

# Universality Of Sankaradeva's Thought For Community Development: A Study Of Assamese Muslims

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**ABSTRACT-** Srimanta Sankaradeva was the pioneer to disseminate noble thoughts of moral values and spiritual inspiration for the humanity and social harmony. Liberalization of these thoughts popularized his vision and cultural creations among different communities of Assam. It was a Vaishnavite movement; however, it widens the range of assimilation of dignified outlooks. Attributable to this, Assamese Muslims are one of the significant communities that inspired and accumulate several thoughts of Sankaradeva in their stream. This universality of spiritual bond and cultural involvement is a strong communicating mechanism which playing a vital role in community development of Assamese Muslims. Thus, this research paper is to study the universality and liberalization of Sankaradeva's thoughts for socio-cultural development in Assamese Muslim community that is incredibly noteworthy to highlight the different issues in modern context.

Key words- communicating mechanism, liberalization, universality, vaishnavite

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sankaradeva's contributions reached the entire region of Assam influenced to get hold of social dignity and prosperity. It is significant to observe that Assamese Muslims are very attached with Vaishnavite thoughts. They have a unique rationalism which take apart them from other Muslims ideology. This is incredible to study the participation of Assamese Muslims in Sankaradeva's Neo-Vaishnavite tradition without changing the track from Islam. The adaptation and accumulation of Sankaradeva's thoughts into Islamic ideology is a living custom and to this research paper is to understand the socio-economic-cultural transformations for their community development.

## II. OBJECTIVE

This research paper has been focused on its objectives mainly to study the Sankaradeva's philosophy of spiritual liberalization that inspired Assamese Muslims community to incorporate in socio-cultural life. Foremost emphasis is to study the contribution of Assamese Muslims to enhance Sankaradeva's vision as a communicating mechanism for greater community development. Also to understand the historic evolution, socio-cultural transformation of Assamese Muslims community and its future prospect with recent circumstance.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This is a critical and analytical type of research. The findings of the research are based on two types of data i.e., the Primary data and Secondary data. Different information related to the adaptation and assimilation of Sankaradeva's philosophy by Assamese Muslims community from Sankaradeva era to modern period is considering as chronological edge is the primary data for the research purpose. After the data collection process, data analysis has been done. Also it includes various socio-cultural components of communication process which may establish the influence of Sankaradeva's philosophy in Assamese Muslims community as a vital dynamic aspect for community development.

### IV. HISTORY OF ASSAMESE MUSLIMS

The term Assamese Muslim is stand for the religiously Islamic community who used Assamese language, folk culture and social tradition of Assam. Assamese Muslim is also referring as *Asomiya Musliman*. Historically, the Islamic tradition entered Assam during 1206 AD by the force led by Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar, a turkey invader came to Assam through Tibet region. After this, from 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries several Muslim invaders came to Assam and the so many conflicts took place were many prisoners stay put here. In between this, during 1662 AD a significant conflict occurred between Ahom dynasty and Mir Jhumla where according to a treaty a part of Assam was occupied by him. Afterward, this was again taken over by Ahom rulers. Along this, several Muslims officials were appointed by Ahom rulers in state of affairs and the acquaintances with Muslim society got increased. Simultaneously, many Intellectuals, Saints, Artists migrated to this province and enhanced Assamese Muslim community. However with the course of time, this region assimilated the Muslims people with indigenous people and culture. So many Muslims married to native girls, learned the local language, adapt folk culture and customs into their life. On the other hand, at that time conversions to Islamic creed also shown as a major fact in increasing the Muslim population. Nowadays, although they possess Islam as their religion but socio-culturally they are distinctive and vibrant which is far away from traditional Middle East Asian live hood and ideology. This is stated by Wikipedia that ' the Assamese Muslims probably one of the less orthodox Muslims communities of entire Asia. They follow many Hindu customs and take part in Hindu festivals'. Due to this distinguished socio-cultural assimilation with other indigenous communities, the Assamese Muslims evenly developed and continued as an imperative part of this multi-dimensional Assamese society.

## V. SANKARADEVA'S VISION OF LIBERALIZATION

Sankaradeva was a great intellectual had immense observations on socio-cultural-political circumstance of that period. He understood about the mass appeal of his liberal philosophy of life but at the same time he well known of limitations of people in terms of acceptance. To integrate the multi-lingual, multi-coloured cultural heritage of Assam, Srimanta Sankaradeva formulated a unique form to retelling of motivational mythological stories through several artistic manifestations of drama, songs, sattriya dance etc. that never depicted rigidity of Hindu philosophy but proficient to generate universal platform and huge popularity.

Although the Neo-Vaishnavism is a stream of Hindu religious vision and practice but it is more flexible and progressive. In early period of Sankaradeva, there were so many different deities and mainly living animal and human were sacrifices in the name of *Sakti pujan*. Along this, so many blind beliefs and merciless rituals took place and the social system suffered a lot. To abolish these malpractices and to provide an appropriate divine pathway towards humanity, Sankaradeva introduced EK SARAN NAM DHARMA. *EK SARAN* is referred to be under the guidance and direction of the single God who is not other than Lord Krishna who described as *Palankarta* i.e., the protector of humanity and social values. Instead of offering many things, the three fundamental practices are formulated to worship the single God are *Kirttan*, *Smaran*, *Bandan*. *Kirttana* is to express and execute the glory of Lord Krishna in the form of poetic illustrations that articulated by Sankaradeva. *Smaran* is to bring the instructions learned from *Kritan* and Guru (the mentor) to the mind. *Bandan* is the devotional expression of thoughts towards Lord Krishna and the *Guru* for all those we learn about this world and humanity. To perform and practice these values Sankaradeva established *Sattra* and *Namghar* across the regions which were residential spirituality learning institutions and community prayer houses, respectively. *Sattra* are headed by *Gosain*, a spiritual leader who teaches moral education, social values to disciples, students and followers. And the *Namghar* are the native prayer houses where people of the locality gathered for worship practice and perform the spiritual learning in various art forms like, *Bhaona*, *Sattriya* dance, *Borgeet* presentation. These institutions are widely open for all irrespective of caste, creed, and gender that they can participate in the services and can enjoy the cultural performances.

According to the Census report of India, 1891, it is stated about the Vaishnavite influence on outcast that "when the neophyte takes the Saran, the Gosain inculcates a few moral precepts such as 'Obey your parents', never raise your hands against them', 'be always respectful to elders', tell no falsehood' etc. He then sprinkles sacred water over them and bless them. Having done this he takes his fee and departs. He interferes no farther with their old religious beliefs, nor does he insist on their abstaining from eating pork and drinking rice beer." (Para-233 Vol.1- Chapt-8). It can be assumed that Sankaradeva's philosophy of spirituality distinctly possess the path of moral, social values which does not stress to change the religious or individual identity. Therefore, beginning of Sankaradeva's

era to modern period, along with a number of tribal communities; Assamese Muslims community equally feels enlightened to incorporate Sankaradeva's school of thoughts into their life and culture.

## VI. SANKARADEVA'S PHILOSOPHY IN ASSAMESE MUSLIMS COMMUNITY

Srimanta Sankaradeva's one of the distinguished disciple Chandkhai was a Muslim. He was well known for logical account. It stated that Chandkhai had seen Sankaradeva's divine form. He inspired a lot by the Sankaradeva's liberal outlook towards an outcast person like him. Chandkhai became a follower of Sankaradeva and he composed several devotional songs which spread out the message of Sankaradeva on spirituality, morality and humanity. Subsequently, a number of Muslims people were acquainted with Sankaradeva's EK SARAN NAAM DHARMA, and assimilation of Vaishnavite and folk cultures were put into practice.

## VII. IMPACT ON ASSAMESE MUSLIMS

About 250 years before the birth of Sankaradeva, the Islamic ideology entered to Assam however the Sankaradeva's philosophical transmission motivated Assamese Muslims community to recognize the multi-cultured foundation of socio-cultural development. It is observed that the institutional structures of *Sattra* and *Namghar* are also established in Muslims community. In 1891, Census report of India stated about this. In Jorhat sub-division of undivided Sivasagar district, presently in Jorhat district there were about sixteen thousands of Muslim populations. The report says that Assamese Musalmans followed the Hindu customs and religious structure. Further this, they have their spiritual leaders i.e., *Gosain*. It was mandatory to all the Muslims populace get attach to the *Gosain* for acquire the knowledge of individual-social values. Namely, *Halungpuria Gosain*, *Bakirpuria Gosain*, *Hak Khoa Dewan Gosain* are some Assamese Muslims *Gosain*. Notably, *Bakirpuria Gosain* is name after the first *Pir* of the line *Bakir*. They have their own *Sattra* where resident disciple (*Bhakat*) used to live who desist from matrimonial or other physical relationships. *Gosain* are be given the offerings from other non-residents followers and disciples. The authorized village chief is called as *Gaonbura* who is appointed by *Gosain* with a turban as a symbol of recognition. Under him a number of *Barik* or peon worked and collect the offerings. In Darrang district, *Damodoria Boragi Sattra* is considerable to have a Muslim family tree that was converted but still participates in *Sattra*'s various programs.

On the other hand, the edifying practices of devotion are basically the good habits of lifestyle. Sankaradeva's philosophy of *Sanskar* i.e., reform for personal, mental and social health and hygiene. Realizing the fact, *Sayan Sadachar*, *Bhojan Sadachar*, *Goyon Sadachar* are introduced which says about the daily routine of sleeping, eating, moving to somewhere etc. Similarly, for mental recreation spiritual activities like singing the devotional songs accomplish with several instruments. It is observed that many Assamese Muslims follows these routines. As well as, while praying they perform rhythmic clapping which is similar to *Kawali* performed by *Sufis*. Such comparable

integration of Vaishnavite thoughts and Islamic culture is assumed to lead the *Baul* culture in Bengal region. It is also seen that integration of Vaishnavite ideology and Islamic tradition brought out folk songs like *Kabira Geet* or *Baadshahi Geet*, *Fakirali Geet*, *UjaUtha Geet* or *Aituti Geet*. Among this, the women participation is a significant element to understand the gender egalitarianism in Assamese Muslims.

In 1630, Azan Fakir a notable Sufi saint came for exploration and distribution of Islamic ideology in Assam. It was about eighty years after the death of Sankaradeva and Azan Fakir found that the Islamic thought of Assam is already absorbed Neo-Vaishnavism of Sankaradeva. They took part in singing of *Kirtana*, took *Prasad*. He understood the universal acceptance of Sankaradeva's philosophy and himself introduced a liberal form of Sufism. He composed *Jikir* and *Jaris* in the pattern of Vaishnava songs i.e., *Borgeet*. *Jikir* and *Jaris* put up with the similar spiritual and humane values to deliver socio-cultural harmony.

Significantly, in Azan Fakir's period there were no mosques among local Muslims in lower part of Assam. There were only community prayers houses *Namghars*. *Sattra* culture is not confined within the frame of spirituality but it leads socio-political-cultural developments of village and the state. In addition, it is to mention that in united India of Pre-Independence period, at Dhaka there were so many Muslims disciple of Madhupur Satra, Coch behar. From this point, it can be understand that the Sankaradeva's establishments straightforwardly influenced the Assamese Muslims community.

#### VIII. SANKARADEVA'S IDEOLOGY IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

As per the census of 2011, the Muslims population is about 34% of total population of Assam. Among these, a large number of Muslims are Assamese Muslims who possess liberalized socio-cultural life. From British rule, although there is the Muslim Personal Law (1937) and Sharia Law for Muslims community but Indian constitution provides equal rights to all citizens a Uniform Civil Code under article 44. Hence, as stated earlier, Assamese Muslims are holding global outlook about their socio-cultural development. Looking into the Human Development Index (HDI) according to Open Government Data (OGD) Platform Although the literacy rate 68.5%, which is lowest in the country, and for instance the literacy rate of Assamese Muslims is higher than this with 73.18 % age. Putting this point, social status, gender equality, mass participations are very customary for Assamese Muslims community. Because of the progressive approach a large number of scholars, eminent personalities come out from Assamese Muslims. Namely, Baag Hazarika, the Brave Commander of Ahom Kingdom, former President of India Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, Anuwara Taimur, the only woman Chief Minister of Assam, Dr, Maidul Islam Bora, the first Assamese Doctorate, Mahanmmed Saadulah, the only Assamese member of the drafting committee of the Constituent Assembly, Fardina Adil, the first Assamese woman IAS officer, Padma Bhshan awardee Vocalist Parveen Sultana, distinguished writer Syed Abdul Malik and many other prominent figures glories the state and the nation.

This revealed the potency of the Assamese Muslims community is enlightened by high social values articulated by Sankaradeva and the disciples to generate greater Assamese community.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Sankaradeva says, *Kukur srigal gadorghoru atmaram, Jania sobaku pori koriba pronam* (11/17/33 bhagawat). It means all the living creatures whatever it may be all are to be valued. Consequently, all the people of any caste, creed, and gender they are imperative & respected. These high principles also delighted Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation who said, “A great Vaishnava revival under Sankaradeva 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. Assam, indeed, is fortunate for Sankaradeva has five centuries back, given the Assamese people an ideal, which is also the ideal of Ram-Rajya.”

Today, some rigid and aggressive Islamic elements is leading a faithless environment in the world. To abolish these it need to open the thoughts in a global way. Beyond the religious customs and acquaintance, Global community can incorporate Sankaradeva’s ideology of social ethics and kindness. It can be comprehend that accepting the institutional and structural sketch of Neo-Vaishnavism; the Assamese Muslim society becomes a model of community development for not only this region, also for rest of the world.

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