

*Philosophy of Srimanta Sankardeva
and his creation*



[Imaginary portrait of Srimanta Sankardev by [Bishnu Prasad](#)

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Introduction :

Srimanta Sankardeva, a multi-faceted genius, was born at Tembuāni (Bordowā) presently Nagaon district of middle Assam in the *Āhin* (September-October) month in 1371 *Sakābda* (1449 AD). He was not only a spiritual leader but also equally a social reformer and a prolific writer and composer. Srimanta Sankardeva was an aesthetic , artist, sportsman ,yoga expert , river specialist, a person capable of turning the weather and environment favorable, painter, weaver artist , play writer, lyricist, composer, poet, actor , teacher architect, sculptor , dancer, instrumentalist , traveler, propagator, philosopher and Sanskrit scholar . For having all these qualities Srimanta Shankardeva reverentially known as Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva. The word 'Mahapurush' implied the person with such extra ordinary quality which are not found with the common people. 'Maha' means great and 'purush' means person.

Philosophy of Srimanta Shankardeva :

Sankardeva's ideology is based on religion which has human value for propagation of the society on the path of

sustainable development. He unified the diverse ethnic groups of Assam and brought them under one umbrella, and giving a distinct identity by restructuring the social order of that time through the essence of Vaishnavite culture. This new concept was named as Neo-Vaishnavism. It was so simple approach where irrespective of cast and creed all people can come to the fold of religion for their spiritual satisfaction or achievements. Sankardeva considered the religion as a cultural activity for well being of the society as a whole and spiritual refinement of the individual.

Now we are going to discuss the philosophy of Sankardeva in a simpler way . The prime objective of Sankardeva's philosophy was to build a stable society by eliminating the superstition , some odd practices and simplified the religious concept to that extent so that common people could get benefit . In the religious perspective Sankardev believed in the oneness of God. Sankardeva reflect his view as -

“thou art the supreme self
the only Lord of the universe
there is no other except thee” [horamohan,p135;kirtan
ghosha]

Sankardeva propagated this message as 'ek saran nama dharma' ,it means supreme surrender to one ,and that one is

krishna or Vishnu . Krishna is the incarnation of Vishnu . Sankardeva preached devotion to a single God,i.e Lord Krishna or Vishnu . According to Sankardev krishna is the highest end of all and it can be achieved by controlling of impulse and desires to purify the heart. According to him –

‘ache mane samasta pranir hridyata
Isawar pratibimba lagecha manat’ (Anadi Patan)

It means all creature possess mind and mind catches the reflection of God .According to him there is a relation between body and mind which is inseparable.

Sankardeva opined Tolerance and *Respect* are the two main factors for making a good society per excellence. His view was –

nindibaka nahi, bandibaka nahi
para dharmak nihinsiba kadacit
sakalo pranika dekhibaka atamasama
satru mitra udasina sabato samana
sabako maniba tumi Vishnu buddhi kari

It means- tolerance of other’s religious belief, regard all beings as your own

Self, friend-enemy all are equal , all are the son of one Almighty . It reflects

the concept of pre supposing the divine presence in all beings.
According to
him God is always every where and every one seems to be of
equal status in
the eye of God. –

Brahmanara chandalara nibichari kul
Datata churarat jena dristi ek tul

It means irrespective of cast and creed, high and low profile of
beings, all are same in the eye of God.

Sankardeva's Neo- *Vaishnavism* is based on four
ways of worshipping and these are (i) *Guru* (preceptor), (ii) Deou (God)
(iii) Nam (Uttering Krishna Nam)and (iv) *Bhakats* (devotees) . These
are to be considered as four pillar of Neo- *Vaishnavism*.

According to Sankardeva “**Nāhi bhakatita jāti-ajāti vicāra**” It
means there is no cast difference for worshipping the God Lord
Krishna . People from also untouchables or lower castes came under
the fold of his disciple . Sankardeva unified the society by accepting
the people of lower cast as his disciple by saying :

Kirata Kachari khasi Garo Miri
Yavana Kanka Goal

Asom Muluk rajak turak
Kuvakcha mlecha candal
Ano jatanara krishna sevaka
Sangat pabitra hai
Bhakati labhiya sansara taria
Baikuntha sukhe chalay. (Bhagawat)

This version implies that during the periods of Sankardeva the following casts Kirat, Kachari, Khasi, Garo , Miri , Yavana, Kanka goal, are always considered as lower cast in the society . With the spiritual message that in the eye of the Almighty all are equal , so one could not under estimate the lower cast people as neglected one : Again

Kukura Srigala Gadhavaro atma Ram
Jania sabako kariba pranam (Kritan by Shankardeva)

Sankardeva's philosophy is not limited only with human being rather it is extended to all leaving creature which is based on the concept that every living being is God's creation :

Samasta bhutat byapi aso mai hari
Sabako maniba Vishnu budhi kari
(Kritan by Shankardeva)

And

Jta Jva Jngama kita patangama

Aga nag jaga teri kaya
Shankardeva)

(Borgeet song composed by

It means like human being the same soul is also found in the heart of all animals , birds , insects, and others and one should give the proper respect to them. It implies that one should not disturb them or suppress them as animal.

Sankardeva's Creativity :

Sankardeva transmitted the Vaishnavite movement by establishing two socio religious institution : the *Satra* and the *Nāmghar*. Sattras as a spiritual hub or platform where the devotees assemble and pray the God untidily irrespective of cast and creed . The word Sattras is derived from the Sanskrit word and it means the holy place where discourse on Vishnu (Krishna) are continuously lasting years to years .With the passage of time sattras developed by introducing some social issues for upliftment of the society and emerge as a distinct characteristic institution which is not found anywhere in India.The structural feature of Sattras consist of Prayer Hall (namghar) and the shrine (monikut) .The shrine is attached with the Prayer hall .

In this context it may be referred the sayings of Baikunthnath Bhattacharyya :

yatracaranti Sadharman kevala bhagavatpriyah

*nabadha bhagavad bhktih pratyaham yatra vartate
tat sattramuttaman ksetram vaishnavam suravandiotam
tatrastha vaishnava sarve harinamaparayanah. (Saran Malika)*

It means the place where the devotees assemble and pray to the Almighty with nine fold devotions are to be termed as Sattra and the place (Sattra) are adored by the devotees who worship only the supreme god VISHNU . The nine fold of devotion means the nine ways for praying Almighty and these are Sravana (to listen) ,kirtana (to sing) , Smarna (to recollect) , padasevana (serving) , archna (worship) , vandana (singing the glory) ,dashya (servitude),sakhya (accepting as friend) and atmanivsdan (self submission) .

Sankardeva has composed so many beautiful lyrics, drama and dance with proper grammar, the relevancy of this is still alive. He started his literary works at the age 12 years when he was a student and wrote his first poem with proper rhymes without using vowels. In this poem he presented the beauty of Lord Vishnu. Shankardeva composed many devotional songs and sung these in various raga styles. These styles are slightly different from either the Hindustani or the Carnatic styles. These songs are called as Borgeet by his follower .

Sankardeva was an artist having profound skill and expertise in practice of Art. He portrayed a beautiful art depicting the seventh havens (Sapta Baikkuntha) where the Almighty Lord Sri Krishna

moving around to show his role for the well being for the people of this world. He used this canvas as a dropper for staging the mythological Ist Bhowana play " *Chihnayatra*" and this was beginning of Ankia Bhowana ,one of the premier opera house theatre in Asia . Bhowana has seven essential elements and these are in accordance with the Natya Shastra . These are stated as :

Sapta Rasa Natak Rasana Karaya
Sonoka Sapatabidha Rasar Annaya
Gayan Byana Saba Sabha Jby Kara
Sutra Natya gana Rasikar mana Hara
Pandita buji shloka karila rasana
Gita artha bujibaka dwija sabhya gana
Brajabhashi bhashak bujiba janilo
Cho Mukha dekhibaka agya murha loka
Sudha ba Asudha tathpito Krishna Nam
Ahi sapta rasa natar anupam

This means Bhowna consist of seven elements and these are Gayan (Geet) , Badan (Instruments) , Sutra (Introducer), Natyagana (script writer), Pandita buji Sholak Rasana Kara (Lyric composer) , Gita artha bujibaka dwija sabhya gana(Music Composer),Chu Mukha (masks) .

Sankardeva introduced the mask culture in Bhowana .

Sankardeva used masks in his first Bhowan "China Jatra". According to him Mask is a such elements of Bhowan which attract the audience and able to impressed the role of the character .

For staging this drama he innovated all the requirements like instruments, other items for the staging the play besides composing lyrics and dialogues. Through Bhowana it is tried to establish the idea of integrity among all cast and creed and address to audience leaving the individuality concept by the Sutradhar (introducer) as :

Uba noraloka

Samajyar loka

Sabhasada loka

Samajika loka

This ideology is well acceptable for all over the world.

The one of the important creation of Sankardeva is Satriya Dance which is originally used as accompaniment for Ankia Nat (Bhowana) . The solo performance was also done and its now regarded as a classical dance of India. Satriya Dance is one of the innovative creation of Shankardeva where also different posture of Yoga are used such as Mati akhara, Thianam related to Sirsasana, Kasabandha to Pdmasana , and Mayurasana.

The Auniati Sattras have paintings manuscript is "Sri Hasti Muktawali" where the Mudra's of Nritya are depicted and it is based Satriya Dance . Till date it is preserved in Auniati Sattras .

One of the important milestones of his creativity is Brindabani Bastra . It is a hand woven pictorial textile depicting incidents in the life of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama. It was woven by a village of weavers at Tantikuchi in Barpeta district under the guidance of Srimanta Sankardeva. The rare piece of ancient *Brindabani bastra*, created by Srimanta Sankardeva is preserved in the British Museum in London. It was about 120ft long and 60 ft. wide .

Mahapurush Sankardeva was a great sportsman. Apart from the common games , he also played with porpoise, crocodile and fishes. He caught it and again releases it in the water again. He also played with ox . He created a conducive environment of yoga practice in the ritual practice and in performing dance. The sitting posture in *nam prasanga* (rituals) is Padmasana and Sukhasana and clapping in nam prasanga are prominent techniques of practice of Yoga . It is basically purely scientific . Sankardeva has to be termed as an environmental scientist of his age in terms of River specialist. During his period in Bardowa once the heavy flood of Brahmaputra washed out the crop field and dwelling houses through its tributary Tembuwani . At that time he used a special technique with the cooperation of local people and specially a lady named Radhika of low cast for building a dam and channel to control the over flooded water . It shows his broad heart to the society.

There was also another incident in Bardowa for which he may

be termed as Metrological Scientist . Once in Bardowa a dry session occurred creating heavy scarcity of water . Sankardeva started to chanting Hari nam for seven days continuously in such a conducive tune that could able to create an favorable atmosphere for raining . He knew how to make the change of weather by some tune or sound.

Srimanta Sankardeva devloped the Assamese language and used it to write the books so that common people could read. In case of drama he used Brajāvali, a language he developed by mixing Assamese and Braja language of Brajadham.

Shankardeva composed *Kirtana-ghoshā* ,narrative verses praising Lord Krishna elaborating his activities of Childhood and other activities and every Assamese people always kept this as a symbol of respect to Almighty Krishna.

Sankardeva was very much aware on the heritage of Assam as well as India . In his writing he always conscious on heritage and tried his best to reflect it . He praise the Bharat for its rich heritage and culture by saying :

“Dhanya Dhanya Kali kal Dhanya Dhanya bharata barisha ” means praise Bhrata for its glorified culture and heritage . He magnified all these things through his cultural activity by unifying heritage , legendary culture of Bharat with songs , dance and dialogue of drama .

Conclusion :

The basic philosophy of Sankardeva is to restore peace and harmony in the society and also he gave the path for upliftment of individual personality of human beings through cultural and literary activities. His creativity and philosophy remind us to live untidily which reflects the concept Upanishada mantra's "Vasudhay Kutubukam" and 'Isha bashyam idamg ... '. Sankardeva is always in favour of creating harmony and peace among the people of the society. His pholosophy is harmony and peace could be restored by making well being to all people of global community. For this humanitarian nature we may named Sankardeva as "*Manab Ratna*".