



Sankardeva's "Eka-Sarana Nama Dharma" and Its Contribution Towards the Formation of a Greater Assamese Society

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Abstract: *Srimanta Sankardeva, the great soul of Assam, played a pivotal role in the formation of a larger Assamese society. At the time of Sankardeva's birth, the atmosphere in Assam was marred by numerous uncivil practices (Goswami 2018). Sankardeva was able to open the eyes of all the people by spreading the seeds of "Eka-sarana nama dharma" in the beautiful land of Assam. Sankardeva envisioned Assam as a divine garden where people from diverse ethnic groups and tribes could coexist in harmony. He broke down all the instability by uniting them through the thread of bhakti.*

Keywords: Tribes, Sankardeva, Srimanta

I. INTRODUCTION

Srimanta Sankardeva was the versatile genius of Assam. He was also regarded as a worthy son of God. In the 15th and 16th centuries, brahminical dominance, or a caste hierarchy, prevailed under the guise of devotion to God. Most of the people of that time were illiterate and unintelligent. The higher caste people dominated them, and they were not allowed to participate in the religious ceremonies and interpretation of the holy scriptures. Srimanta Sankardeva spearheaded the "Neo-vaishnavite" movement in Assam, which was later known as "Eka-sarana nama dharma". "Eka-sarana nama dharma" means complete self-surrender to one God or the Almighty. He is Hari, Krishna, lord Vishnu. Sankardeva emphasised only in sravana and kirtana. Only by chanting the name of God can one be redeemed from the cycle of birth and death. The "Neo-Vaishnavite" movement brought incredible changes to the socio-cultural and religious history of Assam. Through the "Neo-vaishnavite" movement, Sankardeva founded an egalitarian society where people, irrespective of their caste and creed, get an equal opportunity and can live their lives happily and peacefully. He revolutionised the entire Assamese society in every aspect, and therefore, he was a revolutionary reformer of Assam. The service of humanity is the service of God, which has been the main motto of the "Neo-vaishnavite movement."

Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan's famous saying in "Earth one family" is: Religious men will be revolutionaries if there are errors to be corrected and evils to be overcome. Their ambition would be to remove the most significant burden of men, namely the exploitation of man by man (broadcast on Kiev Radio, Russia, June 26, 1956). Religious people must think about those people who are helpless, who are constantly oppressed by the powerful; they must think about the freedom of those downtrodden, dalit people, the untouchable, who are victims of social injustice and discrimination based on religion, class and creed. The great devotee Bhakta Prahlada once said, "Naitan bisaykripanaan bimuksho ekah" (I don't want to attain freedom without thinking about these unfortunate people). (Saikia, G).

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a qualitative method, where all data are collected analytically from secondary sources, including published papers, journals, and books.

1. Objectives: To study Sankardeva's "Eka-sarana nama dharma".
2. To study the contribution of "Eka-sarana nama dharma" towards the growth and development of a larger Assamese society.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. The neo-vaishnavism of Srimanta Sankardeva: a great socio-cultural revolution in Assam, MSSV JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, VOL.1 NO.1 (ISSN 2455-7706), Rinku Borah discussed neo-vaishnavism and its impact on the socio-cultural life of the people of Assam [1].
2. Srimanta Sankardeva: The saviour of the subaltern, Gitali Saikia briefly wrote about the impact of "Eka-sarana nama dharma in the Assamese society".

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the objectives, the following description highlights the paper's findings.

A. Universal Love and Brotherhood

Love and respect for every living being are reflected in Sankardeva's "Neo-vaishnavism" or "Eka-sarana nama dharma". We are all the manifestation of God. God is in everybody's heart. Therefore, we are all equal and identical in nature. Sankardeva broke down the caste hierarchy which was prevalent at that time [2][3].

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Sankardeva accepted all his followers as disciples, regardless of their caste and community. Among them, Narottam of the Nagas, Govinda of the Garos, as well as Chandchai of the Muslims, were noteworthy. Sankardeva said:

"Nabachai bhakati jati ajati
Krsnara kirtane jati ajati nabache"
(There is no discrimination in bhakti)

According to Sankardeva, no one becomes a Brahman by their race or birth. One must become a Brahman only by chanting the name of God with a pure heart. Not only for human beings, Sankardeva promotes kindness and respect for animals as well. Sankardeva said:

"Kukuro srigalo hari godorvoru atmaram
Janiya sobako pori koriba pronam
Somosto bhutote byapi asu moyi hari
Saboko maniba tumi Vishnu budhi kori
Brahmanor chandalor nibisari kul
Datat surot jen dristi eko tul
Nisot sadhut jaro voilo eko jnana
Tahakehe pandit buliya hobe jano"

(Even in the dog, foxes, God is within their souls. He is the only wise person who does not discriminate between Brahman, the high caste people and the chandal, the lower caste people, who accept all as brothers and sisters, as we are the children of the same Divinity [7] [8].)

The Assamese society of Sankardeva's time was greatly influenced by saktism; even Sankardeva's prime disciple, Madhavdeva, was a follower of saktism before they met. Saktism mainly concentrated on the sacrifice of animals and even humans in the name of devotion to God. However, Sankardeva completely disregarded this kind of religious faith and beliefs, and he propagated "Eka-sarana nam dharma" by stating that there is only one supreme reality, which assumes forms and is the cause of all incarnations. Sankardeva wrote:

Prathame pranamo brahmarupi sanatan
Sarva abatarara karana narayana 15

First of all, I bow down to Narayana, the eternal one, in the form of Brahman, the cause of all incarnations (N, Kanta 2020)

Madhavdeva, following Sankardeva, says,
Matsya, kurmma, narasimha, Vamana, parashurama
Halirama Varaha Shri Rama

Buddha Kalki name dasa Akriti dhoricha Krishna
Taju pawe karo ho pranama (Namghosha 3).

(Meaning: Krishna has taken ten incarnations as a fish, a tortoise, a half-man, half-lion, the dwarf, Parashurama, Halirama, the Boar, Rama of Ramayana, Buddha and Kalki). According to Sankardeva Krishna, or Lord Vishnu, the root cause of the universe's creation is Krishna.

B. Bhakti Marga

Among the three marga of attaining moksha or liberation, Sankardeva considered bhakti as the most straightforward way or marga to achieve moksha. The other two paths are full of difficulties. Karma marga is not suitable, especially for this age of Kali. (Chutiya) Srimanta Sankardeva saya:

Nalage bhaktita deva dvija rsi huibe
Nalage sambhrita sastra vistara janibe
Yaksa raksha stri sudra yata brajabasi

Pakshi mrigo Vishnu bhalia Krishnaka upasi

Srimanta Sankardeva's bhakti marga does not require a person to be a Brahman by caste, and it is not mandatory to know all the sastras. By worshipping or having unflinching faith in Krishna, the Yakshas, Rakshasas, women, Sudras, all the inhabitants of Braja (Vrindavana), and even birds and beasts, they all became Vishnu. According to Sankardeva's "Eka-sarana nama dharma," in doing bhakti, one should not perform any ritualistic ceremony to satisfy God. Sankardeva said in Prahlada Charita :

"Tapo japo yajna dana bidamvna
Kevala bhaktita tusta hanta Narayan. (Kirtana 380)
Nuhi puspa bhala nuhi banaphula
Janiba nadira jale
nuje bhakti kari nomo Krishna buli
muhuro pada kamala. (Bhagawata, 16112)

(I don't want a beautiful flower or a delicious fruit as an offering; I like you to pronounce my name with bhakti with sincere devotion and complete surrender to me.) [4] [5]

C. On the Universe

We find that Srimanta Sankardeva thought about the nature of our universe. According to him, from the transcendental point of view, the universe is not an illusion. The universe is created by God, who is real; therefore, the world is also real. Sankardeva said that there is no difference between gold and gold ornaments; in the same way, there is no difference between God and the universe. (Boruah, 2018). Sankardeva said: Tumi karya karana samasta caracara Suvarne kundale yena naahike antara (Kirtana ,520).

Again said,
Tumi satya brahma Tomaata prakaashe
Jagatae sadaa Tumio prakaashaa
Antaryami bhagavanta
Etekese jnani Gane avasheshi
Jagataka bole hari (Kirtana 1661)

(This means that you are the absolute Brahman. The unreal universe is the manifestation of you. You also manifest yourself in the universe. For this reason, wise people regard the universe as a manifestation of God.

D. Namghar and Satras

Namghar and satras are the most influential institutions for spreading Nam dharma among the people. Namghar and satras are integral parts of Assamese society. Namghar is a network that attracts and connects people from various parts of the northeast through engaging activities such as "bhaona", "borgeet", and "dihanam". Bhaonas were played in the Brajavi language. Namghar is the centre for discussing and solving various social and religious issues, where all people can present their opinions without any restriction. So namghar creates equality and respect among the people by allowing them to offer their prayers or devotion to God [6].

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, we can conclude that "Eka-sarana nama dharma" through the neo-Vaishnavite movement revolutionised the entire Assamese society.



It unites all people from different castes and communities, regardless of their background, by breaking down the caste hierarchy. Everyone can chant the name of God from a pure heart. There are no rigid, ritualistic principles for devotion to God. One can obtain liberation from the endless cycle of birth and death through doing bhakti with a pure heart. Through the universal love and brotherhood, Sankardeva teaches us that we are all the children of the same divinity, and therefore, we should have love and respect for each other. Sankardeva's religion is one of the simplest and most liberal religions. Sankardeva was not only a religious guru but also a social reformer. For his incredible contribution towards the creation of a greater Assamese society, we will never forget him as a star, without whom Assamese society would be incomplete.

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