Śaṅkaradeva which is still flowing through various religious institutions in Assam. This book was written in Assamese in a very simple and lucid manner. Kesavananda Dev Goswami through his book *Life and Teaching of Mahāpurūṣa Śaṅkaradeva* (1982) discusses the varied life of the saint and his contributions to the society and culture of Assam with a broader perspective. He tries to give an idea about the higher quality of Śaṅkaradeva.

Sivanath Barman in his book *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva: Kṛti aru Kṛtitva* (1983) referred to the prevailing socio-economic condition responsible for the growth of the *Bhakti* Movement in India in general and Assam in particular. He also analyzed how Śaṅkaradeva popularized a simple way of devotion to God by avoiding expensive rituals like sacrifices, pilgrimages, elaborate worships etc. Dr. Hiren Gohain in his book *Asamīyā Jātīya Jīvanat Mahāpuruṣā Paramparā* (1987) studied Śaṅkaradeva from Marxist perspective and on the basis of historical materialism. Kesavananda Dev Goswami in his book *Post Śaṅkaradeva Vaiṣṇava Faith and Culture of Assam* (1988) provided a broader perspective to Śaṅkaradeva Studies from his observation of the life and works of Śaṅkaradeva. He dedicated his whole life in studying Śaṅkaradeva from all aspects, the life of the saint, his contribution to the Assamese society and culture and so on. Sivanath Barman's another prominent contribution to Śaṅkaradeva Studies is *An Unsung Colossus: An Introduction to the Life and Works of Śaṅkaradeva* (1999). In this book he discusses Śaṅkaradeva's contribution to the Assamese society in immense details along with new the revolutionary value system in which *Gurujanā* is introduced through his preaching of the philosophy of *bhakti*.

Śaṅkaradeva (2008) and *Asamīyā Mānuhar Itihās* (2013) are two significant works of Nagen Saikia through which he contributed a lot to the Śaṅkaradeva Studies of his times. In these two books, he discusses the multi-faceted genius of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and his contributions to the Assamese literature, culture, society, philosophy etc. on the basis of scientific and systematic studies. Pradip Jyoti Mahanta in his books *Śaṅkaradeva Movement: Its Cultural Horizons* (2007) and *Śaṅkaradevar Śilpalok: Nandanikata aru Samajdarsita* (2007) discusses the philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva on the basis of religious, social and cultural perspectives. Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti in his book *Pūrṇāṅga Kathā Gurucarit* (2007) made a comparative study of the *Caritas* of Śaṅkaradeva. He draws vital conclusions regarding the chronology of various major events associated in the life of Śaṅkaradeva by a detailed comparative study of all the hagiographies, by cross examining the historical facts and in certain cases even by analyzing in the light of some established scientific theories. The same author in his book *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva: a Multi-faceted Genius* (2015) discusses Śaṅkaradeva from sociological perspective and how the saint can be regarded as one of the pioneer of socialist of the entire world. *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva: The Great Master* (2009) and *Beautiful Mind of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva* (2012) are

two important books of Dayananda Pathak through which he tries to critically appraise the saint on the basis of his life and his activities of superior qualities for which he remains in the heart of Assamese people.

Besides all these, there are lots of other studies that focus on different aspects of the multi-faceted genius of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. Different educational institutions and other socio-religious organizations are also dedicatedly engaging themselves in that direction. It is a continuous process which has lots of scope for development in the academic as well as research domain. The National Education Policy 2020 in its preamble mentions very clearly that the Indian education system produced great scholars and Indian culture and philosophy have had a strong influence on the world. These rich legacies to world heritage must be nurtured and preserved for posterity and researched, enhanced, and put to new uses through our education system. Śaṅkaradeva Studies as an academic genre has already earned a particular place in the universities and research domain. The movement started by Lakshminath Bezbarua and carried forward by other eminent personalities has lots of scope for inclusion as an academic branch under the purview of Indian Knowledge System in all levels of learning from Secondary to PG. Such approach will systematically transfer the philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva from one generation to another which is one of the major aims of introducing Indian Knowledge System in NEP 2020.

7. Conclusion:

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is a versatile genius who has contributed to the entire sphere of Assamese society. He is an institution. To understand and to evaluate this great personality, lots of scholarly works have been done in Assam since the publication of scholarly articles by Lakshminath Bezbarua in the leaves of renowned Assamese monthly magazine the '*Bahī*'. It is a movement started by Lakshminath Bezbarua and carried forward by other eminent personalities till the present days. Scholars are of the opinion that the most notable contributions of this particular magazine of the modern period of Assamese literature is the creation of Śaṅkaradeva Studies. The articles published in the '*Bahī*' such as '*Mahāpuruṣā Dharmar Baiśiṣṭa*', '*Mahāpuruṣ Śaṅkaradevar Harinām Kīrtan Tattva*', '*Śrīmanta Śaṅkar Pracārita Vaiṣṇava Dharma*', '*Kuri Śatikāt Śrīmanta Śaṅkar*', '*Śaṅkarī Sāhityar*

Baiṣiṣṭa’ etc. established Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and rejuvenated his philosophy among the masses. It must be admitted that Śaṅkaradeva Studies is an emerging discipline in research through which a lot of systematic and scientific studies have been done focusing on the various aspects of the life and works of Śaṅkaradeva from different angles. It can surely be a prospective academic programme within the purview of Indian Knowledge System as suggested by the National Education Policy 2020. The works carried out by the eminent personalities and other researchers during the past years will surely help the policy makers in that direction. Such endeavor will definitely establish Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva in national as well as international level.

Bibliography:

1. Barman, Sivanath. *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva: Kṛti aru Kṛtitva*. Assam Publishing Company, Guwahati. 1986.
2. Barua, Birinchi Kumar. *Śaṅkaradeva Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam*. Bina Library, Guwahati.1960.
3. Barua, Madhurjyaa Mandit. *Adhunik Axom aru Śaṅkaradeva Charcha*. Rekha Prakashan, Guwahati, 2019.
4. Bora, Surendranath. *Śaṅkarī Istāhār*, Sankardev Mission, 2013.
5. Borkakoti, Sanjib Kr. *Pūrṇāṅga Kathā Gurucarit*. Bani Mandir, Guwahati, 2007.
6. Borkakoti, Sanjib Kr. *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva aru Bhāratvarṣa*. Purbanchal Prakash, Guwahati, 2015.
7. Gohain, Hiren. *Śaṅkaradeva Sandarśan*. Santi Prakashan, 2013.
8. Gohain, Hiren. *Asamīyā Jātīya Jīvanat Mahāpuruṣā Paramparā*. Alibat Prakashan, Guwahati. 2016.
9. Goswami, Kesavananda Dev. *Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva*. Alibat Prakashan, Guwahati. 2018.
10. Mahanta, Bapchandra. *Śaṅkaradevar Byaktitya aru Sattra Vyavastha*. Publication Board, 2005.
11. Mahanta, Pradip Jyoti. *Śaṅkaradevar Silpalok: Nāndanikata āru Samājdarsita*. Purbanchal Prakash, Guwahati. 2007.
12. Mazumdar, Bimal. *Śaṅkaradeva Carcā*. Banalata, Guwahati. March, 2016.
13. Neog, Maheswar. *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times: Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam*. LBS Publication, Guwahati. 1965.
14. Neog, Maheswar. *Śaṅkaradeva the Great Integrator*. Omsons Publications, New Delhi. 2011.

15. Pathak, Dayananda. *Beautiful Mind of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva*. Aak – Baak, Guwahati. 2012.
16. Phukan, Bimal. *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam*. Kaziranga Books, Guwahati. 2010.
17. Saikia, Akon Chandra. *Śaṅkarī Bhaktibādar Dārśanik Tattva*. Aak – Baak, Guwahati. 2016.
18. Saikia, Chandraprasad (ed.) “Asamar Bātarikākat–Ālocanīr Derśa Bacharīā Itihās” Guwahati. 1998.
19. Saikia, Nagen. *Asamīyā Mānuhar Itihās*. Katha Publication, Guwahati. 2013.
20. Sarma, Nabin Chandra. *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva*. Banalata, Guwahati. 2014.
21. Sarma, Satyendranath. *Neo–Vaiṣṇavite Movement and the Satra Institutions of Assam*. Guwahati University, Guwahati. 1966.
22. Tamuli Lakshminath (ed.) *the Bāhī*, Asam Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati. 2005.
21. <http://www.tributetosankaradeva.org>

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's Ideal Society

Mr. Suraj Chetry

Abstract:

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, the luminary of Assamese culture, sage, spiritual leader, and reformer, envisioned an ideal society rooted in spiritual devotion, equality, and cultural unity. His vision of an ideal society found vivid expression in his literary and artistic creations. His teachings, grounded in Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, sought to transcend social divisions and establish a framework for collective welfare and ethical living. This paper explores the underpinnings of his vision, the societal values he espoused through his literary works and the findings regarding the implementation and relevance of his ideas in contemporary society like the great western and Indian philosophers who anticipated different theories and views of an ideal society. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva forwarded his own theory of ideal society which is easily and comfortably accessible in the institutions like the *nāmghars* and the *sattras* and the trend he developed to bring everyone under a single roof to create an ideal society.

Key words: ideal society, *nāmghars* and *sattras*, teaching through performing, moral discipline, culture, spirituality.

1. Introduction:

An ideal society is defined as a society that operates under ethically, morally, spiritually and socially expectable standards. Such societies do not experience severe activities that are detrimental to human development and economic growth. Mahapuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, a 15th–16th century Assamese saint, reformer, and cultural icon, projected an ideal society deeply rooted in spiritual values, ethical conduct, and social harmony. He was a towering figure in the religious and cultural history of Assam through his Neo-Vaiṣṇavism Movement in Assam. He sought to create a society based on devotion (*bhakti*), equality, and mutual respect. He sought to address social inequalities and establish a society where devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa acted as a unifying force. He strongly opposed to the policy of caste discrimination. So, he expressed it through his books and embraced everyone equally. He adopted a socialist, democratic policy by giving discipleship to people of different castes and so he was able to bring unity in Assamese society. His teachings emphasized inclusivity, moral discipline, and the use of culture as a means of spiritual and social reform. The institutions he established, such as *nāmghars* and *sattras*, continue to influence Assamese society in the formation of ideal society. He envisioned a harmonious society free from discrimination, where spiritual devotion and ethical conducts were central. His writings, including the *Kīrttana-ghoṣā* and *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* translations, alongside his contributions to art, music, and drama, served as powerful vehicles for spreading his vision of social reform and spiritual enlightenment towards an ideal society.

2. Literature Review:

Plato in the *Republic* lists three classes in his ideal society: 1. Producers or workers: the labourers who make the goods and services in society. 2. Auxiliaries: soldiers who protect the society. 3. Guardians: those who keep order in the society, that is, the Philosopher Kings and Queens. An ideal society or Utopian society is defined as a society where everything is as good as it possibly can be for everyone living in that

society. However, this type of society has never existed before and continues to be a dream that remains locked up in minds (Plato).

Thinker	Core Idea	Society Structure	Property System	Governance Style
Plato	Justice through hierarchy	Class-based	Common for rulers	Philosopher kings
Thomas More	Communal harmony	Egalitarian	No private property	Rational Deliberation
Karl Marx	Classless society	Classless and stateless	Communal ownership	Collective decision making
John Rawls	Justice fairness	Democratic and fair	Redistributive justice	Participatory democracy

A Comparative Summary of the great western thinkers is stated below after reviewing the Literature. These thinkers offer diverse and thought-provoking perspectives on the nature and structure of an ideal society, each highlighting different pathways to justice, equity, and harmony.

Great Indian thinkers like Swami Vivekananda proposed an 'Ideal Society' that would take the best aspects from different periods in a society's evolution. Specifically, it would have the knowledge and culture from the periods dominated by priests, warriors, and traders. It would also have the ideal equality of the period dominated by labourers (Swami, 1907)

Ideal society in Indian history refers to a vision characterized by social and economic equity, as articulated by leaders like Gandhiji and Nehru. Mahatma Gandhi's ideal society is the *Rāmrājya* (the reign of righteousness) which emphasized principles of truth (*satya*), nonviolence (*ahimsā*), equality, and self-reliance. He advocated for a decentralized system of governance where villages functioned as self-sufficient units, fostering economic and social independence. Gandhi's ideal society

was free from exploitation, class distinctions, and untouchability, relying on the moral and spiritual growth of individuals. He believed that the pursuit of nonviolence and truth could build a harmonious and equitable community (Parel, 1997).

Jawaharlal Nehru envisioned an ideal society rooted in democratic socialism, industrial progress, and scientific temper. He believed in creating a society free from poverty, inequality, and discrimination, with an emphasis on secularism and social justice. Nehru's vision included the modernization of India through planned economic development, education, and technological advancement while maintaining a commitment to democratic values and individual freedoms (Gopal, 1995).

This concept encompasses a philosophical ideal where the greatest good is achieved for the largest number and integrates core principles of liberty and harmony. Dr. Ambedkar developed ideas of constitutional theory and democracy. For instance, in one of his famous works titled *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) he writes, "My ideal would be a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity, which is only another name for democracy". (Ambedkar, 1936)

The key ideas of ideal society of Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar are highlighted below:

- **Vivekananda** envisioned a society grounded in spiritual unity, individual empowerment, and education.
- **Gandhi** sought a self-reliant and morally-driven society based on non-violence, truth, and simplicity.
- **Ambedkar** aimed for a democratic and egalitarian society, focusing on social and economic justice through legal reforms.

3. Methodology:

The methodology applied in this study is analytical. This paper analyses about the ideal society of Mahapuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva with reference to other western and Indian philosophers and thinkers. The data used here are collected from secondary sources.

4. Findings:

a. *Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's Vision of an Ideal Society:*

Śaṅkaradeva's ideal society was a harmonious blend of spirituality, equality, and cultural vibrancy. The following aspects highlight his vision:

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's ideal Society and teachings revolve around his Bhakti Movement's central figure, Lord Kṛṣṇa. Śaṅkaradeva drew his thoughts from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, emphasizing the universal and all-encompassing love of Kṛṣṇa. The Key mythological elements include:

- a. **Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Being:** Śaṅkaradeva's teachings positioned Kṛṣṇa as the sole object of devotion, transcending the need for ritualistic practices.
- b. **Divine Līlā:** The playful and passionate acts of Kṛṣṇa, as described in texts like the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, served as metaphors for divine grace and human values such as humility and service.
- c. **Bhakti as the Path to Liberation:** The *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*'s message of devotion (*bhakti*) resonated in Śaṅkaradeva's works, emphasizing that spiritual salvation is attainable through heartfelt devotion rather than rituals or caste-based hierarchies.

b. *Literary Contributions and Social Philosophy:*

Śaṅkaradeva's *Kīrtana-ghoṣā* and *Nām-mālikā* are compilations of devotional verses and hymns that simplified spiritual teachings, making them accessible to the masses. His translations and adaptations of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* into Assamese provided moral and spiritual guidance while fostering a sense of cultural unity. Through his writings, Śaṅkaradeva emphasized virtues such as truth, humility, and compassion, challenging the prevailing caste and class barriers.

c. *Spiritual Devotion and Bhakti:*

Mahapurūṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's theory is based centrally in his teachings of the concept of *Nāma-dharma*, the chanting and singing of the Lord's name, which he considered the simplest and most universal form of worship. (Neog, 1984). He

emphasized *bhakti* (devotion) as the path to salvation through single God, Lord Kṛṣṇa, as a unifying force for all irrespective of caste, class, or gender. His concept of *bhakti* (devotion) was inclusive, promoting the idea that true spiritual practice is accessible to people across all strata in the society. He propagated the chanting of the name of Kṛṣṇa (*Nāma-dharma*) as a simple and accessible way to attain spiritual fulfilment. He replaced elaborate rituals and sacrifices with devotional practices like chanting (*Nāma-dharma*), singing hymns (*bargīts*), and collective prayer by preaching Neo-Vaiṣṇavism. (Barua, 2003) Śaṅkaradeva founded the first ever *Kīrttan-ghar* at Bardovā to practice and preach Neo-Vaiṣṇavite faith during fifteenth century in Assam and propagated the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* (Neog, 1984)

d. Egalitarian Society:

Śaṅkaradeva tried to establish a classless society through his religious principle by removing untouchability and intolerance (Neog, 1984). Besides, his *bhakti* theory also emphasized on imparting democratic values like brotherhood, unity, equality by adopting right values of love, affection, peace etc (Barua, 2003).

Śaṅkaradeva rejected the rigid caste system and preached the equality of all human beings under the divine grace of Kṛṣṇa by promoting inclusive spaces for worship in *nāmghars*. His teachings encouraged people from different castes and backgrounds to come together for collective worship and cultural activities fostering a sense of collective identity. (Sharma, 2008)

e. Cultural Integration:

Śaṅkaradeva used his literary works, including the *Kīrttana-ghoṣā* and adaptations of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* to spread moral and spiritual teachings as a tool for spiritual and social reform to unite society (Neog, 1984). He innovated performing arts like the *aṅkīyā nāṭ* (one-act plays) and the *satirīyā* dance form, using these as a medium to communicate ethical values and unite people through shared cultural experiences (Barua, 2003). His *bargīts* (devotional songs) combined lyrical beauty and spiritual depth, fostering emotional and spiritual connection among the communities. These creative forms were accessible to the masses and served to break social barriers. He used

these instrumental tools in disseminating his teachings to foster cultural unity (Neog, 1984).

f. *Institutions for Social and Spiritual Development:*

Nāmgars: These community prayer halls served as centers for spiritual discourse, cultural activities, and community decision-making, promoting a sense of unity.

Sattras: Monastic institutions functioned as hubs of education, cultural preservation, and moral guidance. They played a crucial role in nurturing Śāṅkaradeva's ideals among the masses.

These institutions played a pivotal role in promoting the ideals of unity, education, moral discipline, and social cohesion, embodying his vision of an ideal society.

g. *Ethical Teachings:*

Śāṅkaradeva's works advocated for a society where virtues like honesty, non-violence, and respect for others were upheld. He opposed practices such as animal sacrifice and superstitious rituals, promoting instead a rational and compassionate approach to spirituality (Neog, 1984). He condemned practices that perpetuated inequality, superstition, or exploitation. He urged people to lead disciplined lives and contribute positively to society. One should look upon all living creatures as equal to one's own self. This is indeed the highest of all means. Śāṅkaradeva's religion thus puts equal stress upon the highest of the *upaniṣadic* teachings. His religious teachings emphasize the basic moral code to weave out the way to emancipation from all mundane sufferings (Sharma, 2008).

h. *Inclusivity and Universal Brotherhood:*

Śāṅkaradeva's teachings were inclusive, addressing both spiritual and practical concerns of life. He emphasized the oneness of humanity under God. He sought to erase divisions caused by social, religious, or regional identities. He sought to unite diverse communities under a common spiritual and ethical framework, promoting a sense of universal brotherhood (Barua, 2003).

i. *Community-Centered Living:*

The emphasis on collective participation in worship and cultural activities fostered a sense of belonging and social cohesion. He believed in uplifting the underprivileged and advocated for mutual support within the community (Sharma, 2008).

5. Analysis:

1. **Impact on Society:** Śaṅkaradeva's teachings led to significant reductions in cast

based discrimination and superstitious practices in Assamese society. His cultural innovations fostered a collective identity and unity among the people of Assam (Sharma, 2008).

2. **Relevance in the Contemporary Society:** Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's vision of an ideal society remains relevant in contemporary period by addressing modern societal challenges such as discrimination and social fragmentation. His emphasis on equality, inclusivity, and the integration of spirituality in everyday life through *nāmghars* inspire the efforts toward building harmonious and equitable communities (Neog, 1984). His teachings encourage breaking down barriers of caste, creed, and social status, fostering unity in diversity. The cultural and spiritual institutions he founded continue to serve as cornerstones of Assamese identity and values. (Barua, 2003)

3. **Challenges in Implementation:** While Śaṅkaradeva's teachings continue to inspire, modern influences and changing socio-economic conditions pose challenges to the preservation of teachings and practices of his vision (Neog, 1984). The commercialization of cultural practices and the erosion of traditional values threaten the integrity of his ideals. (Sharma, 2008) Efforts need to adapt his ideas to address contemporary issues without diluting their essence.

Key Differences between Śaṅkaradeva's and western philosopher's idea of ideal society.

Aspect	Sankardeva's Society	Western Philosophers' Society
Foundation	Spiritual and devotional	Rational, secular, or materialistic
Focus	Community and equality	Individual rights and liberty

Aspect	Sankardeva's Society	Western Philosophers' Society
Morality	Religious and ethical	Secular or humanistic
Cultural Unity	Based on shared spirituality and art	Based on laws, reason, or economic systems
Institutions	<i>Nāmghar</i> (spiritual hubs)	Political, legal, or economic institutions

6. Conclusion:

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's vision of an ideal society, as articulated through his literary and artistic creations, offers a profound blueprint for harmony, inclusivity, and spiritual growth. His emphasis on spiritual devotion, social equality, and cultural integration provides a timeless framework for addressing contemporary issues. He gave Assam a new discipline of faith in a single divinity. He was the greatest spiritual leader of Assam, who simplified the modes of religious practices with great emphasis on *bhakti* and he made it accessible to every members of the society by rendering the holy-scriptures into the language of the people.

His rejection of caste-based hierarchies and emphasis on devotion and ethical conduct continue to inspire generations. By revisiting and revitalizing his teachings, we can draw valuable lessons for building a just and compassionate society. His legacy reminds us that cultural and spiritual integration can be powerful tools for social reform and enduring unity.

Śaṅkaradeva's vision is more spiritual and community-driven, whereas the western philosophers often focused on rational, secular, and individualistic approaches to societal organization. Both, however, aimed at achieving harmony, justice, and well-being. Hence Śaṅkaradeva's ideal society was more realistic and in the modern era also. Most care is adopted to keep the trend of tradition and teaching of Śaṅkaradeva to achieve the ideal society.

Bibliography:

1. Ambedkar, B. R. *Annihilation of Caste*. N Delhi: Navayana, 1936.
2. Barua, B. K. *The Cultural Heritage of Assam*. Gauhati: Lawyers Book Stall, 2003.
3. Gopal, Sarvepalli. *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, Volume 2 (1947-1956)*. Harvard University Press. 1975.
4. Neog, M. *Religion and Art of Sankaradeva*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1984.
5. Parel, A. J. *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* (Cambridge Texts in Modern Politics). Cambridge University Press. (Ed.).1997
7. Sharma, S. *Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam*. Guwahati: Eastern Book House, 2008.
8. Vivekananda, Swami. *The Complete Works Bibliography of Swami Vivekananda*. Kalkota: Ashrama. Advaita,1907.
6. plato. n.d. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato%27s_political_philosophy#:text=Plato%20lists%20three%20classes%20in,the%20Philosopher%20Kings%20and%20Queens."The Republic .](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato%27s_political_philosophy#:text=Plato%20lists%20three%20classes%20in,the%20Philosopher%20Kings%20and%20Queens.)>Wikipedia (2024).

The Concept of Bhakti in the Teachings of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Sri Caitnyadeva: A Comparative Study

Mouchumi Borgohain.

Abstract:

Bhakti Movement originally began in South India in the 9th century with Śaṅkarācārya and spread all over India by the 16th century. It was made possible by the spiritual reformers of India who offered remarkable leadership in making the movement successful in their respective regions. Amongst the leaders of the *Bhakti* Movement, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva of Assam and Śrī Caitanya Mahaprābhū of Bengal were two great luminaries of Eastern India. Today, everyone is aware of the fact that these two great men uplifted the cause of humanity irrespective of caste, creed and religion. It is a matter of surprising coincidence that these two personalities were almost contemporary in their sacred life when there was hardly any influence of *bhakti* in socio-religious sphere of the society. The religious scenario was darkened by anarchy, animal sacrifice, ritualistic *śaktism* and *tantricism*. Though their lives, thoughts and approaches differ in great many ways, both of them were two prominent promoters of the *bhakti* cult in two different parts, Assam and Bengal, respectively. The main objective of the paper is to discuss the differences and the meeting points of the perspectives of *bhakti* in the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva and Caitanayadeva.

Key-words: *bhakti*, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, Sri Caitanayadeva, *kīrtana*

1. Introduction:

The path of *bhakti* or devotion is considered to be the most effective and assured way of attaining divine bliss. The word *bhakti* refers to an ardent longing for God with love, faith and whole-hearted surrender. *Bhakti* means the deepest mental situation, the heartiest love and feelings to God. The history of the *Bhakti* Movement of India is quite ancient. The concept of *bhakti* emerged in the Ṛgveda and in the subsequent *upaniṣads*. The seed of Neo-Vaiṣṇavite *bhakti* movement was first started in South India, with the passage of time this seed of *bhakti* movement spread all over India. This movement was guided by a galaxy of spiritual leaders, mystic saints and devotees, who carried the message of *bhakti* and spread it in different parts of India. Different systems of *bhakti* movement crept in medieval India and in the eastern parts in particular. Amongst the leaders

of the *bhakti* movement, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva of Assam and Śrī Chaitanaya Mahāprabhu of Bengal were two great luminaries of Eastern India.

2. Objectives:

In this paper, a humble effort is made to discuss the differences and the meeting points of the perspectives of *bhakti* in the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva and Chaitanyadeva.

3. Methodology:

Both descriptive and analytical methods are adopted in the process of conducting the study. The paper is prepared on the basis of secondary data like books, journals, internet etc.

4. Discussion:

In the 15th century A.D, a socio- religious movement popularly known as the *Bhakti* Movement had dominated the whole environment of India. It was made possible by the spiritual reformers of India who offered remarkable leadership in making the movement successful in their respective regions. Fortunately, two great saints emerged both in Assam and Bengal. They were Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Śrī Chaitanyadeva. It was the darkest period in the life of Bengal. Society was writhing under the curse of caste rigidity and tyranny of the rulers. It was Śrī Chaitanyadeva who saved the nation from total collapse. His undaunted spirit inspired millions to rise against the injustice and torture. It was he who for the first time broke down the barriers of caste and creed and through his preaching he had created an environment of spiritual consciousness. In the same way, Śaṅkaradeva inspired *bhakti* in Assam just like Chaitanyadeva and other reformers elsewhere. The giant figure of Assamese art and culture brought revolutionary changes to the tumultuous society, which was scattered and fear-ridden at his time. Śrī Śaṅkaradeva made the society free from anarchy and chaos and gathered people of all caste and creeds under the same roof and taught them to inculcate the noble ideals of peace and harmony. He caused a great social revolution by fighting against the anti-social elements prevailing in the 15th and 16th century Assamese society. Here is a discussion on the similarities and the dis-

similarities of the two great revolutionary thinkers.

Similarities:

The *Bhakti* Movement in Bengal began in the 15th century with the emergence of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, a saint and social reformer who preached the doctrine of *bhakti*. Caitany's teachings emphasized the importance of devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa as the supreme form of worship. According to Caitanya, God is personal, kind, affectionate, omniscient and omnipresent. He is also the creator, maintainer and annihilator of the world. In the same way, Śaṅkaradeva was also a great preacher of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism and also a great religious and social reformer. His religion explains its cardinal principles which enjoin the worship of one God which is formless i.e. *nirākāra*. He gave an abstract concept of God who is known as Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa. Their relationship, like the Lord and his servant, is very devotional.

Śrī Caitanya propounded his theory of *Acintya-Bheda-Abheda*. In Sanskrit *acintya* means inconceivable, *bheda* means different and *abheda* means Non-difference. It is a Vedic School that represents the doctrine of incomprehensible oneness in diversity. According to which the supreme reality and his creation is qualified with the attributes of difference and non-difference both. According to him the name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is *śabda avatāra* (incarnation of words). He said that mere chanting the name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is sufficient for his realization. So, according to him, *kīrtana*, the regular chanting and singing in chorus of Kṛṣṇa's name was the best way of attaining the ultimate aim of human life. He himself was mostly lost in performing *kīrtana*. His *kīrtana*'s were so enchanting that people lost themselves and wept and danced with him on the magic spell of the tunes of his *kīrtana*. In the same way, Śaṅkaradeva propagated a form of Vaiṣṇavism known as *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*, in which Lord Kṛṣṇa is considered to be the one, eternal, absolute and is achievable with unqualified devotion to him. The main teachings of this religion is *eka deva, eka seva, eka bine, nai keva*. He spread the liberal and humanistic doctrine of *bhakti*. The religious system of Śaṅkaradeva is strictly monotheistic and the worship of deities other than Kṛṣṇa is strictly prohibited. As a monist Śaṅkaradeva believed one reality which is Kṛṣṇa who has some attributes God or Kṛṣṇa who is the supreme being and the universe

is a manifestation of God. *Jīva* and *jagata* are the parts of him and dependant on him. So according to Śaṅkaradeva, the universe is like God. He believed that bondage and liberation are attached with human being. Bondage means *bandhan* which is attached with *karma*. *Bhakti* is the highest position above all in his religion. According to Śaṅkaradeva, *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* of the Lord's name in an attitude of complete surrender to the Lord is the only path prescribed. Śaṅkaradeva defined that there are four truths or reals in the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* in which one can take shelter. They are: *Guru, Deva, Nāma, and Bhakata*. The holy words of *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* are *eka deva, eka seva, eka bine, nai keva* and *eka saru, eka taru*. Thus, Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy of religion is the supremacy of *bhakti* and *bhakti* is the main path to attain God.

Humanism is the essence of Śaṅkaradeva's social, cultural and religious teachings. He aimed at moral and spiritual upliftment of the people in the society. He wanted to remove all sorts of social evils, ritualistic sacrifice and cruelty on men and animals. He opened the door of his religion to everyone irrespective of caste, class and social position. He made attempts for the removal of untouchability, establishment of democracy and social justice and development of art and culture. In the same way, Caitanya did not believe in any barriers of caste and creed and low caste Sanātanists also came into his fold. His Vaiṣṇavism is known as Bengal School of Vaiṣṇavism which has vast number of followers even in these days. His followers adore him as an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. Though he was not in favour of organizing any sect but his followers were so vast in numbers that they organized a sect of Vaiṣṇavism called *Gauḍīya Sampradāya*. They spread his message throughout Bengal and established temples dedicated to Lord Kṛṣṇa. The most famous of this *Sampradāya* the sub-sect called ISKCON (International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consiousness). One famous temple of ISKON is situated in Kolkata, which attracts thousands of devotees everyday by spreading the message *bolo Kṛṣṇa, kaho Kṛṣṇa, karo Kṛṣṇa śikṣā* or *hare Kṛṣṇa ,hare Rama*.

Dissimilarities:

Caitanya Mahāprabhu was so God intoxicated that he chanted the name Śrī Kṛṣṇa and his consort Rādhā and danced at the tunes of the *kīrtanas* which were organized very often. In this regard Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji writes: "According

to Bengal Vaiṣṇava tradition, Caitanya's *bhakti* or faith in God was on the basis of another kind of relationship that of love, the *mādhurya-bhāva* or self-forgetting love of a married women (*parakīyā* or another man's wife) for a lover which would impel her to abandon intense attachment to make light of everything that a good wife holds dear in life") (Chaliha 1998). Thus, Caitanyadeva's belief in the *mādhurya-rasa* or love relations between lover and beloved as the mode of worship of God by his devotees, does not find favour in Śaṅkaradeva's school of Vaiṣṇavism. The main plank of of Śaṅkaradeva's creed is imbedded in *eka-śaraṇa* which is superimposed upon the dualism of *dāsyā bhakti*. In Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* there is the existence of only one God that is the Lord Kṛṣṇa who is worshipped and the worship of other Gods and Goddesses is strictly prohibited. On the other hand, the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Cult is acknowledged wholeheartedly in the system of Caitanay's Vaiṣṇavism. However, this is not a very serious difference. Despite the seminal differences both of these saints share similar patterns by giving eternal emphasis of spreading the eternal message of *bhakti* among the people of Assam and Bengal.

5. Conclusion:

A brief comparison has been made here between the two great spiritual leaders of eastern India. Though these contemporary saints of Assam and Bengal were mainly spiritual leaders yet their preaching and works had changed the socio-cultural scenario of both. Both of them preached universal religion and inculcated universal brotherhood among the people of the world.

Bibliography:

1. Chaliha, Bhaba Prasad (Ed.). *Śaṅkaradeva, Studies in Culture*. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, 1998.
2. Neog, Maheswar. *Śaṅkaradeva And His Times: Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam*, LBS Publication, Guwahati. 1998.
3. Barua, M.K (Ed). *Bhakti Rasāmṛt: Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha*. 2018.

4. Banerjee, S. *Bhakti in Bengal: A Study of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism*. 2016
5. Das, S. *Bhakti and Society in Medieval India*, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Śaṅkaradeva's Neo-Vaiṣṇavism: The Way to Greater Assamese Society

Dr. Pragati Prasad Bora

Abstract

The issue of the formation of greater Assamese society and the name of Śaṅkaradeva, the great saint, scholar and social reformer from the northeastern region of India in the 15th and 16th centuries, is associated in such a way that it can't be discussed, leaving him aside. Śaṅkaradeva, taking inspiration from the pan-Indian Bhakti Movement of the 13th and 14th centuries, initiated a new socio-religious reform movement in the region called Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva, officially acknowledged as the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*.

His Neo-Vaiṣṇavism promoted mass integration through all of its manifestations, including *nāmghar*, *sattra*, *ṭol*, and literary creations like *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*, *Nāma-ghoṣā*, *Bhakti-ratnākara*, *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, *bargīt*, *aṅkīyā-nāṭ*, and other literary and cultural creations. Despite the fact that most of his aesthetic creations bear a message of integration, this paper will try to find out a few aspects of his ideology that had a direct impact on the social integration that resulted in the formation of the greater Assamese society.

Key words: Śaṅkaradeva, Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, social integration, greater Assamese society

1. Introduction:

The present-day Assamese society or community is a gift of Śaṅkaradeva, whom the people of northeast give the epithet Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. As his favourite disciple Mādhavadeva called him the *Sarvagunākara*, he was a great saint, scholar, religious preacher, poet, playwright, lyricist, composer, singer, actor, instrument-maker, instrument-player, director, educationist, sociologist, socialist, reformer, humanist, and so on with no comparison, “*jākeri nāhike upām*.”. Through his Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, he integrated the people of all castes, classes, communities, genders, the poor, the rich, the literate, the illiterate, the rulers, and the subjects who resided in the hills and plains of then three independent states: Asama, Kāmarūpa and Behāra, which now cover most of northeast India,. Although there were geographical and political restrictions, Śaṅkaradeva’s Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement broke all boundaries and integrated the people of the region in the name of culture and religion. What he did for the integration of the various racial and ethnic groups of northeast India ultimately resulted in the formation of a greater Assamese society with all modern aspects. Because of this, he is considered the father of the Assamese nation.

2. Objectives:

This paper has two objectives:

1. To have a general conception on Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva and
2. Elements in Neo-Vaiṣṇavism that facilitate social integration.

3. Methodology and Source:

Both descriptive and analytical methods are used in preparation of this paper, data are collected mostly from *Bhagavata-purāṇa*, *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*, *Nāma-ghoṣā*, and *carit-puṭhis*.

4. Findings and Discussion:

Although all aspects of his Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, called *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*, bear the seeds of integration, a few of them proved crucial in giving the basic Assamese society formed during the time of the Kāmarūpa kings and then during the days of the Āhom and Koc kings. Four such aspects of Śaṅkaradeva's ideology are:

4.1. Open Access:

Śaṅkaradeva's cult was open to all, irrespective of caste, class, age, gender, community, and social status. The fact that he allowed women and the *Śūdras* to join his cult and participate in religious discourses is regarded as a revolutionary act considering that Brahmanism was outlawing their right to practice their religion everywhere in India prior to the Bhakti Movement. He writes "O noble one, reveal to women and the *Śūdras* this greatest wisdom if they offer Me (Hari) devotion". (*Kīrttana* 1826)¹³ However, Śaṅkaradeva opened up his religion to include members of the so-called lower classes, including the *Gāro*, the *Bhoṭa*, the *Caṇḍāla*, the *Kirātas*, the *Yavanas*, and other *mlecchas*. In his philosophy there is no time, place, people, rule, restriction, or prescription when chanting the name of Hari. By merely chanting the name of Hari and seeking refuge at Hari, one can achieve emancipation (*Ghoṣā* 29). Śaṅkaradeva's dearest disciple, Mādhavadeva, writes that chanting the name of Hari is the purest religion, and all the beings have right in it. (*Ghoṣā* 118)¹⁴ He even did not forget to mention that in *varṇāśrama dharma*, entry is restricted. In all *varṇāśrama dharma* (class-based), he claims, one can exercise their rights in accordance with the regulations or standards established by it.

Chanting the name of Hari has no rules at all. Consequently, it is the best religion (*Ghoṣā* 119)¹⁵ Śaṅkaradeva kept his cult accessible to everyone while also assuring them that there would be no categorization of followers and that everyone would receive the same respect and opportunity. In its true sense, This religion knew

¹³ "*strī śūdra karai yadi āmāta bhakati/tāhāta kahibā iṭo jñāna mahāmati*"

¹⁴ "*parama nirmmala dharma harināma kīrttanata samasta prāñire adhikāra*"

¹⁵ "*varṇāśrama dharma yata yāra yena bidhi āche tārese kevala adhikāra/harināma kīrttanata*

nāhike niyama eko etekese dharmmamāge sāra//"

no caste, creed, or colour, and a universal spirit is the main principle of this faith. Śaṅkaradeva knew that Brahmanical pretensions had raised a barrier between man and God, and so both by pen and from the pulpit he endeavoured to break down all prejudices of caste, creed, and rank. His teachings embrace the lowliest of the lowly.

Due to this convenience, individuals from various ethnic and racial groups who lived in plains and hills alike accepted this religion and contributed to the formation of a larger Assamese society.

4.2. *The Concept of Single Deity: Monistic Philosophy:*

Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* is defined as taking refuge in one God, which is Hari-Kṛṣṇa. He writes "Take refuge in Lord Kṛṣṇa alone and recite his name". (*Bhāgavata* 2.5.125)¹⁶ He also forbade his followers from bowing down to other deities, eating the food that was offered to them, gazing at their idols, or going into their temples warning that doing so would corrupt their devotion. (*Bhāgavata* 2.5.124)¹⁷ Mādhavadeva stated to worship at Hari's lotus feet and abstain from performing rituals for other gods" (*Ghoṣā* 243).¹⁸ and the path of knowledge and the path of *karma* (*jñāna* and *karma*), which contain the three attributes, are merely inhibitors. Knowing this, depart from them and perform intense devotion at Kṛṣṇa's feet. (*Ghoṣā* 212)¹⁹ Again, he writes that the supreme God is Kṛṣṇa; and to serve him as his servant (*Ghoṣā* 95).²⁰

Thus, the idea of a single God fostered a sense of unity among his followers, aiding in the development of a larger social structure.

4.3. *Importance to śravaṇa-kīrtana:*

¹⁶ "eka kṛṣṇadeva kariyoka seva dhariyo tāhāna nāma/"

¹⁷ "anya devī deva nakaribā seva nakhāibā prasāda tāra/ mūrttiko nacāibā grho napaśibā bhakti haiba byabhicāra/"

¹⁸ "bhajiyo harira caraṇa-pankaje tejiyo anyatra kāma/"

¹⁹ "tiniguṇamaya yata jñāna karmma kevala bandha kāraṇa/jāni tāka teji ekānta bhakati bhajiyo kṛṣṇa caraṇa

²⁰ parama īśvara kṛṣṇa huyoka tāhāna dāsa"

In Śaṅkaradeva's faith, the mode of worship is *śravaṇa and kīrttana*, listening and chanting of the name and attributes of Hari. Although he mentions nine modes of devotion, he gives greater importance to *śravaṇa and kīrttana* among the nine forms of devotion. He denied other rituals and preached that everyone can attain salvation through the recital of *Harināma*. He writes that the chanting of *Kṛṣṇanāma* is the only means of emancipation in the Kali Age (Bhāgavata 2.5.40)²¹ and “without *śravaṇa-kīrttana*, through other pious deeds, none can overcome this illusive world”. (*Kīrttana* 1673)²² He placed *kīrttana* above all rituals like *tantra-mantra*, *dhyāna*, *yajña*, and *pūjā* (*Kīrttana* 74).²³ He wrote that everyone can attain salvation through the recital of *Harināma*, irrespective of women, children, old men, *Cāṇḍāla*, and Brāhmaṇa. (*Bhāgavata* 2.1.13)²⁴ Śaṅkaradeva writes that devotion does not discriminate among communities (*Kīrttana* 129) and communities like *Kirāta*, the *Kachāri*, the *Khāchī*, the *Gāro*, the *Miri*, the *Yavana*, the *Kaṅka*, the *Govāla*, the *Asama*, the *Maluka*, the *Dhobā*, the *Turuka*, the *Kuvāca*, the *Mleccha*, the *Cāṇḍāla* and all others become pure in the company of devotees of Kṛṣṇa. (*Bhāgavata* 2.53-54).²⁵ In the *Nāma-ghoṣā*, Mādhavadeva writes that the so-called low castes like the *Gāro*, the *Bhoṭ*, the *Yavana*, and even the biggest sinners can be free from worldly bondage and can attain salvation by chanting the name of Hari.

Śaṅkaradeva strictly prohibited idol worship because idol worship involved the issue of sacrifice, both human and animal, and moreover, it was too expensive. Any kind of sacrifice is cruel. Additionally, it gave the priestly class a chance to exploit the ignorant masses on one hand, and on the other hand, the agrarian society's economy suffered a lot because the agrarian people sacrificed their valuable possessions like cows, goats, and birds before deities. As a result they were impoverished. Hence, he rejected the use of Brahmanic rituals and the priestly rites in

²¹ “*kali yuge kṛṣṇa nāma kīrttanate gati*”

²² “*śravaṇa kīrttana binā āna pūṇye nāpāya jānā iṭo ghora saṅsārara pāra*”

²³ “*satyayuge dhari dhyāna samādhi/tretāta samaste yajñe ārādhi// dvāpare pujai nānā bhaktivāve/ kalita kīrttana si gati pāve*”

²⁴ “*stṛī bālya bṛdha samastare adhikāra/cāṇḍālako karai nāme tekhane udhāra*”;

²⁵ “*kirāta kachāri khācī gāro miri yavana kaṅka govāla/ asama maluka dhobā ye turuka kuvāca mleccha caṇḍāla/āno pāpi nara kṛṣṇa sevakara saṅgata pavitra haya*”

religious practices. Along with sacrifices he also disapproved of idol worship and the costly arrangements. He wrote that giving God a small amount of water and *tulasī-pāt* (leaves of basil tree) is all it takes to make God yours (*Ratṇakara* 39).²⁶ and in devotion, money is not necessary, and one can get emancipation by taking the name of Kṛṣṇa by any means. (*Bhāgavata* 10.55.1132).²⁷ Additionally, he disregarded the necessity of pilgrimage and argued that one could obtain relief from world miseries, divine virtues, and peace even in one's own home by reciting and listening to the name of Hari(*Kīrttana* 1928) .²⁸

Thus, Śaṅkaradeva gave the common people a very straightforward, cost-free, and easily accessible Hindu path of worship while also protecting them from the religious exploitation caused by the priestly class. As a result, people from every nook and cranny of the area came forward to join this cult, giving the Assamese nation a greater shape and wider perspective.

4.4. Equal vision:

Neo-Vaiṣṇavism taught people that everything in the world, including men and animals as well as the earth and the sky, is a creation of God and that all of his creations, whether they are people or other living things, should be treated as equal. He writes that God is all-pervading in creatures, one has to look at his presence in all and feel Godliness in them. (*Kīrttana* 1820)²⁹; and see all creatures as good as oneself (*Kīrttana* 1825)³⁰ and even the souls of dogs, foxes, and asses are truly those of God and with that knowledge, one should salute each and every one of them (*Kīrttana* 1823).³¹ Even more, he pleaded to treat thieves and donors equally (*Kīrttana* 1821)³² The devotees began to use a common phrase, such as “*bāpa*” or “*bhakata*,” which conceals their original status, to address one another. This aspect of

²⁶ “ *dei eka salu jala tulasīra pāte/ ateke bikraya kṛpāmaya jānta tāte//*

²⁷ “*nāhi sikā taṅkā byaya kāyakleśa bhakatita eko nāi /yena tenamate Kṛṣṇaka smarile eteke mukuti pāi//*”

²⁸ “*taribā saṁsāra āra śravaṇa kīrttane /grhate thākiyā sukhe mahā puṇya sāñcā//*

²⁹ “ *samasta bhūtate byāpi ācho mai hari/ savāko mānibā tumi viṣṇu budhi kari*”

³⁰ “*sakala praṇīka dekhibeka ātmasama*”

³¹ “ *kukura śṛgāla garddabharo ātmārāma/Jāniyā savāko pari karibā praṇāma*”

³² “*dātāta corata yena dṛṣṭi ekatula*”

Nāma-dharma inspired those from the so-called lower classes to join the cult, participate in discourses, gather for meals and cultural activities that proudly integrate into Assamese society.

4.5. *Love for Outcastes:*

The majority of Śaṅkaradeva's disciples were from the lower level of society, and this was a deliberate action rather than something that just happened. His guiding principle was to serve humanity, and he gave the oppressed, as well as the tribes in the northeast, a special consideration. In accordance with what is written by Śaṅkaradeva, a man becomes free from all sins if he consumes food that has been touched by the untouchable and the law caste. (*Kīrttana* 222).³³ He writes that devotion does not discriminate among communities (*Kīrttana* 129)³⁴ and the *Kirāta*, the *Kachārī*, the *Khāchī*, the *Gāro*, the *Miri*, the *Yavana*, the *Kaṅka*, the *Govāla*, the *Asama*(*Ahoms*), the *Maluka*, the *Dhobā*, the *Turuka*, the *Kubāca*, the *Mleccha*, the *Cāṇḍāla* and all other communities become pure in the company of servants of Kṛṣṇa. (*Bhāgavata* 2.2.53-54)³⁵ *Hari-nāma* is free from any rule or ownership, and tribes like the *Miri*, the *Āsama*, and *Kachārī* achieve salvation by chanting the name of Rama. By chanting the name of Rama, those in the lowest castes also obtain salvation. According to Mādhavadeva, by chanting the name of Hari, even the most sinful men born into the lowest caste can find salvation and live in peace. Śaṅkaradeva claims that *Hari-kīrttana* purifies everyone, even the outcasts (*mleccha*) who consume even dog's meat, and the *Cāṇḍāla* should be qualified as a priest for sacrificial fame the moment he chants *Harināma*. His view against the oppression of the priestly class was loud and clear. He expressed his mind through the characters he created for his dramas and other literary works. This might be felt in his very first creation, the *Hariścandra-upākhyāna*. This book can be considered his first attack on Brahmanism, which he considered the enemy of humanity. At the outset of the book,

³³ “*antyabarṇe hīnabarṇe yiṭo anna chovai/tāka bhuñji samasta pātaka mukta hovai//*”

³⁴ “*nabāchai bhakati jāti ajāti//*”

³⁵ “*kirāta kachārī khācī gāro miri yavana kaṅka govāla/asama maluka dhobā ye turuka kubāca mleccha caṇḍāla //āno pāpī nara kṛṣṇa sevakara saṅgata pavitra haya /bhakati laviyā saṅsāra tariyā vaikuṅthe sukhe calaya//*”.

Śaṅkaradeva portrayed Hariścandra as an ardent follower of Hari who refused to worship deity Gaṇeśa. Here, he exposed the Brāhmaṇas' cruelty and greed, for which a pious king like Hariścandra had to endure great sufferings. Hariścandra gave away his kingdom, sold his family, and agreed to be slaves, all to fulfill a promise he had made to the Brāhmaṇa sage Viśvāmitra. Hariścandra and his family had demonstrated great virtue and righteousness, contrary to the tyranny of the Brāhmaṇas. He portrays the tyranny of Brahmanism and the greed that lies behind it in this book. He establishes their inferiority to regular human beings by describing how the two Brāhmaṇa saints Viśvāmitra and Baśiṣṭha turned into two birds while engaged in combat. He demonstrates how Brahmanism is based solely on one's own interests. Thus, Śaṅkaradeva used this book to protest the caste-based privilege in religion and also religious exploitation by the Brāhmaṇa caste, which can be seen as a brave step towards social reform in mediaeval Assam. The book *Hariścandra-upākhyāna* is merely an illustration;

Because of Śaṅkaradeva's effort, Neo-Vaiṣṇavism gained popularity among the tribes and other lower caste people throughout the entire Northeast region, which not only broadened Assamese society's base but also its outlook.

5. Conclusion:

It can be accepted that by adhering to the main principles of *bhakti* Śaṅkaradeva introduced a creed which revolutionized the entire face of the life of the people. He could form a nation of a broader civil society by uniting the diverse tribal communities of the region. He gave it a culture, to be identified later as Assamese culture.

Thus, Śaṅkaradeva and his Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement contributed to the formation of the greater Assamese society. Other than the "one particular place" of political boundary criteria, the remaining three criteria for forming a nation—a common language, a common way of life, and a shared culture—were all present throughout the whole Brahmaputra valley during Śaṅkaradeva's time. (Saikia 133).

Works Cited:

1. Śaṅkaradeva, *Kīrtana-ghoṣā*, Edited and published by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, Nagaon,
2. Mādhavadeva. *Nāma-ghoṣā*. Edited and published by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, Nagaon, 2009
3. *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa*. Edited by Pitambar Deva Goswami, *Banalata, Guwahati, 2007*
4. Saikia, N. *Asamiya Manuhar Itihas*, Katha Publication, Guwahati ,2016

The *Bargīt* Heritage: A gift from Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva

Karabi Kanta Deka

Abstract:

In Assam, the *Bhakti*-Movement or Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Movement was launched by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and his closest disciple Mādhavdeva in the 16th Century. To him, there is no caste system in the temple of God; all, irrespective of caste and creed are equal before His eyes. Śaṅkaradeva brought a new ideal of unity to the society. He composed a large number of books including drama called *aṅkīyā nāṭa*, *bargīts*, *bhaṭimā* and poetry in the language of common people so that they could understand their teachings. He

organised and performed the music and dance and gave publicity to the basic teachings of Vaiṣṇavism among the common people to attract them through presentation of activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa. This paper tries to explore Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's contribution to music. (i.e., *bargīts*).

Key words: Śaṅkaradeva, Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*, *bargīt*, *tāla*, *rāga*.

1. Introduction:

The *bhakti* cult in India was started by the *Ālvār* saints of the South. They belonged to the period between the 7th and the 9th Centuries A.D. In the 9th century A.D. the pleasant and scattered utterances of the spiritual experiences of the *Ālvār* saints were arranged and codified by the great *ārcārya* Nāthmuni. Later Yamunācārya preserved the tradition of Vaiṣṇavism. It was Rāmānuja who shaped Vaiṣṇavism and gave it a solid foundation. Gradually through the pioneering works of Kabir, Nānak, Ekanāth, Mirābāi, Chaitanya and others the doctrine of *bhakti* had permeated the Indian society (Baruah, 2005).

Śaṅkaradeva, the Vaiṣṇava saint of Assam was enormously influenced by the unique spirit of Indian culture. Śaṅkaradeva propounded a religious system in the light of the *bhakti* cult of India. It is based on the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. It is known as *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* – the *bhakti* cult of Assam or Assam Vaiṣṇavism. Maheswar Neog states, “the official name of the *bhakti* creed of Śaṅkaradeva is *Eka Śaraṇa Nāma Dharma* and this explains its cardinal principles, which enjoy the worship of one God, that is Viṣṇu, especially in the incarnation of Kṛṣṇa and interdicts the votaries from the worship of any other deity and indicates its main form, which consists of the utterance of the holy names of the God in the singing of the songs in his glorification.” (Neog 124). Besides the religious purpose, the *bhakti* movement also aims to reform the social condition prevailing in the society. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva used various forms of art and literature to preach his teachings. He was himself a great poet, a musician, a dramatist and a performer. Śaṅkaradeva rendered the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and several other *purāṇas* to Assamese and to *Vrajabuli* for easy comprehension of the people of Assam. Śaṅkaradeva and a host of his followers made a systematic attempt for disseminating the new message of religion and ethics

through the media of literature, art, music and drama. Śaṅkaradeva is the pride of Assam for his valuable contributions in the cultural sphere.

2. Objective of the Study:

In this paper, an humble attempt has been made to study the contributions of Srimanta Śaṅkaradeva in the sphere of music (*bargīts*).

3. Methodology:

The study is based on secondary sources i.e. books, research papers, research articles, reports etc. published in journals. Materials from websites are also collected. This study is descriptive in nature.

4. Discussion:

Music of a nation is a natural expression of the mass soul. Therefore, it is a true expression of the cultural soul of a people. The *bhakti* movement of Śaṅkaradeva has openly invited to the people of different ethnic origins, caste, creeds or religious groups. The movement received tremendous response everywhere. The *bhakti* movement, in particular fostered the culture of the classic style of singing.

In Assam also, Neo-Vaiṣṇavism brought in its train a wide culture of music. The Vaiṣṇava music of Assam is rich and remarkable in its tone and variety. Śaṅkaradeva and his closest disciple, Mādhavadeva composed a number of songs of various order. These were— *bargīts* (devotional lyrics, *gīts*, noble songs), *aṅkīyā gīts* (songs of the drama), *payāra* (recitation verse) and *bhaṭimā* (*prasastis* of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, of a *guru* or a king). Of these, the *bargīts* and *aṅkīyā gīts* represent the classical mode of Assam's Vaiṣṇava music. The term *bargīts*, however literally means the superior song' (Chaliha, 1978). Śaṅkaradeva termed his songs as *gīt* (songs). *Bargīts* occupy a pivotal position in the Vaiṣṇava tradition, literature and culture of Assam. Śaṅkaradeva was the creator of the *bargīts*. His creation of *bargīts* is one of the main modes of conveying the principle of *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*. Kaliram Medhi calls the *bargīts* as 'great songs' or 'songs celestial'. Devendranath Bezbaruah, the first historian of the Assamese literature, name these as

‘Holy songs’. Dr. Banikanta Kakati calls them ‘noble numbers’. The second historian of Assamese literature, Dimbeswar Neog has termed only the spiritual songs composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva as the *bargīts*; he has even excluded the songs included in their *nāṭas* from the arena of *bargīts*, he stresses (Rajkhowa, 2012).

Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva had composed 191 numbers of songs. These songs are accompanied with certain well-determined *rāgas*. The *Bargīts* are the songs based on the spiritual thoughts related to devotion of God only. The *bargīts* were written in an artificial language called *Vrajabuli* or *Vrajāvali*. Śaṅkaradeva composed altogether 240 *bargīts* for the purpose of prayer services. The only manuscript copy of the *bargīts* was accidentally consumed by fire in the house of a musician disciple of his, Kamalā Gāyan by name (Neog, 2014). People have remembered only 34 *bargīts* which were recovered by Mādhavadeva. At the express request of his Guru Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva composed his own *bargīts*. The *bargīts* composed by Śaṅkaradeva were based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* and on the character of Lord Kṛṣṇa of *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. Śaṅkaradeva went on pilgrimage in 1481 A.D and 1550 A.D. The *bargīt* ‘mana meri rāma carana hi lāgu’ was composed by Śaṅkaradeva at Badarikāśrama in 1489 A.D.

The *bargīts* are sung in two methods. When these are sung as part of prayer or *prasaṅga*, no *tāla* is necessary. But when the *bargīts* are presented as cultural items, use of one or more *tāla* is required. The important *tālas* of the *bargīts* are – *Ektāla*, *Rupak*, *Paritāl*, *Yati*, *Bisham*, *Math-tāla*, *Una-yati*, *Rup-ganjāl*, *Oltaganjāl* etc. and some minor *tāla*. The *rāgas* in *bargīts* have the means of expressing the feelings seeking unto God. *Āśovārī*, *Ahir*, *Belovār*, *Basanta*, *Kāmod*, *Dhanaśrī*, *Kalyāṇ*, *Kedār*, *Naṭ*, *Kau*, *Puravi*, *Tur*, *Gaurī*, *Tur-Basanta*, *Mallār*, *Tur-Bhāṭiyālī*, *Lalit*, *Śrīgaurī*, *Māhur*, *Suhāi*, *Sāreng*, *Śyām-Gorā*, *Sindhurā* and *Śrīgāndhār* are the major *rāgas* used in the *bargīts*. The purpose of the saint was to sing of the momentary state of humankind in the divine cosmology. His main motive was also to sing of the glory of the Lord Kṛṣṇa and Lord Rama. The *bargīts* were designed mainly to spiritualize people. Besides spiritual idealism, amusement aspects are also watched in the divine songs. These songs may be divided into different sections. They

are: *paramārtha*, *lilā*, *jāgaraṇa* (songs waking from sleep in the morning), *calana* (child Kṛṣṇa's movement), *khelana* (pastoral sports of child Kṛṣṇa), *nṛtya* (dancing) etc. 'jaya jaya yādava', 'śuna śuna re śura vairi pramānā', 'āgo māi tohāri tanaya', 'ālo māi ki kahabu dukha', 'māi hera gokule cānda āve', 'tejare kamalāpati' are a few popular *bargīts* of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva (Baruah, 1999).

The deepness of the saint's emotional and spiritual thought of the *bargīts* is reflected at the court of the famous king Naranārāyaṇa, the ruler of the Koch dynasty. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva presented himself at the Koch royal court for a proper trial. He proceeded to the *darbār* and when he ascended the steps at the entrance, his prominent hymns in the *ṭoṭaka*, "madhu-dānava-dānava deva varam..;" were on his lips. As a result of his majestic presence, there created a stir all round that the king ordered for a comfortable seat to be placed for Śaṅkaradeva in his own front. He made his prayer to God through the *bargīt* "pāve pari hari karoḥo kātari" an his last moment. By singing this he asked for God's blessing to save his soul (Borkakati, 2015). From these instances, it is well understood that these *bargīts* were mostly composed in natural setting connected to the saint's life. Though the *bargīt* is based on the theme of devotion, it also provides foundation for preaching Sankaradeva's ideology. the *bargīts* have accomplished a journey of more than 500 years. Till today, it is very much fresh in the core of every Assamese's heart. *Bargīts* are well practiced still in the *sattras*. It has a great importance in any religious place of Assam. Thus, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva had made a noteworthy contribution in the field of music through the creation of the *bargīts*.

5. Conclusion:

Thus, Srimanta Sankaradeva's contribution in the sphere of music is immense. Before the period of Sankaradeva, there were traces of a thin stream of culture of music in this region. But with the advent of Sankaradeva, there were the cultural creativity and intellectual efflorescence through the writings, drama, music, painting etc. which are relevant at present times. Sankaradeva had realized that to propagate EkSaranaNama Dharma among the peasants and illiterate music was very essential. For this the saint created music which tried to design the beam of education among

the illiterates. The people treasure them as a part of our national culture and spiritual heritage.

References:

1. Barua, Birinchi Kumar. "The Father of Assamese Drama and Stage". In Chaliha, Bhaba Prasad (Ed). *Sankaradeva Studies in Culture* (pp.16-30), 1978.
2. Barua, S.L. *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. 2005.
3. Baruah, S.K *Borgeet* Jyoti Prakashan. 1999.
4. Bokakati, Sanjib Kumar. *Unique Contribution of Srimanta Sankaradeva in Religion and Culture*. Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, 2006.
5. Borkakati, Sanjib. *Srimanta Sankaradeva a multi-facted genius*. Purbanchal Prakash, 2015.
6. Rajkhowa, Jyoti Prasad. *Sankaradeva: His life, Preaching's and Practices (A Historical Biography)*. B.S. Publication. 2012.

Presence of Equality and Universalism in the *Nāma-ghoṣā*: An Analytical Study

Dr. Prasanta Barik

Abstract

The *Nāma-ghoṣā* is the greatest creation of Mādhavadeva in which his philosophy of life has been expressed in a beautiful way. It reflects the Vedanta philosophy and ideals. Although the book was written in the medieval period, a number of modern concepts like discussion of modern astronomy, sociology, equality, universalism have been found in the book in many times in verse form. The book has transmitted many ideals which are considered as core elements in different branches of social science, especially, in the field of education being taught all around the world in the present time. In this paper an attempt has been made to look into the presence of modern concept of social

science on equality and universalism available in the *Nāma-ghoṣā*. This paper is empirical in nature.

Key Words: *Nāma-ghoṣā*, equality, universalism, social science.

1. Introduction:

The *Nāma-ghoṣā* has been considered as one of the greatest Vaiṣṇavite scriptures written by Mādhavadeva around 1568-1596. The book was written in verses in praise of lord Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu. The book contains one thousand verses for which it is also known as *Hejāri* (one thousand) *Ghoṣā* in Assam. Around 400 *ghoṣās* of the book have been transcreated from Sanskrit *ślokas* originated from the *Śrīmadbhāgavata-purāṇa*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣada*, *Padma-purāṇa*, *Brahma-purāṇa*, *Skanda-purāṇa*, *Śanti-śataka*, the *Gītā* etc. Although the book was written on the basis of various *purāṇas*, due to its high quality, the book has been considered as one of the most prominent original books of Vaiṣṇavite scriptures.

In the *Nāma-ghoṣā*, the philosophy of the life of Mādhavadeva has been expressed in poetic form. The book is based on Vedanta philosophy. Almost all the verses of the book reflect the major ideas of Vedanta philosophy and ideals. The verses of the *Nāma-ghoṣā* transmits the ideals of devotion in the society and have given positive message to the lives of people.

Although the book the *Nāma-ghoṣā* was written aiming to expand the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, along with its main ideas, a number of verses have been seen establishing different theories or ideas of modern social science in a passive way. In this essay an attempt has been made to discuss some notable concepts available in the *Nāma-ghoṣā* in following way:

Equality:

In the medieval period, caste-ism was an integral part of Indian society. The society of that time was organized into hierarchy on the basis of a system of *varṇa* and *āśrama* which laid down separate ordinances or *dharma* for different categories and castes. Philosophical rejection of caste has been considered as one of the basic features of Indian democracy. Without equality, democracy is meaningless. Equality aims to ensure that all citizens are treated equally before law and have equal access to public areas and opportunities. The article number 14 and 15 of the Indian

constitution ensures equality to the citizen of the country. Caste system in India is a social hierarchy that divide people into small groups based particularly on their birth. It has been rampant in Hindu society for at least 3000 years and it is considered as one of the world's oldest form of social stratification. The philosophy of pure devotion propounded by Mādhavadeva in the *Nāma-ghoṣā* runs counter to the philosophy of this discrimination (*bheda*). According to the philosophy of the *Nāma-ghoṣā*, man is a part (*aṁśa*) of God. The philosophy tries to break the caste and creed systems of the society and wants to create a society based on equality.

In the *Nāma-ghoṣā* Mādhavadeva writes:

*nuhu jānā āmi chāri jāti chārio āśramī nuhu āti
nuhu dharmāśīla dānavrata tīrthagāmi/ (Ghoṣā 670)*

(Meaning: We do not belong to the four castes available in our society (the Brahmins, the *Kṣatriya*, the *Vaiśya* and the *Śūdra*). We do not belong to the four *āśramas* (*Brahmacarjya*, *Garhastya*, *Vānaprastha* and *Sannyās*). We are not religious donors, nor ascetics, nor pilgrims.)

Like the modern political philosophy of equality, Mādhavadeva wants to establish a society free from caste (*jāti*), creed, *āśrama* and religion in the *Nāma-ghoṣā*. He advocates for a society where everyone is equal, where everyone has the equal right to pray Lord Kṛṣṇa.

The same advocacy for equality can be noticed in the following verse of the *Nāma-ghoṣā*:

*hari nāma kīrttanata nāhi deśa kāla pātra
niyam saṁjama eku bidhi/
harita śaraṇa laiṅyā kevale harira nāma
kīrttana karante huve siddhi. (Ghoṣā 28)*

(Meaning: In the chanting of the name of the Lord Hari, there is no barrier of place (*deśa*), time and person. There are no specific rules and regulations to pray to the Lord. Everybody can attain success in the world only by taking refuges in the rules and chanting the name of the Lord.)

In this verse Mādhavadeva has advocated for social equality. He tries to break the caste barriers in society allowing all people to take part in *bhakti* to attain *Mokṣapada* in his/ her life. Mādhavadeva wants a society free from caste and creed systems which creates discrimination (*bheda*) among people. The *bhakti* philosophy of the *Nāma-ghoṣā* envisages a kind of society which is modelled on *Vaikunṭha*, the transcendental society in which the governing ideal is one of equality. In the *Nāma-ghoṣā*, we find the clearest rejection of caste in the entire *Śaṅkarī* literature.

Presence of Universality:

Reflection of universalism can be considered as one of the major concerns of the book *Nāma-ghoṣā*. John Murray (1741-1815) and Elhanan Winchester (1751-1797) are usually credited as founders of modern Universalist movement. George de Bonneville is considered as the pioneer of universalism. The Universalists believed—“It is impossible that a loving God would elect only a portion of humankind to salvation and doom and the rest to eternal punishment.”

Similar universal essence can be drawn in different verses of *Nāma-ghoṣā*:

āpuni āpuna bandhu āpuni āpuni śatru
āpuni āpuna rākhe māre/
harika nabhaji nara āpuni huvaya naṣṭa
hari bhaji āpunāka tāre // (Ghoṣā 26)

(Meaning: You are your friend; you are your enemy. You can save or kill yourself. Those who do not worship Lord Hari are going to ruin oneself and he or she can save himself or herself by worshipping the Him.)

As the Universalists believe, Mādhavadeva also believes that human being suffers pain and pleasure due to his/her own activities. We are our best friend and, on the other hand, nobody can save us when we harm ourselves. In the *Nāma-ghoṣā*, Mādhavadeva says that by chanting the name of the Lord we can save our life from ruin.

From this point of view, Mādhavadeva has talked about universalism earlier than the western thinkers. But we have to remember that his discussion is based on spirituality only.

Conclusion:

The *Nāma-ghoṣā* has made a significant contribution in the context of spreading *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*. The book reflects some notable traits which are earlier than some recent thinkers. Being a strict follower of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva tries to create such kind of social environment where every human being can equally pray for Lord Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu to attain perfection. The book has opened our mind towards the study of modern thoughts emerged in the medieval period.

Bibliography:

2. Das Haramohan(Ed.). *Nāma-ghoṣā*, Banalata Prokashon, 2012
3. Goswami, Narayan Chandra, *Kīrttana-ghoṣā aru Nāma-ghoṣār Tattārtha Samikṣā*
4. Das Ilaram, *Nāmaghoṣār Rasāmṛt* , Bonolota Prokashan(Online Assamese Book SKU- 1907
5. Sashmol, Subhash, *Nāmaghoṣār Mūlsaha Eti Samālocanāmūlak Adhyan*, The Asiatic Society , 2012
6. Borkakoti, Dr Sanjib Kumar, *Nāma-ghoṣā*, The Oriental Gem, Motilal Banarsidass , Delhi Edition - 2022
7. Pathak, Pranabananda , *Nāma-ghoṣā, Hymns to the Blessed Lord* , Bibliophile , South Asia, 2005
8. Hazarika, Surjya (Ed.), *Nāma-ghoṣā* Bani Mandir ,Guwahati , 2003
9. Chutia, Rameshwar, *Kathā Nāma-ghoṣā*, Kiran Prakashan , Dhemaji , 1993
10. Das, Hiren Deka Dr Latumoni Das *Sintamoni ,Madhabdevar Sahitya Prativa* , Ashok Book Stall , Ghy , 2017

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE JOURNAL:

1. *Kīrtana* : The *Kīrtana-ghoṣā* by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva
2. *Bhāgavata*: The *Śrīmad Bhāgavata-purāṇa* translated by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva
3. *Ghoṣā*: *The Nama-ghoṣā* by Mādhavadeva
4. *Ratṇakara*: *Bhakti-ratṇakara* by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva
5. *Vākyāmṛta* : *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmṛta*
published by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha,

6. SHT : *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times* by Dr. Maheswar Neog
7. *Gītā*: : The *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*
8. *GCK* : *Kātha Guru Carita* edited by Dr. Maheswar Neog

Our Contributors of this Issue:

1. Dr. Sailen Bharali, Jawaharlal Nehru Professor (Rtd.), Guwahati University
2. Dr. R.C. Borah, Ragitrar (Rtd.), Mahapuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Visvavidyalaya, Nagaon, Assam
3. Dr. Pragati Prasad Bora, H.O.D, of History, Charaibahi College, Charaibahi, Morigaon,
4. Mouchumi Borgohain. Research Scholar, Śaṅkaradeva Studies Mahapuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Visvavidyalaya, Nagoan
5. Dr. Indira Saikia Bora, Former Professor & HoD, Department of Śaṅkaradeva Studies, Mahapuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Visvavidyalaya,

Nagaon, Assam

6. Moyuri Bora, Research Scholar, Department of Śaṅkaradeva Studies, Mahapurūṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Visvavidyalaya, Assam
7. Dr. Sarangapani Bordoloi, Principal, Asom Sattriya Sangit Mahavidyavidyalaya, Jorhat.
8. Dr. Archana Barua, Professor (Adjunct), Department of Philosophy, Cotton University
9. Dr. Prasanta Barik, Subject Teacher, Panigaon Model Higher Secondary School.
10. Mr. Suraj Chetry, Assistant Professor, Lakhimpur Kendriya Mahavidyalaya.
11. Sri Golok Ch. Bora, Academic Officer Rtd., SEBA
12. Karabi Kanta Deka, Research Scholar, Deptt.of Śaṅkaradeva Studies, Mahapurūṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Visvavidyalaya, Nagaon