

# Humanism in the Philosophy of Sankardeva

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## Abstract:

The present paper deals with the inherent elements of Humanism in the philosophical ideas and practices of Mahapurush Sankardeva. In this process, the paper analyses the pivotal principles and ritualistic practices of his religio-philosophical tenets and established how the ingredients of humanism pervades over all of them. It has been extended from propounding ideas to composing a vast range of literature. Sankardeva thus turns out to be a genuinely progressive humanist in both his thoughts and actions

**Keywords:** Religion, philosophy, humanism, culture, Bhakti.

## 1. Introduction

We all know the contribution of Sankardeva in forming a well-disciplined Assamese national lifestyle. The effects of Sankardeva's personality and aptitude along with his contributions towards human society are helping enough to strengthen the 21<sup>st</sup> century Assamese society.

Human welfare is the prime motto of humanism. The notion of humanism approach reflects in treating human as human irrespective of cast, culture, religion or creed, in breaking the chain of narrow mindset and indulging the self in the creative work with the aim of human welfare. In general, the concept humanism is a kind of remonstrance. It is born from the result of the protest against the present system to rescue individuals from injustice, oppression and any kind of critical condition. The humanitarian approach of Sankardeva is also the end result of that kind

of protest. During the appearance of Sankardeva the religious disparity and corruption disrupted the societal life. The existence of the superfluous and bogus rituals has not only diverted the people from the path of genuine religion but also spread the seeds of discrimination among them. To exploit and to oppress the common public a conduit was created by manipulating the actual substances of the *Sastras*. Therefore Sankardeva aimed at relieving the society from such dire circumstances and to construct the bridge of national integrity by fabrication of mutual understanding with the help of love. To achieve this goal he initiated the Neo-Vaishnavite movement and propagated Ekasarana Naam Dharma (Shelter in One Religion). Hence, undoubtedly it can be said that the root of the belief of Sankardeva was humanism.

This polymath personality has relied on religion as a tool for development of the society and to guide the individuals to fly sky high for their upliftment. His approach to humanism is reflecting at its best in his effort to lay down the foundation stone of a disciplined and peaceful Assamese society by pouring purity in the heart and mind of the individuals to develop a mutual sensitivity in the society with the help of moral education and religion.

In this paper a detailed discussion will be done on how humanism is visible in the spiritual thoughts of the ecclesiastic personality Srimanta Sankardeva

## **II. Source of the Study and Methodology**

To conduct the study secondary sources are used. The vital facts are gathered from the secondary sources like reference books written in Assamese, journals or memorials etc.

To seek the allegorical form of the collected information primarily analytical and descriptive method is used.

## **III. Aim of the study and its importance**

Humanism is closely related to the intention to liberate the individuals from the socio cultural jeopardy and the aim of the paper is to have a detailed discussion on how Sankardeva has indulged himself irrespective of cast, creed and religion in spreading the Ekasarana Dharma by incepting the Neo-Vaishnavite movement.

The contribution of Sankardeva in the field of the Assamese religion-society-literature-culture is phenomenal for the society-literature-culture of the present time. On the basis of this contribution the society is proudly established itself in the global platform. Therefore, it is important as well as significant to study about the creator of a beautiful society.

## **IV. Subject Matter**

15<sup>th</sup> century; an era full of chaos and conflicts, a time which was religiously, politically, socially and culturally critical. To fight against the dilapidated society of the epoch Srimanta Sankardeva took the responsibility to shed light on the Assamese society surrounded by darkness by lighting the lamp of religion.

India is a land of religion. The common public accepts anything in the name of religion only. Probably a visionary like Sankardeva have understood this fact easily. Thinking about the people the religious belief he propagated and spread focused not on logic but on trust; not on tactics but on love.

The prime aim of 'Eka Sarana Naam Dharma' the religious ideology propagated by Sankardeva was to transform the *Agama* practices like worshipping the Idol of Gods, immolation or sacrifice in the name of Gods, Yagya or Shraadh to *Nigama*. The pantheistic religion propagated by Srimanta Sankardeva rejects Vedic ritualism and focuses on pure devotion. And for this purpose he propagated a new religious philosophy named 'Eka sarana'; gathering the roots from the holy books like

the Bhagawata, The Geeta, Upanishada and Brahmasutra. As a medium to accomplish his aim he said to the people about spiritual liberation by relying on 'Harinaam' and as a result he transformed the eksarana naam dharma into a simple and accessible common religion against the Vedic sacrificial form of Hinduism (Sakta Tradition) with the help of the groups of the neophytes who were introduced into the faith via a system of initiation itself referred to as Sarana. He contributed towards the present and futures of Assam with the motto "Ek Dew Ek Sew Ek Bine Nai Keu" which asserts the belief on one single God. Sankaradeva had the vision that worshipping different God will create a chaos in the society and hence he advised his followers to devote themselves to one sole God. The teaching of Sankaradeva reflects the mutual love, kindness and an image of peace. If we follow his ideology in this present era we will definitely be able to craft a classless, creedless and a peaceful society in near future.

Further, it is seen that Humanism is the reason behind the sensitiveness and universality of the work of art, musical compositions of Sankaradeva. Amid his work of arts Borgeet, Satriya Dance, Ankiya Naat and Bhaona are the prime. In the era of Sankaradeva the religious conversion was avert due to initiating this type cultural transformation for human welfare with the religious approach and his spiritual thoughts reached right from the ancient Kamrup to Dhaka, Puri, Kochbihar, Modhupur, Bhutan, Nagaland etc. He was not aiming to display beauty with his work of art; the objective was

to fulfill the requirements of life. He devoted himself in creating literature not to get the limelight but to maintain a communication with the common people. Besides he translated the 'Sastra' written in the Sanskrit Language to simple Assamese simply with the intention of wellbeing of the general population. He took the responsibility of the translation of the holy books so that the books do not become the sole property of a single section of people. It can be drawn that the inspiration of Sankaradeva's work of art is the common people. The focal point here is that his cordial empathy and love towards the public has unlocked the road of his creative talent. And hence from the creation of Sankaradeva the society has received the learning of literary tactics, religious tactics, spirituality, culture, politics, learning about the life and the world, the teachings to eradicate the class discrimination and above all his works taught the society about unity.

Humanity was the baseline of the philosophy and the creation of Sankaradeva. His affection towards people has particularly helped him to make him enthusiastic in doing any kind of work and gave him the mental strength to bear all kinds of sacrifices. Perhaps because of this the 'Naamdharma' propagated by him embraces people from all stages of the society including women, child, old, Chandal which helped in united the dilapidated and the divided society.

As a result a huge section of the society who was the victim of social discrimination on the basis of cast and creed found the path of salvation in Harinam Kirtan of Sankaradeva. Therefore, it is mentioned in

the *Pashanda Mardan* and *Nimi Navasidha-Sangvaad* that –

*“Chandale Korise Naam Kirtan |*

*Buliya Ninde Jitu Agyajan ||*

*Taak Sambhasan Jijone Kore|*

*Aganma Punya Tekhane Hore||”*

*(Pashanda Mardan)*

(The person who even greets the ignorant one who insults a Chandal for performing Naam Kirtan he owns the result of his good work.??)

*“Kaak Buli Hori Kotha*

*Horir Kirton Kiba*

*Jitu Sobe Ekue Najane*

*Stree Sudra Antyajati*

*Taku Sikhaa Diba Mati*

*Dhoribe Sisobe Ohuprane |”*

*(Nimi Navasidha-Sangvaad)*

(The aforementioned lines assert that, “Hari Kirtan should be taught to the one who even doesn’t know anything in this regard. Female, Shudra, Lower born should also be called upon for this teaching and they will whole heartedly learn it.)

The way the Mahapurusha had declared a revolution in the 16<sup>th</sup> century itself is not being able to done by anyone in the present time also.

Another sign of understanding of humanity in the emerging beliefs of Sankardeva is noticed in his respect towards other religion. His own religion and culture

has found publicity and a wide platform through his views on other religion. For example, he has said about other religions that-

*“Bhagavat Saastre Sradha Koribo Nityanta*

*Nokoribo Ninda Aan Saastrku Ekanto”*

*(Nimi Navasidha-Sangvaad)*

(The lines assert that one should surely respect the Bhagavata but at the same time should not insult any other religious books.??)

Another contribution of Sankardeva towards human welfare is the establishment of Naamghara, Satra, etc. He doesn’t simply take the lead in opening the doors of Naamghara and Satra by establishing it but simultaneously he has a greater role in influencing hearts of the individual. Due to this liberal belief of Sankardeva people who were considered as lower cast by the society took part in Harinaam Kirtan. He focused on the purity of mind along with the peripheral purity. He gave importance in maintaining a sound health just like he focused on bravery and patience to build up moral values and will power.

Point to be noted that in the current time also the purity in food habits, manners, and clothing habits can be seen in the Naamghara and Satra system even after decades of the demise of Sankardeva. Undoubtedly this is the emergence and advancement of the spiritual thoughts of this visionary personality.

Again if we notice another thing – his prohibition in worshipping idol and other

Vaidic rituals is incorporated with a deeper meaning. In his *Ratnavali* it is mentioned

*“Anya Devi-Deva Nokoriba Seva*

*Griho Noposiba Taar |*

*Murtikou Nachaiba*

*Prashadou Nokhaiba*

*Bhokti Hoibo Byabhishar ||”*

(In these lines Sankardeva asserts Bow not to other gods and goddesses. Enter not the house where it is worshipped. Cast not a glance at the images. Partake not of their offerings, lest thy devotion to the One should be polluted.)

Whatever Sankardeva has said about the idol worshipping is reflecting word by word in the present time because in this era the religion is taking an illicit appearance among the youth in the name of Durga Puja and Shiva Puja. It is seen that in most of the programs chiefly related to puja there is availability of alcohol and weed. Perhaps, because of that Sankardeva as a visionary has rightly warned about idol worshipping and other Vaidic rituals that worship will be full of infidelities. Worth mentioning that considering all these factors he prohibited consuming any kind of drugs or alcohol in the religion propagated by him. Further he wanted to mitigate the animal sacrificing in the Assamese society in the 15<sup>th</sup> century itself, which is still prevalent in the society and the torture upon animals is still being continued in the name of superstitions. In the period of the birth off Sankardeva the

Assamese society was going through injustice, oppression, infidelity, rape, corruption, quarrel and violence. The circumstances of today’s society are also similar. But, at that time Sankardeva protested against this with his Bhakti movement and with an open voice he commented on animals that –

*“Kukkur Chandaral Gadarbhorou  
Aatmarqm*

*Janiya Sabakou Pori Karibo Pranam ||”*

(In these lines Sankardeva asserts that the God is in the soul of dog, chandaal and even in donkey. Hence, ensure to show your respect to all of them??.)

The humanitarians hold the faith on positive energy, capacity and probability of human being. They believe that people own infinite strength and with the right implementation of this strength people can enrich the self along with developing the society as a whole. Being respectful towards the divinity of human being Sankardeva completely surrendered himself for the moral development and future welfare of the society despite of surrounded by obstacles.

Though humanism was the focal point of the Bhakti movement of Sankardeva yet his religious opinion was not emerged simply from emotions. A philosophical doctrine was associated with his religion. The Bhagavata is the base of the religious philosophy and literary work of Sankardeva. The Bhagavata is known as the key summary of the Vedas. Hence, the philosophical opinion of Sankardeva was formed with the inspiration from the Bhagavata Purana. The

religious devotees of other parts of India who were the contemporary of Sankardeva followed paths of Vaidic philosophy but their philosophical doctrine was simply to establish the superiority of their path of worship. Sankardeva accepted bhakti as the way to get connected with the almighty or the way of salvation and he said that from this type of bhakti acquiring knowledge is possible –

*“Bhakati bale gyaan lobhila nirgun /*

*Jivonte Mukut Hui Bohila Arjun //”*

*(Shri Krishna Baikhunta Prayaan)*

Sankardeva is such a thoughtful personality who doesn't simply draw the beliefs and thoughts of his previous time but he transforms his thoughts and beliefs by noticing the importance of time and acceptance of people. This is reflecting the uniqueness of his perceptions. Furthermore, even after his demise this great human being has been more relevant due to his societal outlook. One of the greatest examples of it is the selection of the heir for the Ekosarana Naam Dharma. During the time of Sankardeva there was a system where the son inherits the royal or religious rights of his father even if he is not eligible for it. This system is still prevalent in various places. But, Sankardeva was not influenced by these rules and he decided to transfer his designation to his favorite disciple Madhavdeva completely in a democratic manner after his demise. Following the principles of Guru Sankardeva Madhavdeva also made Gopaldeva, Badala Ata, Bangshi Gopal Deva the religious head and expands

democracy in the Satra system. It can be said that the invention of the democratic selection process of the Satradihikaar of Barpeta Satra is the reflection of Sankardeva's outlook.

### **V. Comment**

In my paper it is discussed how humanism is reflected in the approach of Sankardeva. During the study to prepare this paper I've reached in a conclusion that Sankardeva is such a creator of an era and a guide of the Assamese society who has shown a new way to craft the life and society during the time of pandemonium via his humanitarian spiritual outlook. Whether it is work of art or philosophical doctrine his aim was common public. To make the Ankiyanaat advantageous for the public he simplified the rules of Sanskrit drama, just like that he amalgamated his own apprehension to the complicated theories of Vedas so that the general people can be able to accept those. Which indicates humanism is the prime inspiration of Sankardeva's thought process and his perceptions.

### **VI. Conclusion**

Sankardeva has enriched the Assamese society with language, culture, conventions for the wellbeing of human being. If we minutely analyze the contribution of Sankardeva it is seen that his offering are not only relevant to this era but it will be pertinent to the Assamese national life in the near future as well.

It is the responsibility of each and every humanistic Assamese to observe that the capitalist globalization of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century which has brought a negative

transformation in the society, that cannot harm the valuable contribution of Sankardeva because unlike the other religious head Sankardeva did not only spoke about religious philosophy; he has shown a nation the way to be culturally prosperous through his spiritual thinking; now this is the way to enrich the Assamese nation by embracing all the tribes by accepting the Assamese language and culture as our own. Our pride is here only because Sankardeva has given us life, He has given the identity to the people of Assam to live as a community. Along with a changing era the values will also transform and may be its effects will be on the religion and culture of this great personality. But, one thing is for sure, amid the contributions of Sankardeva a new sapling will blossom and it will flourish with prosperity in the Assamese society in the upcoming decades.

To conclude, the success of my paper is a matter of your judgment.

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