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EDITOR

DR. PANKAJ BARAH

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ŚRĪMANTA ŚAṄKARADEVA SAṄGHA
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EDITORIAL

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

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

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

...

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

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

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

deep philosophical insights. Life and works of a mahāpuruṣa influence common people as well as visionary leaders to develop effective management strategies of an organization, a society, and for the entire world. Such leadership must have the ability to communicate, unify, manage conflicts, innovate, persuade, encourage, and inspire people to take meaningful, productive, and sustainable actions. Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkardēva was such an inspiring polymath having multifaceted talents, skills, wisdom, and knowledge, who came to this world nearly six hundred years ago.

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

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

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

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

Acknolwdgement: I sincerely acknowledge all the contributing authors for their valuable articles for the Volume XXI of Mahāpuruṣajyoti. My special thanks to all the scholars who helped by providing critical review the submitted articles. I am sincerely thankful to honourable Chief advisor, Padadhikar, Pradhan Sampadak of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha, along with the president, secretary and members of sahitya sakha samiti for their kind advice in editing of this Volume. I owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Jagat Chandra Kalita, Head, Dept. of Sankardeva Studies, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya (MSSV); Prof. Suresh Chandra Professor (Retd.) MSVV; Mr. Kailash Das, Dr. Tarun Gogoi, Associate Professor, Hem Chandra Dev Goswami College, Sivasagar; Dr. Biswajit Kalita, Associate Professor, Suren Das College, Hajo; and Mr. Manoj Kumar Deoraja for their generous help and mentoring in all aspects during the editorial process. My sincere thanks to Mr. Babul Barhoi, Associate Professor, Department of English, OPD College, Lakhimpur, who painstakingly helped me to typeset the articles with proper diacritical marks. I express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Pankaj Protim Bodoloi for sharing the original image of Vrindavani Vastra for the cover page of this volume. I thank the technical support of the ELLOID Communication for printing the journal. Finally, I pay deep respect and gratitude to my late father Siddheswar Bora, a schoolteacher, a true follower of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, who introduced me to the life and philosophy of of Mahāpuruṣajyoti Śaṅkaradeva.

Sincerely,

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February/2022

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***Disclaimer:** The opinions expressesd in the articles are those of the contributors concerned, not of the editor or the śrīmanta śaṅkaradeva saṅgha in general.

Relevance of Śaṅkaradeva

Kailash Das

Introduction:

Śaṅkaradeva's contributions to religion and culture had brought about a Copernican revolution in the North-Eastern part of Indian in the 15th and 16th centuries. It had survived the vicissitudes of history of the intervening centuries and proved its relevance to modern times also. The *Eka-śaraṇa Hari-nāma dharma*, a living Vaiṣṇava faith, has been drawing more and more devotees to its fold. The socio-cultural values inherent it the faith have attracted more and more appreciators to its academic pursuits. About the rest of the Assamese population, Dr. Hiren Gohain comments- …"To-day even those who are not followers of Śaṅkaradeva's religious faith or its rites and rituals – realize it deeply that—in the context of their racial identity as Assamese – their conversation, conduct and behaviour, thoughts and value-judgment –there exists a profound influence of the Vaiṣṇava bhakti-movement of Śaṅkaradeva.[1]

The Bhakti-faith of Sankaradeva is a living and growing faith. Dr. Banikanta Kakati has aptly brought out its essence –The *Eka-śaraṇa* system is not a religion of bargain and barter 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 hands of the Lord.[2]

This new concept of Śaṅkaradeva's faith is couched in the Bhāgavata-purāṇa –

savaipuṁsāṁparodharmo
yato bhaktiradhokṣaje
ahitukyapratihatā
yayā ātamā saṁprasīdati ||[3]

[Meaning: That is certainly the sublime religion for men, (religion) from which is created the devotion to Lord Viṣṇu –devotion which is without any (ulterior) motive, unobstructed (or constant) and by which the soul becomes deeply pacified.]

Thus Śaṅkaradeva's faith, discarding gross materialism and sensual avidity, can certainly bring back mental peace and spiritual outlook to the modern men

Concern for the common people:

The mission of the medieval bhakti-movement was mainly the amelioration of the low-caste communities by relieving them of the age-old exploitation by the Brahmanical sacerdotalism and providing them with a new way of life, both mundane and spiritual. At the instance of the leaders of the

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All India bhakti-movement, Śaṅkaradeva used Assamese, the language spoken by the people of Assam, as the medium of propagation of his Vaiṣṇava faith. As a result, the followers of bhakti faith had a direct communion with God without any mediator and thus got freed from the age-old exploitation of sacerdotalism. Adoption of vernacular language as vehicles of religious matters by Śaṅkaradeva and his counterparts and their followers in the rest of India was an epoch-making and audacious feat, because in their times it had been promulgated as an act of sacrilege by the priestly class.

As a propagator of new faith, Śaṅkaradeva had been very conscious of the receptive capacity of the common people. Therefore, he enriched his writings with local colours and folk-elements. In his religious literature, Śaṅkaradeva either avoided knotty philosophical concepts or elaborated those in easy-to-understand vocabularies. In the creation of *aṅkīyā nāṭs*, Śaṅkaradeva deviated from Sanskrit dramaturgy that much as needed for propagating his bhakti-faith among the common people. For example, the function of the Sūtradhāra is brief in Sanskrit drama. But in *aṅkīyā nāṭs*, the Sūtradhāra never disappears from the stage; amongst other activities, he drives home the tenets of bhakti to the illiterate audience.

Of the nine modes of bhakti, Śaṅkaradeva laid more stress on śravaṇa and kīrttana and thereby solved the problem of illiteracy. In one of his bargītas, Śaṅkaradeva has written:

"bulite eka śunite śatanitare"

(Meaning – If one chants the names and attributes of Lord Kṛṣṇa, a hundred of illiterate devotees get emancipated.)

Through this *śravaṇa* and *kīrttana*, the vast majority of illiterate people got enlightened in the precincts of the *nāmghar*s.

Removal of caste-ism and untouchability:

As in the day of Śaṅkaradeva, caste-ism and untouchability had struck deep in Indian society; he, for strategical reasons, did not call for their total abolition. Instead, he declared open the doors of bhakti-faith to all castes and untouchable communities:

siṭo cāṇḍālaka gariṣṭha māni /
yāra jihbāgre thāke hari vānī //111a

cāṇḍalo hari nāma lave mātra /
karibe ucita yajñara pātra //118a

kṛṣṇara kathāta yiṭo rasika /
brāhmaṇa janma tāra lāgai kika //
smaroka mātra hari dine rāti /
nabāce bhakati jāti ajāti //[4]

Meaning: the untouchables are to be considered most respectable ones who have the name of Hari on the tip of their tongue (111a). The moment an untouchable takes resort to Hari's name, he deserves to be the priest of a sacrifice (118a). If a person enjoys bliss in Kṛṣṇ's discourse, why does he need to have the birth as a Brahmin? Let him only recall Hari day and night; bhakti does not discriminate between castes. (129)]

Responding to the call of Śaṅkaradeva, people from different castes came forward to get initiated into his faith, some of the famous devotees coming from outside the pale of Hinduism may be mentioned –

(i) Jayahari Ātai (original name: Cānsāi or Cankhān)- a Muslim.
(ii) Dāmodar Āta (original name :Prema)- Bhuṭiyā
(iii) Paramānanda Ātai (original name: Pamkāng) - a Mishing.
(iv) Govinda Ātai- a Gāro.
(v) Rāma- aKachārī.
(vi) Narāyaṇa- a Miri.
(vii) Balāi- a Mikir.
(viii) Narahari- an Āhom.
(ix) Cilārāi- a Koch.
(x) Jayarāma- a Bhuṭiyā.
(xi) Madhāi- a Jayantiyā.

It is due to the preaching of Śaṅkaradeva that untouchability in Assam is conspicuous by its near absence. In one of his visits to Assam, Gandhiji declared:

A great Vaiṣṇava revival under Śaṅkaradeva in the sixteenth century has made Assamese people kindly, tolerant and humane. There is no sign anywhere of that form of untouchability which is to be found in south India.

***Sattras* and *Nāmghars* :**

The two great institutions working for the promotion and propagation of Assam Vaiṣṇavism are the *sattras* and the village *nāmghar*. Śaṅkaradeva laid the foundation of sattra first at hisnative place Bardovā and then at different places of his stay during the propagation of his Vaiṣṇava faith. After his demise in 1568, the *sattras* assumed their institutional form at the hands of Mādhavadeva, Dāmodaradeva and their followers.

Following the schism in the religious order of Śaṅkaradeva, a large number of *sattras* came into being by the 17th century. At present (2008 A.D) the number of *sattras* stands at 450: Nikā-saṁhati: 157, Brahma-saṁhati:79, Puruṣa-saṁhati: 90, Kāla-saṁhati: 113 and others: 11.[5]

Normally a *sattra* consists of an enclosed establishment with four karāpāṭs (gateways) and four hāṭis (rows of huts) surrounding a spacious hall called *nāmghar* and a *maṇikūṭ* attached to the eastern side of the *nāmghar*. The sattrādhikār (Head of a *sattra* and the dekā-sattrādhikār next to sattrādhikār (devotees who are either celibates or office bearers of the *sattra*) reside in the *sattra*- campus. The general *śiṣyas*)lay disciple) live in the villages or towns surrounding the *sattra* affiliated to.

The *nāmghar* or the *kīrttan-ghar* is the sanctum-sanctorum of the *sattra*. Its ends point the east and the west. Attached to the eastern end of the *nāmghar*, there exists a smaller house, called *maṇikūṭ* or *bhāj-ghar*, perpendicular to the length of the *nāmghar*. *Maṇikūṭ* means a house for valued properties of the *sattra* and *bhāj-ghar* means an arched house for the same purpose.

At the eastern part of the *nāmghar* is placed the *āsana* (seat), *siṁhāsana* (seat with lion motif), or *guru-āsana* (seat of the guru). It is a tree-dimensional structure, tapering upward. At the top of the *āsana*, is placed a specific scripture – generally the Guṇamālā, the quintessence of the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, rendered by Śaṅkaradeva. Sometimes the Kirttana-ghosā or the Bhāgavata-X, by Śaṅkaradeva or the Nām-ghoṣā or Bhakti- ratnāvalī by Mādhavadeva is preferably installed in the *āsana.*

The word *guru* in *guru-āsana* means the Lord within the heart of the devotee[6]. The specific scripture installed in the siṁhāsana is the Lord in worded form. So there being no scope for idol worship in Śaṅkaradeva's faith, all religious activities are performed in front of the *guru-āsana*.

Social roles of village *nāmghar*s:

Apart from the main *sattras,* every village of Hindu or Hinduised population contains one *nāmghar*. On all festive occasions connected with the life and doings of Kṛṣṇa, the hymn songs of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are recited in accompaniment to musical instruments.

These *nāmghars* are something like village parliaments. Their affairs are conducted there on a purely democratic principles, every household in the village has equal voice in the management of affairs. The *nāmghars* are the court-houses where the elders of the village sit in judgement on petty peccadilloes; moral or social delinquents are brought to trial and fined or excommunicated until the fine is paid up, the fine going to the common fund of the village.

The *sattra*s and the village *nāmghar*s have been working for the promotion and propagation of *Nām-dharma* through the media of literature and culture.

Democratic value:

The religious philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva does not admit of any discrimination among men on the basis of caste, creed, gender and social status. So, Śaṅkaradeva and his successor Mādhavadeva upheld the values of democracy in their lives and activities.

In the early stage, the headship of the Vaiṣṇava order and *sattra*institutions had been conferred on democratic basis. Before his passing away, Śaṅkaradeva nominated Mādhavadeva, his alter-ego, to the headship of the Vaiṣṇava order. He could have nominated his eldest son Rāmānanda, but he did not. Similarly Mādhavadeva handed over the management of the Barpeta *sattra* to the community of devotees appointing Mathura Das Ata as the leader. In the earlier stage, a *sattrādhikār* did not consider the *sattra* as personal property but as the properly of the community of devotees.

It has already been said that the affairs of village *nāmghar*s are conducted on a purely democratic principle; every household in the village has equal voice in the management of affairs of the *nāmghars*.

Humanism:

Sankaradeva's writings are infested with humanistic ideals. Before his passing away to Vaikuṇṭha (celestial abode), Lord Kṛṣṇa gave advices to Uddhava:

samasta bhūtate vyāpi ācho mai hari /
savāko mānibā tumi viṣṇu buddhi kari // [1820 b]
brāhmaṇara cāṇḍālara nibichāri kula /

dātāta corata yena dṛṣṭi ekatula //

nīcata sādhuta yāra bhaila ekajñāna /

tāhākese paṇḍita buliya sarvvajana //

viśeṣata manuṣya janata yiṭo nare /

viṣṇubuddhi bhāve sarvvadāye mānya kare //

īriṣā asūyā tiraskāra ahaṁkāra /

save naṣṭa hovai teve tāvakṣaṇe tāra //

kukura śṛgāla garddabharo ātmā rāma /
jāniyā savāko pari karibā praṇāma // [1823 b]

sakala prāṇika dekhibek aātmā sama /
upāya madhyata iṭo āti mukhyatama // [1825 a][7]

Meaning – (Kṛṣṇa says to Uddhava) – As I am immanent in all created beings, you treat them as being the God himself. [1820 b]

He who does not discriminate between the castes of a Brahmin and Cāṇḍāla, who looks with an equal eye to a donor and a thief, who does not differentiate between a saint and a vile person is called a wise man by all. (1821)

A person, who invariably considers me to be present in all human beings, finds that before long he is free from the feeling of jealousy, fault finding and contempt along with his egotism. (1822)

Knowing that the supreme soul is immanent in the dog, the jackal and the donkey, lie prostrate on ground and pay obeisance to all of them [1823 b].

Perceive my presence in all beings. This is the most efficacious way unto God. [1825a]

Thus we see that Śaṅkaradeva's humanism is not confined to humankind only, it extends beyond to all living beings. It is infested with different values like democracy, toleration, secularism, altruism etc.

Though Śaṅkaradeva prescribed sectarian injunctions and interdictions for the devotees of his bhakti faith, he exhorted them to exercise the values of toleration and secularism:

parara dharmmaka nihiṁsibā kadācita /
karibā bhūtata dāyā sakaruṇa citta // [8]

(Meaning – (Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna) O kind hearted one, Be compassionate to the living beings. Never bear any malice to others' faith.)

bhāgavata śāstre śraddhā karibā nitānta /
nakaribā nindā ānaśāstrako ekānta //[9]

(Meaning—You certainly ought to have reverence to the scripture Bhāgavata but at the same time you would not bear contempt to other scriptures.)

In this context, Dr. Nilima Sharma opines – "centuries before India's political independence, Śaṅkaradeva could use the connotation of the term secularism in the same sense in which the constitution of India has used it. Gandhi's *sarva dharma samanantva* was taught by Śaṅkaradeva in the 15th century.[10] The value of altruism is evinced in the concept of *jīvanmukti* (liberation while alive) of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti* faith.

Assam, Bhāratavarṣa and the world:

Śaṅkaradeva with his towering personality, peerless erudition and deep knowledge of the interacting social forces, succeeded in generating his religious faith in the hearts of the people, at the teeth of the reactionary forces. His adoption of Assamese language as the vehicle for the propagation of Neo-Vaiṣṇavite faith made it the common language of communication of the

different groups of people. The comprehensive Śaṅkarī culture woven round the *Eka-śaraṇa Hari-nāma dharma* gave the people a uniform psychological make-up. All these led to the emergence of the Assamese racial entity. But it was not qualified by parochialism, as the protagonist had always sung the glory of Bhāratavarṣa and possessed a world outlook.

In his compilatory work Bhakti-ratnākara (Sanskrit), Śaṅkaradeva has devoted a complete chapter *Bhārata-bhūmi-praśaṁsa* for the eulogition of Bhāratavarṣa. Such eulogization abounds in his vast Assamese works also-

koṭikoṭi janma antare jāhāra
āche mahāpuṇya rāśī /
si si kadācita manuṣya hovaya
bharata bhumita āsi //[11]

(Meaning – The person who has immense virtues accumulated in crores of past lives, seldom he only is born as human being in the land of Bhārata.)

bhārata variṣa kaliyuga iṭo
harināma narakāyā /
cāriro saṁyoga kata bhāgye bhailā
āro āchā bāta cāi //[12]

(Meaning—Bhāratavarṣa, Kaliyuga, Hari's name, and human body have, by the turn of a fate, formed a continuum. What are you waiting for?)

Such examples can be multiplied. Thus Śaṅkaradeva brought the spiritual significance of the holy land of Bhāratavarṣa to the people of Assam and thereby contributed immensely to the concept of national integration of India. Here lies the relevance of Śaṅkaradeva in the context of the fissiparous forces trying to destabilize India.

But the great Śaṅkaradeva was not only concerned with the people of Bhāratavarṣa, he was equally concerned with the people of the world. In one of his colophons, he has addressed the people of the world:

obā naraloka hari bhajiyoka
dharā iṭo upadeśa /
eḍā ālajāla jīvā katakāla
jaḍā bhaila paraveśa //[13]

(Meaning – Oh mankind, Take refuse in and offer service to Hari. Give up evasiveness and abide by this advice. As old age is coming, how long will you live?)

The verse quoted above reflects the Upanisadic dictum *'vasudhaivakuṭumvakam'* and hence the relevance of Śaṅkaradeva to modern times yearning for world peace.

Environmental protection:

Śaṅkaradeva's religious philosophy upholds the modern eco-centric and bio-centric thinking. He makes no discrimination between man and nature; rather he points to the biotic communion between the two[14]:

garu gopīkā paśu bṛkṣa bana /
nāhi janmāntare kichu sādhana //
ehi janme mātra kari bhakati /
pāileka sakale mohora gati //[15]

(Meaning– the cows, the cowherds' wives, the beasts, the trees and the greenery have not earned any merit in their past lives. But resorting to devotion only in this life, they all have attained liberation.)

cāru sarovara nirmmala jala /
Sugandhi padma śobhe utapala // - 147b

Āchai rājahaṁsa samūhe rañji /
Līlāye mṛṇāla bhuñje ubhañji //

pāre pārijāta malayā vāva /
catake tyaje sulalita rāva // - 148

bhramara gaṇe gāvai hari gīta /
vaiṣṇava gaṇa śuni ānandita //[16]

(Meaning – In the clear water of the beautiful lake, there shines fragrant lotuses and water-lilies. Flocks of swans are playing in the water, sportingly uprooting and eating the lotus-roots. On the banks, the Pārijāta trees are in bloom, and fragrant and cool breeze are blowing. The song-birds are singing in mellifluous notes. Bumble bees are singing the glory of Hari, on hearing which the Vaiṣṇavas are in the state of bliss.)

Śaṅkaradeva upheld the values of love, respect and kindness to all living beings.[17] Dr. Nilima Sharma writes,- "Eco-awareness is revealed while he [Śaṅkaradeva] describes the natural beauty of Vṛndāvana."[18]

In support of her statement, Dr. Sharma quotes from the Adya-Daśama:

iṭo vṛndāvane āchai yata tarugaṇa /
dekhā dekhā kene mohā sādhura lakṣaṇa //
karai para upakāra kino kṛpāmaya /

pararese arthe jīvai iṭo vṛkṣacaya // - 926
thākai sahi rahi mahā raudra vṛṣṭi vāta /
āmi sukhe vañco rahi ihāra chāyāta //
para upakārī taru janama sārthaka /
santara bimukha yena nuhike prārthaka // - 927
bākali pallava mūla patra puṣpa phala /
yei yibā cāve pāvai vṛkṣata sakala //
jīvanara sāphala dehīra ehimāne /
jīvai para upakāra kari arthe prāṇe // - 928

(Meaning – Have a look at all the plants of Vṛndāvana. You see, they bear the characteristics of the great souls. How merciful they are! They live only for others and themselves undergo (for others) the severity of summer heat, heavy showers and stormy winds. We take shelter in their shadows and stay comfortably. The birth of the trees has become successful. They are as that of the saints who never disappoint needy persons. Whatever is desired–the bark, tender leaves, roots, leaves, flowers and fruits – can be had from the trees by any person. This much is the fruitfulness of the birth of embodied creatures that do good to others through their life and wealth.)

Śaṅkaradeva had strictly prohibited the killing of animals for flesh –

raṅge paśu māri yiṭo parama niṣkhale /
nija putrabhāryyā same bhuñje kautuhale //
mahā rauravata parai nāhike nistāra /
sehi paśu ācuriyā māṁsa khāya gāra //[19]

(Meaning: The most wicked person who kills the animals sportingly and devours their fleshes eagerly with his wife and sons, has no escape from falling into the worst of the hells called *raurava*. These very animals devour his flesh by scratching (in *raurava*).

In one of his *bargits* Śaṅkaradeva reveals his deep penitence about his heinous crime done towards the creatures.

Dhruṁ: nārāyaṇa kāhe bhakati karo terā /
meri pāmaru mana mādhava ghana-ghana
ghātuka pāpa nāchoḍā //

Pad: yata jīva jaṅgama kīṭa pataṅgama
aga naga jaga teri kāyā /
savakahu māri purata ohi udara
nāhi karatu bhūta dāyā //

Meaning – Oh Narayaṇa, how can I offer devotion to thee! Oh Mādhava, my vile mind is ever bent on committing sin from killing other creatures. All jīvas that move about, all insects and flies, all immovable plants and mountains and the world as a whole are thy body; but I slaughter them all to stuff my belly – do no compassion to them.

Women Empowerment:

Śaṅkaradeva did not allow women to get mixed with men in the *sattra* precincts and village *nāmghars* for performing any congregational religious service. It was not that he did not like the upliftment of women. It was due to the fact that, in his times, free mixing of men and women in sakta-tanrik religious rites and rituals led to the sexual exploitation of the woman and the degradation of the religious orders.

Śaṅkaradeva was in favour of imparting spiritual knowledge to women and the *Śūdras*. Before passing away to Vaikuṇṭha, Kṛṣṇa advised Uddhava to impart spiritual knowledge to them.[20] Śaṅkaradeva's grand-mother was a sagacious wise woman; Śaṅkaradeva's family maid Candarī learned much from the ambient atmosphere of the family. In this family tradition, Kaṇaklatā, the grand daughter-in-law of Śaṅkaradeva,founded and managed *sattras*.

In the context of an enchantress, Śaṅkaradevawrites:

ghora nārī māyā sava māyāte kutsita/
mahā siddha muniro katākṣe harai citta//
daraśane karai tāka japa yoga bhaṅga/
jāni jñāni gaṇe eḍai kāminīra saṅga//[21]

(Meaning: Of all attachments, the worse is that to women, their side-long glances overpower the heart of even the most accomplished sages. Their sights destroy all penances, meditations and yogas. Knowing these, the wise people give up the company of lustful women.)

Here Śaṅkaradeva is not blaming the women; he is blaming the men who, due to attachment to lustful women, lose their accumulated merits. Some people are found to misinterpret the above verse. [22]In his vast literary works, Śaṅkaradeva has delineated the characters of women who are more or less docile and devoted to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

In his Uttarākānda Rāmāyaṇa, Śaṅkaradeva has depicted Sītā as a protagonist against male domination over female. Vālmiki's Sītā is mute and an epitome of sorrow. But Śaṅkaradeva's Sītā is vocal about her plight. To the negotiators sent by Rāma, Sītā terms her husband as *yamakāla* (God of Death). In the assembly at the capital of Ayodhyā, Sītā vents her bitterness and

humiliation, perpetrated by Rāma, in a sort of harangue; ultimately, swearing in the name of her mother Mādhavi Devi (Goddess Earth) about her chastity and devotion to Rāma, Sitā disappears in her mother fissure. W.L. Smith has rightly commented –"He (Śaṅkaradeva) is writing a real story about real people, not about a deceptive characters acted out by playful deities (*līlā*)"[23]

Work -culture:

Some progressive (?) writers decree that in the ideology of Śaṅkaradeva, there is no place for work-culture. Let us examine this statement.

In the large corpus of his writings, Śaṅkaradeva has glorified puruṣakāra (human effort) protected by the grace of God:

puruṣa puruṣara kichu nui/
kṛṣṇara prasāde samasta hui//[24]

Meaning –Human effort by itself, yields nothing. But if it is protected by the grace of Lord Kṛṣṇa, it accomplishes everything.)

In the context of an event, Śaṅkaradeva exhorted Mādhavadeva, "Death kills everyone the moment it gets an opportunity. An earthen lamp full of oil is put out by a gust of wind, but it survives if is covered against the wind.[25]

Śaṅkaradeva prescribed neither sannyāsa (asceticism) nor worldliness. He professed a middle-path :

devaro durlabha ihena janmaka
byartha karā kona kāme/
gṛhate thākiyā harika smariyā
moksa sādhā harināme //[26]

(Meaning: This (earthly) life is very difficult to obtain even by the gods. Never waste it in vain. Leading a domestic life, remember Hari and attain liberation by chanting his names.)

Thus Śaṅkaradeva encouraged the vast majority of his followers to maintain their families through physical labour permeated by the *śravaṇa-kīrttana-smaraṇa* of the glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa. In short "Śaṅkaradeva taught his followers to perform the usual duties of life with the name of Rāma on the lips (*mukhe rām-nām hāte krtya kām*) and did not advise mortification.[27]

Śaṅkaradeva led a full-fledged worldly life; he married second time after the demise of his first wife and was blessed with two daughters and three sons. He also exhorted Mādhavadeva to get married. But Mādhavadeva

remained a life-long celibate. Of course, as the head of the order after Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva did not advise anybody to adopt celibacy. However, at the end of his life, Mādhavadeva advised some of the celibate devotees to get married observing the mental aberrations on the part of them and thus without renouncing the world, lead a faithful of devotion. Some of the celibate devotees responded positively to their guru's advice while other stuck to celibacy which has been carried down to modern times by a section of Assam Vaiṣṇavaism.

On the other hand, the bhaktas residing in the *sattra*s had to render full-time religio-culture services, although they were not engaged in other physical works. Still in their leisure times they served in the various cottage-industries of the *sattras* to meet the needs of the *sattras* and also the demands of the visitors.

The large number of lay disciples reading in the village were encouraged by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva to pursue non-violent means of livelihood mainly agriculture and small-scale cottage industries.

Contribution of Śaṅkaradeva to Indian Culture:

It was Śaṅkaradeva who for the first time introduced India to Assam. It was mentioned that he adopted the Assamese language as the vehicle for the propagation of his Vaiṣṇava faith among the Aryan as well as the non-Aryan people of the north-east India. Secondly, the comprehensive Śaṅkarī culture woven around the *Eka-śaraṇa-Hari-nāma-Dharmma* gave the people a unidirectional, psychological make-up. Thirdly, a large corpus of Assamese works abounds in high eulogization of the glory of Bhāratavarṣa that if a man takes birth in Bhāratavarṣa in the Kali age and resorts to Hari-Nāma, he is sure to attain emancipation. Thus, Śaṅkaradeva brought home the spiritual significance of Bhāratavarṣa to the north-eastern people and thereby strengthened the national integration of India.

The Ālvārs (6^{th} to 9^{th} century) of Tamil Nadu were the first to have sung the glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa in Tamil. Then it was Rāmānanda (1400-1470 A.D) who propagated his bhakti faith in northern India in the language of the people. Later Kabir (1440-1518 A.D) declared, "*Sanskrit kupa jalābhāśa bahati nadi* (Sanskrit is water confined in a well whereas the vernaculars are flowing water)[28]. The use of vernaculars, in place of Sanskrit was declared as an act of sacrilege by the erstwhile priesthood because it threatened their very livelihood and high status in the society. But the momentum of the all India bhakti movement swept away the priestly opposition. Thus a large corpus of Vaiṣṇava literature came into being in different Indian vernaculars, giving rise to a great efflorescence to which Śaṅkaradeva's contribution was substantial.

Dr. S.K Chatterji maintains— "The use of Vrajabuli or Vrajāwalī dialect in Assamese is a case of direct participation in a common literary life in eastern India"[29]. Dr. Sukumar Sen finally held that Vrajabuli was not an artificial dialect, it happened to be the junior most Aryan language. In Assam it is called Vrajāwalī.

Śaṅkaradeva composed *bargīts* (Celestial songs/Holy songs) and *bhaṭimās* (panegyrics, only one in Sanskrit) in Vrajāvalī. He also composed some dramas, called *aṅkīyā nāṭas* popularly in Vrajāvalī interspersed with Sanskrit ślokas (verses) and dialogues in prose. Mādhavadeva also followed his *guru* in the use of Vrajāvalī and Sanskrit.

When Śaṅkaradeva set out for his first pilgrimage in 1479 A.D, he composed the song *rāma meri hṛdaya paṅkaje raiche* (Rāma dwelleth in the lotus of my heart) at a place Raumari (in between Barpeta and modern Koc-Behar) then in course of this pilgrimage, he composed in 1488 A.D. the song *mana meri rāma caraṇahi lāgu* (rest my mind, rest on the feet of Rāma). According to Dr. Maheswar Neog— "these seem to be the first bargīts of Śaṅkar as well as the first composition in the Vrajabuli idiom".[30]It was again Śaṅkaradeva, before whom no Indian dramatist dared to have used Vrajabuli or Vrajāvalī in the stage directions of the Sūtradhāra, the dialogues of the actors and actresses and some of the songs."[31]In the medieval period, we see the emergence of egalitarian societies in India, based on the principles of bhakti faith, where Kabir (caste not yet decided), Rabidas (the currier), Dhanna (the jat), Sena (the barber) were placed on the same level as the high-caste people. In Assam also, at the instance of Śaṅkaradeva, there formed egalitarian societies in the *sattras*. Also in his literacy works, we find that there is no place for caste-distinction and untouchability. But unfortunately, at the advent of Krishnaram Bhattacharya (Parbatiyā gosāi), a *śākta guru* from Bengal, the Āhom kings, their families and some of the nobles got initiated to śāktism. This Brahmanism, patronized by the Āhom kings and nobles caused great havoc to the egalitarian societies being sustained by the followers of Śaṅkaradeva, specially the Māyāmarīyās.

It has been already mentioned that Śaṅkaradeva firmly believed in strict monotheism. He did not admit of any female figure in the Godhead. In this respect, Dr. S.K Chatterji says:

"…The Eka-śaraṇa faith worships only Viṣṇu, either as Viṣṇu or through his incarnations Kṛṣṇa or Rāma, acknowledging of course the figure of Śrī or Rādhā or Sītā but never thinking of the śakti aspect as inseparable and worthy of the some honour or worship as the essential Puruṣa aspect of the Divinity. The amoral and anti-social idea of the figure of the *parakīyā* has always had the risk of bringing in eroticism and even moral turpitude and this was carefully avoided by Śaṅkaradeva … Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka-śaraṇa dharma*

... agreed more with the manly path favoured by Kabir, Nanak and later Tulasidasa : it was the path of a man's straightforward faith in his master, without his assuming the nature of a women."[32]

Thus, strict monotheism a unique contribution of Śaṅkaradeva to Indian culture.

It has already been said in the life sketch of Śaṅkaradeva that the learned king Naranārāyaṇa was overpowered by the saintly and enlightened personality of the *guru*. In the last year of his life, the *guru* was entreated on different occasions by the king for initiation into the *bhakti* faith. But the *guru* declined every time under some pretext. This episode called from the hagiographic literature of medieval Assam show glaringly that Śaṅkaradeva was a firm believer in the true value of secularism. Secularism is not equal treatment of the state to all the religion of the people, but it is the principle of separation of the state from religions intuitions. Śaṅkaradeva wanted to keep his religions order separated from the policy of the Koc-kingdom by declining initiation to king Naranārāyaṇa.

Śaṅkaradeva could have easily made his religions order a state-order and taken revenge on the priestly Brahmins who had earlier polluted the ears of the kings of Assam (Āhoms) as well as of Koc-behar, leading to the beheading of his son-in-law Hari and the inhuman torture of his devotees. But Śaṅkaradeva did not do that because he believed firmly in secularism in its true sense. Other values preached and practiced by Śaṅkaradeva have been dealt with already. These values are perennial contribution to Indian culture.

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The World of Vedic Literature

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

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

Divergent views

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

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

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

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

Saṁhitā

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

The *Brāhmaṇas*, although considered to be an integral paret of the Vedic literature, they are often looked down upon as mere non-sense by a group of scholars. Max Mueller considered them to be mere 'theological twaddles'1. Again, according to Dr Winternitz the *Brāhmaṇas* constitute an important segment of Vedic literature. The general readers may not enjoy the *Brāhmaṇa* part of the Vedic literature. But they are considered to be important social documents of the Vedic society and civilization[2].

Āraṇyakas

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

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

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

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

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

Vedic Hymns

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

Thought Pattern

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

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

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

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

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

Vedāṅgas

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

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

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

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

Conclusion:

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

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Śaṅkaradeva's Universal Humanism

Dr. Deepshikha Mahanta Bortamuly

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

Keywords: social reformer, upliftment, universal humanist.

Introduction:

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

Śaṅkaradeva, an Institution by Himself:

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

Eradication of the Fear of God:

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

bhayaṅkara kopa dekhiyā tomāra
` prabhu mora bhaya nāi/
saṁsāra cakrar nikār dekhiyā
sadāye dhatu uḍāi // (I am not afraid of your terrible look as I get disheartened everyday at the way things turn up in the cycle of life/ *saṁsāra*)

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

dhana-jana-tapa prabhāve tomāka

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

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

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

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

...
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd.
O, no end is limited to damned souls
...
My God, my God! Look not so fierce on me![2]

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

Towards a Progressive Society

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

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

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

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

kukur śṛgāl gardarbharo ātmā rām
jāniyā savāko pari karibā praṇām

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

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

In an article on Universal Humanism[3], Tone Sveterlj defines universal humanism in the following way:

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

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

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

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

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

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

khuji napāi bhāika māri Kṛṣṇe nile maṇi/
śuni sarvaloke āka kare kaṇākaṇi//
vekata nakare keho mādhavaka ḍare/
pāileka kalaṅke moka jāni dāmodare//
kimate duryaśa gucāo guṇi bhagavanta/
...
diyā moṇi moka mayi neo dvārakāka/
gucoka duryaśa dekhāo lokata pratyay.//

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

Nāmghar as a Community Cultural Centre:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion:

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

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

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

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Comparison of Humanism launched by Śaṅkaradeva and the Humanism in Europe

Babul Barhoi

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

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

Introduction:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He says:

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

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

And,

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

sehi eka śaraṇa bhajana anupāma
muśunai āna eko devatāra nāma[2].

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

Another evidence:

anya devī deva nakaribā seva
prasādo nakhāibā tāra /
gṛho napaśibā mūrttīko nacāibā
bhakti haiba vyabhicāra[3] *//*

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

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

2. Humanism was against caste system.

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

Martin Luther said in this context:

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

Śaṅkaradeva says in this context:

siṭo cāṇḍālaka gariṣṭha māni /
yāra jihbāgre thāke hari vāṇī[4] *//*

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

kṛṣṇara kathāta yiṭo rasika /
brāhmaṇa janma tāra lāgai kika //

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

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

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

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

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

The same idea is echoed in the following stanzas:

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

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

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

3. Humanism was anti-ritualistic.

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

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

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

samaste tīrthata karile snāna /
karile si si tapa homa dāna //
sehise kulīna vedaka buje /
yāhāra mukhe hari nāma sije[8]*. //*

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

sūrya grahaṇata eka koṭi dhenu
brāhmaṇaka dei dāna /
prayāga gaṅgāra jalata nivāsa
kare daśa kalpa māna //
ayuteka yajña kare meru sama
suvarṇaka dei dāna. /
eka śata bhāgo govinda nāmara
reṇuko nuhi samāna[9]*. //*

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

nalāge deva dvija ṛṣi huibe /
nalāge sambhṛta śāstra jānibe //
michāte mare āna karmma kari /
hovanta bhakatite tuṣṭa hari[10] *//*

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

yijane yāya hari nāma sevi /
pāchata phure yata deva devī //
yateka tīrtha tāka stuti kare /
tāra vāyu pāpa samasta hare[11]*. //*

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

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

Conclusion:

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

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Reflection of Śrīmanta Śaṅkardēva in *Kāmrūpīyā Lokagīt*

Mitali Barman

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

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

Introduction:

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

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

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

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

Discussions on the Findings:

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

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

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

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

o guru śaṅkardev he
o guru janama labhilā
mṛtyumukhī asamīyāk dharmajñāna dilā he
ki o, pitṛ-mātṛ duiku guru sarute herāilā
khersūtīr pālanate dāṅgar-dīghal hailā[1]

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

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

ki o, asamīyār māje nāchileka ekatār jarī
tumi prabhu bāndhidilā sabāke sādari[2]

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

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

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

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

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

For example:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

tumi vine guru vāramvār ān nāhi jāno
karā dayā kamalalocan
agatira gati guru kalikālar kalpataru
tayu pāve paśilo śaraṇ.[7]

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

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

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

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

uri gailā rājhaṅgsa pari gailā pākhi
sio dēhā pari railā yamunāra bāli[9]

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

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

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

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

Śaṅkaradeva wrote:

phandilo māyāra pāśe kāla vyādhe dhāyā āśe
kāma krodha kuttā khedi khāy."[10]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Example of such a *lokagīt* is cited below:

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

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

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

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

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

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

There are other such examples also as follows:

nāmghar śuvani bātcorā paduli
bhakatar śuvani mālā
maṇikūṭ śuvani candratāpekhani
vantir śuvani śalā"[17]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

śaṅkara mādhava he nāmare pātilā khelā/
o vaikuṇṭhare parā harināma āni
bhāraṣṭe pracār karilā//
ār, ādite harirnām vaikuṇṭhe āchile
nāmare pātilā khelā/
ār dēvatā sakale tāṅka guputa karilā
nāmare pātilā khelā//
ār śaṅkara svarūpe tāṅka namāi ānilā
śaṅkara mādhava he// [19]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion:

It is sung in *Kāmrūpīyā lokagīt* as:

śaṅkar guru āmāre jagat guru āmāre
lukāi āchā dekhā nedā maṇikūṭar bhitare[24]

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

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

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The *Bargīt* as a fine skill in Śaṅkarī teaching

Golok Chandra Bora

Abstract:

The system of Śaṅkarī teaching may be considered to start from the event of Cihnayātrā, the first drama introduced by Śaṅkaradeva in 1468 A.D. It involves literatures, dramas, songs, dances and musical instruments as the elements of Śaṅkarī teaching. The system was evolved in nāmghara, thāna and satra, and later it reached to every household following Śaṅkarī philosophy. The Śaṅkarī teaching was initiated by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, and later enriched and propagated by their disciples. Amongst various instruments of Śaṅkarī teachings, bargīt is a fine art form consisting skills of singing, playing instruments, maintaining beats and rhythm of instrument (khola) and cymbal (tāla), classical musical knowledge apart from grasping of its lyrical beauty and literary meaning. Skill development is an important objective of education as a psychomotor domain of personality development. Bargīt plays a very important role in Śaṅkarī teaching system towards mass education and skill development. The objective of this article is to critically analyze the place of *bargīts* in the system of Śaṅkarī teaching, the elements of skills in *bargīts*, and the relevance of *bargīts* as a domain of skill development.

Keywords: Śaṅkarī teaching, education, psychomotor skill, bargīt, mass communicatin, communication process, art, science.

Introduction:

Teaching in modern education is an art and as well as a science. As an art, teaching involves skills like speaking, reciting, explaining, meaningful gestures, stimulus variations, expression, movements etc. Avoiding vague words, odd gestures etc. are also equally important to maintain an artistic nature of teaching. These are similar to the qualities and disqualifications of an artist mentioned in the *Nātyaśāstra* of Bharatamuni and *Saṅgīt Ratnākara of* Śarangadeva. Science is more important than art in teaching. Science of teaching is mostly rooted in psychology. This involves arousing motivation, attention, interest, appreciation, attitude, knowledge and values in the learners.[1] These are important both for formal and informal teaching.

Śaṅkarī teaching was first traced with the enactment of *Cihnayātrā* drama in 1468 A.D. Staging of this drama involved multidimensional skills like speaking dialogues, reciting verses (*slokas*) and hymns (*bhaṭimās)*, facial expressions,

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movements, motor skills in dancing, singing and playing instruments, drawing and painting, sculptures like making of instruments (*khola, tāla*), grotesques (*mukhās*) and other art forms like make-up, dress and costumes. These skills were first introduced by Śaṅkaradeva himself. All these are found in his later dramas—*Patnī-prasāda, Pārijāta-haraṇa, Kālīya-damana, Kelī-gopāla, Rukmiṇī-haraṇa and Śrīrāma-vijaya*. Śaṅkaradeva wrote *Kīrtana-ghoṣā* to perform *kīrtanas* in the front of assembled people (disciples). But listening is the foremost target here to react by the receiver (listener disciples) in the communication process. The orator (speaker of *kīrtana*) is the source or the sender of the communication process. The Speaking-listening (*Śravaṇa-kīrttana*) is the main skill to learn language in modern teaching–learning system. These two are also the foremost qualities among the nine kinds of *bhaktis* referred to in his *Nāma-dharma* by Śaṅkaradeva. The other forms of *navadha bhaktis* are—*smaraṇa, arcana, bandana, pada-sevana, ātma-nivedana, sakhitva,* and *dāsya*.[2] The main objective of Śaṅkaradeva to adopt these communication techniques and other creative art forms was to preach his *Eka-śaraṇa* theory, which is the core of the *Śaṅkarī* teaching system. *Śaṅkarī* teaching system was carried over by Mādhavadeva and other disciples and was transmitted through the *nāmgharas, thānas* and *satras.* This has been continuing till this date also.

A skilled person is called as *nipuṇa* or *paṭu* in *Śaṅkarī* language. When *Cihnayātrā* was first staged, Śaṅkaradeva selected people for acting, singing, dancing and playing instruments (*khola-tāla*) as per expertise of the individual. Śaṅkaradeva himself performed *khola* as *bāyana,* sang *rāgas-gītas* and also performed *Sūtradhārī* dance. He arranged a *kumāra* (potter) from Kapilīmukh to make a *khola* (special kind of *mṛdaṅga*). The objective of making a new instrument *khola* was to produce deeper sound and to be more resonant than the existing *mṛdaṅga.* The sound of *khola* was found to be more tuned and resonant to the voices of singers (*gāyana*).

As a noun, skill refers to the ability to do expertly and well or to use one's knowledge effectively readily in execution or performance.[3] Here knowledge means physical ability or mental powers like thinking, reasoning, computing etc. As an educational objective, skill pertains to psychomotor domain of personality development. For example, when we talk about a skill like dancing, it involves flexibility of body, shoulders, hands, fingers, eyes, feet, and at the same time coordination of all organs to manifest beautiful gestures. Singing involves qualities in modulation of voice, pronunciation of words, expressing meaning, maintaining rhythm and so on. In Indian classical language this is called *gāndharva vidyā*

(education). Śaṅkaradeva himself belonged to a *gāndharva* family. He praised his father Kusumbara as "*gāndharva sākṣāta*".[4]

The *Bargīt*- a fine skill

Right from the education under Mahendra Kandali's School (*ṭola*), Śaṅkaradeva used to write songs (*gītas*). The first ever song written by Śaṅkaradeva was found to be the soft song (*Komala-gīta*):

karatala kamala kamala dala nayana/
bhavadava dahana gahana bana śayana// etc.

In the time of *Cihnayātrā*, he wrote some songs, which were no longer been found along with the script of *Cihnayātrā*. Right from Tembuvanī up to Bhelā Madhupur he wrote several songs. Songs were composed during his pilgrimage also. For example, while he was in Badarikāśrama during his first pilgrimage[5], the song written by him was:

mana meri rāma caraṇahi lāgu/
tañi dekho nā antaka āgu// etc.

Apart from several songs composed for dramas (*nāṭas),*Śaṅkaradeva wrote two hundred and forty (twelve scores-*bārakuri*) numbers of songs in total. Unfortunately, the whole manuscript of 240 numbers of songs was burnt to ashes when Kamalā Gāyana, one of the singer disciples of Śaṅkaradeva took it for singing and memorizing. That was a sad incident in Śaṅkaradeva's life. He then, asked Mādhavadeva to compose similar songs. Apart from writing one hundred and fifty seven numbers of songs, Mādhavadeva also revived few *bargīts* of his beloved guru Śaṅkaradeva, which were stored well in the memories of various bright disciples. Śaṅkaradeva might have written a few *bargīts* after the sad incident though he had only two years to complete his long life of one hundred and nineteen[6]. Thus the 240 numbers of Śaṅkaradeva's *bargīts* came to 34 numbers, and thus we find altogether one hundred and ninety one (191, *na-kuri eghāra*) songs of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. People who practiced these songs, felt that those were unique, and not similar to the existing folk songs of light thoughts and languages. These are also classical (*rāga*) based songs and not easy to sing. They felt that the language of those songs was something Saṅskrt[7] mixed with *Braja,* and the feelings of the songs were very high. This highness was duly honoured by the word '*bar*' like *bar-sabāha, bar-nāmghara, bar-ākharā, bar-tāl, bar-dhemāli* etc., as used in old Assamese. In due course, these were named as '*Bargīts*'. Dr. B. Kakati has remarked, *bargīts* as 'noble numbers' and "*bargīts* are based on high moral and spiritual values". As per Kaliram Medhi, *bargīts* are 'great songs or song celestial'. Devendranath Bezbaruah

felt them as 'holy songs'[8]. The language used to write these *Bargīts* was later on identified as *Brajāvalī. Brajāvalī* was also used to write the dramas (*nāṭas*). Śaṅkaradeva used Saṅskrt and Assamese language to write all his books except six dramas and songs (*nāṭas and bargīts*). In dramas he used Saṅskrt for verses (*ślokas*) and *bhaṭimās* of *Sūtradhārī* and *Brajāvalī* for dialogues (*kathā*) and songs (*gītas*). But in *bargīts*, he exclusively used *Brajāvalī* mixed with Assamese and Saṅskrt, which could maintain a lyrical standard, a classical style of singing[9], a spiritual thought and a uniqueness amongst all existing local songs prevailed at that time.

Appeal of *Bargīts*:

Śaṅkaradeva has dealt with almost all Hindu scriptures,viz., Vedas, Vedanta, *Upaniṣadas, Purāṇas, Ramāyaṇa, Gītā, Mahābhārata* and other contemporary scriptures. The knowledge of these scriptures has been reflected in his books like *Kīrtana, Daśama, Guṇamālā, Bhakti-ratnaākara* etc. These all were wrote to establish his doctrine of *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma*. Dramas were written to teach people the essence of life by attracting them through the skill of mass communication. But it is interesting to see the intervention of *bargīts* in between the literatures and dramas of Śaṅkaradeva. From the influence of bargits on people it can be assumed that the *bargīts* acted as the instruments of propaganda[10]. A fiew example may be given how strongly *Śaṅkarī* teaching was supported by the *bargīts:*

1. Instrument for Prayer:

People like to pray their favourite deities. Prayer is a unique way to feel the very existence of oneself in the midst of this Universe. Śaṅkaradeva has set oneness of God in *bargīts* as'*Parama Brahma'* which is *nirguṇa* and the '*Purṇa Brahma Kṛṣṇa'* from *Gītā* and *Bhāgavata* which is *saguṇa* to carry us to the *nirguṇa*. Prayer with *bargīt* may connect one to his/her origin.

Let us take a few examples:

dhruṁ: *jaya jaya yādava jalanidhijādhava dhātā/*
śrutamātrākhilatrātā/
smaraṇe karaya siddhi dīnadayāla nidhi
bhukuti-mukutipada dātā//

pada: *jagajana jīvana ajana janārddana*
danujadamana dukhahārī/
mahadānanda kanda paramānanda
nanda nandan banacārī//

.....

śaṅkara ehu abhilāsī//

(rāga-Āśovārī- Śaṅkaradeva *)*

Here, Yādava (Kṛṣṇa) and *dhātā (Parama Brahma)* are not different. A devotee (Śaṅkaradeva) as the slave to the feet of Kṛṣṇa (*Keśavara caraṇakamalara kiṅkara*), prays to Viṣṇu, the obliging, the emitter of ray of peace, the owner of happiness and resources to dominate demon(*danuja*) and to provide joy repelling sorrow of life.

dhruṁ: *nārāyaṇ kāhe bhakati karo terā/*
meri pāmaru mana mādhava ghana ghana
ghātuka pāpa nachorḍa//

pada- *jata jīva jaṅgama kīta pataṅgama*
aganaga jaga teri kāyā/
……
sava aparādhaka vādhaka tuvā nāma
tāheśaraṇa lehu jāni//

(rāga-Dhanaśrī- Śaṅkaradeva*)*

In this prayer, the poet puts down himself to the feet of Nārāyana and asks, "Oh *(he)* Mādhava, my evil mind repeatedly involve in sinful activities. Oh *(he)* Nārāyaṇa, how can I serve you? All organisms including animate (*jīva*) and inanimate (*jaḍa)*, are originated from you. But I kill all these to fulfill my appetite; I don't show minimum kindness to these animals. You exist in all objects being soul or Iśvara, like space spreading in to all. Therefore, all harms done on these bodies are done to you only. Śaṅkara prays, "*he nātha*, please be kind enough to me, so that I would never leave *Rāma-nāma*. Because your name is the resistant to all crimes. Internalizing all these, I take oath at your name."

Other examples of prayers are:

dhruṁ: *nārāyaṇa caraṇe karoho gohāri/*
viṣaya vilāsa pāśe chāndi indriya mohi
*ohi lute vātovārī// (rāga-Dhanaśrī,*Śaṅkaradeva*)*

dhruṁ: *rāma gosāñi karoho gohāri/*
rahu hṛdi paṅkaja ṭhāma hāmāri //
(rāga-Āśovārī, Mādhavadeva*)*

dhruṁ: *nārāyaṇa māyā jānaba koi/*
surapati caturabayana muni śaṅkara
cintiteākula hoi// (rāga-Dhanaśrī, Mādhavadeva*)*

Almost other nine *bargīts* of Śaṅkaradeva and 25 *bargīts* of Mādhavadeva seem to come under this category.

2. Instrument for advising

Through a few *bargīts* Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva puts forward suggestions how to think and act to overcome hardships of life. For example a few songs are mentioned below:

dhruṁ: *bolahu rām nāmese mukuti nidānā/*
bhava vaitariṇī taraṇīsukha saraṇī
nāhi nāhi ñama samānā//

pada: *nāma pañcānana nāde palāvata*
pāpadantī bhya-bhīta
……
kṛṣṇa kiṅkara kaya choḍa māyāmaya
rāma paramatattva sāra//
(rāga-Dhanaśrī, Śaṅkaradeva*)*

dhruṁ: *nāhi nāhi ramayā vine tāpatāraka koi/*
paramānanda pada makaranda
sevahu mana moi//
(rāga-Gourī, Śaṅkaradeva*)*

dhruṁ: *re mana sevahu harikahu caraṇā*
nikaṭe dekhahu maraṇā/
dekhata harikahu caraṇa śaraṇa vine
nāhināhi bhavabhaya taranā//
(rāga-Āśovārī, Mādhavadeva*)*

dhruṁ: *ramaka vāṇī japahu mana bhāi/*
kaliko kāle āvara gati nāi//
(Rāga-Āśovārī, Mādhavadeva*)*

Thus almost eight *bargīts* of Śaṅkaradeva and thirty *bargīts* of Mādhavadeva come under this category.

3. Instrument for telling story:

Story telling is a universal teaching skill. Most of the great literary creations of the world are found in story telling mode. Most of the literature of Śaṅkaradeva is also written in story telling style. He adopted various stories of *Bhāgavata* and other

puraṇas to establish the supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa and to show the baselessness of worshipping various deities for propitiating various greeds. In the *bargīts,*Śaṅkaradeva describes the beauty of Kṛṣṇ's activities to make the people feel that all art forms are accumulated in and emit from Kṛṣṇa. People can involve in the sap of the essence of these stories and get required energies to live. Let us see a few story telling *bargīts* below:

rāga- Nāṭmallar:

dhruṁ: *madhura mūruti murāru*
mana dekha hṛdaye hāmāru/
rūpa anaṅga saṅga tulanā
tanu koti sūruja ujhiyāru//

pada- ……
aravinda nindi pāva nava pallava
ratana nūpura parakāśa/
bhakata parama dhana tāhe majoka mana
śaṅkara ehu abhilāṣā// (Śaṅkaradeva)

In the last stanza of the *pada*, it is described that, the feet of Murari (God) is like fresh leafs glorified by golden pearls which transcends even the beauty of lotus. The poet (Śaṅkaradeva) seeks his mind to be concentrated on those feet, which are of the absolute value for the devotees:

Some other beautiful bargits of this kind are:

dhruṁ: *gopinī prāṇa kāhenu geyore govinda/*
hāmu papinī punu pekhabo nāhi āra
sohi vadana aravinda// *(rāga-Māhura)*

dhruṁ: *herohu māi calali vipine madhāi/*
veṇu viṣāṇe niśāneāvata
haraṣe haraṣe dhenu dhāi// *(rāga-Dhanaśrī)*

dhruṁ: *dekhu sakhi madhura muruti hari/*
dhari adhare pūre mururī// *(rāga-Dhanaśrī)*

dhruṁ: *ānande govinde bāya vṛndāvane veṇu/*
rūpe bhūvana bhule rahiyā kadamva tale
kālindī tīre rākhe dhenu// *(rāga-Āśovārī)*

Almost other eleven *bargīts* of Śaṅkaradeva and ninty six *bargīts* of Mādhavadeva seem to come under this category.

4. Instrument for expressing situational thoughts:

Śaṅkaradeva composed various *bargīts* to express his situational feelings mixed with deep philosophical thoughts. When Śaṅkaradeva was at Vadarikāśrama, the sacred place at the source of Ganges, the young pilgrim was much provoked to compose his first *bargīt*:[11]

dhruṁ: *mana meri rāma-caraṇahi lāgu/*
taña dekha nā antaka āgu//

pada- *mana āyu kṣeṇe kṣeṇe ṭuṭe/*
dekho prāṇa kona dine chuṭe//
mana kāla ajagare gile /
jana tileke maraṇa mile//
mana niścaya patana kāyā/
taña rāma bhaja teji māyā//
re mana i sava viṣaya dhāndhā/
kene dekhi nedekhasa āndhā//
mana sukhe pāra kaice ninda/
taña cetiyā cinta govinda//
mana jānjyā śaṅkare kahe/
dekha rāma vine gati nahe// *(raga-Dhanaśrī)*

Rest my mind; rest on the feet of Rāma;
Seest thou not the great end approaching?
My mind, every moment of life is shortening,
Just heed any moment it might fleet off.
.....
O mind Śaṅkara knows it and says,
Except through Rāma there is no hope,

(Translated by B. Kakati, *Śaṅkaradeva*, 1921, p.10)

This poem is a beautiful example of poet's self-criticism about his incapability of mind to realize the very instability of life. We spend time by sleeping very happily but don't want to see the end of life. He (Śaṅkaradeva) reminds us that human life is very transient and illusory.

When he was in Gaṅgmou *thān* on the way to Pātbāusi from Bardovā, his first son Rāmānada was born in 1504 A.D. When Chandarī, their housemaid informed Dekāgiri Śaṅkaradeva, that one male baby was born; he was quite calm and was indifferent to the occurence. He immediately composed one *bargīt* and sang it with full emotion[12]. It was:

dhruṁ: *pāve pari hari* *karoho kātari*

prāṇa rākhabi mora/
viṣaya viṣadhra viṣe jarajara
jīvana nārahe thora//
pada: athira dhana-jana jīvana youvana
athira ehu saṅsāra/
putra parivāra savahi asāra
karabo kāheri sāra//
…… ……
Kahatu śaṅkara e dukha sāgara…
pāra karā hṛṣikeśa/
tuhu gatimati dehu chiripati
tattva pantha upadeśa// (raga-Kedār)

The poet explained to the devotees, "How much is the longevity of this human body? It is like a droplet of water on the leaf of lotus, dropping down at any moment". The thoughts underlying in the song is very spiritual and philosophical. The lyricist from his ideology and experience expresses that; this world of blooming life, men and money is very unstable. Relations like spouse, sons etc. are not of much value. "My world is ocean of thought, Oh! Lord, please lead me to cross this", the poet prays.

After the death of guru Śaṅkaradeva, Rāmānanda comes back to Pātbāusi for the funeral ceremony of his father. When he approaches Gaṇakakuchi by river boat, Mādhavadeva sings this *bargīt*:

dhruṁ: ālo mañi ki kahabo duḥkha/
parāṇa nigarḍe nādekhiyā cānda mukha//
pada: kata puṇye labhilo guṇera nidhi śyāma/
vañciyā nileka nikaruṇa vidhi vāma//
……
najāno daruṇa vidhi ki kare vipatti/
kahaya mādhava rāṅgā pade mora gati//

According to *Guru-carita* and L.N. Bezbaruah, Mādhavadeva's sixth sense already felt the demise of his most beloved *guru* before Rāmānanda reached him.

Influence of *Bargīts* in Life

In Vaishnava monastaries—*sattra* and *nāmghara*, there are practices of daily prayer. Daily prayer services are done in three, four, nine or fourteen units called *prasaṅga*. Each *prasaṅga* is started with one. *bargīt*. Bhaṭimā, kīrttana and other items follow it. *Bargīts* are very selective to perform in the morning, noon, afternoon, evening or

night as per their time cycle of *rāgas*. According to Dr. M. Neog, "with all their edifying contents, literary beauty and appealing music, the bargits attracted people to the new faith and became the solace of distressed hearts…There is a popular saying, *nom-negur-barjit, siyo gāy bargīt*. (The most wretched person- he also sings *bargīts*!)"

Rāgas* in *Bargīts:

The *Rāgas* Associated with the *Bargīts* of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are found as: *Ahira, Āśovārī, Bhūpālī, Dhanaśrī, Gaurī, Kalyāṇa, Keḍāra, Māhura,Māhura-Dhanaśrī, Nāṭa- Mallāḍa, Suhāi, Śrī, Tuḍa, Tuḍa-Basanta, Bhāṭiyālī,*and *Basanta.*

The *Rāgas* Exclusively Associated with Mādhavadeva's *bargīts are*:

Baḍāri, Belovāra, Kāmoda, Kānāḍā, Kau, Lalita, Nāṭa, Sindhurā, Śrī-Gāndhāra, Śrī-Gaurī, Suhāi, Śyāma, Śyāmgoḍā, Tuḍa-Basanta, Tuḍa-Dhanaśrī, Tuḍa-Bhātiyālī

Thus we find altogether 32-33 *rāgas* in the *bargits* of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. These names of *rāgas* are also found in the Sanskrit musical literature. But the *rāgas* stand on the base of *Dhruvapada* and *Pravandhagāna*, the traditional style of classical singing,found in pre-*Śaṅkarī* times of Assam. All these *rāgas* have time relation of singing with some exceptions. For example:

Morning	*rāgas:*	*Śyāma, Ahira, Kalyāṇa, Pūrvi* and *Lalita.*
Afternoon	*rāgas:*	*Belovāra, Dhanaśrī, Bhāṭiyālī, Māhura,Mallāḍa, Bhūpālī, Keḍāra, Kāmoda, Śrī, Tuḍa, Sareṅg,Suhāi, Gāndhāra* and *Gaurī.*
Evening	*rāgas:*	*Āśovārī, Baḍāri, Kānāḍā,* and *Sindhurā.*

Ragas related to *bargīts* are basically open ended. Beats (*Tālas*) are initially not bound to *rāgas*. But *rāgas* can be performed with beats (*rāga-tālani*). The lyrics of *bargits* have normally two parts, *dhruva* called *dhruṁ* and *pada*. But these are well designed to classical style of *Pravandhagāna.* The main steps of presenting a *bargīt* in classical (*Pravandhagāna*) style are *Udgraha, Melāpak, Dhruva* and *Ābhoga*. This style has been more or less followed in some present days Vaishnava monasteries (*satra*) also.

Beats (*Tālas*) Associated with *Bargīts*:

Hagiographies say on *Cihnayātrā*, "Guru Śaṅkara has started *rāga Vāyumaṇḍalī* bringing down *Bar-dhemālī, Ghosā-dhemāli* and beats from the abode, Bhima Bāyan has sung *gītas*. Laxman Gāyan and Balāi Gāyan have sung *rāga Timira.*" There are not more records on the event of *Cihnayātrā.* But, it is agreed that Śaṅkaradeva had designed new shape of *khola* and performed *Bar-dhemāli, Saru-*

dhemāli, Ghoṣā-dhemāli etc. with *khola* events in the *Cihnayātrā* itself. This was retained in dramas performed later on in different monasteries mainly in Pātbāusī *thāna.* These cultures have been first preserved and transmitted by the great artisan Mādhavadeva during the life time of Śaṅkaradeva and after his death. Padmakanta Bhuyan alias Badalā Padma Ātā was trained by Mathurā Dās Buḍhā Ātā under supervision of Mādhavadeva, who came to Kamalabari, Majuli for reviving the cultures of Śaṅkaradeva. Later on, culture of singing and beating (*khol-tāl*) has been transmitted through the ages. Though there have been changes but all are remaining almost intact. Presently we find several beats of *khola* which are mathematically equipped with the *bargīts.*

Some available Beats (*Tālas*) of *Khola* are:*Paritāl, Domāni, Rūpaka, Saru-viṣam, Bar-viṣam, Saru-yati, Un-yati, Dharam-yati, Math-yati, Bar-yati, Cutkalā, Racaka, Cabāri, Rūpaganja, Sudhāganja, Ektāli, Ekatāl, Kharmān, Tinimāni,*etc.These beats of *khola (tāla)* have unique mnemonic syllables*(bols),* unit of measurement*(mātrās),* and divisions *(vibhāgas)* in a cycle. One single *tāla* has atleast three cycles *viz., māna, ghāta and coka.* In a single *bargīt* one *tāla* can be very comfortably accompanied. But expert singers generally adopt more than one *tāla,* such as 2, 4, 6, 8, and maximum up to12 *tālas,* depending on the expertise.

***Bargīt* as the Skill in *Śaṅkarī* teaching:**

In formulating educational objectives, Benjamin S. Bloom first looked in to the total personality of an individual. He divided the area of personality development in to three divisions, viz., cognitive, affective (co-native) and psychomotor domains[13]. Simply speaking these are development of head, heart and hand. Pedagogic curriculum is to be developed to suit all these areas and teaching is to be aimed to nurture these all areas.

Śaṅkaradeva's endeavour was started with the **head** from the very beginning of the school at Mahendra Kandali. Just after recognizing *Upaniṣadas* and *purāṇas* he started to write scriptures like *Hariścandra-upākhyāna* based on *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa.* He was involved in intellectual (head) activities in whole life until his last writing *Śrīrāma-vijaya* at the age of 119 years. Later on he came to the **heart** part by emphasizing on devotion (*bhakti*). B*hakti* is rooted in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and the primary target of *bhakti* is the God—Kṛṣṇa. Since God manifests in all creatures—men, animal, etc. as his own creation, *bhakti* may manifests in different ways. *Bhakti* is the respect, sincerity, honesty, loyalty, kindness and morality in modern educational terms.

Thirdly,Śaṅkaradeva came to the **hand (skill)** part. Hand is related to works like making and playing instrument, dancing, singing, acting and so on. He was not

only a high intellectual personality to compose altogether 27 scriptures including Saṅskrt *Bhakti-ratnākara*, but also a skilled artisan to introduce new version of a lather instrument *khola,* to design a wonderful textile *Brndābanī Bastra,* to compose several songs and *bhaṭimās* and dramas. He was an actor, lyricist, singer and instrument player. Mādhavadeva has appreciated Śaṅkaradeva too highly so many times in his *Nāma-ghoṣā*. The most popular saying of Mādhavadeva about Sankaradeva is the *Gurubhaṭimā:*

jaya guru śaṅkara sarvaguṇākar
yākeri nāhike upāma/ etc.

It means to say that Śaṅkaradeva is the source of all attributes (*sarvaguṇākara*) and he is incredible and incomparable.

Though Śaṅkaradeva is well known for his image as the "religious saint", yet he has introduced a very important psychomotor skill like *bargīt*. From the description of the elements of *bargīt* it is clear that *bargīt* involves skills like singing of *rāga, dhruṁ* and *pada* in classical steps like *udgrāha, melāpāk, dhruva* and *ābhoga*. It demands knowledge of beats, rhythm and singing resonantly. The beats and rhythm of *khola* associated with *bargīt* seems to be very difficult in comparison to Indian Classical instruments like *tāblā* or *pākhovāj*. But very fortunately the followers of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva could perform the *bargīts* very easily with too much difficult beats of *khola*. This is a very noticeable quality of the system of *Śaṅkarī* teaching.

Conclusion:

Bargīt with all its qualities—lyrical beauty, poetic excellence, spiritual feelings, musical senses and skills and subjects related to teaching of life from birth to death has been a good mass-communication skill in modern times.

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A Historical Study of Assamese Vaishnavite Theatre in the Light of Theatrology

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Abstract:

Art and society are in a state of continuous mutual dependency. Theatre is a unique art form created by people. Theatre may be defined as a form of human expression and creative activity, which is performed in front of an audience. The main shaping factors of this art form are the socio-economic, political scenarios along with individual, technological and artistic forces. Assam is a state situated in the North Eastern part of India. The history of Assamese theatre goes many centuries back. Śaṅkaradeva, the great Vaishnavite saint of Assam, was the pioneer of Assamese drama and theatre. He introduced innovative dramatic practices that encompassed the most natural expressions in the sphere of drama. In the fifteenth century, when Śaṅkaradeva was only nineteen years old, he organized a dramatic performance known as *Cihnayātrā*, which literally stands for 'pageant on painted scenes'. *Cihnayātrā* may be regarded as the 'preamble' to the first regular Assamese theatre, stage and music. It was the first work of its kind in the entire range of Modern Indo-Aryan languages. Eventually, the pageant show developed as the regular theatre style as *aṅkīyā nāṭa*, the representation of which is called *bhāonā,* which is also spelled as *bhāvanā*. As a performing art form, *bhāonā* does not follow any model of such representation in Sanskrit, *Prākṛt* or otherwise. This theatrical performance has close proximity with Assamese society from the time of its commencement till date. According to the historical '*Treaty* of Yandaboo' in 1826, Assam came under the British colonial rule as a result of which western influence started to impose a great impact on the theatrical practices in Assam. It was followed by different types of theatrical presentations, which significantly affected Assamese theatre. But most of them were western in style. This essay intends to delve into the descriptive aspect of the Assamese Theatre in the light of Theatrology.

Keywords: *aṅkīyā nāṭa, aṅka, bhāonā,* Śaṅkaradeva, Theatrology

Introduction

Each and every human being has a tendency to express his or her day-to-day experiences in front of others. This type of tendency shows the way to different creative work or art forms. Every creative work or art form has some specific characters and that basic characteristic gives the uniqueness of that art form. Theatre is also a unique art created by human being. The basic characteristic of

theatre is its 'audio-visual text'; the script of a play can be referred to as 'text'. When a text is prepared for performance it is converted into 'performance text' for actors, directors and all designers. Finally, when the performance takes place in front of spectators, it is converted into 'audio-visual text' with the help of different allied elements of theatre, viz. lighting, music (including sound effects), acting, dialogue or sound pattern, costume, make-up, settings etc. Theatre may be defined as a form of human expression and creative activity, which is performed in front of an audience. According to Nicoll, "Drama is that art of expressing about life in such a manner to render that expression capable of interpretation by actors and likely to interest an audience assembled to hear the words and witness the actions."[1]

Art and society are in a state of continuous mutual dependency almost like a chain relation. This means that they influence each other; society is modified by the art whose product it is and that art in a given society confronts a structure, which presupposes many of its characteristics. Every change in one sphere is linked to change in the other and it calls forth a further change in the system in which the change originates. The main shaping factors of any art form are the socio-economic, political scenario or reality along with individual psycho, technological and artistic forces and it can be treated as a record of social experience, an embodiment of social myths and ideals and aims and an organization of social beliefs and sanctions.[2]

Here, in this essay, the writer intends to delve into the descriptive aspect of the Assamese Vaishnavite Theatre in the light of theatrology. It is not possible to cover the entire history of Assamese theatre in an essay; therefore, the main focus will be on the traditional theatre practices of Assam, that is, *bhāonā*. According to the theatre researchers, theatrology is the study of theatrical performance in relation to its literary, physical, psycho-biological, sociological and historical contexts and it has three dimensions—theory, history and practice. With the help of these tools, Assamese traditional theatre i.e., *bhāonā* is attempted to examine.

Bhāonā and *Aṅkīyā Nāṭa* : The Vaisnava Theatre and Drama of Assam

It is already mentioned that the practical representation of *aṅkīyā nāṭa* is called *bhāonā*. *Bhāonā*, the traditional theatre practices of Assam was created by an Assamese Neo-Vaishnavite preacher, social reformer and philosopher Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568) and his disciple Mādhavadeva (1489-1596) in fifteenth

and sixteenth centuries. The term *bhāonā* is also used for the play performance based on their models. It should be mentioned here that instead of entertainment to masses *bhāonā* is considered as a great act of piety. It was created as a part of Pan-Indian Vaishnavite (*bhakti*) movement of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. According to Richmond, "...of the various means used to propagate this new faith among the masses of India's village theatre became one of the most successful, owing in no small measure to its ability to draw large audiences together to watch entertaining stories with didactic massages." [3] Even today each and every devotee of Assamese society believes that the piety earned through taking part of any *bhāonā* is more than ten times the efficacy of the service given to the congregation. In this regard, *bhāonā* can be considered as a ritual performance.

Craig has stated, "...the religious drama had no dramatic technique or dramatic purpose, and no artistic self-consciousness. Its life blood was religion and its success depended on its awakening and releasing a pent-up body of religious knowledge and religious feelings."[4] This statement is equally applicable to Assamese *bhāonā* also, it has its basic motive to popularize and reinforce an intense feeling of devotion among the devotees of the God (Kṛṣṇa). According to Maheswar Neog, one of the greatest scholars of Assamese culture and literature:

> Plot, characterization and dialogue are all subordinated to the dramatist's main purpose if instilling into the hearts of the audience the message of 'bhakti'... ...The dramatist's energy is directed towards evoking a devotional fervour in the audience... ...The plot is so arranged as to glorify the hero, Kṛṣṇa or Rāma.[5]

To understand the main motive of *bhāonā* we have to be aware of the religious philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva was the main propagator of Pan-Indian Vaishnavite movement in Assam. Vaishnavism was a movement where poet-saint of India was proselytizing a revision of orthodox Hinduism and the base of this philosophical principle is derived from the *Vedantic* text *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Being and Ultimate Essence of the universe. The official name of Śaṅkaradeva's Vaishnavism is *Eka Śaraṇa Dharma*—the religion of supreme surrender to one. Śaṅkaradeva believed that God creates the individual soul and it is clouded by illusion of the creator (*māyā*). To overcome this, the devotees have to worship God and thus release him from the cycle of rebirth. The play performance might have the anonymity of understanding of the philosophy – "the performance of the play represented a

deliberate attempt by the playwright to duplicate the effect of *māyā* on the audience, through the story, actors, costume, props, music and dance."[6] Here Śaṅkaradeva successfully blended some characteristics of Sanskrit play and some traditional folk-performing art forms of Assam and outside Assam.

Before discussing about the making of *bhāonā* we have to consider the basic theoretical or literary knowledge of *aṅkīyā nāṭa*. The dramatic performance of *Cihnayātrā* was the first ever such performance in Assam. Till now the full text of this play is untraceable, but detailed description regarding the performance is available in different hagiographic (biographic!) works on Śaṅkaradeva. As it appears in hagiography it was a panto-mimic performance with painted scenery in the backside. It was performed with the help of music and dance. This performance was developed later into a regular theatre style, *aṅkīyā nāṭa*. The term *aṅkīyā nāṭa* was not used by Śaṅkaradeva; he called his dramatic work as *nāṭa, nāṭaka, yātrā* or *nṛtya*. The hagiography writers of Śaṅkaradeva used the term *aṅka* to describe his play. In reference to *aṅkīyā nāṭa*, a great Vaishnavite researcher S. K. De wrote to Maheswar Neog "the word *aṅka* is used in medieval vernacular literature in the sense of drama in general, without any reference, express or implied to the highly technical *aṅka* of the Sanskrit Drama."[7] Another argument is also there that Assamese variety of drama was called as *aṅka* only because it was a dramatic composition of single act.

Śaṅkaradeva wrote six *aṅkīyā nāṭas* – *Patnī-prasāda* (the favours shown by Kṛṣṇa to the wives of the Brahmans), *Kālī-damana* (the subjugation of the serpent Kālī), *Keli-gopāla* (Kṛṣṇa's playful sports with the milkmaids of Vṛndāvana), *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* (the abduction of Rukmiṇī), *Pārijāta-haraṇa* (the theft of the flowering *Pārijāta* tree) and *Rāma-vijaya* (the triumph of Rāma). His principal follower Mādhavadeva also wrote– *Arjuna-bhañjana* (uproot of Arjuna tree), *Cor-dharā* (catching of the thief), *Pimparā-gucuvā* (removal of ant), *Bhūmi-letovā* (the story of earthen layer on face), *Bhojana-vehāra* (treating to Lord Kṛṣṇa) and *Dadhi-mathana* (synthesisation of card by the milkmaids of Vajra). Mādhavadeva's plays are comparatively small with limited scope of story elements and portrayal of single situation. They are generally known as *Jhumurā*. Assamese dramatic literature grew under the auspices of the two great saints Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. After their demise, the process slowly declined due to fall short of the excellence of the master's handiwork.[8],[9]. Although the history speaks of the continuation of writing of similar generic plays till date; yet some major changes have come over the years. After the 'Treaty of Yandaboo' in 1826, the British occupied the land and the entire socio-cultural life of Assam changed. As a result, the western style of drama and

theatre came to be introduced in Assam. From that period, two major types of drama and theatre appeared in Assam – (a) Tradition of Vaishnavite drama and theatre, i.e. *aṅkīyā nāṭa* and *bhāonā*, (b) different generic style of western drama and theatre. But the practice and performance of the living tradition of *aṅkīyā nāṭa* and *bhāonā* is still preserved in the villages and *sattras* of Assam. Some new technical aspects of western plays have also been incorporated in recent performance of *bhāonā*, mainly in lighting, costume, props etc.

The researchers and historians of Assamese drama have mentioned that the *aṅkīyā nāṭa* has some noteworthy characteristics, i.e., –importance of *Sūtradhāra* (Stage Manager), essential lyrical nature, use of *Brajāvalī* language, use of lyrical prose text, music and dance; great stress in *bhakti* sentiments. *Sūtradhāra* plays the vital role in any *aṅkīyā nāṭa*. The entire performance is under the close supervision of the *Sūtradhāra* and he remains in the stage from the beginning to the end. He is not a conjugated part of the main performance but he actively takes part in the entire process of the play and provide necessary stage directions from time to time, deliver discourses on the ethical and spiritual meaning of the plot etc. He should be an accomplished dancer, singer and narrator.

Use of Sanskrit verse and different types of songs give the special characteristics to *aṅkīyā nāṭa*. *Aṅkīyā nāṭa* is lyrical in nature and the whole performance takes place in a rhythmic representation of dances, songs and dialogues. All the characters move rhythmically from the beginning to the end in the form of dance. Even the fighting scene takes place in the form of dance. Śaṅkaradeva used *Brajāvalī* language in his plays and in one special type of song (*bar-gīta*). Assamese *Brajāvalī* is an artificial diction and it is a mixture of *Maithili* and Assamese language. Śaṅkaradeva was well versed in Sanskrit language, but he used this *lingua franca* as it was the common language of Kṛṣṇa devotion of those times and he used this language to get response from the audience of the entire region. The main characteristic of *aṅkīyā nāṭ* is giving great stress in the manifestation of *bhakti* sentiments. *Aṅkīyā nāṭas* were written more with a religious motive but "it would not be correct to say that dramatic effect did not exist in them at all; it existed at least in the conflict of interest and emotions. This conflict which is the soul of all dramas was made spectacular rather than intensive in the psychological sense."[10]

The Vaishnavite drama of post-Śaṅkaradeva period does not adopt all these basic characteristics. Due to deficiency of excellent writers in regards to use of Sanskrit verse, it decries and in the later part, everyone avoided it. The preponderance of *Brajāvalī* is largely minimized and gradually regular Assamese

conversational diction emerged. In the same way, the prevalence of *Sūtradhāra* role is minimized. The minimization of *Sūtradhāra's* role helped in certain extension as in the development of dialogue as a dramatic piece. Even the gradual emancipation of drama and theatre from its exclusive religious purpose has also appeared in the sphere.

If we consider the plot and subject matter of *aṅkīyā nāṭa*, we will find that Śaṅkaradeva has written all his plays based on some portions of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and *Rāmāyaṇa.* Apart from *Rāma-vijaya* (here he brought the theme from *Rāmāyaṇa*) he adopts all plots from *Bhāgavata-purāṇa.* Basically no changes were made in the main stories and central characters, but some minor details have been incorporated. According to Sanskrit drama a play has five stages of development of actions (*avasthā*), five elements of plot (*arthaprakṛti*) and five junctures (*sandhis*). Even Śaṅkaradeva does not closely follow the theoretical niceties, but his play has been analyzed on the basis of these aspects of Sanskrit drama. Portraying of certain incidents on stage is prohibited in Sanskrit drama, but Śaṅkaradeva does not follow such prohibition in *aṅkīyā nāṭa*. The unity of time, space and action are not properly observed in *aṅkīyā nāṭa*.

Generally, characterization is the lasting element of any dramatic work. But *aṅkīyā nāṭa* does not give more emphasis on portraying any character. Basically Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu's incarnation Rāma was the central character of *aṅkīyā nāṭa* and he is divine and endowed with all good and great qualities. The leading female characters are Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā, Yaśodā, Śacī and Sītā. The comic character *Viduṣaka* of Sanskrit drama is absent in *aṅkīyā nāṭa*. Śaṅkaradeva replaces this character by some of the other characters like *Nārada* (in *Pārijāta-haraṇa*), *Vedanidhi* (*Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*), *Viśvāmitra* (*Rāma-vijaya*).

The principal disciple Mādhavadeva also follows his Guru's path. He also incorporates the main theme of his plays from *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and *Vilvamaṅgala Stotra* and main characters of his plays is also Kṛṣṇa. But Mādhavadeva minimizes the role of *Sūtradhāra*, Sanskrit verse and *Brajavalī* language. He adopts old Assamese language in his dialogue.

It is already mentioned that the living tradition of *aṅkīyā nāṭa* is continuing till date. Most of the writers try to imitate Śaṅkaradeva; but they are unable to continue the rich tradition. They collect themes from Rāmāyaṇa tales, *Mahābhārata* tales and from other epics etc. they even collect themes from some verses of Śaṅkaradeva and others. Particularly killing of demons or evil ones (*badha*), rape or carrying away of godly and noble women (*haraṇa*) are the popular theme of those plays. They give more emphasis on love scenes,

fightings, dances and mournful wailings (*vilāpa*); sometimes they bring extra-sensuous elements too. In this regard a statement of Maheswar Neog is stated below:

> There is a good deal of blood and thunder in the *bhāonā* plays particularly in those written after the two great Masters... ...This predominance of blood and thunder is there in the same measure as in plays of other parts of medieval India, whether it is *Kathākali* or *Bhāgavata-melā*. The characters sometimes look grotesque and instill in the heart of the audience awe and terror with a little violence, alternated by moments of tenderness and grace and touches of lyricism and pathos[11].

The central character of the plays was also shifted to different characters. Even some comic characters are also introduced for comic relief in the performance. Even in the performance of Śaṅkaradeva's play some comic characters were brought in[12].

The Making of *Bhāonā*

Basically *bhāonā* can be divided into two categories- *aṅkīyā bhāonā* or representation of the dramas of Śaṅkaradeva & Mādhavadeva and some other plays of later *Mahantas*; secondly, *General bhāonā* or *mātṛbhāṣār nāṭak* (generally used Assamese speech for its dialogue) or representation of the dramas written by followers of both.

Most of the *bhāonā* performances take place in *nāmghar*, the prayer hall of the villages of Assam and in *sattras*.

> The *sattra* institution envisaged by Śaṅkaradeva and his apostles is the high watermark and consummation of the *bhakti* movement in Assam. Designed on democratic norms and solidarity of the preceptor and the laity, *sattra* was conceived as a source of life, verve and vigour for sustenance of the tradition of religious learning and the pursuit of art and the new social order born out of their resurgent milieu. [13]

S*attras* include four rows of *hāṭi,* the house or huts, where devotees or monks assemble and stay together. The prayer hall of *nāmghar or kīrttanghar* is situated in the central place of the compound. The prayer hall is rectangular in shape, two-roofed and mainly supported on two rows of large wooden pillars. Two other rows of shorter and thinner posts are placed in both sides and joined with the first two rows. Earlier it was thatches structure, but now it is made of other materials available in the market. The hall is usually built east to west. In the

eastern part another small hall in constructed and this portion is called *maṇikūṭa*—the 'house of jewels' or 'sanctum sanctorum'. Here a copy of *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (translated into Assamese by Śaṅkaradeva), a religious script is kept upon a *Siṁhāsana* (a quadri-angular wooden structure with a large base at the bottom with five or seven stairs proportionately growing smaller to the top decorated on all sides with creeper-flower designs). The four angles are likewise decorated with stylized motifs of lions standing on elephants or on tortoises. The sacred scripture the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* is installed on a small cubicle built at the top) the wooden throne symbolized representation of Kṛṣṇa. The structure of village *nāmghar* is also similar to it.

The *nāmghar* serves the purpose of the stage and auditorium of *bhāonā* performance. *(Fig.1)* Sometimes a large pandal (*rabhā*) of oblong shape is also constructed for *bhāonā* performance. Lately, it is noticed that some performances of *bhāonā* also takes place in proscenium stage. In such cases, the organisers place a symbolic representation of *maṇikūṭ* in any corner of the proscenium stage. According to the hagiography of two masters, Mādhavadeva built a temporary performance house at Barpeta (a small town of Assam) for presentation of his plays *Bhojana-vehara* and *Dadhi-mathana*. It was called *bar-ghar* (big hall), *raṅga-gṛha* (play house) or *natuvā-ghar* (dancers or actors house). The entire hall was decorated with mica sheets and shone like gold and silver.

The performance takes place in the centre, facing the *maṇikūṭ* of the *nāmghar* i.e., two-third of the space between the two lines of the big pillars. All around the stage (not using any raised platform) is the auditorium, leaving two passages, one nearby *maṇikūṭ* and the other at the further end as the entry and the exit passages of actors and orchestra (musicians-*gāyana-bāyan*). The side nearby the *maṇikūṭ* is reserved for the superior of *sattra* or other such holy men of the village and other dignitaries take their seats nearest to this place. General audience, consisting of all classes of people, takes their seats at the remaining parts of the auditorium. Most of them sit on the floor and the last few rows have to be kept for standing spectators. In earlier times, a part of the auditorium was set apart under cover of a scene as greenroom. Nowadays separate *Cho-ghar* (greenroom) is constructed to the side of the *nāmghar.*

The first ever *bhāonā* performance took place in front of painted sceneries, but after that Śaṅkaradeva discarded the presentation style. The *bhāonā* performances took place in an arena like space and no permanent background of set was used. Only a white curtain (*ār-kāpor*) was used in front of the special archway of lights (*agni-gaḍ*) for introductory entry of the orchestra

(*gāyana-bāyana*), chief actors like *sūtradhāra* and the hero. Presently, it has come to notice that some villagers and those who are performing in proscenium stage, try to use platform or fixed sets, simple decorative scene-pieces for *bhāonā* performances. The special archway of lights with nine lamps is a major part of the entire *bhāonā* performance. In earlier times, the arch was constructed with bamboo sticks, but now it is made of decorative wooden structure and the shape was varying from place to place. The use of nine lamps in the arch represents nine types of *bhakti* mentioned in the Vaishnavite text. According to Richmond "...it is not be found anywhere else in India. The arch may symbolize the bridge between the physical and spiritual world or merely the point of transition between the *māyā* of the real world and that of the drama."[14]

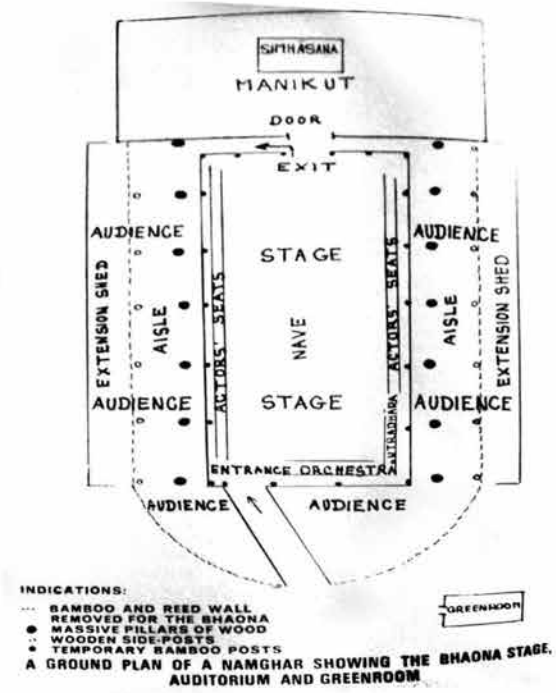


Fig 1: Ground Plan of the *nāmghar,* performance space of *bhāonā* (Source: From the Book *Bhaona: The Ritual Play of Assam,* written by Maheswar Neog*)*

The term *bhāvarīyā* is generally used for the actors of *bhāonā*, in earlier times they were called as *nartaka* or *natuvā* (dancer). As it is already mentioned

that dance is the predominant element of *bhāonā* and the earlier term also represented it. The term *bhāvarīyā* is not applied to the role of Rāma or Kṛṣṇa (they are referred as *gosāi* -God) and *sūtradhāra*. The actors of *bhāonā* seem to be amateurs in nature. Richmond rightly observed that "from the beginning in the early sixteenth century, *aṅkīyā nāṭa* has been the province of amateurs. As far as known there have never been professional companies of actors organized to perform, it is a fact which further emphasizes that its purpose is strictly religious and not secular."[15] In *sattras*, actors are selected from among the clerics and in villages they are selected from among the villagers. There is no restriction of caste in casting of characters; even today, people of Muslim community can take part as an actor in any *bhāonā* performance. Any person with high social, religious and political status can take part as an actor or members of orchestra without any hesitation of losing his status. But the main actor *Sūtradhāra* need to have the quality to sing solo and in chorus, to dance, to properly recite Sanskrit verses. Usually a handsome lad is selected for the role of the main hero of the *bhāonā* and when he makes his entry into the performance arena he is considered as an incarnation of God. In earlier times women were not permitted to take part as an actor, male actors invariably played the role of female characters. The monks of the *sattras* are clean-shaved and they grow long hair; this advantage helps them in playing a female role. It has come to the notice that those who play female characters and play any role of dancer in *bhāonā,* their physical gesture is unknowingly dominated by feminine characters in their day-to-day's life. It could be an anthropological study of *bhāonā*. But today, most of the *sattras* and villagers disagree to the restriction of earlier. Nowadays we can see *bhāonā* performance made by all female group members without the aid of male members as actors (*Fig. 2, 3*).

Fig 2: Female artist performing *bhāonā* (Source: From own Collection)
[*Please see the back cover of the journal]
Fig 3: Female artist performing *bhāonā* (Source: From own Collection)
[Please see the back cover of the journal]

The visual appeal of *bhāonā* lies on melodramatic and rhythmic acting style. All actors have particular set of costumes, specific masks, effigies and some props. Generally, the *khanikar* (painter and artist of earthen models) prepare the *cho-mukhā* (effigies), face mask and necessary props of the *bhāonā* with the help of other performers or villagers. Effigies are large in size and representations of animals and other inanimate objects or characters. Serpent-demon Kālī, Nara-

siṁha (Half man and half lion incarnation of God, *Fig 4*), *Jāmbavanta,* the king of bear, mythical birds like Garuṇḍa, Jatāyu, monkey (Hanumanta), Rāvana, the king of Lanka (sometimes Rāvana used only mask) are the examples of life-size effigies.

Fig 4: Effigies of *Nara-simha* used in *Bhaona* (Source: From own Collection)
[Please see the back cover of the journal]

Effigies are made of bamboo wicker-works, covered with clothes and clay and if necessary stitched by hanging fibers of jute. Effigies are painted in a stylized manner to symbolize the personality and temperament of the characters. Face masks are other specific props of *bhāonā*. Masks are used for unusual appearance of different characters like four-headed Brahma, demons (*Fig 5*) likes Suvāhu, Mārica, Śūrpanakhā, Rāvana etc.

Face masks are also made of wood or bamboo, covered with cloth and clay. In ancient times, all effigies and masks were painted with vermilion (*heṅgul*), yellow arsenic (*hāitāl*), indigo (*nīl*) and lamp-black. But now *khanikars* use general paints available in the market. All other props are also made of bamboo, wood or cane. The costumes of the actors of *bhāonā* have change through the last five centuries. According to Richmond the costume of the *Sūtradhāra* seems to have been preserved throughout the form's creations.[16] He wears a full white skirt, richly embroidered waist-band, collar studded with pearl-like beads and two different types of head-gear; one is like turban (*pāg, pāguri*) and the other one is *Moglāi-tupi* like the head-gear of Mughal emperors. He wears silver bangles (*gāmkhāru*), a lace with a drum-like golden bead in the middle (*matāmaṇi*) dangling ear-ornament of gold (*unti*) and brass anklets (*nepur*). The hero Kṛṣṇa put on yellow colour lower garment *dhoti*, embroidered sheets of yellowish, blue or reddish cloths adorning his breast, waist and back. He wears a waist-bend falling in multiple laces of tinklers, a tiara with a number of spikes, peacock feather and garland of flowers; but it seems to be a modern feature. Kings and warriors wear different coloured waistcoat studded with glittering glass or mica and tight *dhoti* as lower garment.

Female characters usually dress with three-piece cloths- *mekhelā,* the close skirt, *rihā*, an upper wrapper and a black blouse. In earlier times, the dress of the *gopīs of Vajra* (milkmaids) consisted of a lower *ghagrā (ghuri),* decorated wrapper (*rihā*) and a brocade waist-band (*taṅgāli*), black blouse, but now the indigenous dress *rihā* and *mekhelā* have taken their place of those costumes. Female characters required detailed and careful makeup. Artificial breasts made

of wood or heads of gourds, coconut shell equally divided into two parts are used; they put vermilion marks on the forehead, used bracelets, necklaces, ear-ornaments and lizard like ornaments of gold, silver and jewels across the head. Generally, nobody used any kind of footwear in *bhāonā*. Bare feet were one of the major features of any ritualistic performance; but now it has come to the notice that some characters use footwear in the performances.



Fig 5: Demon character of *bhāonā* with full costume and mask
(Source: From the Book *Bhāonā: The Ritual Play of Assam,* written by Maheswar Neog)

In earlier times, vermilion, yellow arsenic, indigo, chalk (*dhal*), brown ocher (*gereu*), lamp-black, collyrium, mica were used as makeup materials; but now actors use different materials easily found in the market. Some definite colours are used in the face to identify specific characters and temperament of the characters. For example, indigo is used for face painting of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, black is used for all demons, reddish for the singer of heaven and other Gods, white for Brahmins and mendicant etc. Rags, jute fiber, yak tails were used as artificial hair on head and body. The *cho-ghar* (greenroom) is used as dressing room and here all effigies are preserved for the particular performances.

The big or kettle-drums (*ḍabā*), barrel-shaped drums (*khola*), large cymbals (*bar-tāl*), flat cymbal (*pāti-tāl*), small size cymbals (*saru-tāl, khuti-tāl or mañjirā-tāl*), flute (*vāhī, murulī*) and gong made of bell-metal, *Śaṅkha* (conch shell) were used as musical instruments of any *bhāonā* performance. But in some places, *Kālīyā* (pipe) seems to be used. Generally, ankle-bells (*nepur, junukā,*

ghungurā) were used by Kṛṣṇa. Presently different types of musical instruments like *rudra vīṇā*, harmonica, violin etc. are also used in some performances of *bhāonā*, but mainly barrel-shaped drums play the role of the main musical instrument of any *bhāonā* performance.

As we know lighting is a major element for any theatrical performance. In ancient times different types of lighting elements were used in *bhāonā*, like large chandeliers (*gacā*-each holding about hundreds of earthen lamp), torches (*āriyā*-burning clothes soaked in mustard oil), large mustard oil lamps and brilliant pyrotechnic lights (*mahatā, matā* or *mahalā*) and small lights in special archway of lights. After the invention of gas lights, petro-max lamp and electric lights etc., all these techniques appeared in *bhāonā* performance and these replace the traditional lighting arrangements. Śaṅkaradeva started a unique way of lighting design. All characters enter into the performance area through the special archway of lights and they appear after the removal of a curtain in front of them. The whole concentration of the spectators is in that portion and due to the lights in the archway, the characters become distinctly visible. It seems that Śaṅkaradeva adopted the concentrated lighting technique in this manner. Therefore, we can say that Śaṅkaradeva was the first light designer of Assam.

Bhāonā is generally performed in some special occasions, like *Janmāṣṭamī* (the birthday celebration of Lord Kṛṣṇa), *Nandotsava* (celebration of Kṛṣṇa's birth day), *Dal-yātrā* (ride for colours), *Rās-pūrṇimā* (full-moon nights of the month of November) and on saint's day. Sometimes they are celebrated in special occasions like death of a holy man of a village and *sattra*. Most of the villagers of Assam perform *bhāonā* once in a year, mainly when they are free from all agricultural activities and can devote time for devotional celebration (roughly mid-January to mid-April). The celebration is termed as *bacherekiyā bhāonā* (annual performance of *bhāonā*) and the entire village gets engaged with the performance in different levels. All family members of villagers may not be casted the characters of the particular play to be performed in the annual performance of *bhāonā*, but all the people of the village get psycho-physically involved in the process in different levels in the arranging the performance.[17] Therefore, everyone feels some kind of deep intimacy in the entire process which is generally not found in any other theatrical performance. It is a unique tradition or characteristic of *bhāonā*.

The rehearsal process commences with some traditional approaches; it is called as *Nāṭ-melā* (the starting of the rehearsal process). All members of the village or *sattra* get together in the prayer hall and offer homage to God in traditional way and state that they are planning to perform a *bhāonā*. The head of

the village or *sattra*, the head drummer and singer (main *bāyana* and *gāyan*) and along with all the members present in the prayer hall, decide the drama to be performed and selection of roles. After that the rehearsal process starts. The rehearsal process takes place in the *nāmghar*. Generally, the head drummer with the help of the head singer and senior members of the village or *sattra* give training to all the performers of *bhāonā* in the evening time and get ready for the performance. The annual performance of *bhāonā* of a village is like a special occasion to all families; it creates a holistic and festive mood in the villagers. Everyone gets involved in the different levels of the entire process. For example, the village *khanikar* and his followers get busy with making of necessary effigies, masks and other props; in the same way some members are involved in making of simple decorative scene-pieces, some members look after the ritual matters. Hence we can say that the arrangement of a *bhāonā* is a 'community involvement process', it is a unique characteristic of the said dramatic performance. Commonly every villager invites their relatives on the particular performance day to watch the performance.

Performance takes places

On the particular day of *bhāonā* performance the entire village is in a festive mood. The *bhāonā* performance takes place in the evening, but the ritual processes continue to the morning and they perform holy-songs (*nāma-kīrttana*) and congregational prayers (*bar-sabhā*) daylong. Normally the actors fast for the day and take the blessing of the holy assembly.

Usually the *bhāonā* performance continues throughout the night, no play is performed in the early hours of the morning. Before the actual performance takes place in the evening, after the lighting of the lamps, the holy assembly congregation offers the evening prayers and start beating the kettledrum (*ḍabā*) kept on a stand along with conch shell and gong. It creates a spiritual and serene atmosphere. Then two persons carry the archway of lights and place it at the entrance area. A big piece of white cloth is screened in front of the archway and the whole team of orchestra takes place behind it. The numbers of the team may vary in different performances. All musicians wear *dhoti* as their lower garment, shirts and turbans. They offer their homage to God and says *''jaya hari bolā, jaya rāma bolā''* (say victory to Kṛṣṇa, say victory to Rāma) then the curtain is removed. They make their entry into the performance space and then move towards the *maṇikūṭ* and in marching pattern forms a figure eight, and then they present long series of elaborate rhythmic passages. This holistic performance is

called *dhemāli (Fig. 6)* and it is similar to *pūrva-raṅga* the preliminaries of Sanskrit play.

Fig 6: Preliminaries of *bhāonā* perform in a proscenium stage
(Source: From own Collection)
[*Please see the back cover of the journal]

The numbers and types of these rituals vary from *sattra* to *sattra* or village to village. "Some of the preliminaries, introduced by Śaṅkaradeva, seem to have died out; others may have been introduced in later times, and some of them seem to have merged into one another."[18] Different types of *dhemālis are- Saru-dhemāli* or *Coto-dhemāli* (minor preliminary), *Bar-dhemāli* (major preliminary), *Na-dhemāli* (new preliminary), *Cho- dhemāli* (mask preliminary), *Nata-dhemāli* (dancer's preliminary), *Deva-dhemāli* (God's preliminary), *Rāga-dhemāli* (preliminary of melodies), *Ghoṣā-dhemāli* (preliminary with one type of holy song), *Barpetīyā-dhemāli* (preliminary connected with Barpeta). Among these, *Saru-dhemāli or Coto-dhemāli* (minor preliminaries), *Bar-dhemāli* (major preliminaries) and *Ghoṣā-dhemāli* (preliminaries with one type of holy song) are commonly practiced in any *bhāonā* performance. Sometimes it is followed by *Guru-ghāta* (concert in honour of the religious preceptor). The *dhemāli* performances consist of different footwork, hand gestures, intricate vocal rhythms of drums and cymbals. These preliminaries generally take more than one or two hours and may cover up to three or four hours, but presently the tendency of minimization can be observed. "This is an integral part of any *bhāonā*, whether it is held in a village prayer hall or on a modern stage."[19] After the preliminary performance is over, the *Sūtradhāra* makes his entry in to the performance arena. Again the same style of entry takes place, a white curtain is raised in front of the archway and he takes his position behind it. After the removal of that curtain we see him bowing towards the *maṇikūṭa*. He makes his entry in to the stage and performs a particular style of dance called *sūtradhāri nāc* with special rhythms of drums and cymbals. It should be mentioned here that the display of fire-works (*mahatā, matā* or *mahalā*) also takes place during the entry of *gāyana-bāyana*, *Sūtradhāra* or some major characters. After the dance performance the *Sūtradhāra* recites the *nāndī verse* (benediction verse); announces the subject matter and briefly summarizes the plot and sing the *bhaṭimā song* (ode in praise of the hero). "In between these dance acts he introduces brief dances. All these different dances today seem to be only *nṛtta*, based on rhythm (*tāla*) alone (*nṛttaṁ tāla-layāsayaṁ*), and to have lost much of the significance of pantomime (*bhāvāsayaṁ nṛtyaṁ*)."[20] Then he exchanges

dialogue with his companions and announces the entry of the hero, then he recites a Sanskrit verse and sing a song for his entry with proper musical accomplishment. During his recitation the curtain is held once again in front of the archway. When the song of entry begins the curtain is taken off and the main hero (Kṛṣṇa or Rāma) appear. Generally, at that time, the entire gathering bows to him as offering homage to God. Common audience believes that he is not a particular actor; he is the earthly incarnation of the Supreme Being and eventual spirit of the universe. The hero makes his entry in to the stage and dances to the rhythm of the song, it is called *Gosāi-Praveśa Nāc* (entrance dance of the God). After completion of the dance he takes his positions besides the *Sūtradhāra*. The *Sūtradhāra* once again sing other songs for the entry of heroines and other major characters. The minor characters do not get the privilege of entry songs. Generally, they enter with the rhythmic concert played in drums or accompanying with the other major characters. All characters give their appearance in the stage with different rhythmic dance movements and they have specific entry dance (definite foot work and gestures depending on the temperaments and moods of the characters). Musicians speak the vocal rhythmic pattern (*bol*) first and then play it in the drum. They generally take their seats on the stage and when their turns come they rise from their seat and speak or act. Then the actual performance starts as per the text. The *Sūtradhāra* narrates the story line from time to time and the actors act as per his direction. During the performance, sometimes *Sūtradhāra* "halts the action to deliver a discourse on the ethical and spiritual meaning of the plot."[21] The acting style of *bhāonā* is too much exaggerated and stylized in nature but it is rhythmic in nature (Fig. 7). B*hāonā* ends with a prayer in Assamese called *mukti-mangala bhatima* (the praise for salvation for all). The *Sūtradhāra* announces the completion of the performance and begs forgiveness from God with the *mukti-maṅgala bhaṭimā* for any mismanagement of the particular performance.

Fig 7: A fighting sequence of *bhāonā* (Source: From own Collection)
[*Please see the back cover of the journal]

This is not the end of the entire process of *bhāonā*. One more ritual process takes place for the final stage of the *bhāonā* performance called *Nāṭ-sāmarā* (closing ceremony of *bhāonā*) and it is conducted in the same process as starting of the rehearsal process. All members of the village or *sattra* get together in the prayer hall and again plead for forgiveness of God for any mistake, which might have been taken place in the entire process, and performance of holy-song for the same. This way the final step of a *bhāonā* performance takes place.

Conclusion

To get adequate knowledge of the beginning of the Assamese Vaishnavite theatre and drama one has to consider the socio-political conditions of that period. At that time, Assamese society was divided into two major categories, i.e., the elite class (representing Royal family and their officials) and the lower class (general masses). Most of the power and economy was in the hand of the elite class and the condition of general masses was pathetic. General people were not allowed any good position in social structure. It has also come to notice that apart from oral literatures, the different rulers of the different parts of the regions patronized all other written literature of pre-Śaṅkaradeva period and naturally entire literature process was in the hands of Brahmins. Śaṅkaradeva did not belong to Brahmins family and he started his journey without taking any patronage of the king. Therefore, historians identify that his entire works belonged to general masses and not for the elite class. It is already mentioned that the official name of Śaṅkaradeva's Vaishnavism is *Eka Śaraṇa Dharma*—the religion of supreme surrender to one; here everyone belonging from different caste backgrounds could avail equal position; it means caste-distinctions was not permitted in this practice. All were equal in the eyes of God. Injustices developing from inequality in society might have been prevented through this dictum. Therefore, general masses could easily accept his new thoughts and he could make a suitable position within them. Śaṅkaradeva traveled from place to place and it helped him in spreading his message in the entire region.

If we consider the theatrical representation of Śaṅkaradeva, we will find that the characters portrayed in his play did not belong to only the general masses, all represented celestial beings. The general masses felt accustomed with the story line and characters of the main motto—*dharmar jay, adharmar parājay* (victory of the truth or piety and defeat of blasphemy). Another aspect of his is that the situations or the environment created in the *bhāonā* were similar to day-to-day Assamese society. It is already stated that the arranging of *bhāonā* is like a 'community involvement process' and it creates 'collective consciousness', though it seems to create social homogeneity and harmony. A progression of creative art practice was also established through the process of producing *bhāonā.*

However, after the physical departure of Śaṅkaradeva, caste-distinctions again came to the forefront due to some conflicts within his followers. The Ahom royalty also started to patronize some *sattras.* Some *sattras* were invited to perform *bhāonā* in the Ahom royal court during the later part of the

seventeenth century. In this way *bhāonā* entered in to the royal court, but the basic structure of the performance did not change. *Sattras* take the major responsibilities of preserving and transmission of all aspects of religion and art that evolved in the neo-Vaishnavite movement of Assam. A newly selected chief of any *sattra* (*Sattrādhikāra*) has also to prove his creativity by writing and performing a play. It can also be considered as a significant contribution to performing art of the *sattras*. In this way, a large number of *aṅkīyā nāṭa* were been written and performed. Please have look at the quotation:

> For the most part of *aṅkīyā nāṭa*, like other forms of Vaisnava drama, is the product of didactic purpose stemming from religious origin. It was not created for the courts of kings, as was the Sanskrit drama, nor was it developed to provide a livelihood for a community of artists, as were the *Bhāvai* of Gujarat and the *Tamasā* of Maharastra; nor has it been marketed as a concert piece for modern, middle-class, urban audience in India or abroad. It must be judged first for the work it does to sustain and spread the faith among the Assamese people and not for its artistry.[22]

Changes come to the entire performance of *bhāonā* particularly in its organization, different allied fields related to performances; but most of the rituals are maintained in pre-post and during performance and presently some organizations have tried to preserve the traditional form of performance. It is a good sign for this theatrical performance. It has come to the notice that the dance form of *aṅkīyā bhāonā* is to some extent different from *general bhāonā* or *matṛbhāṣār bhāonā*. For example, the rhythm used for the entry of a hero of *aṅkīyā nāṭa* is not used in the entry of same hero of general *bhāonā*. It may be due to the special honour given to the creator of the *bhāonā*.

Another feature came to the notice of the writer that since the last three decades of twentieth century, modern Assamese playwrights and theatre directors have been trying to understand the potentialities and attempts to incorporate the presentation style of *bhāonā* in their performance. As a matter of fact, this tendency came to the sphere due to the movement 'back to the root' which started in entire India in the sixth decade of twentieth century. Nowadays, *aṅkīyā nāṭa's* have been translated to perform in different local dialects of Assam and some foreign languages. But all of these creators should be careful to maintain the entire ritualistic process of the *bhāonā*.

Thus it can be summarized that the Assamese Vaishnavite theatre, as a religious discourse, has been providing pleasure, relief, encouragement and

wisdom to Assamese people for the last six centuries. We have to treasure these as a distinct discipline under a ritual theatrical heritage as well as a spiritual one.

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Aṅka or *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ*: Genesis and Structure

Dr. Madan Sarma

Abstract:
With dialogues written in rhythmic prose in *Vrajavalī*, the plays known as *aṅkas* or *aṅkīyā nāṭas* and produced by Śaṅkaradeva are sometimes described as 'ritual plays' or 'dance dramas', although such nomenclature does not do justice to these unique dramatic texts written primarily for spreading the message of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Nāma-Dharma* (worshiping God by chanting the name of one God Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa) among the masses. Although Śaṅkaradeva was familiar with Sanskrit drama and drama that existed elsewhere in eastern India, his plays owe much to the local folk dramatic and quasi-dramatic tradition. First written and performed in the early sixteenth century, Śaṅkaradeva's *aṅkas* or *aṅkīyā nāṭas* that laid the foundation of Assamese drama can, perhaps, best be described as a unique form of musical theatre that has survived till today.

Keywords: *aṅkīyā nāṭ, Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva, ritual play, Vrajavalī, operatic structure, dhemāli*

I

Nature of *Aṅka*

The term *aṅka* refers to the *Vaiṣṇava* 'ritual' plays written by Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and some of their successors. Though the term *aṅkīyā nāṭ* is often used to refer to Śaṅkaradeva's plays, the term is tautological since *aṅka* and *nāṭ* mean the same thing, drama [1]. Śaṅkaradeva himself used the terms *nāṭaka* (in *Keli-gopāla, Rukmiṇī-haraṇa, Rāma-vijaya* and *Pārijāta-harana*), *nāṭa* (in *Rāma-vijaya, Pārijāta-haraṇa*), *lilā-yātrā* (in *Kālīya-damana*) *and yātrā* (in *Pārijāta-haraṇa*) to refer to the plays. Interestingly, Śaṅkaradeva also used the term *nṛtya* in his play *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*: "*rukmiṇī haraṇa vihāra nṛtya parama koutuke karaba'*. Some experts of *sattrīyā* dance would like to call these *aṅkas* 'dance drama' because of the predominance of dance in them[2]. However, *aṅkas* appear to be much more than 'dance drama' as exchange of rhythmic dialogue and stylized acting in some of them. For example, in a play like *Pārijāta-haraṇa*, play not an insignificant part in these.

The term *aṅka,* referring to drama was presumably used first by Śaṅkaradeva's biographer Daityārī Thākur in the saint's biography, written six decades after the passing away of the great saint. Though Sanskrit texts mention *aṅka* as a form of *rupaka, aṅka* or *nāṭa* has little in common with Sanskrit *aṅka* as pointed out by several scholars including Bapchandra Mahanta[3]. Referring to

Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Mahanta suggests that aṅka is a *ruḍhi* (root) word which refers to such creations where the meanings are given excellent form with the help of bhāva (thoughts) and *rasas*, and that *aṅka* or '*aṅkīyā nāṭa*' had little in common with Sanskrit plays[4]. Similarity between Sanskrit play and *aṅka* is noticed only in the *ślokas*, *sūtradhāra* and *bharatavākya* (in *aṅka* or *nāṭa—muktimaṅgala bhatimā*). According to Mahanta differences from Sanskrit plays are greater in *aṅka* or *nāṭa.*[5]. The restrictions imposed by the classical texts such as *Sāhityadarpaṇa*on showing or performing certain acts on stage—*yuddha, badha* (killing), *vivāha* (marriage), *bhojana* (feasting), *abhiśapa* (cursing), *mṛtyu* (death), etc.— are not observed in the *aṅkas* at all.[6]Scholars like B. K. Barua assert that for the dramatic techniques Śaṅkaradeva was indebted to Sanskrit theory of drama, especially in the use of *nāndī*, benedictory verses, and *bhaṭimās* akin to prologue and epilogue. According to E. Farley Richmond *nāṭ* is the next closest relative to the Sanskrit dramatic tradition after *Kutiyattam*[7]. It needs to be stressed that unlike *aṅkas*, for quite some time*Kutiyattam* was not accessible to anyone except people from the Brahmin and other similar 'higher' castes. In *Kutiyattam* body kinetics (*aṅgikabhinaya*), assisted by orchestral support, makes the theatric communication possible. Any performance of *Kutiyattam* involves dance movements, a rich repertoire of gestures and elaborate facial expressions. The last characteristic is not given any great importance in the performance of the *aṅka.* Acting of roles in *aṅkas* is marked by an abundance of *nṛtta* which means rhythmic gestures or movements without any *bhāva*, *nṛtya* which depends on *bhāva,* and *gīta*. Music plays a very important role in *aṅkas*. Acting is not mimetic, not "*svabhāvānukulanukṛtī*"(natural representational) as BapchandraMahanta correctly observes, but rather music, and *tāla* or rhythm-based *nṛtta* appear to be the main feature of *aṅka* or *nāṭa*[8] .Acting and gaits of the actors can be said to be stylized.

As pointed out by Bapchandra Mahanta, actors and spectators do not get fully immersed in the action and emotions expressed and evoked during the performance and they do not reach a state of *tanmaya*, resulting in the evocation and resolution of *rasa*[9]. In fact, *aṅkas* do not aim at evoking the eight types of *rasas*. Emotion is not taken into any great height. Frequent interruptions by the *sūtradhāra* and the almost continuous process of illusion making, and illusion breaking do not allow any strong emotion to be sustained for long. That is why it seems that any discussion on the evocation of eight *rasas* in the *aṅkas* is likely to be somewhat mechanical. In the *aṅkasśānta rasa* or *bhakti rasa* is evoked. Mahanta suggests, "for rising up to the stage of *śānta rasa* that is signaled or identified as *bhakti* or *vātsalya* there is no need to subdue intelligence or judgement. *Śānta rasa*can be deepened and extended only when *buddhi* (intelligence) is raised to the level of conscience. That

is why before the audience reach the state of *tanmaya* or an emotionally surcharged state, the *sūtradhāra* changes the current of *bhāva*, creating, at the end, a calm and sacred atmosphere of *śānta rasa*[10].

Sankaradeva's plays are sometimes described as 'ritual drama' though such a nomenclature fails to capture the richness and variety of his creations. In many societies theatre or dramatic tradition began with some form of ritual drama which was performed to placate the gods and ensure the well-being of the members of a society. In ancient times, ritual dramas were performed in Egypt and Greece by various communities in the hope that such performances would please the heavenly forces and ensure good harvest, proliferation of cattle and enhance the fertility of the women. Such dramas were often based on popular myths prevalent among the communities. Ancient theatre –fully developed first in Greece in the sixth century BCE—might have developed out of such ritual dramas or certain practices associated with rituals performed during some form of worship. Greek philosopher and critic Aristotle has mentioned in his book *Poetics* that Greek tragedy evolved from dithyrambic choruses and comedy from phallic songs. Though in India people often talk of the 'divine origin' of drama, it is surmised that at the time of singing the hymns of the *Sāmaveda* certain gestures and movements were used which might have contained an element of acting[11]. One must not ignore the presence of various forms of folk performances which contained certain features of drama. However, in several countries in Europe liturgical or religious drama might have evolved out of some form of ritual drama associated with cultic worship.

One of the most well-known religious plays produced in the West, a morality play, *Everyman* was written in English around 1500 CE. Kaliram Medhi[12] suggests that the first play of Śaṅkaradeva *Kālīya-damana* (subjugation of the serpent Kālī by Lord Kṛṣṇa), was written in 1518. However, Maheswar Neog, K D Goswami, Bapchandra Mahanta, Mahim Bora and others suggest, and it is now generally accepted that *Patnī-prasāda* might have been the first play written by Śaṅkaradeva. In fact, technically *Patnī-prasāda* appears to be inferior to Śaṅkaradeva's other plays. However, the subject or theme chosen for his first play is notable. It shows how the Brahmins performing *yajñas* and other rituals deliberately ignored Kṛṣṇa while their wives through their devotion to him received *prasāda* or blessing from Kṛṣṇa. When one compares one of the *aṅkas* with *Everyman*, one finds that Śaṅkaradeva's play is a fully developed dramatic text with realistic and poetic dialogue in prose, a number of songs and poems, different forms of dances and a rich repertoire of music. It needs to be stressed that Śaṅkaradeva created one of the first plays in a regional Indian language with dramatic dialogue *in prose*. Śaṅkaradeva's innovation successfully blended religious philosophy with creative use of

indigenous, folk or semi-classical dramatic forms such as *ojāpāli*, and selected conventions of Sanskrit drama as spelt out in Bharata's magnum opus *Nāṭyaśāstra.* It is true that Śaṅkaradeva's plays are primarily meant to spread the *Vaiṣṇava* faith and establish Kṛṣṇa as the supreme Lord. Yet these plays used to provide wholesome entertainment to the common people by acting, dancing, and singing. *Mukhās* or masks and effigies were used to give realistic effect to some of the characters and evoke various emotions.

II

Genesis of *Aṅka*

According to the narrator of *Gurucarit-kathā* (a hagiographical account of the lives of *Vaiṣṇava* saints including Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, composed most likely in the second half of the eighteenth century) and Daityāri Thākur's biography of Śaṅkaradeva, much before Śaṅkaradeva began composing any of his full length plays or *nāṭas*, he wrote and staged *Cihnayātrā,* a play, presumably without any dialogue but with *rāga*-based songs, instrumental music and dance. He even used painted scenes showing seven *vaikuṇṭhas* (heavens).

Gurucaritkathā mentions that after listening to a verse translated from *Śrīmadbhāgavata* ("*Viṣṇu buddhi kari nandara pok /dekhāilā vaikuṇṭha lok*") the *Bhūñās* and disciples requested Śaṅkaradeva to show such a spectacle[13]. The narrative, then, mentions the process of Śaṅkaradeva's making of *khola*, a kind of drum used in the *aṅkas*, *sattrīyā* music and dance. He made the *khola* with the measurement as follows: the radius of the right head is of seven *āṅgul* or 3.5 inches that of the left head is of thirteen *āṅgul* or 6.5inches. He also drew a drop scene- '*tulāpātatsātvaikuṇṭhalikhiche'*. The performance was accompanied by the musical preliminaries known as *dhemāli* (play), *bar-dhemāli* (major preliminary) and *ghoṣā-dhemāli* (verses sung). Dev Goswami surmises that the model for this form of *pūrvaraṅga* might have been acquired from folk performances[14].

Dhemāli is an interesting word and has several meanings—fun, frolic, playfulness bordering, at times, on a mild form of eroticism, and even amorous play. Bapchandra Mahanta rightly points out that the word *dhemāli* was used first in the 14th century by Madhava Kandali in his Assamese translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (verse 4532) to mean unruliness and chaos. As Mahanta rightly points out, by designating a sacred ceremony as well as an artistic innovation as *dhemāli*, Śaṅkaradeva has elevated what are usually implied by *dhemāli*.

During the performance of *Cihnayātrā* Śaṅkaradeva used *sūtra(dhāra),* the stage manager or director and lamps (*martā, āriyā*). The text mentions the scintillating effects of the music performed by a number of singers, led by Śaṅkaradeva. The overall impact on the audience was so spectacular and so heavenly

that some Brahmins wanted to be indoctrinated by Śaṅkaradeva[15]. *Gurucarit-kathā's* account shows that Śaṅkaradeva created *yātrā*, presumably sometime after the saint had come back from pilgrimage for twelve years.

One may assume, as does Bapchandra Mahanta, that Śaṅkaradeva's music, dance, theatre etc. also developed after pilgrimage[16]. Śaṅkaradeva was born in the influential and powerful Śiromaṇi Bhūyā family. His forefathers are believed to have come from Kanauj in the eleventh or twelfth century CE. Śaṅkaradeva has described his father Kusumbar Bhūyā, a Śiromaṇi Bhūyā", a powerful administrator, "as a famous*gandharva* praised by all." Kesavananda Dev Goswami points this as very significant as it shows the musical inheritance of the saint and establishes the fact that his forefathers might have migrated before the emergence of *dhrupad* and so brought with them the tradition of *gandharva* and earlier forms of (*Hindusthanī*) classical *rāgas*[17].This fact is relevant in any serious discussion of the musical aspects of Śaṅkaradeva's plays.

The motivation for creating *yātrā* and later *aṅka* might have come from Śaṅkaradeva's study of the *Śrīmad-bhāgavata*. Verse 23 of canto 11 of *Śrīmad-bhāgavata*says that the devotees of Krṣna should sing and act Krṣna's story:

śraddhālur mat-kathāḥ śṛṇvan
su-bhadrā loka-pāvanīḥ
gāyann anusmaraṇ karma
janma cābhinayan muhuḥ

Drama was seen as a means of spreading the message of *bhakti* or devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa (the incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu) and suggesting that by watching the acts, sports and frolics of Kṛṣṇa the audience may attain salvation or spiritual bliss.

Some *Maithili* scholars claim:

> Scholars from Kamrupa visited Mithilā and learnt the medium of their dramas. It is said that during his pilgrimages, Śaṅkaradeva, the leader of the Assamese reform movement, had seen Vidyāpati's successful handling of his mother tongue. ... At a time, when printing press was unknown, Assamese drama was being written in sweet and chaste *Maithili* because of its spectacular appeal to the people. ... Śaṅkaradeva wrote a number of *Maithili* dramas of which only six are extant[18].

However, the same scholar later modifies his earlier statement as follows:

> The Assamese dramas came to be written in pure vernacular and in the writings of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, *Maithili* element is *preponderant*. Sanskrit and

> *Prākṛt* continued to dominate *Maithili* dramas but that was not the case with the Assamese. Śaṅkaradeva dispensed with *Prākṛt* but occasionally used Sanskrit. *Vrajabuli* was frequently used. A vital point of difference between the *Maithili* and the Assamese dramas is that in the former there is no *sūtradhāra* except in the prologue (*prastāvanā*) and absolutely no stage direction nor speech by the stage manager whereas in the latter there are such directions and speeches in *Vrajabuli* by him every now and then throughout the whole performance. There is only one point of resemblance and that is that both are one-act plays.... It is in the prose portions of these dramas that *Maithili* elements are preponderant while the Assamese elements are more prominent in lyrics and songs.[19]

Chaudhary further claims, "The prose portion of his drama *Kālīya-damana* is almost the living *Maithili* specimen of his age"[20]. The texts like *Gurucaritkathā* do not refer to the kind of contact that the *Maithili* scholar talks about. However, Gayā and presumably some of the *Maithili* areas were among the places visited by Śaṅkaradeva during the pilgrimage.

Though Mahim Bora asserts, "...Not keeping any readymade model in Sanskrit or *Prākṛt* in view—the playwright Śaṅkaradeva had to experiment as indicated by *caritputhis*"[21], some *Maithili* scholars[22] suggest that Śaṅkaradeva was "largely influenced" by *Maithili* poets Vidyāpati and Umāpati. Assamese scholars refute this claim. Umāpati Upādhyay's Sanskrit play with songs in *Maithili Pārijāta-haraṇa*is not a pre-Sankarite play as suggested by Bapchandra Mahanta[23]. According to *Maithili* scholars, Umāpati Upādhyay was born in 1580 and he died in 1644. His play *Pārijāta-haraṇa* was written in 1620.[24]

In both Vidyāpati and Umāpati the *sūtradhāra* has a minimal role—just as in any typical Sanskrit play. Both have quite a few songs and Vidyāpati's text contains more songs than dialogue. *Rāgas* used in Vidyāpati are—*Mālava, Dhanaśrī, Deś-mallāra, Malārī, Varārī, Kourava, Vibhāsa, Kolava, Gurjārī,* Or*gujjārī*. In Umāpati the *rāgas* used are—*Vasanta, Mālava, Āśovārī, Rājviyā, Nāṭ, Kedār* and *Lalit*. In Umāpati's play Nārada gives Śrīkṛṣṇa the fragrant flower *Pārijāta* as a gift when the latter accompanied by Rukmiṇī was looking at the beauty of the garden near *Raivataka* hills one day in spring. Satyabhāmā saw this from a distance and feels unhappy. Kṛṣṇa wants to talk to her but she pretends to suffer from a severe headache. Finally, Kṛṣṇa sends Nārada to Indra with the message that Indra should give the plant *Pārijāta* to Kṛṣṇa or fight him. Indra chooses to fight. Accompanied by Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa goes to Amarāvati, defeats Indra and brings the plant for Satyabhāmā. It is a simple story lacking the rich variety and sophistication of Śaṅkaradeva's play. Even if one accepts that Umāpati belonged to the fourteenth century, one must say that it is not a play to be imitated or emulated by Śaṅkaradeva.

While some describe *Maithili* poet Vidyāpati's Sanskrit-*Prākṛt* play *Gorakṣa-vijaya* (1425) which contains invocation, dance, songs and lyrics and speeches as a *sāngītaka*[25], some would like to call it a *kīrtanīyā drama.*[26] While discussing different forms of dance, Mandakranta Bose assumes that *sangītaka* refers to a mimetic dance. She mentions that Vararuci refers to *sangītaka* to mean dramatic presentation involving dance, music and acting performed during the spring festival.[27] It might have been a dance drama. She points out that in Kālidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitrasangītaka* is used as a dance-piece.[28] Manohar Laxman Varadapande says, "The term *sangītaka*, as a kind of operatic theatrical performance is mentioned in many ancient literary works"[29], for example, in *Mudrārākṣasa* of Viśākhadatta. Quoting this verse from Shubhankara's *Sangīta-dāmodara:*

"tālavadyānugaṁgītaṁnatībhiryatragīyate/
nṛtyasyānugataṁraṅgetat sangītamucyate",

Bapchandra Mahanta suggests that *Maithili* plays *Gorakṣa-vijaya*and*Pārijāta-haraṇa*and Assamese *aṅkas* may owe something to *sangītaka.*[30]

As suggested by Varadapande, Vidyāpati's play *Gorakṣa-vijaya,* a *sangītaka*, may owe something to such folk tradition as *svaṁtamasā*, a popular mode of theatrical entertainment. Similarly, Śaṅkaradeva's *aṅka*, while drawing something from the operatic *sangītaka*, may owe more to folk tradition. These two aspects demand some discussion.

It is important to note that Śaṅkaradeva's plays contain samples of the earliest prose writings in Assamese. It is also noteworthy that his plays contain the earliest samples of dialogue in prose, perhaps in any play written in a modern Indian language.

The language used by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva in their plays is sometimes described as *Vrajabuli*[31], and sometimes as *Vrajāvalī*[32,33] where according to Medhisome '*Maithili* elements predominate'[34]. Bapchandra Mahanta suggests that Śaṅkaradeva's *Vrajāvali* contains elements of *Vrajabhāṣā* or *Vrajabuli*, *Avadhī* and *Bhojpurī*. In early *Maithili* literature too elements from *Vraja*, *Avadhī* and *Bhojpurī* predominate. Naturally, much similarity is noted between Śaṅkaradeva's *Vrajāvalī* and *Maithili*. Perhaps because of this some Maithili scholars like Ramakanta Chaudhary claim that Śaṅkaradeva wrote plays in *Maithili*. "*Vrajāvalī* is the name of the language-style or form used by pilgrims to and from *Vrajabhūmi*[35]. Dev Goswami suggests that Śaṅkaradeva used *Vrajāvalī* "keeping a larger audience in mind"[36]. Chaudhary suggests that "Maithili added sanctity to the

character of the dramas"[37].Vaishanava saint-poets wrote in such a 'literary' language in the hope of spreading the *bhakti* movement across a large geographical region.

One can easily note that Śaṅkaradeva's *Vrajāvalī* is quite different from Umāpati's*Maithili* and from Vidyāpati's form of *Maithili* which might remind one of the languages of the *Caryāpadas*. Here is an example from the play *Gorakṣa-vijaya* of Vidyāpati:

dūgotā yogi hamesahajaksaṅg
path jānuhove manorathabhaṅg
āmitathabolijakhojilajāo
jatha sun lo gurucaraṇerinão

And here are two examples from Umapati's*Pārijāta-haraṇa*:

1. *ongonita kingshukachāru champak bakulbak-phula phulliā*
   Punukatahupātanipataninīpanewārimādhavimalliā
2. *āj janma-phalabhela, sabapariharihariharimohiphuldela*
   Pujalapurabahame gori, asataniparipūrali more.

Compare this with Śaṅkaradeva's lyric in *Pārijāta-haraṇa* -Satyabhāmā's lament:

keṣava he bujhalahu tuhu
jānalahu tuhu byvahāra.
atave cāturi coḍi salahu bahuri hari e
jāhā priyāra maṇī tohāra
...
Jaicana pīritirīti sabahi bidita bheli re
Āju jānala mati toi---

(Trn.(last two lines) :Your acting of love stands revealed now. I know what you are, realize your intention.)

Śaṅkaradeva takes liberty to draw features from popular folk performing arts such as *ojā-pāli, bhari-gān, dhuliyā*[38] to create highly original plays combining dialogues in prose, dances, songs, masks and Sanskrit verses. Scholars have pointed out that Śaṅkaradeva might have been inspired by certain forms and genres of performing arts prevalent in Assam during his time. Kaliram Medhi speaks of the possibility of Śaṅkaradeva's creative use of indigenous performing art forms including folk dramatic forms while creating the Assamese drama[39].

Putalā-nāc or puppet-show is one of the earliest performing arts in different cultures. The references to puppet-show in the *Gurucaritkathā* clearly show that puppetry was a popular art form in the fifteenth century. The troupe of *putalā-nāc*includes singers and musicians. Popular stories from the epics, the *purāṇas* and even folk tales are narrated with the help of dialogues and movements. A troupe of *ojā-pāli*performers consists of an *ojā* (the master or expert) who is an expert vocalist and narrator, and five or six *pālis* (assistants) who are competent singers. An *ojā-pāli* performance is marked by choral singing and rhythmic body movements. The *ojā* narrates the story by singing and using hand gestures and *mudrās*, some of which might have been derived from Tantric texts. He also moves about the arena with eye-catching rhythmic steps. As the *ojā* sings a strain, the *pālis* take it up and repeat it. Their singing is accompanied by clapping of small cymbals and marking of time with careful foot movement. The *ojā* puts on a light long coat, *dhoti* with the flowing ends tucked in front and a cotton wrapper placed round the waist with the ends hanging in front. In course of time two distinct forms of *ojā-pāli* emerged: *Śukanannojā* and V*yāhar* or *Viyāharojā*in lower Assam.

Dhuliā is another folk performing art, which was very popular in lower Assam, especially in the district of Kamrup. In a traditional performance the *dhuliās* usually begin by singing, which is accompanied by beating of drums and clapping of cymbals. Some members of the team perform acrobatics. Sometimes they stage short plays based on mythological stories. They also stage skits or satirical plays on contemporary social issues. Skits may not be based on any written text. The *dhuliās* and *bhairās* (*bhāorīyās*or actors) often innovate to create dramatic situations. Some practitioners trace the origin of the *khulīā-bhāorīyā* to *Viyāharojā-pāli*[40].The leader of the troupe is called *ojā*. In this form of performing art small drums, *kholas*and cymbals are used. The *ojā* conducts the performance and guides the other members including the main singer *bāyana,* the drummers or *khulīās*, the cymbal players or *tālis*and the actors (*bhāorīyās).* The *khulīās'* dramatic performance is based on the episodes from the two epics. *Kuṣān-gān* and *bhari-gān* are two popular forms of folk drama prevailing in the Goalpara region in lower Assam. In both, the themes of the folk plays are drawn from the two epics. A *kuṣān-gān* troupe consists of a conductor or leader called *gīdāl* or *moulā*, a *dovari* who exchanges dialogues with the leader and the assistants, a number of musicians and a few dancing boys called *ceṅgrā* or *cokrā.* The musical instruments used by the troupe are *khola* (drum), cymbals and a one-stringed instrument *benā.* Music and dance are common features in these two art forms.

Some of these indigenous folk dramatic forms may have contributed to the emergence of drama proper in Assamese. According to Kaliram Medhi, "...the

ultimate source of the Assamese drama, divested of the outward form, is in all probability the choral performance of the Assamese *ojā-pālī*"[41]. Like *ojā-pāli*, *aṅka* is mostly poetic. It is dominated by singing. In *ojā-pāli* verses to Gaṇapati or Manasādevī are sung. This is similar to the recitation of the *nāndīśloka* marking the formal beginning of an *aṅka*. *Ojā* is the lead singer and manager or director of *ojā-pāli*. The role of the *sūtradhāra* in an *aṅka* is similar, linking audience and actors or performers, maintaining the thread. *Pālis* of *ojā-pāli* are like *gāyana-bāyans* of an *aṅka*. Ancient *devadāsī* dance and *deodhaninṛtya* may have contributed some features similar to the dance of *aṅka*. In the ultimate analysis, Śaṅkaradeva's *aṅka* is his unique creation that might naturally owe to rich classical and folk performing arts. As scholars including K D Goswami have rightly observed, the composition of lyrics and the creation of music for them and for the dances of *aṅka* performance or *bhāonas* are Śaṅkaradeva's original contributions.

III
Structure and Performance of *aṅka*

Any discussion of the structure of *aṅka* cannot be undertaken without taking its performance into account because the written texts, as they are available now, do not contain much elaborate instruction or direction about its actual performance. The word *bhāona* refers to the performance of the plays created by the saints Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Later, the term came to be used also for plays based on their models.

In an *aṅka*or *nāṭ* or *bhāona,* time, distance, and change of scene are indicated by the *sūtradhāra's* songs and verse recitation or through the characters' dialogue. Śaṅkaradeva's genius, his impeccable knowledge of music, rhythm and dance enabled him to incorporate aesthetically pleasing *rāga*-based music and elaborate dance movements in the plays. It is but natural that creative artists in the *sattras (*monasteries) would go on adding to the musical and dance repertoire to make the performance of *bhāona* more appealing.

The text of an *aṅka* begins with two *ślokas* or verses, *nāndī*, in Sanskrit. While the first *śloka* is a prayer to Kṛṣṇa, the second one contains an abstract of the play. This is followed by a *nāndī* song in *Vrajāvalī* sung by the *sūtradhāra*. After that the text says: *nāndyantesūtradhāraḥ*-meaning, at the end of the *nāndī* the *sūtradhāra* will recite the *śloka* in Sanskrit announcing the name of the play.

The text of any *aṅka*does not specifically mention all the preliminaries (*pūrva-raṅga*) before the actual staging of the play, before the recitation of the *nāndī.* The first-time reader of the text might not know that the *nāndī*is preceded by elaborate preliminaries.

The *purva-raṅga* (preliminaries) includes the carrying of *agni-gaḍ*, the arch of lights made up of two wooden poles or bamboo sticks joined to the acting area, the stretching of a white curtain known as *ār-kāpor*, and the performance of *dhemāli.* Nine small, lighted torches on the *agni-gaḍ* symbolize the nine forms of devotion *(bhakti)*. The group of musicians, the *gāyana-bāyans* --drum and cymbal players and singers –takes their position behind the *ār-kāpor*. As the white curtain or *ār-kāpor* is removed, many devout Vaishnava spectators chant the name of Lord Viṣṇu to signal the transition from the mundane into the spiritual world. The musicians, dressed in white (*dhotis*, shirts, and turbans), begin the preliminary instrumental music known as *dhemāli* with its elaborate rhythms. Apart from more common *bar-dhemāli* (major or long preliminary) and *saru-dhemāli* (minor or short preliminary), some other forms of *dhemāli* are also performed on certain occasions. This entire prelude may be quite elaborate and may last for an hour or so. After the *dhemāli*sare over, the *sūtradhāra* gets ready to enter the stage. The lighting for fireworks is followed by holding of the screen or *ār-kāpor*. As the screen is removed the *sūtradhāra* enters and performs dances. Only after that he sings, the *nāndī.*

Conventions are so well established that any group performing an *aṅka* OR *ankiyānāt*knows exactly what goes on before the *nāndī* is sung or recited.

The text then indicates that the *sūtradhāra* will sing a *bhaṭimā*song, an eulogy for the hero, Kṛṣṇa or Rāma. Śaṅkaradeva's first play *Patnī-prasāda* is an exception in that here the Brahmins first enter the stage. Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and the cowherds enter after them. It is interesting to note that the *praveśagīta* for the Brahmins contains the line "*bine haribhakati biphalasvargakāma*". The play does not end in the *muktimaṅgala bhaṭimā*. Before the conclusion the *sūtradhāra* stresses that by asking for food Kṛṣṇa "*biprasavaka karma-garbadūrakarala*".The *sūtradhāra* announces the subject or theme of the play and urges the audience to listen and watch carefully. He announces the entry of the hero. This is followed by a brief interaction with his companion (as in *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*). As the *sūtradhāra* sings the song of entry or *praveśagīta* to the accompaniment of appropriate instrumental music, the hero or the main character enters, either dancing or in stylized rhythmic gaits. The characters of an *aṅka* enter and exit with stylized gaits set to the appropriate music and *bols*(drum syllables). Experts have identified nine types of dances performed in an *aṅkīyā-bhāona*[42].The characters dance before taking their place in a corner of the acting space.

In the play *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* first Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by Uddhava enters and "*eka pāśa huyā rahala*". Apparently, Kṛṣṇa is in Dvārakā. Then enter Rukmiṇī and her friends and they too "*nṛtya kaye eka pāśa huyā rahala*". Rukmiṇī and her friends are in Kuṇḍil, thousands of miles away from Dvārakā. Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī have not

met or seen each other before. Yet they take their place in full view of each other. The *sūtradhāra*'s words indicate distance of time and space and the audience accept this without perceiving any artificiality in it. As the situation demands, actors playing different roles rise from their seats and take their position in the acting area and perform their activities—speaking, singing, and dancing.

The *sūtradhāra's* commentary in prose, occasional exchanges of dialogue among the characters, and songs and dances, capturing various moods and dramatic situations, help in enacting the different events, constituting the story or elaborating the subject. The play ends with the announcement made by the *sūtradhāra* in Sanskrit and *Vrajāvalī* that the play has come to an end "*rukmiṇī-haraṇa nāṭa sampūrṇa bhela*". Finally, the *sūtradhāra* and all the characters and the group of singers and instrumentalists sing the *muktimaṅgla bhaṭimā* or benediction.

The *sūtradhāra* of an *aṅka* has a much bigger role than that of a Sanskrit drama and is present throughout the performance. He advises or directs actions, advises the audience, leads and assists the singers, sings the *ślokas* and also the *muktimaṅglabhaṭimā* (benediction). Through his comments he intervenes to break the illusion created by the acting, dance, music or spectacle and brings the audience back to reality, reminding them of the divine.

A close study of the texts of the *aṅkas* makes one observe several interesting facts. Different locations, situations, happenings, and activities are indicated by the words spoken by the *sūtradhāra*, and the members of the audience must assume (as the audience of the Brechtian theatre often does) that they see the characters precisely in those locations, situations, or events. The events take place in different locations—forest, riverbank, *yagnyaśāla*, lake, different places—Dvārakā, Kuṇḍil and so on. Certain situations and happenings are left to the imagination of the audience. Distances in time and space are easily bridged—through words and through flights of imagination. This is beautifully shown in *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* where Kṛṣṇa the incarnation of God often behaves like an ordinary young man.

In *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*, once the dramatic action starts after the completion of the formal steps such as recitation of the *nāndī*and singing of the eulogy, things move fast. Just after Rukmiṇī takes her place, Surabhi, the messenger from Kuṇḍil arrives at Dvarakā and meets Kṛṣṇa. Without much ado, the messenger eulogizes Rukmiṇī's exceptional beauty and suggests that Kṛṣṇa's *gṛhavāsa*, family or domestic life will be happy if the princess of Kuṇḍil, Rukmiṇī becomes his wife. Kṛṣṇa is shown to behave like any young man as he is easily moved by the messenger's extolling the beauty of Rukmiṇī:

"Hearing about Rukmiṇī's beauty and attributes Kṛṣṇa, leaving aside all other thoughts, just went on thinking of Rukmiṇīday and night."
Kṛṣṇa's emotion is conveyed by a song in *rāga Dhanaśrī*, the lyric of which is beautiful:

Priyākerikāhinīśuniemurāri/
Birahedahanacittaākulakiñcita//

And then, an alliterative line—

Gunitekāminījāmini jāi/
Nayaneninda nāhiāi

(night wears off, thinking of the young woman, sleep does not come to the eyes)

The *sūtradhāra* empathizes with Kṛṣṇa and expects the audience to do so: "*kṛṣṇaka dukha ki kahaba.*" Rukmiṇī goes through the same stage of expectation and apprehension in Kuṇḍil when she is visited by Haridāsa, a messenger from Dvarakā. Haridāsa describes Kṛṣṇa's beauty and charm. Rukmiṇī is deeply moved by his narration and goes on thinking of Kṛṣṇa. Rukmiṇī's feelings find expression in the song " *kaicana keśava darśana hoi*" (How can I see Kṛṣṇa?).

Unaware of the mutual admiration and attraction between Rukmiṇī and Kṛṣṇa, Rukmiṇī's father King Bhismaka decides to marry his daughter off to Kṛṣṇa. This unexpected goodnews was conveyed to Rukmiṇī by her friend Lilāvati. Rukmiṇī's heart dances with joy and her happiness is conveyed by the song "*sakhihe sudinabhayori*" "o friend, good days are here".
Dramatic conflict is introduced by the dramatist when he introduces Rukmiṇī's elder brother, headstrong young Rukmi. Rukmi fiercely opposes her marriage with Kṛṣṇa. The young man is bent upon inviting Śiśupāla to marry his sister. Old Bhismaka has to acquiesce to the proposal. All these happen in quick succession. Actions and music follow. The *sūtradhāra* draws the audience's attention to love-lorn Rukmiṇī's miserable condition and most appropriately his intervention is followed by a sad song: "*hari bine ramaṇī dekhata āndhiyāri*" in the *rāga Gaurī*. Shell-shocked, Rukmiṇī slowly recovers and then first reacts angrily to her brother's cruel act, saying, "Why didn't you die at birth?"This naturally leads to her breaking down to heart-rending lamentation in the form of a song "*hari, hari, hāmāra karama kinā bheli*" (O, Hari, what has befallen me!)in the *rāga Śrīgāndhāra.*

Śaṅkaradeva the dramatist portrays Rukmiṇī as a resourceful and active young lady. She does not waste her time in helpless lamentation. She thinks of sending someone to Kṛṣṇa:"*ohi buli hetha mātha kare cintite, eka mitra brāhmaṇaka mane pāvala*". Suddenly it strikes her that she can send her well-wisher, Brahmin

Vedanidhi to Dvārakā. She even writes a letter to Kṛṣṇa: "*eka patia lekhi deu, tāhek aniya jāva*", 'I'll write a letter, take that along.' Vedanidhi leaves immediately and quickly arrives at Dvārakā. How he manages to do so-with the help of any magic or yogic power—is immaterial for the playwright and for the audience. A willing suspension of disbelief is implied. Vedanidhi's encounter with Kṛṣṇa is interesting. Kṛṣṇa says to him: '*Hāmu kona prayojana sādho tā ājñā karaha'*, 'Tell me what can I do for you.' Vedanidhi smiles, indicating Kṛṣṇa's 'playful' *lilā* of oscillating between his divine self and his very much human self, "*he svāmī śrīkṛṣṇa, tuhu jagataka param aiśvara…āh, tohāka mahimā ki kahaba.*" And then he says, '*hāmu jadarthe āvalo tā śunaha*", 'Let me tell you why I am here', and he accordingly briefs Kṛṣṇa who requests him to read aloud Rukmiṇī's letter. In her letter Rukmiṇī even suggests how and where Kṛṣṇa can meet her. Rukmiṇī's impassioned letter deeply affects Kṛṣṇa and makes him lament in a song "*hari, hari, kinā bheli rāja kumārī*".

Śaṅkaradeva's incorporation of comic elements makes the play realistic and entertaining. As Kṛṣṇa rushes with Vedanidhi in his chariot at break-neck speed the latter loses his sense of hearing. He becomes unable to move his hands and feet and finally becomes unconscious. After regaining his senses as a result of Kṛṣṇa's ministrations, the Brahmin asks: "Who are you? Who am I? Why did I come here?" Kṛṣṇa smiles and replies, "I'm Kṛṣṇa from Dvārakā and you are Vedanidhi. Rukmiṇī sent you to me. That's why you and I are going to Kuṇḍil."

The dramatist then skillfully shifts the scene, indicated by the *sūtradhāra*: "*ikathā rahoka, rukmiṇīka vṛtānta śunaha.*" Rukmiṇī's initial worry and frustration and subsequent joy are adroitly captured in several songs.

Dramatic conflict is created by making, first Śiśupāla, and then Rukmi challenge Kṛṣṇa and fight him. After defeating the two, Kṛṣṇa leaves for Dvārakā with Rukmiṇī. Lord Brahma, accompanied by Nārada, comes to perform *homa* at Kṛṣṇa's wedding. Interestingly, Kṛṣṇa says to Brahma, "*hamo mānuṣa huyā tohāka darśana bhelu .hāmāka bhāgyaka mahimā ki kahaba. Janama sāmphala bhela."*

More comic elements are introduced when Lord Brahma has a look at Kṛṣṇa's bride Rukmiṇī's face: "*…mukha candrikā karāte rukmiṇīka bhūvana mohinī rūpa nirekhiye brahmā māti luti parala.*" When the bridal veil is removed to show the bride's face, Brahmā gazed at Rukmiṇī's dazzling beauty and fell on the ground, unnerved. Nārada says to him, "*he pitā, svasthahava, ito tohāra vyavahāra nohe*", O, father, restrain yourself, such conduct is unbecoming of you", much to the mirth of the audience.

Such comic, humorous elements are also noticed in another play *Rāma-vijaya.*In this play sage Viśvāmitra comes to perform *homa* at the wedding of Rāma

and Sītā and on seeing Sītā's matchless beauty during *mukha candrikā*, (showing the bride to the gathering), *"kāme ātura bhelaha, (*overcome by desire) *...śarīra kampi muruci parala."* In *Rāma-vijaya* the dramatist makes the conduct of the kings coming to Sītā's*svayaṁvara* appear foolish and ludicrous and even grotesque:

> *se rājāsava aicana vibhatsa bhāvanā kaye eka pāśa huyā sabhāta baithala: rājanandinika nava-jouvana rūpa-lāvaṇya nirekhi rājāsavakā kāma vāne pirala; acetane murcchita huyā parala.*

In all these cases the situation becomes farcical. Such comic, farcical and even grotesque (as in the *Śaṅkhacuḍa* episodes in *Keli-gopāla)* are not an aberration or incongruous in religious plays. In his discussion on the late medieval French religious drama, Alan Knight observes:

> There is still a tendency, moreover, to view comic scenes as profane drama even when they occur within religious plays. The fact that comic and even grotesque elements can serve a religious purpose in both sacred ritual and drama has been a difficult notion to grasp (or to admit) in our enlightened Western culture. Yet most other cultures, including that of the Middle Ages, have traditionally blended the comic and the religious without any sense of incongruity[43].
> Śaṅkaradeva precisely does that-- blends the comic and the religious, bhakti.

Talking about "the psychological function of the comic in all societies," Knight says: "Obviously the farces were played to make people laugh, but laughter is possible only in a meaningful cultural context where certain elements are in conflict"[44]. In the cases cited above, the conflict is between *bhakti*, restraint, and social decorum on one hand and desire and profligacy on the other.

Operatic structure

Thematically and structurally *Keli-gopāla* appears to be somewhat different from Sankaradeva's other plays. In their emphasis on music,*Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* and *Keli-gopāla* have operatic structure though one must not forget that opera as distinctive genre developed in Europe towards the end of the sixteenth century.

Opera is often defined as a dramatic performance or composition of which music is an essential part. It is a dramatic work that can be sung, and sometimes spoken in a place for performance, set to original music for singers. Comparable art forms may also be called opera, e.g., Chinese opera. Opera developed in the West towards the end of the sixteenth century. In 1637 the first opera house was opened to the general public in Venice and by that time opera became popular in many urban centres of Europe. In Opera the dialogue is accompanied by music. Solos, duets,

choral pieces are used to dramatize the action. There is often a display of vocal skills by an individual singer in an opera. There are two modes of singing in opera: recitative singing imitating inflections of speech, and melodic style of singing to express emotions, known as *āria*.

In *aṅkas* there is no scope for displaying individual vocal skill as the singing is choral.

The distinctive character of the play *Keli-gopāla* is marked by the *nāndī śloka* itself. The nature of the *nāndī śloka in* two parts in Sanskrit is somewhat different from such *ślokas* in other plays. The first section of the *śloka* evokes the atmosphere of the *Rāsalīlā* created with the help of music and dance:

On a soft moonlit night in autumn the *gopa-putra* Kṛṣṇa accompanied by the cowherd women unceasingly took part in amorous play with pleasing music and dance, winning their hearts.

In the second part of the *nāndī śloka*, while bowing to Kṛṣṇa once again reference is made to mesmerizing music:

Seeing the full moon in Vṛndāvana, Kṛṣṇa, possessing unquestionable sense of understanding, played beautifully on his flute in the guise of a cowherd, mesmerizing the beautiful women of Vraja.

This recitation is followed immediately by the *nāndī gīta* in the *rāga Suhāi*. It beautifully evokes the atmosphere for amorous play by mentioning bright moonlight, gentle breeze and flowers in full bloom.

After this the *sūtradhāra* announces the name of the play.As the *praveśa gīta* is sung,Kṛṣṇa and cowherd women enter the stage or acting area.

Kṛṣṇa plays on his flute and attracted by the music, the *gopīs* approach him. Immediately after that singing of the song '*akhandamaṇḍala śaśīśaratarātita..*' and dancing begin. This song is about how the women, moved by the captivating notes of Kṛṣṇa's flute, leave their husbands and sons to be near Kṛṣṇa. This is followed immediately by another song expressing the state of the *gopīs* who were prevented by their husbands from coming to Kṛṣṇa and who died in grief, attaining the ultimate emancipation because of their devotion.

The dramatist Śaṅkaradeva shows Kṛṣṇa's playfulness as Kṛṣṇa pretends not to know why the cowherd women have rushed towards him. Kṛṣṇa innocently asks the women: "What calamity in Gokul has forced you to rush to this forest at night?" He smiles and asks them, "Tell me what you want me to do for you." Kṛṣṇa's words make them lower their heads in shame and Kṛṣṇa continues his playful banter: "If you came to see Vṛndāvana, you've seen it in its best; if you came to see me, you've seen me. Now leave quickly." Thus, appropriate mood is created and naturally a song is sung "*e śakhi calahu bāhuri gauri gokula govārī*", containing Kṛṣṇa's advice

to the women to go back to their families. The *gopīs* are hurt by Kṛṣṇa's unpleasant words (*vipriya vāṇī*). The *sūtradhāra* describes the *gopis'* distraught condition: "*mukha malina, jaice śiśira pari padma saṅkocita bhela, hṛdaye marama cāḍala*" (their faces gloomy, just as when dew falls the lotus closes its petals, distress in their hearts increased)

Their frustration, worry and sadness find expression in the next song "*Cintita gopīnī pekhiye nairāśa".*

Thus, songs play a major role in this play in creating dramatic situations and expressing various moods and sentiments of the characters. The songs of the play are in sixteen different *rāgas* (*Keli-gopāla: Suhāi, Śyām, Śrīpayār, Kedār, Śrī-gaurī, Belovār, Śrī-gāndhār, Kānāḍā, Kalyāṇ, Gaurī, Āśovārī, Māhur, Dhanaśrī,KāruṇyaKedār,Nāṭ,Ahir)* and set to various *tāls* or rhythms, indicating Śaṅkaradeva's experimentation as a musician-composer. The lyrics of these songs beautifully capture shifting of moods and sentiments and shades of emotion. In this play *rāga*-based songs have beautifully captured various moods and conflicting emotions of the *gopīs*.*Gopīs'* impassioned words in the next song "*harihe bujalutuhu bara nirdaya*" (O, Hari, we realise now how heartless you are) are followed by their dialogue in rhythmic prose, which end in these words-"*taba pada-paṅkajatejayenāhipārie, nāhipārie*" (we can never leave your lotus feet) and the next song begins with some of these words: "*nāhi pāraya pāva paṅkaja tejaya*". The song, which is a *vilāpa* or lamentation, is most appropriately in the *rāga Śrī-gāndhār*.

Gopīs' mood of despair gives way to joy as Kṛṣṇa consoles the women, saying that he was just being playful and that he would fulfill their wish. This is to be followed in performance by dancing and singing with the *gopīs*, and two songs follow in quick succession "*dekho sakhi aicana nikaruṇa kanu*" (see how unkind KānuKṛṣṇa is) in *rāga Śrī-gāndhār*and "*keśava karatare keli gopīnī saṅge raṅge* "(Kṛṣṇa plays merrily with the *gopīs*) in *rāga Suhāi*.

A sudden interruption in the joyous activities is caused by the appearance of a lustful demon Śaṅkhacuḍa, a servant of Kuvera, who intends to abduct a *gopī*. The whole atmosphere changes as Kṛṣṇa fights the demon and finally forces him to run away.

Once again Kṛṣṇa plays with the *gopīs*, fulfilling their desire. Starting from the next song "*ramayā karu madankhelā*"(Kṛṣṇa plays amorous game..) there are fifteen more songs before the second interruption by the demon Śaṅkhacuḍa. It is noteworthy that the incidents involving the demon Śaṅkhacuḍa are not part of the *Rāsalīlā* chapter of the *Śrīmad-bhāgavata*. Śaṅkaradeva incorporates this in the *Rāsalīlā* to create dramatic effect and break the monotony likely to be caused by

overwhelming *śṛṅgāra rasa* or eroticism. The fifteen songs referred to are of the following types:

Kṛṣṇa's amorous play, Kṛṣṇa's request to the proud *gopīs* not to spurn him, the lament of the distraught *gopīs* who are peeved at them, Kṛṣṇa's sudden disappearance to teach the proud *gopīs* a lesson, *gopīs*' asking the trees of the whereabouts of Kṛṣṇa, frustrated *gopīs* imitating Kṛṣṇa and playing of various roles as Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa's playfully carrying a *gopī* on his back, *gopīs*' prayer, entreaty to Kṛṣṇa, *gopīs*' lament as they follow the footsteps of the woman supposedly accompanying Kṛṣṇa, more lamentation follows in two songs '*gopīnika koiche keśava jīvāle'*(why did Kṛṣṇa revive the cowherd women) and '*karuṇā sindhu jīvana lehu katilāi*'(ocean of mercy why do you take our lives?),sudden re-appearance of Kṛṣṇa, *gopīs* fussing over Kṛṣṇa and display of fake anger, Kṛṣṇa's consoling the *gopīs* and Kṛṣṇa's play with the *gopīs*.

The amorous play is interrupted briefly for the second time when Śaṅkhacuḍ aappears again from nowhere. Kṛṣṇa fights and chases him away. Two more songs record Kṛṣṇa's frolic with the *gopīs*, after which Śaṅkhacuḍa pops in and runs away carrying a cowherd woman. Kṛṣṇa fights and kills the demon. After that Kṛṣṇa goes to the river Yamunā with the cowherd women and has amorous play in the river. The song "*karata gopāla jalakeli*" captures this situation. Finally, it is dawn and the time for winding up the amorous play arrives. Cock crows, signaling the end of night and coming of dawn. The last song "*bāhuri gaurī gopāla prāṇa nāheri*" expressing the *gopīs*' sadness caused by the impending separation from Kṛṣṇa echoes a well-known *bihu* song as pointed out by Kesabananda Dev Goswami[45]. This shows Śaṅkaradeva's respect for folk tradition and his creative use of folk elements.

kukurā ārāvaya jāni rajani śeṣa
tāhāka śāpaya puta māthe
aju vairini niśi nimiṣe puhāvali
hāmāka tejaya prāṇa nāthe

(The cock crows knowing that the night has ended
He is cursed in the name of their (cowherd women's) sons
Today my enemy the night passed so quickly
So my Lord had to desert me.)

This song echoes the following *bihu* song:
Kukurā kukurā ajāti kukurā
Mucari /bhukuwāi mārim mai tok
Rāti noupuwāotei kiya dāke dili
Dhane erizāi mok

(O, low born cock,
I'll kill you with a single blow
Why did you crow before the night was over?
See, my darling has deserted me)

Sūtradhāra now tells the audience that the *gopīs* have won over Kṛṣṇa by expressing their longing and engaging in love play but in this age, there is no other way but to chant and listen to *Harināma* for salvation.

As in other plays the characters make their entry and exit dancing or with stylized gaits. The language of the commentary given by the *sūtradhāra* and the dialogues spoken by the characters is rhythmic and often highly poetic.

Conclusion:

Perhaps Śaṅkaradeva's drama may be described as a unique form of musical theatre as the conception, the structure and the unfolding of dramatic events or situations—all appear to be musical. However, poor, or indifferent quality of dance and mechanical rendering of the songs, often devoid of appropriate *abhinaya*, tend to adversely affect the musical quality of the *aṅkas* or *ankiyā-nāts*. Experts and performers need to identify the most distinctive or unique features of the performance of an *aṅkiyā nāt* (*bhāonā*) and ensure that these are retained in any performance. Some changes such as shortening the duration of the *dhemāli* and avoiding repetitive movements may be welcome and effective. More emphasis may be placed on singing the songs (*nāṭar gīt*) correctly and making the dance movements and gaits of the characters economic and yet aesthetically pleasing.

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Rukmiṇī-haraṇa Nāṭa: A stylistic study of the play-text

Biswajit Kalita

Abstract:
With the evolution of linguistic methods and methodologies, play-texts have recently become the object of strenuous investigation to find out the buried performance features which are independent of the performance-texts. This paper is an attempt to apply at least one stylistic model propounded by the stylisticians, especially by Mick Short in order to infer performance features from the play-texts of *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa,* an *ankīyā-nāṭa* composed by medieval saint-poet-dramatist of Assam, Śrīmanta Śaṇkaradeva. An attempt has also been made as well to comprehend the overall structure of the *ankīyā-nāṭa* genre.

Keywords:*ankīyā-nāṭa*, play-text, performance-text

Introduction

The paradox of authorial intention and the director's autonomy, or the contest between play-text and performance-text while producing a play has been a recent phenomenon, the debates primarily arise when author's intention is clearly stated in the form of stage directions. This debate dilutes and takes a different twist and colour in case of traditional and folk theatre forms where no such authorial intention is explicitly expressed in the form of stage directions and when the authorial intention is replaced by the social belief system concerning a myth or series of myths which upholds the particular theatre conventions. The play-texts of *ankīyā-nāṭas* put the director or the performers in a unique fix insomuch as they contain only scanty, almost no instruction of stage directions. This is however not a surprise considering the fact that most of the traditional and folk plays of India largely follow the Indian classical Sanskrit theatre tradition in style and technique wherein the *sūtradhāra* introduces the subject of the play and does almost everything for successful completion of a play. As HabibTanvir puts[1], "The numerous forms of Indian folk theatre all share some common fundamental values…. Almost all of them usually cover a large canvas in their stories and denote change of location by movement and word of mouth rather than by a change of sets and decor. They often have a sort of stage manager…who opens and establishes the play and provides the link scenes, and all these are the very elements upon which the classical Sanskrit drama is also based in a broad sense". Being a traditional ritual theatre-form, the traditional

wisdom of the people and the contextual knowledge of the themes guide the director or the actors of *ankīyā-nāṭa* to derive the performance features. But recent developments in stylistics provide reading strategies of the play-texts for meaning generation which might help exploring alternative performance strategies. As Macrae puts it[2], "Critical understanding of the relationship between a text and or performance and its reader or audience in the construction of meaning evolved through linguistic and then cognitive turns in literary theory". The paper seeks to explore the stylistic models which may be employed to derive the performance features of the play-texts of *ankīyā-nāṭa*, especially *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*, or derive the appropriate behaviour expected of the characters while performing such a play.

Methodology

Fernando de Toro[3] observes that "the dramatic text is a fundamental, unavoidable, material reality" and it has to be accepted that the play-text is "another component of the theatre performance, integrated into the stage practice". The play-text is the soul of the theatre as it expresses not only the original intent of the playwright but also provides, as Roman Ingarden puts, [4] "(a) a main text made up of the dialogues and the characters and (b) a secondary text- the *didascalia* and the stage directions'. It becomes obligatory for the director or the performers to read the text more than once in order to translate the ideas into the performance-text, for "when sensitive and experienced readers interact with a play-text they in effect infer how the play would be performed on the stage"[5]. *Exploring the Language of Drama: from Text to Context*, edited by Jonathan Culpeper, et al. is a significant contribution to the field of stylistics analysis of dramatic texts. Herein Short says, "we carry with us a large amount of information about how to interpret utterances, and hence how they will be said, what gestures and actions will be appropriate, and so on"[6]. Short provides a roadmap[7] or strategy in order to infer performance features from a play-text which is given as follows- **"What is said** (in dialogue and stage directions**)** leads via process of inference to **what is meant** which in turn leads via inference to ***performance features*** (Action, Speech, Appearance). Of the performance features. ***Actions*** refers to what is done on stage (movement, placing of objects and other 'business'), gestures, body position and posture changes, facial expression, direction of gaze. ***Speech*** refers to: Assignment of general pronunciation features (e.g. non-standard accents, and unusual speech features, like stutters), Assignment of intonation contours and tonic placement for each line, paralinguistic phenomena (e.g. tone of voice, loudness, speed of delivery, pauses, etc.). ***Appearance*** refers to: Gender, age and physical size of actors, skin colour, hair colour and other physical features, What the characters wear." This model may be applied to the play-texts of *ankīyā –nāta.*

Play-text vs Performance-text Debate

Bertolt Brecht believes[8], "Proper plays can only be understood when performed." For Stanislavski, "it is only on the stage that drama can be revealed in all its fullness and significance". J. L. Styan, Stanley Wells and other dramatic critics hold superiority of the performance-text over the play-texts. There are also critics whose arguments favour reading of play-texts over the performance. For example, Charles Lamb recommended that plays be read rather than acted[9]: 'What we see upon the stage is body and bodily action; what we are conscious of in reading is almost exclusively the mind and its movements'. William Hazlitt also preferred reading of plays[10]. L.C. Knights' essay 'How Many Children had Lady Macbeth?' is an important addition to the criticism of drama and theatre; here Knights argues[11]: 'Read with attention, the plays themselves will tell us how they should be read'. Over and above these all, the populace has the common wisdom that drama is meant for performance, hence structurally different in style and technique from the other genres of literature like poetry and novel which demand the act of reading only for their appreciation. The intention of the dramatist regarding how a particular play should be performed is visible through the stage directions contained in the play. This may be illustrated with an extract from the Act-I of Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*:

> [*A country road. A tree. Evening. Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before. Enter Vladimir.*]
>
> ESTRAGON: (*giving up again*). Nothing to be done.
>
> VLADIMIR: *(advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart*). I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. (*He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to Estragon.*) So there you are again.

The italicized texts above are the instructions to the performers or the director, as the case may be, which provide the performance details— the setting, context as well as the behaviour expected of the performers, although "It does not tell the performers exactly what to do or how, but it demarcates a clearly specified range of appropriate behaviour"[12]. So far as translating the authorial intention in performance, the instructions given in the play-texts are sufficient. But drama is also a "plastic object" which the directors mould according to the requirements: "... the director shapes, adapts, adopts, changes....The director's task is to shape, to resolve space and time problems, meaning concretization, proxemic and kinesic problems, the theatre relation, ideological problems, etc., that is, everything directly involved with stage practice."[13] What is clear, therefore, is that over insistence on the play-text

over the performance-text would never yield a successful dramatic production in the same way as over reliance on director's authority could spoil the theatre experience- "restricting full understanding to theatrical experience alone would appear to have the logical consequence that plays could never be sensibly performed."[14] Short draws attention to a production of Shakespeare's history play[15], *King Lear*, which was an "interesting and enjoyable theatrical experience, but was unfaithful to the original script. Although it used the words of the original, it did so in a way which was entirely different from the original intention, turning a history play into a puppet show farce". Short has similar experience with production of the Macbeth[16], "which was at the same time both unreasonable (unfaithful) and a poor theatrical experience". A successful dramatic production, therefore, entails sites of negotiations between the play-text and the performance-text, which careful and attentive readings of the play-texts could resolve.

Deriving performance features from *ankīyā-nāṭa*:

Śrīmanta Śaṇkaradeva composed seven plays which are known as *ankīyā-nāṭa*. Out of these seven plays only six plays are extant. These are 1) *Patnī-prasāda* 2) *Pārijāta-haraṇa* 3) *Kālīya-damana* 4) *Keli-gopāla* 5) *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*, and 6) *Śrīrāma-vijaya*. However, this investigator willingly avoids discussing all the six plays but restricts himself to the play-texts of *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* only. Structurally, the play begins with a Sanskrit *śloka* of four lines which is extended further by another *śloka* of four lines, connecting both the *ślokas* by the conjunctive adverb 'moreover' (*api-ca*), followed by a song called *nāndī* set in *rāga* and *tāla*. Once the *nāndī* is sung, the *sūtradhāra* declares to satisfy the audience that 'nothing much is to be said; he utters the holy name of Mādhava twice, bows unto Nārāyaṇa and addresses the audience first in a Sanskrit *śloka* and then sings a lengthy *bhaṭimā*. Thereafter, the *sūtradhāra* introduces the audience to the subject of the play and urges them to watch and listen with rapt attention. This follows a small conversation between the *sūtradhāra* and his companions regarding the kind musical instrument to accompany the performance.

The play actually begins with a Sanskrit *śloka* which announces the entrance of Kṛṣṇa in gracious gait, followed by an utterance of the *sūtradhāra* who reiterates the entrance of Kṛṣṇa in prose. This follows a song set in *rāga* and *tāla* with two parts: the refrain and the verse, which eulogizes the attributes of Kṛṣṇa. Thereafter, the *sūtradhāra* announces "Śrīkṛṣṇa having entered thus remains in one corner (of performance area). Then O noble assembly, hear, how Rukmiṇī enters". The next song set in *rāga* and *tāla* describes how Rukmiṇī enters, with descriptions of her beautiful physical attributes, and what she does there (in the performance space).. The story thus moves through a sequence of *ślokas*, songs and dialogues till it ends

with a concluding prayer (*mukti-maṅgalabhaṭimā*). No act or scene division is noticed in an *ankīyā* play-text. The story simply progresses from one stage to the other through songs in sequence which incorporates the important incidents of the intermediary period between the episodes. The sequences of *slokas* and songs, etc. as stated above may be translated[17] to infer the performance features buried there:

Sl No 1. Śloka :

> "I take refuge with all humility at the crimson-feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the dust of whose lotus-feet is taken on the head with joy by Śiva, and other inhabitants of heaven; chanting of whose name removes defects and impurities rendered by Kali and eternally liberates the sons of Manu (man)."

Further-

> "I salute that Supreme spirit Kṛṣṇa who, in no time defeating Cedi and other kings, abducted Rukmiṇī, who deformed invincible Rukmi in war, who lawfully wedded the daughter of Vidarbha, who enamoured the citizens of Dvāraka."

Sl. No. 2. *Nāndī* Song: melody: *Suhāi*: beat: single clap

Refrain: "Glory, glory unto *Murāru*, the Eternal Soul of the universe, at whose feet we salute with reverence."

Verse: "One who is prayed with reverence by *Pañcamuha* and the feet-dust of whom Hara (Śiva) smear on head, who is prayed by deities and demons alike, is my saviour and beatituder. He, won over the kings inflicted by senses, abducted Rukmiṇī with ease, and did earthly sports- sings Śaṅkara, the servant of Hari."

Sl no. 3. *Bhaṭimā:*

> "Glory, glory unto deity Yādava whose beginning or end is beyond perception; whose lotus-feet is paid homage to eternally by *Brahmā*, the lotus-reposer, and Śiva. He, who descended and relieved the burden of earth, and bodying himself forth as fearsome Narasiṁha, tore apart the chest of Hiraṇya; having created the worlds (with all manifestations) He had there many a sport and restored the three worlds with a touch and blow of toe-nail. His character is so divine that can remove the demerits of Kali. The Ganga that emanates, touching his red lotus-like feet, makes both divine and human being pure.He is the slayer of Agha, Baka, Dhenuka,

eliminated Kamsa and Kesi and also killed Madhu, Mura, Naraka and Kubalaya. He subdued Indra's pride and rid the dwellers of Braja of fear……etc."

Sl no 4. *Sūtradhāra*: "O the assemblage, O noble souls, the Supreme Preceptor of the universe Nārāyaṇa who through part incarnations reduces the burden of earth over and over again, that Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa descending in full form will do the deeds of abduction of Rukmiṇī here in the midst of the assemblage; behold and listen to it with devout attention and reverence". (Śrīkṛṣṇa first enters with Uddhava, thence Rukmiṇī gets in accompanied by her dame-friends.)

Sl. No. 5. *Sūtradhāra* again: (Giving ear to the sky, says to the companion:) "O friend, what music do you hear?"

Companion Responds: "O, divine *dundubhi* is on; ye, the sound of divine *dundubhi* fills the air".

Sl no. 6. *Sūtradhāra*: "O we have seen, we have seen; there descends Supreme Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa".

Sl. No.7. *Śloka*: "There enters Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by Uddhava, the creator of the universe and the friend of the honest, whose countenance defeats crores of cupids put together."

Sl no. 8. *Sūtradhāra*: "O the assembly of noble souls, that Śrīkṛṣṇa, of whom I have said, is coming with Uddhava, ye he is coming. The *sūtradhāra* now exists."

Sl no. 9. Song: melody: *Sindhurā*: beat: single clap

Refrain: "There enters the Preceptor of the universe (on the arena), cladding like a dancer whose luster wins over crores of Cupids."

Verse: "He is clad in soft yellow attire, and the beauty of his countenance, with a hue of smile, radiates like tasteful moonbeams. He is lotus-eyed, with arms of inordinate length reaching to the knee, while his neck is adorned with the *Kaustabha* that radiates like the rising sun. A necklace of gems and pearls and pendants on his ears swing forth, while anklets make sweet tinkling sounds in His lotus feet. His form illuminates like crores of moons together—thus sings Śaṅkara, the servant of Keśava."

Nowhere in the above excerpts has any distinct stage direction for the director or the producer, except songs and ślokas, and in that cased how the director or the producer of the play would possibly fix the stage directions for the actors. The stage directions however come from the words of the *sūtradhāra* (sl no. 4-6, 8) who himself takes part in the entire proceedings when he announces the separate entrance of Kṛṣṇa with Uddhava and then the entrance of Rukmiṇī with her dame-friends. The *sūtradhāra* also draws attention of the audience to the kind of divine music he hears (sl no. 5). As obvious, *sūtradhāra's* directions only reflect on who is entering

the stage but they are notoriously silent about other major performance attributes or signs, viz., costume, colour of complexion, gestures, the tone of speech and a lot of other information required. Mick Short's strategy is: "**What is said** leads, via **process of Inference** to the performance features relating to **Action, Gestures, Speech and Appearance.**" So, first, in order to find out "**What is said**" about Śrīkṛṣṇa's character the director has to go to sl. no. 1-4 and sl. no 9. While sl. no 1 is an obeisance to Lord Kṛṣṇa alone, sl. no.2 is an obeisance plus an introduction to Kṛṣṇa -Rukmiṇī episode. The first *bhaṭimā*, i.e. sl no. 3 sings the glory and attributes of Lord Kṛṣṇa and towards its end, in the last few couplets, the 'noble souls' who want liberation in *Vaikuṇṭha* are instructed to hear Kṛṣṇa's sport of abduction of Rukmiṇī, a story whose principal aim is to extol the virtues of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The sl. no. 9 may be a perfect indication as to how the character of Śrīkṛṣṇa should be enacted- the actor should wear a soft smile, clad in soft yellow attire, neck should be adorned with a garland that resembles the mythical *Kaustabha*, a necklace of gems and pearls and pendants should adorn his ears, and finally the actor should wear anklets. This song also indicates the ideal physical feature of the person who would take the role- he should have at least beautiful expressive eyes if not lotus-eyed and arms reaching to the knee. The colour of Kṛṣṇa's body is not mentioned which is to be drawn from the Hindu sacred texts.

The key to performance of such a play-text is obviously not to be seen in distinct stage directions, but to see them in the cumulative total of the *ślokas*, songs and dialogues. The audiences and other partakers gather the knowledge that the subject of the play is no ordinary mortal drama but of a divine nature connected with the deeds and exploits of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The reason of accommodating so many songs may be to set the tone of the play in the right way or it might have the obvious intention of teaching the ignorant masses of the time about their Lord and their duty unto Him. Secondly, for indications regarding "**Action, Gestures, Speech and Appearance**" which might be appropriate of Kṛṣṇa**,** the director or the producer of the play has to resort to the sacred texts of Hindu mythology, or he or she should at least go back to the songs and *ślokas* wherein the character of Lord Kṛṣṇa is beautifully delineated. The 'process of inference' leads to the general comprehnsion that Lord Kṛṣṇa must not enter the stage wearing a shirt and pent, rather He should enter in a costume befitting his grand status. His actions, gestures and speech should also be appropriate, lest any deviation from the accepted norms would jeopardize the grand status of Kṛṣṇa or the performance in entirety.

Conclusion

Ankīyā-nāṭa is a ritual-theatre genre performed with extremely rich paraphernalia, which are invisible in the play-texts but to be learned through conventions, and that

too under proper guidance. Hence, it is impossible for a stranger to take up a play-text of this genre and perform it with a mere reading like an occidental theatre which is full of stage directions. Traditionally, *aṅkīyā-nāṭa* is meant to be performed in an open single circular space in the *nāmghar* or *sattra*, hence the play-texts do not provide elaborate stage directions for lack of space, or for lack of elaborate stage maneuverability. In view of this, there may be restrictions applying many of the stylistic methods which have evolved on the basis of the modern theatre genre. Further, the pay-text has certain inconsistencies which need to be resolved through negotiation between the play-text and the performance-text. As for example, Śrīkṛṣṇa is the Supreme Soul and as such his virtues, deeds and attributes are duly eulogized (a) in the *ślokas*, songs and the *bhaṭimās*, and (b) by the characters like Rukmiṇī and Śaśīprabhā (letter of Rukmiṇī to Kṛṣṇa, for example). At one point of time (*bhaṭimā* no 2) the *bhikṣuka* from Kuṇḍila tells Him mostly of the physical attributes of Rukmiṇī upon which Śrīkṛṣṇa becomes frantic with excitement to be in her company instantly (song no 4). Kṛṣṇa's behavior at this point of time, at least as the song suggests, does not give justice to the way He was introduced to the audience in the preceding *ślokas* and songs. In view of such conflicts, it might be interesting to see the sites of negotiation between the two texts.

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The *Sattras* through the prisms of modern management principles, governance and control structures

Dr. Satyakam Dutta

Abstract:
In this Article, an introduction is made to the concept that the *sattras*, which have successfully survived as organisations for several hundred years, can have much learning in the management, governance and administration realms, which can be a subject matter of learning for modern day organisations whose longevity is rarely more than a hundred years. Further, the *sattra*s are studied from the current management perspectives and its control structures are examined.

Keywords: *sattra*, Śaṅkaradeva, Management Principles, Governance, Control

1. Introduction

For nearly 500 years, the *sattras* have served as the bedrock of Assamese civilisation, providing a unifying legacy, tradition, and culture to the numerous ethnicities and tribes that make up Assam's territory and people. The *sattras* have changed over time, and their ideas have been refined as well. While *Mahāpuruṣ* Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and his most decorated pupil Mādhavadeva established the institution of *sattra* and fructified the idea of a monastic institution in the form of a *sattra*, it was their direct disciples and, later, their lineages who formalised the structure, traditions, and religious administration of the *sattra*, giving the Assamese society a distinct paradigm.

2. *Sattra* as an organisation following management principles

If we look at the history of the concept of organization, mostly organisations in the olden times in the form of an Army or a religious following we find that the Army or a group of soldiers protected a populace that had the prerequisite of discipline and compliance. Religious groups were generally governed with a common belief system which kept the members motivated and the oneness of cause intact. Hence, a religious group can be a better candidate over an Army for the definition of an organisation. It is heartening to see that in those religious organisations, the management philosophies followed today and believed to be conceptualized in and after the 18th century, were followed and hence there is a need to study those religious organisations so that modern organisations can benefit from them, in terms of longevity, synchronization of

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organisational goals and maintenance of high levels of motivation.

Sattras of Assam, too, fit well in terms of the concept of an age-old organization, sustaining for a period of nearly 500 years, keeping the original spirit alive. The *sattras*, which are basically monasteries, were instrumental in the spread of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam's length and breadth within a very short span. It can be said that *sattras* were the institutions which brought about a spiritual revolution in Assam during the 15th to 17th centuries. While most modern organisations have a life span and very few are older than a couple of hundred years and those which have completed a long term have invariably gone through the cycles of change in ownership, amalgamation or change in the business altogether, the *sattras* have survived several distrous moments in the past and are still keeping the essence of Assamese spiritualism very much alive. Any study into the overall management, governance and administration of the *sattras* can throw light on several aspects which can help modern organisations to increase their life spans and also make them a better place for the employees.

During the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, several management philosophers propounded theories about how management of organisations can be made better. Those theories over the years have been refined by several thinkers and based on their inputs we currently have the Management Principles, Management Models and Management Theories which the current organisations try to follow in spirit as the case may be, so that their profits rise and employee satisfaction remains good.

Many recent studies of monasteries have considered them to be forerunners in governance and have had a significant impact on the economic development of the regions they are in. This can be said to be true in the case of *sattras* also. On the other hand, the great economic success of numerous monasteries in medieval times serves as an example of efficient organization of commercial enterprises. On the other hand, the creation of wealth led to the temptation of misuse.[1]

As a reaction, sophisticated governance systems were established within religious orders[2].The article strives to generate deeper general insights into the functioning of governance structures, processes, and incentives with the *sattra* administration.

While many other organizations establish controls and supervisory institutions in order to monitor decision making, monasteries apply common value systems in order to discuss possible solutions and come to beneficial conclusions[3], this value system in the monasteries keep the essence of the organisation intact and keep the negative forces at a distance. This is remarkably true in the case of the *sattras* too. The *sattras*, all over Assam,

have a common value system very carefully imbibed within the inmates since their childhood. This makes all personal goals of the inmates converge towards one value system only. With the advent of science and technology, the value system with the *sattras* have faced big obstacles, but so far, the value system has survived with rationalisation of use of science and technology.

The indoctrination of the *bhakatas* (inmates/monks) in a *sattra* happens at an early age. Their choice to lead a monastic life is tested at several levels. Their suitability to live in the *sattra* is determined in a stringent way. However, in the recent times the inmates are sent to live in a *sattra* by their parents mostly due to poverty unlike in earlier times when such choices were done by parents willing to send one of their off-springs towards a noble cause of serving the religion. As they grow up, the values get inculcated and service to God slowly becomes paramount. This way of indoctrination is more or less the same in all the *sattras* where residency is provided. Through several years of upbringing in the *sattras*, the inmates are chosen for different works and tasks are divided. While someone excels in religious performances, someone does well in cultural activities and some in administration. In almost all, the *sattras*, a remarkable distinction is found among the branches of administration which we can divide into General Administration, Religious Administration and Cultural Administration. This division helps in keeping the right person in the right job under the overall control and guidance of the *sattrādhikār*.

Careful socialisation and the establishment of an organisational identity are essential for successfully living and working together. The socialisation process in a *sattra* lasts a lifetime and promotes the internalisation of a person's entire value system and its impact on the other inmates. Trust, hospitality, tradition, and work as a vocation are all important aspects of an inmate's overall development, and these values are learned during the inherent socialisation process.

Considerable importance is given to the opinion of the inmates and hence democratic ideals are inculcated within them deeply. The opinion of all is taken on important issues in a get together of all the inmates called the *samuha* and decisions are then taken. No one can question any decision once taken after consultation with all, that discipline is maintained.

In this way almost all of the Henry Fayol's fourteen principles of management are seen in the *sattras* already practiced and followed. Henry Fayol, whom we know as the 'father of modern management theory', propounded these principles in the nineteenth century, while the *sattras* have seen these maybe a few years after their inception.

Further to these democratic values, clan-control mechanism and devotion to the Almighty are the three keys which have extended the life spans of the *sattras* and have helped them to overcome several stressful times in the past.

We can name any management thinker recognised by the management community today, and their thought processes will match with the management mechanism followed in the *sattras* since long. The Management Principles are the essential, causal factors that serve as the basis for any productive management. Scientific management appears to rely more on the individual worker's efficiency but the methodology of management principles centres on the entire organization. The contributors to this management philosophy included Henri Fayol, Mary Parker Follett, and Chester I. Barnard.

Mary Parker Follett and Chester Barnard were early proponents of a more humanistic management perspective that emphasized the importance of understanding human behaviour, organizational preferences and behaviours as well as social interactions and community processes which we can see intricately being done in the *sattras*. The humanistic perspective and more specifically the concept of constructive conflict is also visible in the *sattra* organisation. In order to mitigate the ill effects of conflict, the *sattras* have the highest powers to the *sattrādhikār* and the *deka sattrādhikār*, who can ease out differences with dialogue as also through the discussions in the *samuha*, thus making a case for resolution through constructive conflict.

Douglas McGregor also came up with his management theory. His theory is often referred to as McGregor's XY theory and it refers to two styles of management : Authoritarian (Theory X) and Participative (Theory Y). Despite being more than 50 years old, his approach continues to be a cutting-edge management model. According to McGregor, Theory Y is more plausible and rational than Theory X. Therefore, he promoted good team ties, productive and exciting work and everyone's involvement in decision-making. In the *sattra* institutions, we can see that the Theory Y is purely at work. Residents of the *sattras* do their activities on their own accord. They don't need any external factors to motivate their productivity. Team work is fostered. Decision making is truly democratic. Thus, there is a great amount of cohesion among the inmates which gives rise to better productivity, organisational longevity and peace.

The management principles not only of the above thinkers which were practiced in the *sattras*, but of many other later thinkers were also in practice there. Other such thinkers include Peter Drucker, Robert Waterman, Tom Peters, Konsuko Matsushita etc, who had propounded many Management Theories later, but were found to have been followed in the *sattras* since long.

These should be subject matters of research with funding from the Government as well as from the private organisations, which is currently lacking.

The idea of "Social Movements" which was suggested initially in the 1950s, is now taking an organizational shape in these contemporary times and is of strong interest to the subject of this article. It is understood that, if the "Social Movements" were to survive, they must become much more like organisations. It is traditionally thought of by the companies as entities with clear cut borders, structured processes and well-defined structures of power. Social movements, by comparison, are seen as more organic and dynamic. The words "social movement" applies to a form of collective action focusing on common political or social problems. A few other good examples include the civil rights campaigns, women and LGBT movements. Leaders of the social movement focus on charisma rather than authority to inspire the people to take action. The background of the *sattra* Institutions as discussed previously has been the Vaiṣṇavite Movement. Therefore, it can be concluded that social movements must establish an institutional structure, as in the *sattras*, in order to maintain the movement's ideology into perpetuity, or at least try to do so, when it reaches maturity. Contemporary philosophy of management, though, argues that the distinction between the two is already blurred: companies have become much more like social movements, and social movements are becoming more permanent. Just as companies outsource specific jobs, social movements may carry out contract activities such as lobbying and fundraising. Thus, the concept of "Social Movement" is also appropriate in the case of the *sattras*.

3. How Sattras can be of interest to the management?

Due to the recent economic scandals pertaining to manipulated financial statements like that in Enron, Satyam and more recently in ICICI-Videocon, BharatPe etc, an interest in analyzing the alternative models of governance increased considerably. Instruments of governance used by the *sattras* can be seen as a suitable source of new ideas for governance models. Accountability of community members to the *sattrādhikār* concerning financial matters, participation in the decision-making process, monitoring and advising the *sattrādhikār* through the *Sattra* Management Committee etc. are integral parts of monastic governance in the *sattras*.

Sattras can be viewed as pioneers of governance which have had a major impact on the development of the economy in Assam. Although the great economic success of numerous *sattras* in medieval times serves as an

example of an efficient organization of religio-economic enterprises, the generation of wealth led to the temptation of misuse. The resulting wealth was a significant reason why governance became this important: for example, some *sattrādhikārs* and monks lined their own pockets and certain *sattras* were undisciplined. It can be shown that *sattras* not only developed special systems to check these excesses but also established these basic governance instruments very early in their history and therefore were able to survive for centuries.

Sattrādhikārs and other leaders of the *sattras* are disciplined either through members exerting their participation rights, or through internal control mechanisms, like the development of value systems and special supervisory concepts as discussed earlier. Secondly, monasteries are experts in internal control mechanisms: their organizational members are committed to one institution for their entire lives. Limited exit-options are compensated by more "voice." Even in the case of *sattras*, "voice" plays a major role. When members perceive a decrease in the quality of their organization, they have the possibility of improving the situation.

Corporations and firms are for-profit organizations, i.e. economic communities, while monasteries like *sattras* are non-profit organizations, i.e. life partnerships. The objectives of the two organizational forms differ fundamentally and decisively. The main objective in corporations and firms is to maximize shareholder value. The main objective in monasteries is to operate as a steward of God[4]. In spite of these differences, they have many problems of the same nature in common which can help in learning from each other, as has been explained here in this article.

An important function of corporate governance is to control and discipline management. The same goal is shared by the *sattras*, where disciplining the monks (*bhakatas*) is a central task, so that the activities of the *sattras*, both religious and economic can be performed with ease. A long average lifetime, coupled with minimal control problems, indicates a crisis-proof, effective governance mechanism.

In order to substantiate how the *sattra* governance model significantly contributes to the stability of *sattras*, three aspects are to be considered of great importance:

(1) The basic governance model was formed very early and has been more or less constant over time;

(2) The adherence to the rules, regulations and the traditions propagated by Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and the subsequent *gurus* from drifting away into other governance structures; and

(3) The external governance mechanisms of the *sattras*, sometimes

under the aegis of the kings, and now under the *sattra Mahāsabhā* and *sattra* Management Committee etc. have contributed to this stability, without removing autonomy and tradition from the individual *sattras*.

4. Governance mechanisms of the *Sattras*

As has been discussed earlier, a combination of Internal and External Governance Mechanisms, have helped the *sattras* to survive for such a long period of time without losing much essence with which they were started.

4.1 Internal governance mechanisms:

Internal control in the *sattras* can be divided into two main categories. First, *sattras* build on common value systems, careful selection and rigorous socialization processes. Second, *sattras* grant participation rights to their *bhakatas* and build largely on internal monitoring processes. These internal monitoring processes in *sattras* reduce agency problems.

- To ensure that common value systems are suitable in guiding the individual behaviour of the members of a *sattra*, the *sattras* build on careful selection and rigorous socialisation processes.
- Candidates for a *sattra* livelihood go through a tight selection process in order to test their suitability.
- Socialisation in the *sattras* is a lifelong process. In order to ensure living and working together successfully, careful socialisation, and the composition of an organisational identity is crucial. Two rules are essential: first, with respect to the values of Śaṅkaradeva, dialogue among the *bhakatas* is fostered, and any disagreements are addressed and solved. Second, monastic partnership depends on a fulfilling life environment. The Vaishnavites promote equality of treatment in daily life in order to integrate new members. From the very beginning, the novice is a part of the community; he participates in the same structures, including the daily routine, prayers, and meals. Being treated as an equal in life and work community facilitates and the establishment of common values. These readings deal with diverse topics, like the holy texts of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and their disciples, politics, philosophy, or the history of the *gurus* and the respective *sattra*.
- The *Sattrādhikār* carries out the main responsibility for spiritual and economic concerns, he represents the *sattra* in external affairs, delegates duties, and he is in charge of the well-being of every

bhakata. Unlike corporations and firms, the *bhakatas* possess substantial participation rights and monitor the management.

- The *sattra* Committee or the *samuha* consists of all *bhakatas*. Every one of these *bhakata* has equal rights and may vote in elections or in the process of selection of administrators of various functions within the *sattras*.
- *Sattras* complement participation processes with internal monitoring processes. Similar to some corporations and firms, many *sattras* have a two-tier board structure, i.e. there is a *sattra* Management Committee (the *Satttrādhikār* and the functional officials like the *bāyana, gāyana, bharalī* etc.) and a separate advisory board, normally called the *Sattr*a Development Committee (some executive from the management committee and some leading civil people from outside the *sattra* like the Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police etc).
- One of the themes within a *sattra* is the principle of monastic leadership, which include having a shared vision, common goals and values, choosing the community members with the help of a long-lasting selection and socialisation process, defining a clear hierarchy, having a participative approach to decision making, encouraging the personal development of individuals, and ensuring economic and social sustainability of a *sattra*. An authentic leader, a *Sattrādhikār,* is expected to teach by example and serve the whole monastic community.

4.2 External governance mechanisms

The interplay between internal and external control mechanisms in Vaishnavite *sattras* can be of particular interest for profit-oriented organisations. History shows that the internal control mechanisms of *sattras* sometimes fail. For example, in situations where the *Sattrādhikār* and the Leadership join in enriching themselves, or simply do not care about the economic situation, external control is important. The external control is hierarchically organized and consists of jurisdiction and periodical monitoring. As mentioned earlier, the *Sattra* Development Committee (members from the management committee and also some leading civil people from outside the *sattra* like the Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police etc) provide a semi-external accountability mechanism.

- Vaishnavite *sattras* belong to the Vaishnavite faith propounded by Śaṅkaradeva and his disciples. However, there is no specific law which demarcates the jurisdictions.

- Every four to five years, delegates of the *Sattra Mahīsabha* should visit a *sattra* to evaluate the condition of the *sattra*. They do visit and some form of monitoring is present. However, this should be institutionalized.
- It is pertinent that though the *sattras* have a strong internal control mechanism, it lacks in external control to a high degree. For *sattras* to become model institutions in terms of governance, there should be some sort of institutionalized external control mechanism. A law in this regard and more active participation of the *Sattra Mahāsabhā* is very pertinent in this regard.

5. What can the business organisations learn from the Sattras?

While the *sattras* pursue a twofold strategy, which utilizes both external (loose though) and internal control elements for a long period. Now, the modern corporations focus on more reliance on external control mechanisms. Historically, external regulations enforced by the government played a major role in governance to resolve corporate governance issues. As a result, governance and administration in case of corporations do not consider deeply the internal control mechanisms, and intrinsic motives, such as loyalty or trust.

The *sattras* show that such internal arrangements help to avoid problems and facilitate better control. *Sattras* are built on generally known rules and conventions, e.g. the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva and their disciples and the tradition of a particular *sattra*. They supplement these rules by collective institutions, e.g. the *Sattra Mahāsabhā*. The learning from *sattras* in terms of governance, which emphasises these internal mechanisms, can be implemented in the corporate governance of corporations and firms.

Truly, hardly any organisation exists other than the *sattras*, at least in India, which internalise value systems in such a profound and perfect way. Corporations may refer to their own tradition. Many companies are proud of their culture. It serves to attract suitable employees, customers and shareholders, and should guide their behaviour. *Sattras* demonstrate that common values can be fostered if they are incorporated as an integral part of living and working together. This requires rigorous and credible selection criteria and continuous socialisation processes. The example of *sattras* shows that internal promotions can take advantage of comprehensive information about a candidate's past behaviour. Firms can learn from *sattras* to socialise, inform and educate their employees with regular and sustainable tools, such as group activities, cultural or social. Companies often fill vacancies based on

job advertisements and precise job descriptions. The example of *sattras* shows that work is more than a career – it is seen as a vocation that fosters one's personal and spiritual growth, emphasises cooperation rather than competition and focuses on increasing work effort and efficiency.

The *sattra* approach demonstrates that democratic selection of the *sattrādhikār*, internal monitoring processes, and representation of the *bhakatas* on various issues on an advisory board, viz., the *Sattra* Management Committee (*Sattra Paricālanā Sāmiti)* etc foster and protect the *sattra* by reducing agency problems. Corporations and firms could pre-select suitable CEO candidates by relying on first-hand information from numerous individuals about the behaviour of these candidates. Before selection, these candidates can present their strategic vision for the firm. Such systems create strong competition for unfilled positions and are based on personal experience with the managers.

Finally, Corporations and firms can learn from *sattras* regarding the organisation of external control. External control institutions in corporations and firms should obtain their independency by counting on shareholder representatives. In contrast to *sattras*, which operate as life partnerships and thus are mainly responsible for insiders, the main objective in corporations and firms is financial value added for shareholders. In corporations and firms, shareholder representatives can supervise the election of the CEO and directly elect the members of the audit committee and the auditing firm.

6. Constraints

Two constraints of the monastic approach need to be addressed: the danger of dictatorship of the *sattrādhikār* and the critical subject of lifelong commitment. Just like the *sattras* that have overcome these limitations over the ages, corporations and firms have to balance the advantages and disadvantages of common value systems and commitment. Corporations and firms can prevent group cohesion by promoting the diversity of their employees and their managers. Without implementing exit barriers and constraining the employees too much, commitment should be fostered within organisations.

7. Conclusion

When we look close at the administrative and governance structures of the *sattras*, we find a range of management philosophies implemented in them propounded much later by the recently recognised thinkers. Studies can bring out more insights into the sustained functioning of the *sattras* which can be of

use to prolonging the effective life-spans of modern organisations. The governance mechanism of the *sattras* points out that corporations and firms can prevent agency problems by complementing external discipline with internal behavioural incentives and by utilizing democratic, supportive semi-external control mechanisms. Internal arrangements facilitate a better control through 'voice' in the form of democratic rights of participation and through loyalty and trust expressed in the protection of the ideals and traditions of the *sattras*. Democratic, supportive semi-external control mechanisms result in improvement of self-governance through self-discipline and self-control. Thus, from the internal and semi-external control mechanism, the *sattras* can throw light on various measures of governance which can be imbibed by corporations and firms in order to fend off agency problem and tide over crisis in governance.

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Śaṅkarī classical music

Dr. Jagat Ch Kalita

Abstract:
This article presents a brief comparative overview of Śaṅkarī classical music with respect to the genre of Indian classical music. Finally Roman transliteration and English translation **of** two bargītas each from Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva composed in four different rāgas are provided.

Keywords: Classical music, Prabandhagāna, Śaṅkarī music, Bargīta, Aṅkīyāgīta, Bhaṭimā (panegyrics), Ghoṣā, Rāga, Tāla, Khola, Mahāpuruṣīyā dharma, Ekaśaraṇa.

Introduction:

Assam, the North-Eastern province of India, the older names of which was Prāgjyotiṣapura and Kāmarūpa, is one of the provinces of rich cultural heritages and shares all the aspects of glorious Indian cultural heritage from philosophy to religion, literature to linguistics, music to drama and others. The cultural heritage of this province had attained its peak during the great Neo-Vaishnavite movement of medieval India which was led in Assam by the great social reformer Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, who was born in 1449 A.D and was alive up to 1568 A.D. The reformation movement of this great sociologist thinker was religion based for which he is known mostly as a religious preacher. The name of his religious order, which is a reformed Hinduism with premeditated humanistic outlook, is Eka Śaraṇa Harināma Dharma or Mahāpuruṣīyā Dharma. To make his movement successful for the welfare of mankind Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva studied almost all types of Sanskrit scriptures ranging from philosophy to religion, music to dance, poetry to drama, language to culture; travelled all the centers of learning of contemporary India for twelve years long period and practiced, with his multifaceted brilliance and lifelong determined effort, almost all types of humanistic arts that yielded huge quantity of excellent compositions of universal appeal. What is more, he was the pioneer of most of the arts he created like the unique type of dramatic art called *aṅkīyā* or *Śaṅkarī* drama, special type of musical poetic work named *Kīrttana-ghoṣā*, unique type of

music compositions called *bargīta, bhaṭimā, toṭaya* etc, unique type of musical instrument called *khola* (a kind of drum), unique type of cloth called *Vṛndāvanī Vastra* with beautiful depiction of Vṛndāvana *līlās* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, one type of specially designed prayer house called *nāmghar* and even a sweet language called *Vrajāvalī*, which is intelligible for all the people of Northern and Eastern India. His endeavour has also brought a large group of brilliant artistic creators like Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva, Rām Sarasvatī, Ananta Kandalī, Śrīdhara Kandalī, Gopāl Ātā etc. as his associates and the united arduous effort of these artists bring a great cultural revolution in this region of N.E India along with other excellent creations which set up the new genre of Indian classical music called *Śaṅkarī* Classical Music which is a regional genre with pan Indian features and deep relationship to it.

This genre of Indian music comprises two types of classical songs- *bargītas*, the highly spiritual prayer songs of Assamese literature and *aṅkīyā gītas*, the songs incorporated in the *Śaṅkarī* Vaishnavite plays called *aṅkīyā nāṭ*. It also comprises a a class of semi classical spiritual songs which are called *ghoṣās*, the songs composed especially for community singing and listening (*kīrttana* and *śravaṇa*, which are regarded as the best two types of *bhakti* or devotion) in *nāmghar* (prayer house). A third type of song called *bhatimā* i.e. panegyrics are also incorporated in *Śaṅkarī* music which are not as popular as other types.

The two classical types of songs i.e. *bargītas* and *aṅkīyā gītas* of this genre share almost all the features of Indian classical music, although with some unique features. Both of them are strictly *rāga* based. Nobody is allowed to sing a *bargīta* or *aṅkīyā gīta* without its *rāga* assigned by its composer. Most of the names of *rāgas* have similarities with the names of *Hindustānī* and *Karṇāṭaka* or Carnātic music. Some of the 33 total number of *rāgas* found with these two types of songs are- *Ahira, Aśovārī, Kalyāṇa, Kānāḍā, Kāmoda, Kedāra, Kau, Gaurī, Tuḍa, Tuḍa-vasanta, Tuḍa-bhāthiyālī, Dhanaśrī, Nāṭa, Nāṭa-mallaḍa, Pūrvī, Varāḍī, Belovār, Bhūpālī, Basanta, Lalita, Śyāma* etc. Like other Indian music traditions Assamese musicians have ascribed different melodies (*rāgas*) to each of the eight *praharas* (watch) to which a day is divided (such as from dawn till noon – *Ahira, Kalyāṇa, Kau, Lalita, Śyāma* etc, from noon till sunset—*Kedāra, Gāndhāra, Gauri* etc). More than 14 different basic *tālas* (rhythm) are used

in singing of these songs (although there is no indication of rhythm in the *bargīta*) some of which are *Ekatāli, Kharmān, Cuṭkalā, Cuṭā, Yātimān, Domāni, Viṣama, Bar-viṣama, Una-yati, Dharam-yati, Bar-yati,* etc. These songs have been in practice since its creations through *Guru-Śiṣya Paramparā* (preceptor-disciple tradition).

Among the different old Indian classical music traditions *bargīta* resembles mostly with *Prabandha-gāna* which is said to be the most excellent and full of all the essential elements of musical excellence called *Dhātu* and *Mātu*. *Dhātu* means the body parts of music and it comprises originally 4 numbers of parts- *Udgrāha, Melāpaka*, *Dhruva* and *Ābhoga*. Later on Śāraṅgadeva added one more part called *Antarā*. *Mātu*, on the other hand, means the essence of music which comprises 6 elements. All the five *Dhātus* are available in *Śaṅkarī* classical music although with its local names. Here *Udgrāha* is called *Rāga-tolani*, *Melāpaka* is called *Vartanī* or *Vāka-ālāpa*, *Dhruva* is called *Dhruṁ*, *Dhurā* also *Dhruva* and *Ābhoga* and *Antarā* are called together as *Pada*. All the six *Aṅgas* or essences are available in *Śaṅkarī* classical music.

Śaṅkarī classical music has, however, many unique features from the nomenclature to system of practice, from its aim and objectives to sanctity of practice or performance, from its background of creation to local elements.

Through this genre of music Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and his associates offered two kinds of supreme bliss to human being—one to be tasted here in lifetime and another to be tasted after death. The matter of regret is that such an excellent tradition of music has not been provided proper attention from the music fraternity of Assam, India or abroad of modern age and yet to be recognized as a separate Indian classical music. It may be due to the odd geographical position of Assam, or due to the odd historical events, or due to the poor condition and ignorance of Assamese people and mostly due to the negligence of mainland people.

Two *bargītas* each from Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva composed in four different *rāgas* are given here in Roman transliteration and English translation:

***Bargītas* composed by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva :**

1. ||***rāga***|| ***Kedāra***

Dhruṁ : *pāve pari hari karoho kātari*

prāṇa rākhabi mora ।
viṣaya viṣadhara viṣe jara jara
jīvana nārahe thora ॥

[O Hari (God almighty), bowing down to your feet I devoutly supplicate you, please save my soul. My life is wrecked with the poison of poisonous worldly bondage for which it is unbearable for me.]

Pada: athira dhana jana jīvana yauvana
athira ehu saṁsāra ।
putra parivāra savahi asāra
karabo kāheri sāra ॥

[Wealth, relatives, life, youth along with this world is too temporary. My son, my wife are all trivial, whom shall I rely upon?]

kamala dala jala citta cañcala
thira nohe tila eka ।
nāhi bhayo bhava bhoge hari hari
parampada parateka ॥

[Like the water on a lotus leaf my mind is so inconsistent that even for a while it cannot remain stable. There is no chance of salvation in the worldly pleasure (as I know).]

kahatu śaṅkara e bhava sāgara
pāra karā hṛṣīkeśa ।
tuhu gatimati dehu chiripati
tattva pantha upadeśa ॥

[Śaṅkaradeva says- O Hṛṣīkeśa (Kṛṣṇa), help me to cross this sea of worldly life/ sea of affliction leading me to the divine path and providing me motivational advice.]

2. ॥rāga॥ Dhanaśrī

Dhruṁ: mana meri rāma caraṇahi lāgu ।
taṅi dekha nā antaka āgu ॥

[O my mind, take refuge in the feet of Rāma (God). Why do not you notice the *Antaka* (god of death) in front of you?]

Pada: mana āyu kṣeṇe kṣeṇe ṭuṭe ।

dekho prāṇa kona dine chuṭe ||

[O mind, life-line is reducing every moment. See (remember) which day your soul is going to leave (your body) (i.e. at any day your (my) life can come to an end).]

mana kāla ajagare gile ।
jāna tileke maraṇa mile ||

[O mind, the time-python is swallowing, you should know that casualty can be caused in a while.]

mana niścaya patana kāyā ।
tañi rāma bhaja teji māyā ||

[Mind, the loss of body is unavoidable, (Therefore) leaving the illusion (*māyā*) worship Rāma (the almighty God).]

re mana isava viṣaya dhāndhā ।
kene dekhi nādekhasa āndhā ||

[O mind, this life is bogus. Even knowing it why do not you try to realize this fact?]

mana sukhe pāya kaice ninda ।
tañi cetiyā cinta govinda ||

[Mind, how can you neglect (the eternal bliss) which you have got happily (i.e. without any labour), in no time you should think Govinda (i.e. worship the God almighty).]

mana jāniyā śaṅkare kahe ||
dekha rāma vine gati nahe ||

[Mind, knowing (this fact) Śaṅkara (the composer) says– look, there is no chance of salvation without (devotion to) Rāma (the God almighty).]

***Bargītas* composed by Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva** :

1. ||***rāga*** || ***Vasanta***

Dhruṁ: *hari hero re bāpa paśilo śaraṇe* ।
neribā bāndhava moka jīvane maraṇe ||

[O Hari, O my father, I take shelter in you, (Please) don't neglect me both in this life and after my death.]

Pada: *sanaka sananda yogī yāhāku dhiyāy*।
sakala nigame yāka bicāri napāy ॥

[For whom (to know about whom) the *Yogīs* (ascetics) like Sanaka, Sananda etc.meditate, and who is not reachable even by all the *Nigamas* (*Vedāntas).]*

sahasra bayane yāra napāvanta sīmā ।
adhame jānibo kene tohmāra mahimā ॥

[Whose magnanimity is not explainable even with thousands of mouth, being so stupid how can I know such things?]

ātura bhailoho hari viṣaya vikale ।
kariyo uddhāra moka caraṇa kamale ॥

[I have been inflicted under the illusion of this worldly life, save me from such infliction (by giving me shelter) under your lotus feet.]

tohmāra caraṇa dui mora mahādhana ।
bhakata janara nija tumise jīvana ॥

[Your two (holy) feet are most precious wealth for me, You are the life of the *bhakatas* (*devotees*).

kṛpāra sāgara kṛpā karā ekabāra।
kātara kariyā lailo śaraṇa tohmāra ॥

[O the Sea of kindness (God almighty), please favour me once, (as) I have taken shelter under You praying you earnestly.]

kṛpā karā nārāyaṇa choḍa mohapāśa ।
kahaya mādhava hari dāsaku dāsa ॥

[O Nārāyaṇa, do me favour by removing from me the bondage of *māyā* (the worldly illusion). Mādhava (the composer), the servant of the servant of Hari (the God almighty) says (prays thus).]

2. ॥ ***rāga***॥ ***Bhāṭiyālī***

Dhruṁ: *dāyāra ṭhākura hari yadumaṇi o rāma*
adhame tohmāra nāma ḍāke ।
kṛpā karā nārāyaṇa āhmāra cañcala mana
tohmāra caraṇe yena thāke ॥

[O Hari, Yadumaṇi, the Possessor of kindness, O Rāma, this lowly person is calling You by uttering your (holy) names; O Nārāyaṇa, please do me a favour so that my unsteady mind remains near your feet.]

Pada: eka vipra ajāmila mandamati pāpaśīla
putrabhāve sumari tohmāre ।
karmmabandha kari nāśa vaikuṇṭhe pāile bāsa
iṭo āti vidita savāre ॥

[One Brahmin named Ajāmila, who was extremely evil minded and sinful, was able to get place in *Vaikuṇṭha* (the abode of Lord Viṣṇu) after destroying the bondage of his misdeeds by remembering (worshiping) You in the form of his son.]

tāto kauṭi kauṭi guṇa pāpamati nidāruṇa
tohmāra nāmaka kailo āśā ।
parama patita āmi patita pāvana tumi
ijāniyā karicho bhārasa ॥

[(Being) Crores and crores of time more dreadfully sinful than that (the Brahmin Ajāmila) I seek your Nāma (the holy name), I am the most degraded and knowing You as the supreme rescuer of degrades I rely upon You (for my liberation).]

dhanya dhanya kalikāla dhanya naratanu bhāla
dhanya dhanya bhārata variṣe ।
tapa japa yajña teji tohmāra caraṇe bhaji
tuvā nāma ghuṣiyo hariṣe ॥

[Blessed is the age of Kali, blessed is human body (life), blessed-blessed is Bharata Varṣa (India); deserting *tapa* (penance), *japa*

(meditation) and *yajña* (sacrifice) and adoring Your name chants Your (holy) name cheerfully.]

sakala nigame kaya ataye tohmāka pāya
āka bhāle jāni nārāyaṇa ।
mādhava murukha mati tuvā pāve yadupati
satye satye paśilo śaraṇa ॥

[All the *Nigamas (Vedāntas*) tell that you are attainable in such way and knowing it very well this unwisely Mādhava have taken initiation at your feet with strict promise.]

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Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement from the Context of Yogic Science

Dr. Ujjwal Arun Maske and Mrs. Madhan Borah

Abstract:
Yoga is an ancient heritage of India that flourished in India long ago. The knowledge of yoga is in practice among the people through the great sears and sages. The great personalities like Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva spread the message of yoga among the common people and inspired them to achieve the ultimate aim of life—union with God. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva introduced various media like bargīt, nāmghar, bhāona, māti-ākharā, sattrīyā dances etc. to achieve this ultimate aim of yoga through his unique way. The various practices preached by him through his Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma develop physical, mental and spiritual health among the followers. Through the māti-ākharās and sattrīyā dances one becomes physically healthy. Māti-ākharās have great similarities with yogāsanas. One practices svādhyāya and Īśvara-praṇidhāna through bhāonas, bargīts, nām-prasaṅga etc. He promoted the bhakti yoga mainly. So, it can be concluded that, through the Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva propagated the yogic values and practices among the common people of North-East India and inspired them to live a yogic way of life and achieve the objectives of life.

Keywords: yogic values, yogic practices, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, *māti-ākharā*, *bhakti* yoga

Introduction:

Yoga is an ancient heritage of India which came to us from great seers and sages. Yoga is so old that nobody knows exactly when it was started. Yoga has its origin thousands of years ago, long before the first religions or belief systems were born, and the practice of yoga is believed to have started with the very dawn of civilization. During the early period, the teachings of yoga were transmitted by sages to devote pupils and through them to the successive generation. The teachings of yoga were transferred through oral transmission. After that, the early writings on yoga were transcribed on fragile palm leaves that were easily damaged, destroyed or lost.

In the yogic lore, Śiva is considered as the first *yogi* or *Ādiyogi*, and the first *guru* or *Ādiguru*. It is believed that several thousand years ago, on the banks of the lake Kāntisarovar in the Himalayas, *Ādiyogi* poured his profound knowledge into the legendary *Saptaṛṣis* or 'seven sages'. The sages carried this powerful yogic science to different parts of the world, including Asia, the Middle East, Northern Africa and South America. However, it was in India that the yogic system found its fullest expression. Agastya, one the *Saptaṛṣis*

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who travelled across the Indian subcontinent, crafted this culture around a core yogic way of life.

On the other hand, Lord Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhāgavad-gītā* says:

imaṁ vivasvate yogaṁ proktavān aham avyayam |
vivasvān manave prāha manur ikṣvākave 'bravīt ||
evaṁ paramparā-prāptam imaṁ rājarṣhayo viduḥ |
sa kāleneha mahatā yogo naṣhṭaḥ parantapa ||
Bhāgavad-gītā 4.1-2

(Meaning: I taught this eternal science of yoga to the Sun-God, Vivasvān, who passed it on to Manu; and Manu in turn instructed it to Ikṣhvāku. O subduer of enemies, the saintly kings thus received this science of yoga in a continuous tradition. But with the long passage of time, it was lost to the world.)

Through the great *ṛṣi*s and saints of India, the tradition of yoga is alive in the corners of India. In the North-East India, the works, contributions of Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is very important in the propagation of yogic values and practices among the common people.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is the most celebrated name in North-East India. He was the worthy son of God who is also regarded as an incarnation by the North-Eastern people. He had not only a robust physique with a handsome personality, but also an unparalleled mind. He was a versatile genius, a good administrator, a great medieval saint of the greater North-East whose manifold contribution to the society not only placed him as a social reformer but also as a spiritual and religious leader. He was a preacher, devotee, saint, poet, dramatists, actor, and erudite scholar who shaped the modern North-East some five centuries ago. In 15th century, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva endowed the mankind with his invaluable contributions when time and circumstances promoted him to undertake the tremendous task of reorganizing and reforming the society on religious and cultural basis. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva initiated the Neo- Vaishnavite movement and brought a socio-cultural revolution in Assam. Śaṅkaradeva was the person who first studied Assamese society and then tried to remove all disintegrated factors by propagating a liberal form of *bhakti—Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma.*

Yogic Values in the Social and Cultural Approach of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva:

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva preached his ideology among the people during his twelve yearlong pilgrimages. Many persons accepted him as *guru* in different parts of the country. Thus Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva sowed the seed of *bhakti* movement throughout Northern India as well as Eastern India. Śrīmanta

Śaṅkaradeva ushered the greatest social reform by giving equal recognition of man irrespective of caste, creed and status through the propagation of his Neo-Vaishnavite faith. According to Śaṅkaradeva, there were no spiritual injections in reciting the name of the Lord. Devotion is not the monopoly of any cultured man. It is open to all classes of people. During the period of his pilgrimage, he observed various societies and places to conduct a research on their culture, literature, philosophy etc. and created various arts like *bargīt*, *nṛtya* etc. He also created the musical instruments, Choreography, costumes based on his findings of his research on dance and music. He observed the paintings and sculptures of different famous temples of India. He started educating people on his liberal ideas. He gave equal status to all his disciples. It was a major departure from the prevalent system in the society, where caste hierarchy was observed very strictly. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva opened the door of religion to all. His path- breaking religious system came to be known as *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma.*

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva succeeded to unite the people and enrich the socio-cultural society of entire North-East of his time with the help of some tools. They are: nāmghar, bargīt, bhāona, *māti-ākharā* etc.

***Nāmghar*:**

After conducting a detailed study on various societies, Śaṅkaradeva established *nāmghar*, the institution to spread the secular and democratic ideas. *Nāmghars* take an important role in maintaining unity and solidarity in Assam society. *Nāmghar* is a long and open hall, where the devotees sit together to sing the glory of God. In addition to prayers, cultural functions and religious discourses also are held in it. It is a holy place where people come for the practice of different forms of *bhakti* yoga. *Nāmghar* became the venue for congregational chanting of prayers (*nām-prasaṅga*), singing of classical devotional songs (*bargīt*) composed by Śaṅkaradeva. People belonging from different castes join in the *nāmghar* while doing *nām-prasaṅga,* without any distinction of caste, creed, or colour. Attending the *nām-prasaṅga* at the appointed time and chanting the name of God to the accompaniment of musical instruments were intended to discipline the mind of the individuals. Discipline is the great criterion which in turn is necessary to develop potentialities, thereby enriching the society of that time.

Bargīt:

Bargīt is an anthology lyrical poems composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. It consists of songs or lyrical strains set to music in different melodies (*rāgas* and *tālas*). *Bargīts* are not only some of the finest poetry in North East but also one of the most regarded and pious assets of *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma.* It is mainly a salutation to Lord Kṛṣṇa, his charming

physical beauty, importance and inherent dynamism of *Nāma-dharma* the importance of *bhakti*, prayer and confession of sins, description of child Kṛṣṇa etc. In the majority of the *bargīts* the devotee Śaṅkaradeva strives to the fullest of his capacity and ultimately leaves himself on the mercy of God. The grace, expressing of love and compassion of Lord Kṛṣṇa for his devotee is the popular theme of the *bargīts*. Śaṅkaradeva united the people of Assam by giving the various yogic values especially Ishwar-Pranidhana through the *bargits* and tried to uplift the culture of Assamese people.

Bhāona:

Bhāona is a unique contribution to the Assamese Nation through drama, music and dance. It is an important theoretical medium of mass entertainment in North-East, which was introduced by Śaṅkaradeva. *Bhāona* has been playing a great role in giving Assamese dance, drama and music a distinct and significant identity of its own. This powerful medium used by Śaṅkaradeva and his favorite disciple Mādhavadeva for propagating Vaiṣṇavism among the masses of Assam in the 15th century is traditionally practiced among general *Vaiṣṇava* followers even today. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva performed a bhāona, a great work in the year 1468, when he was only nineteen year old. He decided to stage a play in order to elaborate his own principles and also to entertain his people with some performing art. Thus, the play *Cihna-yātrā* came to be staged. The story of Lord Kṛṣṇa comprised the subject matter of the play. The lives and activities in the seven *Vaikuṇṭhas* described in the scriptures were shown in this play. The *sattrīyā nṛtya* or dance is also an important part of the *bhāona*. The *bhakti yoga* of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva has considerable impact on the society through the *bhāonas*. Thus, through the *bhāonas*, he created awareness amongst the people about salvation and showed the way to connect with God after death through proper *karmas*.

Māti-Ākharā:

Like other Indian classical dances, *sattrīyā* dances have a structural grammar of its own, called the *māti-ākharā*. It is the foundation of *sattrīyā* dance. *Māti-ākharās* are the basic steps or exercise to perform *sattrīyā* dance. Actually, *māti-ākharās* are the foundation for the learners to make healthy physical, mental and spiritual set-up which is essential for a classical dancer. There are 64 tupes of *māti-ākharās*. Some of these *māti-ākharās* are similar to yogic postures. For Example:

1. *Thiya Lan* — *Cakrāsana*
2. *Udha Lan/Urdha Lan* —*Śīrṣāsana*
3. *Mourāi Pāni Khuwā* — *Mayurāsana-*
4. *Teltupi* — *Śalabhāsana, Pūrṇa Śalabhāsana*

5. *Kāsai Pāni Khuwa* — *Padma Mayurāsana*
6. *Āthu Lan* — *Uṣṭrāsana, Pūrṇa Uṣṭrāsana*
7. *Juriyā Kāmi Tanā* — *Dhanurāsana*

The entire body postures are also covered by the *māti-ākharās*, they are: (i) *uṭhā* (rising) (ii) *bahā* (sitting), (iii) *thia* (standing), (iv) *cālanā* (movement), (v) *pāk* (turns), (vi) *jāp* (jump), (vii) *ulāha* (wavy movement) and (vii) *citikā* (springing).

Thus, it is worth mentioning that Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva, the great architect of *sattrīyā* dance was a great expert of yoga. Through *māti-ākharā* Śaṅkaradeva propagated the yogic postures among the entire North-East India followed by the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* (values), *Sattvic* food etc. which invariably gave supreme mental peace to man.

Thus, by the means of *nām-prasaṅga*, *bargīt*, *bhāona*, *māti-ākharā* etc. Śaṅkaradeva tried to propagate socio-cultural aspects of North-Eastern region. Besides these, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva derived the concept of *satsaṅga* (holy company) from the *Bhāgavata* as a pre-requisite for spiritual development. He enjoined upon people in all his writings to have company of such persons, who were pious and devoted to God. Good company elevates one, while bad company pulls one down from meritorious life. Incessant chanting of God's name creates an atmosphere of purity and sacredness wherein enlightenment dawns in the devotee. The method taught by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is the easiest of the different modes of spiritual practice (*sadhanā*). Finally, the saint took the idea of absolute self-surrender to God from the *Bhāgavad-gītā*. This scripture suggests that one should dedicate everything belonging to one to the almighty God and submit oneself at the same time at His disposal. God then takes up the entire responsibility of the devotee. The devotee also becomes capable of getting over his ego, which is a great handicap in the path of spiritual development. A perfect devotee should not have even an iota of ego as it keeps him away from God. He should consider himself as a mere tool in the hands of God.

Such an orientation in the devotee's attitude can be possible only when he follows the triple advice of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva - having pious company, chanting God's name, and surrendering oneself completely to God. Thus Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva talked about three basic needs for the devotees. These are *Deva* (God), *Nāma* (name of God) and *bhakata* (devotee).

Concept of Bhakti and Śaṅkaradeva's Bhakti Yoga movement

Śaṅkaradeva preached true devotion (*bhakti*) to Kṛṣṇa, which he defined as the singing (*kīrttana*) and listening (*śravaṇa*) of Kṛṣṇa's actions. In *Eka-śaraṇa* the devotee worship with the *dāsya* (servitude) attitude in which a devotee sees

himself as God's servant. Śaṅkaradeva established the *śaraṇa* (initiation) mechanism for his religion. People of various castes and religions, including Muslims, were initiated by him. Following initiation, the devotee is supposed to follow the religious precepts of *Eka-śaraṇa*, which include worshipping only one God, Kṛṣṇa, and performing pure devotion to Him.

Elements of *Bhakti*:

There are nine modes of devotion that can be used to practice the various types of *bhakti*. They are *śravaṇa*, the act of listening to a conforming devotee's descriptions of the form, works and names of the Lord. The act of chanting prayers is known as *kīrttana*. The act of recalling Viṣṇu's form (*rūpa*), playful actions (*līlā*), and names (*nāma*) is known as *smaraṇa*. *Padasevana* is the act of worshipping the Lord's feet in a variety of devotional methods. *Vandana* is the act of salutation and prostration in reverence to the Lord. *Arcana* is the rite of ceremonial or non-ceremonious worship. *Dāsya* is serving the God with the attitude of a faithful and self-surrendered servant. *Sakhya* is the sense of friendship between the worshipper and the worshiped. Lastly *Atmanivedana* is the complete self-surrender which consists of the feeling that one's body, mind, senses and soul are intended only for God.

The ideology of the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* is to promote Lord Kṛṣṇa's virtues, who are revered as the only Lord of the Universe and the solitary authority of creation, existence, and absorption. According to Vaiṣṇavite scriptures, a person who recites, utters, or chants the name of Kṛṣṇa immediately receives seven kinds of merits: his sins are erased, merits accrued, indifference to worldly pleasures is created, devotion to Kṛṣṇa is developed, knowledge is begotten, *māyā* is destroyed, and the gap between devotees and the Lord is obliterated.

Types of *Bhakti*:

According to devotional literature, *bhakt*i is primarily of two types:

1. *Sakām* (having desire for fulfilment)
2. *Niṣkām* (desire-less)

The second type of *bhakti* receives the most attention in all Assamese devotional texts. *Bhakti* has been divided into various sorts once more. Śaṅkaradeva categorizes *bhakti* in one of his best creations *Bhakti-ratnākara*.

***Bhakti Yoga* Movement:**

Śaṅkaradeva visualized an egalitarian society, where members from all sections of life irrespective of caste, tribe and community was able to sit together for the prayer of God and dine together. He announced that there is no sense of caste difference in *bhakti*. Members of such tribes as the *Koch*, *Āhom*, *Kacharī*, *Cutīya* and the *Nagās* soon took shelter under the new creed of

Vaiṣṇavism. Śaṅkaradeva made all to believe that everyone irrespective of their caste affiliation has the right to love Hari (Vishnu).

Śaṅkaradeva preached the *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma* which emphasized devotion to a single God. The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam, like all other mediaeval *Vaiṣṇava* schools in India, is essentially and principally founded on *bhakti yoga. Bhakti* is given the highest priority in Śaṅkaradeva's religion. The *Vaiṣṇavas* believe that the achievement of or absorption in ultimate Brahman is not the real emancipation, but rather the eternal contiguity and devotional worship of God through *bhakti.*

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva's *Eka Śaraṇa Hari Nāma Dharma.* advocated four primary elements of yoga viz.,

(i) Comprehension of *Parama Bhrahma*:
All pervasive Supreme Being in the form of Nārāyaṇa as exalted in the *upaniṣads*.

(ii) The complete self-surrender:
Eka-śaraṇa into the Supreme Being in the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as extolled in the *Gītā.*

(iii) *Satsaṅga*:
Fraternity with pious divines as enjoyed in the *Mahā-Bhāgavata.*

(iv) Divine service in the form of Prayer and chanting the name of Supreme Being.

According to his religion God is un-manifested, formless, impersonal, and attribute-less. He is the Supreme Ruler of the Universe. He is all powerful, all-pervasive, omniscient, omnipresent, and infinite without beginning and end.

Conclusion:

Śaṅkaradeva was not only a religious and spiritual leader, but also a great socio-cultural reformer of his time. He conducted his studies in different parts of India and created a new socio-cultural revolution by his Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement. He propagated the ideology of equality and fraternity in connection of his philosophy. Considering man as divine, Śaṅkaradeva treats society as a moral and divine institution whose function is to keep the individuals on the right path and to lead them towards moral perfections. *Māti-ākharās* required to practice *sattrīyā* dance are very much beneficial for achieving good physical health. Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti yoga* also had all-encompassing effects on the social life of North-East. By developing religion, art, music, Śaṅkaradeva's different forms of yogic values helped to lay the foundation of the people of entire North-East. In other words, Śaṅkaradeva had taught the way of life that leads one towards health, love, peace, harmony, prosperity as well as towards the spiritual upliftment.

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Śaṅkaradeva, politics and consequences

-Pankaj Protim Bordoloi

Abstract:
Mahāpuruṣ Śaṅkaradeva, was born and was active in such a period when the core of the Assamese community was fragmented manifolds, and it was facing disintegration in its socio-political and religious order. He is largely attributed to the principal role of a religious saint who brought innumerable changes to the socio-cultural and community identity of the Assamese masses. This paper intends to study his political acumen and maneuvering, which have contributed not only to the successful spread of his religious order and establishing an Assamese cultural identity but also of his actions that led to a major political change in future. The stage was not set for him to spread his ideas and philosophy very smoothly on either side of the pristine valley of the mighty Brahmaputra. Su-Kā-Phā, the first Āhom king has established a political hegemony in the upper valley of the Brahmaputra by consolidating several smaller tribes and clans, however, the society was cursed with the wreath of trāntrism, illiteracy, caste discriminations, and socio-political segregation and conflicts. Śaṅkaradeva made possible the daunting task of the resurrection of the Assamese society, culture, and religious faith and sowed the seeds of national integrity. For this essential accomplishment, his recognition should be equal to his political propositions along with his socio-cultural and religious reforms. The paper attempts to explore Śaṅkaradeva's political maneuvers based on certain significant situations and the decisions and actions he had taken for the same and its future consequences.

Keywords: *Śaṅkaradeva, Medieval Assam, Neo-Vaishnavite movement, politics.*

Introduction

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is considered the founder of the modern Assamese identity by bringing a substantial amount of reforms to the medieval Assamese society. His life and works have been largely discussed in the context of the establishment of a new religious order, introducing a range of new materials to the art and performing genre, which contributed as a medium of propagating his socio-religious philosophy. His seminal work of literature based on various Hindu scriptures provided a fresh dimension to the language and cultural features of the larger Assamese identity. There is a considerable amount of scholarly research work available about almost all aspects of his works. However, none of these works specifically discuss his explicit and matured political maneuver, which demonstrates his time—appropriate and

immensely skilled political maturity, providing an organic base for a hugely successful socio-religious and reformist movement.

The *bhakti* movement that originated from South India in the 6th and 7th century and gradually spread to the other regions of the country and flourished until the end of the 17th century was a direct outcome of the convoluted and stiff caste system, the perplex ritualistic practices of worship and the requirement of a more unpretentious and inspiring process of devotion along with a true sense of salvation. The movement attained distinct characteristics according to the region but retained its core appeal and motive of opposing Brahmanical dominance, religious bigotry and spiritual fanaticism, elaborate ritualism, and caste-ism. The saints of the movement encouraged the path of reaching God through love, devotion, and compassion by chanting or praying to the Almighty rather than involving in decorative ritualistic methods. The movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva in Assam had all these essences of the *bhakti* movement. Moreover, he established many simplified methods of understanding the Hindu Philosophy and religious practices from the complex Sanskṛtized process to an easily comprehensible regional linguistic format.

Before understanding the political actions and influences of Śaṅkaradeva and its future consequences, it is important to understand the socio-political situation of Assam at his time, the history, and the role of *Bāra-Bhūñās* as a land-owning political hegemony and its relationship with other neighboring clans and principalities. The process of disintegration of once powerful *Bāra-Bhūñās* is also essential to understand this development. Discussions about the prevailing caste hierarchy in medieval Assamese society, religious disorder, patronization, and suppression of religious sects also shed light on the matter.

Socio-political condition of Assam in the 15th -16th Century and the *Bāra-Bhūñās*:

The valley of the river Brahmaputra is a fertile land that attracts both Āryāns and Non-Āryāns to settle down here and expand their distinguished culture. Because of this amalgamation, this land inherited a variety in terms of its sensitivity or attachment to religious values and faith. From the prehistoric period, devotion towards *Śiva* was prominent but gradually this swathed to the web of *Tāntric* practices, turning the *Śakti* worshipping into a process of social degeneration and religious bigotry. The *Caritaputhi* attributed to Daitārī Thākur pointed to the socio-religious condition of the time like this:

i deśata pūrvakāle nāchila bhakati/
nānā dharmma-karmma save karilā samprati

nānā deva pūjaya karaya validāna/
haṁsa chāga pāra kāte asaṅkhya pramāṇa/
tapa japa jajña dāna tīrthasnāna kare/
ghora narakata pari pari save mare
[1]

(Meaning: The land has different rituals of worshipping many gods by offering animals and birds sacrifices leading to the death of all in hell)

From the 13th century onwards the ancient kingdom of Assam faced political demoralization in the advent of constant attacks from Muslim rulers and witnessed the rise and fall of many dynasties and kingdoms. The independent principalities spread across the region established separate administrative systems leading to a vacuum of a centralized authority. The extreme eastern part was largely controlled by the *Cutīyās* and in the South a considerable portion was occupied by the *Cutīyās*, and the *Kachārīs*. The eastern part of the country continued with its consolidation policies. The central part of the Assam had a minuscule confederacy of feudal lords known as the *Bāra-Bhūñās* (*Bāra* means twelve; however, there were more than twelve *Bhūñās*). The Eastern part was dominated by the *Kachārīs*. The *Kamatā* kingdom of the west later merged with the *Koch* dynasty. The *Āhoms* invaded Assam in 1228 and established a mighty principality by occupying these lands.

The *Bhūñās* migrated from North India and established a confederacy. Dr. Amalendu Guha pointed out that political condition and the role of *Bhūñās:* "In the 13th century, the Indo- Āryān culture still dominated the lives of a major section of the population in the central plains of the Brahmaputra Valley. Nothing has left of the ancient state of Kāmarūpa at that juncture; except a few fragments that remained in the form of petty chiefdoms. The petty chiefs were called *Bhūñās*, many of whom were migrant adventurers from North-India. The rule by a *Bhūñās* was called *Bhūñārāj* and their temporary confederacies were known as *Bāra-Bhūñā Rājya*. During the 13th to 16th centuries these continued to represent the rule over older peasant settlement in western and central Assam."[2] The debate about the classification of the *Bhūñās* as a class or caste is also important to understand.

"It is usually believed that the *Bhūñās* constituted a Hindu caste. But the *Darang Rāj Vaṁśāvali,* as well as in Persian sources like the *Ākbarnāmā* and the *Āin-i-Ākbari*, there are references to Muslim *Bhūñās* as well. This confirms that the *Bhūñās* were a class rather than a caste. ... In Assam, *Bhūñās* are mostly from the *Kāyastha* and the *Kalitā* castes".[3] This class identification of *Bhūñās* is important to understand the subject.

Śaṅkaradeva and his political responsibilities:

Born in 1371 *Śaka* (1449 AD), Śaṅkaradeva lost his father at the age of 7 years. However, his father Kusumbar Śiromoṇi Bhūñā inherited a vast territory of land, present-day Nagaon and Morigaon District and the northern bank of Brahmaputra. Rāmcaraṇ Thākur wrote:

> *kapilīro hante cāmadharā sīmā kari/...*
> *śiṅgariro hante uttarata ghilādhārī*[4]

In the *Bardovācarit* it was mentioned that the *Bhūñā* confederacy was from Kaliabor to Kajolimukh. The imminent opponent of the *Bhūñās* was the *Kachārīs* and they were involved in frequent fighting for serious to petty issues. Śaṅkar being a child, Jayanta Dalai, the brother of Kusumbar Bhūñā was given the temporary charge of Śiromoṇi Bhūñā due to the untimely demise of Kusumbar Bhūñā. After completion of his education in Mahendra Kandali's *ṭol*, he returned to the helm of the *Bhūñā* confederacy in his twenties. He was known as *Dekāgiri* among his peers and was an able administrator. To mitigate constant threats from the *Kachārīs*, and also to avoid a confrontation, *Dekāgiri* took a policy of changing the office place of Śiromoṇi Bhūñā from Ālipukhurī to Bardovā as per need. However, M. Neog opined that one year before his marriage, the *Bhūñās* and the Brahmaṇas of Ālipukhurī complained, '*ito ālipukhurī sthāna ati alpaprāya*''[5] about the continuous *Kachārī* atrocities, therefore, the *Bhūñās* migrated to Temoni (Tembuvānī) Bardovā and established a *Kīrttan Ghar* there. During that time, the religious and social activities of Śaṅkaradeva were in progress and the Neo-Vaishnavite movement was taking shape. There are two aspects that can be attributed to this incident, which shows his political acumen as a clan head. The *Bhūñās* of Assam did not have many political ambitions and they avoided bloodshed though they were a rich land-owning class. The lower class of the *Bhūñā* hierarchy was mainly peasants and did not have an organized defense system. The *Kachārīs* were of expansionist warrior clan with a state system where the *Bhūñās* were of no match. So, avoiding a direct conflict with the *Kachārīs* and furthering towards more powerful states. i.e., the *Cutīyās* and the *Āhoms*, was indeed a timely decision taken as a clan head. This decision was not a personal one and it bore political significance.

Another aspect of this process is that being the *Dekāgiri,* it was an affordable affair for him to socio-religiously consolidate his subjects to the new religious order, by the time the *Bhūñās* were shifted to Bardovā. His religious philosophy and order had a considerable number of followers, which was evident, as Dr. M Neog has written, that after permanently shifting to Bardovā, Śaṅkaradeva has established a *Kīrttan Ghar* there.[6]

Pilgrimage: the unseen political accomplishment!

Until his first pilgrimage in 1481AD, Śaṅkaradeva was effectively the Śiromoṇi Bhūñā of the *Bhūñā* confederacy and was in this position for almost 14-16 years and, in between, the responsibilities were shared by his grand-uncles, whenever a need is required. He started his pilgrimage at the age of 32-33 years and his household responsibilities were given to his son-in-law Hari and again the affairs of his *Bhūñā-Rāj* were given to his grand-uncles.

'śuniyoka ātaisava bacana āmāra/
tomāsave carccibāhā yata rājyabhār'[7]
(Meaning: my dear folks, take care of the realm).

Again it was written in *Kathāgurucarita* that before going to the pilgrimage:

'jayantaka āni: ṣāṭhī balada chaikuri dhenu, barbhūñā viṣaya śodhāi gṛhabārī parikare same dile.'

(Jayanata was called and 60 numbers of bulls and 120 cows along with the charge of Borbhūñā, home etc. were given).[8]

However, he did not discharge himself fully from the duties and responsibilities as Śiromoṇi Bhūñā that is proved from his later activities.

Śaṅkaradeva has taken the pilgrimage to the sacred places of East and North India twice in his lifetime. One in his early thirties, which is for almost twelve years, accompanied by 17 followers along with his teacher Mahendra Kandali. The second one he has taken in his nineties. Pilgrimage was considered as an integral part of the life of saints in medieval India. If we observe this aspect of a holy man's life, we can find certain striking similarities in this process. Usually, during such pilgrimages, the saints find his *guru* and might receive the sacred teachings in the form of a book or other mediums, which were considered as a guiding light for the teachings he would propagate. It is also clear that a saint may prove his acumen in scholarly debates and establish a follower group that may create the core base of his religious order in future. Holy men can ordinarily visit revered places as considered by the larger community and later establish their sacred sites. There is also the possibility that he may have some miraculous power, which he could have performed during his journey. However, in his pilgrimage, Śaṅkaradeva did not seek to find a *guru*, nor did he receive any teachings in any form, nor did he have any other general characteristic of a pilgrimage. So, why was the pilgrimage? As Phyllis Granoff opined, his pilgrimage did not have the conventional characteristic of a pilgrimage, it 'seems to be the very antithesis of a pilgrimage, however, conceived.'[9] The available

literature discusses his pilgrimage primarily as redemption of his religious sanctity and initiation of a more organized spiritual order. But a very important aspect connected to the socio-religious condition of that time was neglected—the caste echelons of that time and the prominence of the Brahmaṇical order. Dr. Krishna Sharma said 'when the *bhakti* movement is described as a radical movement aimed at socio-religious reform and new social values, the act that it included certain fundamentalist and conservative forces as well, is either ignored or underplayed. If the *nirguṇa bhakats* like Kabir and Nanak rejected the caste hierarchy and all social conventions based on caste distinctions, *saguṇa bhakats* like Tulsi Das, had zealously upheld the sanctity of the caste system and supremacy of the Brahmins. If the former had championed new social values, the latter had advanced the preservation of existing social order and socio-religious norms. If the teachings of one group had led to the emergence of a new unorthodox and protestant sect—those of others, had nourished and reinvigorated the old existent Hindu sects.[10] In light of the above statement, Dr. D. Nath has observed that 'Śaṅkaradeva, contested caste in the field of doing *bhakti*, but he did not advocate the same in the social life like Kabir and Nanak. It appears, Śaṅkaradeva was aware of his own limitations and conservative forces present in his own organization of *bhakti.*[11] Phyllis Granoff again argued that biographies were open about the hostility that the orthodox Brahmins displayed to the new religion promulgated by the low caste *Śūdra* Śaṅkaradeva. One of the accusations they made against Śaṅkaradeva in the court of King Naranārāyaṇa was that Śaṅkaradeva rejected Vedic rituals and, therefore, threatened the security of the kingdom. Śaṅkaradeva's pilgrimage was not only a spiritual journey in its all essence but it also bears all the possibilities of an attempt to legitimize his new sacred order in front of the opposite theological groups within the larger periphery of Hinduism—showing his exemplary political intellect to sustain the new order that he has founded.

Displacement and political equations:

Śaṅkaradeva's life witnessed a considerable amount of migration and displacement spreading over a vast region of present-day Assam and Bengal. He was born in the central part of the Assam in the present day Nagaon District and his working life is spread across present day Nagaon, Majuli, North Lakhimpur, and part of Upper Assam, present day Darrang District, Kamrup and Barpeta District, and Cooch Behar in West Bengal. He died in Cooch Behar. During this course of life, he lived in different socio-political conditions and faced several transformations in this process. He was the Śiromoṇi Bhūñā of the *Bhūñā* confederacy and, therefore, he came to direct contact with many kings, kingdoms, and clan heads. In this constantly

moving situation, he promulgated a religious order, which was not the state religion. The socio-economic structure of the time was influenced by the political powers of the time, however, the social root of the spiritual and philosophical life was derived mainly from religion. Therefore, even if they are not directly connected to the political administration of the region, they are realistic and they have to work in close touch with the political establishments.

The *Cutīyās* were the dominant political force of the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra and the places where Śaṅkaradeva lived in the north bank were mostly inside the *Cutīyā* Kingdom. The socio-cultural structure of the *Cutīyās* was familiar to the *Bhūñās* and near to the existing Hindu pantheon, whereas the *Āhom* state has not achieved the feudal structure; it has become in the later phase and was in the process of transformation from a tribal confederacy to an organized feudal state. The *Bhūñās* and as a *Śiromoṇi Bhūñā*, it was Śaṅkaradeva's well-articulated decision to choose the places of habitat as per prevailing political dimensions and avoid direct conflict with other warring clans. Broadly, he lived in the following places as per chronology:

1449-1517 AD–Ālipukhurī–Bardovā
1518-1543 AD—Routā–Gāṅmou—Kāṅkini—Dhuvāhāta-Belguri Bhūñāhāta—Gajalāsuti
1543-1568 AD – Kamrup—Koch Kingdom

It is already discussed that one of the reasons for leaving Ālipukhurī-Bardovā was the continuous attacks of the *Kachārīs*, however, Anil Raichoudhury pointed out—'The ancient Gauḍa Kamatā Hindu kingdom of the lower part was invaded by the Muhammadan powers and the *Bhūñās* did not find it safe to stay in Bardovā and proceeded to upper Assam through the northern bank of Brahmaputra river.[12] Hari Narayan Dutta Baruah wrote –'*Prabhu* decided to leave the kingdom at Southern bank and moved to North bank of Brahmaputra. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva first shifted the *Bhūñās* to the other bank and later stayed for a few days in Bhalukaguri and Kumurakuti and proceeded towards up in Brahmaputra'[13]. This clearly shows that the decisions of this displacement from his ancestral place to other places were purely political reason, which was well calculated and thoroughly planned.

Gāṅmou was under a prominent Bhūñā Ketā Khā[14] and both his granduncles Jayanta Doloi and Madhab died in Gāṅmou[15]. Then he left Gāṅmou and proceeded to live in Dhuvāhāt-Belguri in the present day Majuli because of the *Āhom-Cutiyā* conflict. It provides a perfect example of Śaṅkaradeva's political maturity. The *Āhom-Cutiyā* conflict was intensified during the reign of *Āhom* King Suhuṁmuṁ Dihiṅgiā Rajā. 'The scene predominated 13th to 16th centuries by two rival political

systems: i) a loose confederacy of hierarchical petty feudal chiefs (*Bhūñā rāj*), thriving on the ruins of an erstwhile imperial tradition that was *Kamrupa* and, ii) the rudimentary semi-feudal state formations emerging directly from tribes, e.g., the *Cutīyā, Kachārī* and *Āhom* Kingdoms. A continuous expansion of the permanent wet rice cultivation meanwhile enabled the disparate peasant societies to yield an increasing surplus and thus lay the basis for a more sophisticated state system. The extension of transplanted wet rice cultivation was particularly rapid in the *Āhom* Kingdom. This led to an increase in the population, which in turn, facilitated the further extension of cultivated acreage. Having absorbed to the *Cutīyā* Kingdom, by 1523, the *Āhoms* continued to expand their domain southward and westward at the cost of the *Kachārīs* and the *Bhūñās*. The *Koch* Kingdom, too, expanded at the cost of petty *Bhūñās* of western Assam about the same time.[16] This is further accredited again in the words of Dr. Amalendu Guha— 'A new phase of intensified Brahmanical influence started with the reign of King Suhuṁmuṁ Dihiṅgiā Rajā (1497-1539)'. He annexed Habung in 1512, a *Cutīyā* dependency until then. Thereafter, the whole of the Hinduized *Cutīyā* Kingdom and parts of the present Nagoan District, then the *Bārabhūñās* and the *Dimāchā* Kingdoms were gradually annexed to the *Āhom* Kingdom. Then the resettled *Bārabhūñā* chiefs and their relatives also began to be absorbed as scribes and warriors in the lower echelons of the growing state machinery[17]'. Thereafter, both Habung and Panbari neighboring it were subjugated and annexed to the *Āhom* kingdom[18] resulting a total subjugation of the *Bhūñās* in *Āhom* principality. So, it is evident that after this massive *Āhom-Cutīyā* battle, the landowning dominant class of the *Bhūñās* downgraded to a mere working class and lost its glory. Therefore, avoiding this social decline of the class hierarchy in the larger society, a considerate decision to move to Majuli was taken. The reason is clear in the words of H.N. Dutta Baruah—'Ahom kings did not pay much attention to occupy this wetland and forested area, where some people from the erstwhile old *Bhūñās* used to live independently'.[19] In Majuli, the *Bhūñās* could maintain certain extent of autonomy.

The reason for further displacement of Śaṅkaradeva and the *Bhūñās* from Majuli was also a political cause and choosing the western direction towards the *Koch* kingdom was indeed an appropriate arrangement.

After the subjugation of the *Cutīyās*, it became evident that the *Āhoms* were the main political power of the region. The *Bhūñās* received high social status in the ancient Hindu kingdom of Gauḍa, and Kamrup and during their stay in central Assam, they were independent chieftains. However, the *Bhūñās* did not receive any such stature under the *Āhom* rule and the main reason behind was—*Āhom* social

ladder was more tribal at that time and did not incline to the Hindu class hierarchy structure. Rāmcaran Thākur describes:

bārabhūñā loka yata/
eka thana bhaila tata/
bārabhūñā āse sehi thāne./
āhoma rajāra tale/
khāte sabaloka yata/
āno kichu nairoja vine.'[20]

(Meaning: Under the *Āhoms*, the *Bārabhūñās* did manual works like the other castes)

As the *Bhūñās* migrated from the lower Assam (*Bhātiphāl* and, therefore, the *Āhoms* called the *Bhūñās* as *Bhātiyās*—people who came from the lower region), there was a considerable trust gap between them. The *Bhūñās* inherited a Hindu lineage which was more similar to the existing traditions of the *Koch* and the *Cutīyās* of that time but not with the *Śān* origin of the *Āhoms*.

Rāmānanda Dvija wrote:

'lagate hoṅkari nilā brāhaya bhūñāka/
caturbhiti hastika dharilā prajājāka//
āno loka dilā tini bhiti rākhibāka/
eka pāśe rakṣā dila bhātiyā bhūñāka//
bhātiyā bhūñāra phāle hasti palāi gailā/
dekhi bhūñā savo mahā śaṅkāviṣṭa bhailā//

(Meaning – *Bhātiyā Bārabhūñās* were involved in elephant hunting as per the order of the king and elephants got away from the side the *Bhūñās* that caused great pain to them.)

The *Āhoms* did not want the *Bhūñās* to settle in one single region and scattered them in various places. The loyalty of the *Bhūñās* was also questionable in their eyes and it was believed that the *Bhūñās* maintain close contact with the rising *Koch* kingdom of the west. In the meantime, *Koch* dynasty under the able leadership of Naranārāyaṇa and Cilārāi was making swift progress in the western region by removing the Muhammadan rule and re-establishing a powerful Hindu state. It was not surprising that the *Bhūñās* were happy by the news of the rising *Koch* Kingdom, who were neglected in *Āhom* kingdom and expected due importance from the *Koch* Kingdom. *Caritkārs* mentioned this advancing information received by the *Bhūñās* about the imminent attack against the *Āhoms* by the *Koch* king. Daitārī Thākur wrote:

naranārāyaṇa nāme eka rājā/
parama paṇḍita dharma panthe pāle prajā//
śukladhvaja nāme tāne bhāi subhanai/
dhuvāhāta hante śune loka samastai//
gīta kabitā guno śunaya rājār/
tāra rāje jāibe mana samasta prajār//
sehi samayata naranārāyaṇa rājā/
māribe āsama rājya sāji gailā prajā//
āga huvā loka pāche kari vārtā dilā/
āponaicchāi loka samaste āsilā//

(Meaning: Naranārāyaṇa ruled the kingdom with prevailing law and religious order. He had a brother named Śukladhvaja. Listening to the qualities of the king, the people of Dhuvāhāta was interested to go to his kingdom. Naranārāyaṇa intended to invade Assam and was informed in advance; accordingly many people went to his region by their own will.)[21]

Although, the ruthless oppressions initiated by the *Āhom* rulers against the *Bhūñās* 'who were residing independently in Dhuvāhāta', the continuous complaints against Śaṅkaradeva by the Brahmins, killing of his son-in-law in the hands of *Āhoms*, were considered to be the obvious reasons for his relocation to the *Koch* Kingdom, however, larger causes were there behind this decision which were purely political for the survival of the Vaishnavite religious order. This will be cleared from the discussion in the next paragraph.

Koch Kingdom: Patronage and Politics

Around 1543 AD, Śaṅkaradeva started his journey towards *Koch-Kamatā* Kingdom via Kamrupa. The *Koches* had already prepared to attack the *Āhoms* under Naranārāyaṇa and Cilārāi. Prince Gohāi Kamal initiated the construction of the massive road from Koch-Behar to Nārāyanpur of the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. At the time of this journey Śaṅkaradeva was more than ninety years old. The religion he propagated was received well by the wider masses of the society. However, the continuous hostile attitude of the semi-tribal non-Hinduized *Āhom* rulers towards this religious order and the constant conspiracies of the prevalent Brahmins of the society restricted its organic growth and many times threatened its existence. A sort of secure environment and patronage was the need of the hour for this religious order and *Koch* Kingdom was the ideal place at that time.

Patronage was evident in ancient Indian history and was often connected to the ideological requirements of the dominant political structure and the socio-economic condition of the society. Evidence is available, that even the religions which were unambiguously against the leading Vedic and Brahmanical structure of that time received patronage from prominent kings—Buddhism is such an example. 'The definition of patronage is popularly treated as a restricted one; the facilities were given by a person of superior status to an artist to enable the latter to produce a work of art. But the act of patronage is neither so restricted nor so simple. It implies a variety of social categories which participate in the making of the cultural object; implicit also is the understanding of institution which is created from the act of patronage and has social manifestation."[22] The migration of Śaṅkaradeva to the *Koch* Kingdom and the receptive acceptance of his arrival by the *Koch* royal family had a twofold requirement. Śaṅkaradeva required that much-needed sustenance and sense of safety to freely spread his faith and religion and he was also interested to promote and popularize this religious order in Kamrup-Kamatā region. King Naranārāyaṇa had significant political and social reasons for welcoming and providing shelter to Śaṅkaradeva.

The *Koch* Kingdom of 15th to 16th century was tribal in formation. The *Koches* followed tribal religion where *Kalitās* were their priests. Viśva Siṁha initiated the process of Hinduization of the *Koches* to the Hindu pantheon. He sent his two sons Malladeva (later on King Naranārāyaṇa) and Śukladhvaja (Cilārāi) to Vārānāsī to study Hindu philosophy and rituals. However, the Brahmanical religious order was not well received by the *Koches*, the *Meches*, and the *Kachārīs* of the region leading to the conflict between tribal beliefs and Brahmanical rituals. 'King Naranārāyaṇa had to issue an edict by which the tribal form of religious practices prevalent among the *Koches*, the *Meches* and the *Kachārīs* were recognized. Therefore, among the mass people the process of Hinduization was slower than in the old royal family'[23]. The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva was already accepted and praised by the masses of other parts of Assam and almost all social classes showed interest in it. Naranārāyaṇa was mature enough to understand this recognition of Śaṅkaradeva's religion and had a pragmatic vision of accepting the same by the tribal faith following masses of his kingdom, which would make rapid transformation towards Hinduaization of the *Koch* Kingdom. 'The process of Hinduaization was further advanced by the advent of Śaṅkaradeva along with his two great disciples Mādhavadeva and Dāmodardeva in Koch Behar in the mid 16th century.'[24]

'Neo-Vaiṣṇavism bears a feudal character and propagated the monotheistic belief and equality of castes. The idea of *dāsya* or supreme devotion to the *guru* as a

medium of attaining God is a feudal concept. 'The *Koch* King Naranārāyaṇa (1540—84), founded the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement convenient for his expansionist drive to bring the whole of Assam under his suzerainty. After all, sword and the *Bhāgavata*, both served a common purpose. Both attempted to bring disparate tribes together and weld them into an integrated social order. *Ek dev ek sev, ek vine nāi kev* – this Neo-Vaiṣṇavite concept of undivided loyalty to one deity alone could not but indirectly help the ideal of one people under one monarch.'[25] This is one of the main reasons, why Naranārāyaṇa supported sheltering Śaṅkaradeva in his kingdom and patronize him, which was later understood by the *Āhoms* in the 17th century, who were initially hostile to Śaṅkaradeva's faith.

The experience of living in *Āhom* Kingdom and the political knowledge of the *Bhūñās* were also important reasons for the *Koches* and providing them official positions on the eastern border of the state was also a wise political decision. 'Naranārāyaṇa not only established him (Śaṅkaradeva) by appointing him as the *Gomastā* or the administrative officer over modern Barpeta region but also donated his lands to establish a *sattra* at Bheladunga (later on known as Madhupur), near the *Koch* capital. Besides, Naranārāyaṇa issued a declaration permitting the free propagation of his teachings amongst his subject population.'[26]

In the process of displacement from Bardovā and later on from Dhuvāhāta, the *Bhūñās* family lost their land rights and also their prevalent social status. As stated earlier, they were considered among the general working class, in the *Āhom* state. The *Koch* Kingdom provided them the lost glory of their upper-class status. The marriage between Cilārāi and the daughter of Rāmrāi (cousin brother of Śaṅkaradeva), named Bhūvaneśvarī or Kamalāpriyā forged a strong political alliance between these two families. This marriage between a *Koch* (considered to be a new class entrant from tribal origin to Hindu fold) royal to a *kulin Kāyastha* girl from the *Bhūñās*, also enhanced the class mobility of the *Koches* in the existing class ladder. 'This marriage not only fulfilled the political agenda but also the close relation with *Koch* royal family that helped in the propagation of the religion initiated by Śaṅkaradeva.'[27]

Śaṅkaradeva was a preacher of a new religious order but he maintained a family life also, after returning from the first pilgrimage, he married Kālindī Āi and also took over the charge of *Gomastā*—Chief of hundreds *Bhūñās* household for a brief period. The marriage of Kamalāpriyā with the *Koch* royal family and his subsequent decision of not involving his eldest son Rāmānanda in religious chief and instead of that providing him training in *Majumdārī* work show his practical acumen and realistic foresight. It is clear that in his entire life he had maintained close contact with the dominant political dispensation. The disagreement theory of giving

śaraṇa to King Naranārāyaṇa was also a sensible political decision taken by both these two mature men. Naranārāyaṇa was conscious of maintaining a secular nature of his state and he was not an avid follower of any sect, so by not giving (as mentioned in *Caritputhi*) *śaraṇa*, Śaṅkaradeva also helped in retaining the secular nature of King Naranārāyaṇa. Naranārāyaṇa was highly impressed by the knowledge and wisdom of Śaṅkaradeva, but the relationship was of a king and a loyal distinguished subject.

Consequences & Conclusion:

Śaṅkaradeva was the founder of the new ideology, which shaped the socio-cultural life of Assam. It also had a great impact for the centuries to come. The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite faith of Śaṅkaradeva propagated equality among all castes by defying the Brahmanical rituals. For, achieving such a distinguished feat in a diverse society of 15th and 16th century Assam was not a painless process. This requires not only the ability to fight or embrace the adverse or conducive atmosphere but also requires a skillful, timely confident, decisive attitude with correct political acumen. Śaṅkaradeva could bear that quality and could endure everything.

The rise of two powerful kingdoms in the eastern (*Āhom*) and western (*Koch*) part of Assam provided a sense of unification among the various ethnic groups of the region along with the rapid emergence of identity creation. The expansionist drive of these two kingdoms and mainly by the *Āhoms* led to total assimilation of socio-cultural and political spheres of influence in the Brahmaputra valley. 'These developments needed a supporting ideology that would cut across tribal fragmentation than in existence and would legitimize the feudal rule'.[28] His newly propagated ideology and faith have supported this consolidation.

"It appears that Śaṅkaradeva was aware of his limitations and the conservative forces present in his organization of the *bhakti,* and therefore, suspecting the rise of the conservative forces at his absence, he did not nominate anyone to succeed him as the head of his order till the last year of his life".[29] The result of this decision eventually led to the rise of significant modifications and extremism in his religious order but he avoided this splitting in front of his own eyes. However, later, a structured feudal nature surfaced in his religious sect (the *sattras*) and led to the rise of extreme radicalism against conservatism and alienation of lower castes by the mainstay of society and religious order and political suppression in one of the sub-sect of *Kāla Saṁhati*, the Māyāmarā or the Moāmorīās. They ultimately collapsed the dominant political system in the 18th century and ended the medieval age of Assam. This 'formation of the Moāmorīā or

Matak community bears resemblance only to the formation of Khālsā and the Sikh history'[30].

Śaṅkaradeva was practical about his choices regarding his life and the religion he has preached. This is marked in the decisions he has taken over the years and established a sound foundation for his ideology. It is his pragmatism that helped him and his followers to continue his religious activities, marred by constant hostility from the rulers, during his time and later on too. Religion and politics are two parallel forces that influenced each other in a varied way. Śaṅkaradeva's life and his religious faith were never free from the clutches of politics, during his lifetime and later on, his disciples had also faced different political situations, and accordingly, to counter the same, wise and timely political decisions were taken by them as shown by their *guru* Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva.

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Figures from the article: *A Historical Study of Assamese Vaishnavite Theatre in the Light of Theatrology* by Dr. Mrinal Jyoti Goswami

Fig. 2



Fig. 6



Fig. 5



Fig. 7







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