

The Contribution of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva to the Life of Assamese Society: A Discussion

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Abstract: "Harinam rokhe Vaikuntha prakashe

Prem amritor nodi

Srimanta Shankare Paar bhagni dile

Bohe brahmandok Bhedi"

(Namghosa)

Through the essence of Harinam (Lord Krishna), life is filled with the nectar of divine love. The one who set flowing the river of immortal love is the revered master himself-

the great saint, Srimanta Sankardeva. He was born on the second Shukla Tithi in the month of Ashwina in 1449 AD. His father's name was Kusumbar Bhuyan and mother was Satyasandha. After being orphaned was brought up by his grandmother Khesuti at the death of his parents.

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva was a versatile genius. From early childhood, his wondrous talent had begun to blossom. He was enrolled in the Mahendra Kandali Gurugrah for education. "Karatala Kamala" composed by Srimanta Sankaradeva during his boyhood, around the age of twelve, is celebrated as his earliest poetic work. Remarkably, the poem employs only the first Assamese vowel অ (a) together with consonants, to craft a vivid and graceful portrayal of Lord Krishna's lotus-like hands, eyes, and feet. This youthful creation not only reveals Sankaradeva's innate literary brilliance, but also marks the auspicious beginning of his enduring contribution to Assamese Vaishnavite literature. Sankaradeva's contribution to cultural institutions like Namghar and Satra fostering nationalism and nurturing equality among varied ethnic communities. Through these cultural endeavours, Sankaradeva sought to elevate and ennoble society, using the power of literary creation as his instrument of refinement and harmony.

"Jai Guru Shankar Sarvagunakar

Jakehi nahike upam"

In reality, Sankardev was a person of all virtues, incomparable to anyone.

Keywords: Sankardeva, society, vaishnavite, versatile, Namghar and Satra.



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Introduction:

Mahapurusha Sankaradeva was the foremost preacher of the Bhakti movement and the founder of the *Ek-Saran Bhagavati* faith. Among his highest aims was to guide humanity toward spiritual fulfillment through religion. His most precious gift to Assamese society lies in his timeless literary genius. By uniting music and dance with literature, he sought to infuse the spirit of devotion into the deepest chambers of the human mind.

Literature, which imparts both wisdom and delight, elevates life to its noblest heights; and Sankaradeva understood this profoundly. There is no sphere of society or culture that remained untouched by the golden hands of this great soul. Whenever disorder engulfs a community or a nation, a savior emerges; and for a nation to endure, its literature and culture must flourish. This eternal truth was clear to the Mahapurusha.

Research content and scope:

Under the topic “**The Contribution of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva to the Life of Assamese Society: A Discussion,**” this paper will explore the profound influence of Sankaradeva’s literary works on Assamese society.

Objectives of the research:

The main objective of the topic is to examine how Sankaradeva’s literary, cultural, and linguistic contributions enriched Assamese language, strengthened social harmony, and shaped enduring cultural identity.

Research methods:

This research employs analytical and descriptive methods, examining literary texts and cultural contexts to understand Sankaradeva’s contributions to Assamese society.

Discussion of main topic:

The *Ek-Saran Bhagavati* faith stands as the guiding force and fountainhead of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, and its followers are those who, through devoted preaching, illuminate the true spiritual path. Literature, the mirror of society, contains both its wisdom and its joy; and in the hands of Sankaradeva, it became a powerful vehicle of transformation. He created an extraordinary body of work—*kavya*, *naat*, *geet*, *totoy*, *chopoy*, *bhatima*, and more—each genre contributing to the spread of the devotional religion he envisioned. Through these creations, the faith propagated by the Guru extended its roots deep into Assamese life, ultimately flourishing into a vast, enduring cultural tree. The remarkable versatility of Sankaradeva is reflected in the immense literary corpus he produced, a corpus that continues to inspire, educate, and unify generations. His literary genius not only enriched Assamese language and culture but also shaped the spiritual consciousness of an entire community.

From the standpoint of his literary craft, the works of Sankaradeva may be distinguished into six distinct and illustrious categories. These are:

- i. Translational.
- ii. Poetry.
- iii. Drama
- iv. Song
- v. Naam-prasanga.
- vi. Devotional.

The moment of the Guru's appearance in this world was itself a reflection of radiant and timeless beauty; likewise, every facet of his creative expression embodied purity, grace, and the luminous outpouring of divine joy. Sankaradeva's life was the life of a consummate artist; at once painter, sculptor, composer, playwright, producer, director, and above all, the great preacher of Lord Krishna faith, a teacher who illuminated the path of righteousness. He was, in every sense, the Guru of literature, enriching Assamese letters with unmatched depth and splendour.

In the vast domain of artistic creation, he opened countless avenues, demonstrating how literature, music, dance, architecture, and performance could serve as instruments of social upliftment. Mahapurusha Sankaradeva understood with profound clarity that a nation can rise only when each of its people is strengthened, spiritually, mentally, morally, intellectually, socially, and culturally. For him, the transformation of society required more than doctrine; it required a complete awakening of the human spirit. Thus, he wielded literature and culture as his chief weapons, guiding society toward harmony, enlightenment, and collective dignity. Through his creations, he sought not merely to entertain but to elevate, ensuring that the nation he nurtured would stand rooted in wisdom, devotion, and cultural brilliance.

Translational:

Mahapurusha Sankaradeva created several noteworthy translations, each reflecting his spiritual profundity and refined literary sensibility. Among these, the *Dasham Skanda* holds a place of particular eminence. Of its ninety chapters, he translated forty-nine, entrusting the remaining portion to Ananta Kandali. Sankaradeva's section, known as the *Adi Dasham*, unfolds a series of exquisite narratives - from the divine birth and enchanting childhood of Lord Krishna to the uplifting accounts of the Gopis' deliverance.

What distinguishes the *Adi Dasham* is not the extravagance of imagination but the solemnity of its themes, the precision and grace of its descriptions, the elegance of its language, the richness of its imagery, and the deep devotional eagerness that imbues every line. Through such translations, Sankaradeva provided Assamese society with accessible paths to spiritual understanding and cultural enrichment, transforming sacred scripture into a living, resonant force capable of shaping the moral and emotional fabric of an entire community.

Poetry:

Sankaradeva composed numerous poems of lasting significance, among which *Harischandra Upakhyan* and *Rukmini Haran* occupy prominent places. *Harischandra Upakhyan*, his earliest poetic creation, draws its narrative foundation from the seventh and eighth chapters of the *Markandeya Purana*. With graceful embellishment and evocative detail, the poet brings the ancient tale vividly to life. King Harichandra endures severe trials for offering his first worship to Vishnu instead of Ganesha, yet ultimately he is blessed with divine grace. Through this narrative, Sankaradeva subtly affirms the spiritual supremacy of Lord Vishnu, in harmony with his devotional vision.

In *Rukmini Haran Kavya*, derived primarily from the *Harivangsha*, Sankaradeva transforms the original source into a work as sweet and harmonious as honeyed milk. Though the story bears traces of the *Bhagavata Purana*, its sequence of events and underlying spirit align more closely with the *Bhagavata* than with the *Harivangsha*. The poem recounts the tender love that blossoms between Rukmini, daughter of Bhishmaka, king of Vidarbha, and Krishna, Lord of Dwaraka—each captivated by reports of the other's virtues and beauty conveyed by Haridasa and Surabhi Bhatt. The narrative culminates in Krishna's triumphant return to Dwaraka with Rukmini and the grand celebration of their marriage amid auspicious manner.

In addition to these major works, Sankaradeva enriched Assamese literature with several compositions based on the *Bhagavata Purana*, including *Ajamila Upakhyan*, *Amrit Manthan*,

Gajendra Upakhyana, *Balisalan*, and *Kurukshetra*, each reflecting his profound devotion and literary mastery.

Drama:

Srimanta Sankaradeva is revered as the father of Assamese *natya-sahitya*. Through song, dance, and dramatic performance, he sought to bring the divine *leelas* of God closer to the hearts of ordinary people. The earliest dramatic creation of Srimanta Sankaradeva was *Chihnayatra*, an innovative precursor to the later *Ankiya Naats*. Unlike conventional plays, *Chihnayatra* did not enact a narrative; instead, it portrayed symbolic depictions of the seven deities of the seven Baikunthas.

Sankaradeva later composed six one-act plays, modeled on the ancient Assamese *Ojapali* tradition, they are *Patni Prasad*, *Kaliya Daman*, *Keli Gopal*, *Rukmini Haran*, *Parijaat Haran*, and *Ram Bijay*. The structural elegance of the *Ankiya Naats* reveals a clear influence of Sanskrit dramaturgy. Having drawn inspiration from classical Sanskrit theatre, Sankaradeva infused these plays with its refined techniques while crafting a uniquely Assamese dramatic form that continues to shape the cultural and devotional landscape of the region.

Geet:

Sankaradeva composed a collection of devotional songs known as *Borgeet* with the aim of cultivating a profound spiritual atmosphere in the hearts of the people. The title *Borgeet* was not assigned by the Mahapurusha himself, but by the followers of the Vaishnava tradition to honour and recognize the excellence of these compositions. According to the *Charith Puthi*, the first *Borgeet* was created in the late fifteenth century. After undertaking a pilgrimage to Badrikashram, Sankaradeva composed his first *Borgeet*, “*Mon Meri Ram Charanehi Lagu*.” These songs were composed in *Brajavali*, a language specifically adopted to express devotional fervor.

Through the *Borgeets*, Sankaradeva conveyed the essence of devotion and the significance of Krishna *bhakti*, guiding people on the path to spiritual liberation from the entanglements of *maya* (illusion). Alongside these, he also composed *Bhatimas*, songs that celebrate strength and glory, further enriching Assamese devotional music and fostering a deep, enduring connection between the community and the divine.

Devotional:

Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva authored numerous works reflecting Assamese society. These include *Bhaktipradeep*, *Nimi-namasiddha Sambad*, *Anadi Patan*, and *Bhakti Ratnakar* - each offering profound insights into social life, spiritual values, and the devotional ethos of the community.

Name-related:

Sankaradeva’s *Kirtans* and *Gunmala* stand as luminous testaments to his extraordinary poetic genius. Among these, the *Kirtan* emerges as a shining exemplar, often regarded as the pinnacle of Vaishnava literature. The collection, sometimes referred to as the ‘*Rahghara*’ of the *Bhagavad Gita*, embodies the essence of the sacred text in a form that is both accessible and deeply touching.

The *Kirtan* and the *Gunomala* are celebrated for the graceful articulation of their themes, the variety as well as elegance of their rhythms, and the precise choice of words that revive and enhance the devotional experience. Their melodious tone and spiritual tone have endeared them to people across all walks of life. The *Gunomala*, composed in six-syllable *Kusumamala* meter, the 377 verses refine the profound teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* with remarkable clarity and charm. Written in a concise yet captivating style, the *Kirtans* reflect not only Sankaradeva’s literary

brilliance but also his ability to inspire devotion and convey spiritual truths through the enduring beauty of poetic expression.

Conclusion:

Through his literary works, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva envisioned a healthy and harmonious society, one rooted in brotherhood, mutual sympathy, and the bonds that unite all people. He sought not merely to entertain but to guide humanity along the path of morality and righteousness. In reflecting upon his contributions to Assamese society, it becomes clear that the Guru aspired to build a society of beauty, virtue, and spiritual depth. His teachings and writings instilled a profound sense of spirituality in the hearts of the Assamese, elevating their thoughts and emotions to loftier heights. Srimanta Sankardeva's efforts sparked a cultural and spiritual renaissance, awakening the collective consciousness of the people. His literary legacy continues to shine as a brilliant star, illuminating the lives of generations and dispelling the shadows of ignorance and moral darkness. In his light, the human soul finds clarity, hope, and inspiration.

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