

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

1.0: Background of the Study

Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568 A.D.) was the leader of the *Bhakti* Movement in Assam. Before Śaṅkaradeva started his movement the society of the region was full of adversities. The people were forced to observe very costly religious rituals. Security of the people particularly of the woman was declining. Political instability led to frequent conflicts among different ethnic tribes. Education was the privilege of only a small group of people comprising royal and upper class people of the society. In such a situation the intellectual development of the people had stopped and the whole production process stalled. People were leading a low standard of living. To redeem the people from such kind of situation Śaṅkaradeva had launched the *Bhakti* Movement which was already widespread all over India. Through the movement he created a renaissance in Assam in all spheres of life. His contribution was multi-dimensional. He worked in various fields for the development of Assamese society, e.g, introduced a simple form of religion devoid of costly rituals, gave a new taste to the people of Assam by introducing new form of music, dance, drama and art, and architected the *Nāmghar* as a religious cum community development centre where people got the opportunity to local self administration and micro-financing, opened up the process of learning to all, and taught the people about the importance of

cleanliness, hygiene etc. He also taught the people that for survival of human being preserving the bio-diversity on the earth is essential. He valued all the living creatures on the earth equally and advised the people to look at them as a part of God. Though Śaṅkaradeva is not established as an economist so far but his views on various economic matters have great importance. Similarly, he favoured a progressive society where everyone gets equal opportunities. He believed that a person must be economically sound and then only he could be expected to grow spiritually. So, he tried to enhance the work culture among his disciples throughout his life. He himself engaged in different economic activities and never depended on his disciples for maintenance of his family. However, Śaṅkaradeva never supported the unnecessary accumulation of wealth by a person. He cautioned his followers not to hanker after money. For achieving income equality in the society, Śaṅkaradeva advocated that the productive capacity of the marginal section should be enhanced. At the same time, he advised his followers to spend one-fifth of their total income for the betterment of the society. Śaṅkaradeva designed the religious center called *Thān* (later become popular as *Satra*) in such a manner that it become self-sustaining economic unit. The inmates of the *Thān* produced everything themselves required by them within the premises. The design of the *Thān* was such that within the premise there was an area for cultivation, one flower garden, one vegetable garden, one garden for medicinal plants and herbs, one or two ponds for water requirements, place for cattle rearing, one grove for valuable trees, fruits and bamboo; besides having a *Nāmghar* or *Kīrttanghar* at the centre surrounded by residential houses for the devotees. Similarly, Śaṅkaradeva took initiative for the revival of cottage industries. His religious and cultural activities

boosted the demand for various products of the cottage industries thereby provided a big push to the industry. Income and employment opportunities to the artisans associated with the cottage industry expanded. He had special attention in the textile sector and did a lot for its development. In brief, Śaṅkaradeva through his *Bhakti* Movement revolutionized the economic development of the region.

1.1: Significance of the Study

The works of Śaṅkaradeva and his *Bhakti* Movement influenced the people of Assam as well as the economy. The Movement was based on different economic aspects. The basic objective of his movement was to attain a situation where all people could lead a better quality of life by avoiding all ills. So, he emphasized besides spirituality on attaining economic self-sufficiency. For it, he advocated education for all and development of all the sectors in the economy for raising employment opportunities. Similarly, Śaṅkaradeva endeavored to stop the age-old exploitations faced by the people in the name of religion. To achieve the goal he made his religious order very simple and cost effective by discarding elaborate rituals. But as time passes some of the religious leaders of his order started to work contrary to his ideology which negatively impacted the rural economy of Assam. The common followers also became subject to a number of exploitations by them. So a study is required to properly restate economic thoughts of Śaṅkaradeva to remove the hindrances of rural economic development of Assam. The present study is very much relevant from this point of view. In addition there is the possibility that the Śaṅkaradeva's model for rural economic development would get universal acceptance. Similarly, the present study is

also important to explore if there is any scope to take his economic philosophy to the global arena.

1.2: Research Problem

Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement means the Vaishnava Movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva in North-East India in medieval period. It was a part of the Great *Bhakti* Movement of India which lasted for five centuries starting from the devotional cult of Alvars in Tamilnadu. However, Śaṅkaradeva did not remain confined only in preaching devotion and ethical values. He worked hard to establish a new social order by removing all kinds of social evils like poverty, ignorance, conflicts among different ethnic groups, inequality among the people on the basis of caste etc. Similarly, he taught the people how to lead a meaningful life by providing them mental food through cultural events. Thus, the renaissance brought by Śaṅkaradeva in the medieval Assamese society could be termed as Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement.

Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement affected the economy of Assam. During the time of Śaṅkaradeva the economy was unorganized in shape and dominated by low demand and low incentive to expand. The people were following only the subsistence economy due to dominance of barter system and lack of markets for their products. Although agriculture was the mainstay of the people but commercialization of agriculture was very limited. Similarly, the other professions like goldsmith, pottery, blacksmith, weaving, silk weaver, carpenter, tailor, oil-crashers, brass metal maker etc. were facing the problem of limited demand for their products. The reformatory activities undertaken by Śaṅkaradeva through his *Bhakti* Movement had directly

impacted the then economy. He always utilized the locally available materials and goods for his religious, cultural and literary activities which was a boost to the local economy. The cottage industries were benefited from his movement. Demand for various items like earthen lamps, vessels, brass and bell metal items, utensils made of bamboo and cane, wood craft products, textile articles etc. expanded with the spread of his religious activities. The growing activities of drama boosted the demand for certain items of cottage industry like musical instruments, masks, artificial weapons made either from wood or bamboo, make-up items etc. Similarly, the introduction of the system of distributing *Prasāda* after *Nāma-Kīrttana* increased the demand for as well as production of local agricultural commodities. Because in the *Prasāda*, Śaṅkaradeva included locally available commodities like pulses, ginger, rice, available seasonal fruits, sugarcane, coconut etc.

Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement also impacted the human resource development of the region. He emphasized on skill development. He strictly prohibited begging by his disciples. In his religious faith the devotees had to adopt one vocation as livelihood so that he did not become a burden on others. The senior devotees of the *Thān* or *Satra*, who were expert on different skills imparted their skills on the juniors. Besides, Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement created a literary opportunity to the people at the grass root level. The rural masses who were deprived for ages from the knowledge of the scriptures could learn the contents of those scriptures simply by listening to his compositions (*Kīrttana*) or watching the dramas composed by Śaṅkaradeva. To encourage the reading and writing habit of the disciples he distributed his numerous writings among them. After the prayer in the morning,

Śaṅkaradeva sat with the disciples for hours to discourse the religious and deep philosophical matters with them. The people could meet their queries through question and answer. The disciples had to undertake reading and writing as they were required to memorize the dialogue to act in drama. Similarly, Śaṅkaradeva worked hard to improve the character of his followers. He tried to develop the values like discipline, self control, truthfulness, sincerity, non-violence, fraternity, equality, love, sacrifice, service to society etc. among the disciples. He did not approve the livelihood associated with violence to others and killing of animals. He taught his disciples to value all the living creatures and trees as self; which helped in protecting the biodiversity.

In brief, Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement had the impact on the economy of Assam, particularly on the rural economy. It affected the production level of the economy. It also affected the productivity and employment opportunities of the people. The present study tries to analyze the impact of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement in different aspects on the rural economy of Assam.

1.3: Conceptual Framework

Different concepts used in the present study are—

- (1) 'Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement' means the medieval Vaishnava movement in North-East India which was initiated by Śaṅkaradeva.
- (2) 'Rural economy' means the economic framework of the rural areas.
- (3) 'Cottage industry' means small scale industry that is carried on at home by family members using simple equipment.

- (4) '*Thān*' means the socio-religious institutions in Assam established by Śaṅkaradeva.
- (5) '*Satra*' means the socio-religious institutions established by the followers of Śaṅkaradeva taking the model of *Thān*
- (6) '*Nāmghar*' means a prayer hall cum community meeting place designed by Śaṅkaradeva.
- (7) 'Big-push' means the concept of economic development that argues for development of an economy various sectors should expand together, so that each provides markets for the others.
- (8) 'Feudalism' means the land holding system of medieval period where all land were hold by one person and the peasants worked for him. The landlord ruled over the subjects tenants.
- (9) 'Economic thought' means the views of person on various economic aspects.
- (10) 'Human Resource Development' means the process of imparting knowledge, education and skill to human being so that they become productive resource.
- (11) 'Human Development Index' means the composite measure of health, education and income that was introduced in the first Human Development Report in 1990 as an alternative to purely economic assessments of national progress, such as GDP growth.
- (12) 'Life Expectancy at Birth' means number of years a newborn infant could expect to live.
- (13) 'Mean Years of Schooling' means the spent years by a 25 years or older person in school.

- (14) ‘Expected Years of Schooling’ means years that is to be spent by a 5 year old boy in school in a particular country.
- (15) ‘Vaiṣṇava’ mean the devotees of Lord Viṣṇu, who worship him through devotion only by discarding elaborate rituals.
- (16) ‘Performing Arts’ means the forms of creative activity that are performed in front of an audience, such as drama, music and dance.
- (17) ‘*Prasāda*’ means the agricultural commodities offered to God in *EŚHND* before *nāma-kīrttana* is conducted which are distributed among the devotees to eat later on.
- (18) ‘*Nāma-Kīrttana*’ means chanting and listening the attributes of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- (19) ‘*Aṅkiyā Nāṭa*’ means the dramas composed by Śaṅkaradeva.
- (20) ‘*Bhāonā*’ means the staging or enactment of the *Aṅkiyā Nāṭa*.
- (21) ‘*Bargīta*’ means the devotional lyrics composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Madhavadeva in *Brajāvalī* language.
- (22) ‘*Bhaṭimās*’ means a class of Vaiṣṇava lyric in *Brajāvalī*, initiated by Śaṅkaradeva, which is a song with a devotional tone, eulogizing God or a person of high rank.
- (23) ‘*Doul Utsava*’ means the Holi festival in Assam introduced by Śaṅkaradeva.
- (24) ‘*Sākta*’ means the worshiper of Goddess Durga.
- (25) ‘*Karkhānā*’ means an establishment where thread or cloths were manufactured.
- (26) ‘Agricultural Economy’ means the local rural economy based on agricultural activities.
- (27) ‘Commercialization of Agriculture’ means that the farmers produce agricultural commodities for sale in the market instead of producing for their own consumption.

(28) ‘Śaṅkarī Villages’ means the villages where majority of the people follows Śaṅkaradeva’s religious philosophy.

(29) ‘Non-Śaṅkarī Villages’ means the villages with no followers of Śaṅkaradeva’s religious philosophy.

1.4: Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows—

1. To analyze the impact of Śaṅkaradeva’s *Bhakti* Movement on the agricultural economy of Assam.
2. To study the impact of Śaṅkaradeva’s *Bhakti* Movement on the cottage industry vis-à-vis the rural economy of Assam
3. To study the impact of Śaṅkaradeva’s *Bhakti* Movement on the economic benefits of Śaṅkarī performing arts, paintings etc. vis-à-vis the economy of Assam.
4. To find the impact of Śaṅkaradeva’s *Bhakti* Movement on the Human Resource Development vis-à-vis the economy of Assam.
5. To trace out the economic thoughts of Śaṅkaradeva.

1.5: Hypotheses

- a. Śaṅkaradeva’s *Bhakti* Movement positively affected the agricultural economy of Assam.
- b. Śaṅkaradeva’s *Bhakti* Movement favourably impacted the cottage industry vis-à-vis the rural economy of Assam.

- c. The impacts of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement on the economic benefits of Śaṅkarī performing arts, paintings etc. vis-à-vis the economy of Assam still continues.
- d. Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement does not lead to the Human Resource Development of Assam.
- e. Śaṅkaradeva had views on various economic aspects and those views are not relevant in the light of present economic situations.

1.6: Areas of Research

To achieve the objectives the present study focuses on the following areas—

1.6.1: Impact on Agricultural Economy: The economy of Assam is mainly agrarian. Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement caused some impact on the agricultural economy of Assam. From the hagiographies it is found that Śaṅkaradeva himself was involved in cultivation and encouraged others to do so. To analyze the impact of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement on the agricultural economy of Assam, the present study tried to find whether he introduced any improved method of cultivation, whether his religious activities increased the demand for indigenous agricultural commodities, whether he undertook any project to control flood, whether he encouraged the commercialization of agricultural commodities, whether he gave importance on animal husbandry and what are the impacts of present religious activities of Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy on agricultural economy.

1.6.2: Impact on Cottage Industry: Due to Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement the cottage industry of Assam got an incentive to expand. To know the impact of

Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement on the cottage industry vis-à-vis the rural economy of Assam, the present study aimed to find how Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement boosted the cottage industry in Assam, what were the industries affected, how the people associated with those cottage industries were benefited, what are the industries still survive.

1.6.3: Economic Impact on Performing Arts, Paintings etc: To spread his *EŚHND*, Śaṅkaradeva extensively used performing arts like *Ankiyā Nāṭa*, *Bargīta* etc. and paintings. Those activities had bearing with the rural economy of Assam. To know the economic impact of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement on the performing arts, paintings vis-à-vis the economy of Assam the present study aimed to find whether Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement encouraged those activities, whether those activities provided livelihood to some people, is the tradition still continues and what is its present impact on the rural economy.

1.6.4: Impact on Human Resource Development: Śaṅkaradeva emphasized on human resource development. The present study aimed to find what were Śaṅkaradeva's views on human resource, how Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement helped the process of human resource development in Assam, whether the process of human resource development contributed to the economy of Assam, what is the present scenario of human development of Assam, whether the villages with no followers of Śaṅkaradeva's religious philosophy has less human development than Śaṅkarī villages.

1.6.5: Economic Thoughts of Śaṅkaradeva: Śaṅkaradeva expressed his views on various economic aspects which were reflected in his works or had been recorded in

the hagiographies. The present study aimed to know the economic philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva, the economic practices of Śaṅkaradeva and the relevance of Śaṅkaradeva's Economic thoughts in present time.

1.7: Profile of the Study Area

Nagaon and Morigaon districts are located in central Assam. The Morigaon was separated from Nagaon as a district in 1989. The area of Nagaon district is 3993 sq. km. Total population of the district was 18,94,788 according to 2011 census, of this 50.96 percent were male. The literacy rate of the district was 72.37 percent (male-76.51%, female-68.07%). The sex ratio of the district is 962 while density is 711 per sq. km. Agriculture provided livelihood to 78% of the total population. The fishery plays important role in the economy of the district which accounts 9 percent of the total fish production of Assam.

Morigaon is one of the most economically backward districts of the state. In the district 80.21 % of the rural people are forced to live below poverty line. In fact the district was declared by the Government of India in 2006 as one of the country's 250 most backward districts out of total 640 districts. The Morigaon district occupies an area of 1,550 sq. km and has a population of 9.57 lakh (as on 2011) of which males and females are 485,328 and 472,525 respectively. It means Morigaon has the highest sex ratio in Assam. The sex ratio of the district is 974 as against 954 of Assam. Agriculture is the mainstay of the district. As high as 95percent of the rural households and 72.26 percent rural workers depend on agriculture. Sector wise contribution to the GDP of Morigaon was like this—primary 31.38 %, secondary 11.74 % and tertiary

56.42 %. According to the 2011 census data the literacy rate of the district is only 59.37 percent (male-73.66%, female-64.99%).

1.8: Methodology

In this study the descriptive method is used. To fulfill the objectives of the study both primary and secondary data were used. To gather the secondary information various books, hagiographies, previous research works in the form of thesis and articles in different journals were consulted. Web materials were also used. For collecting the information several libraries and educational institutions were visited. The primary data were collected from two sources— Śaṅkaradeva's own compositions and field survey. Informations were gathered from Śaṅkaradeva's compositions, viz. the *Kīrttana*, *Bhāgavata*, *Uttarā Kāṇḍa* of *Rāmāyana*, *Bargīta*, *Aṅkīyā Nāṭa*, *Kāvya* and the theological and cosmological works. The field survey involved the following steps—

1) **Selection of the District:** Nagaon and Morigaon districts of Assam were purposively selected for the investigation, on the basis of following criteria-

- Bordowa, the birth place of Śaṅkaradeva belongs to Nagaon district and till now there are large numbers of followers of his religious philosophy and there are proofs of the works/activities of Śaṅkaradeva at Bordowa.
- Morigaon is one of the least developed districts of the country. So, attempt is made to see whether the economic backwardness of the district has any correlation with the practices of Śaṅkaradeva's religious philosophy.

2) **Sampling Design:** For the study six villages from each district were selected. Out of six villages three were Śāṅkarī village i.e, the villages where most of the people practices of Śāṅkaradeva's religious philosophy and other three were non-Śāṅkarī villages.

3) **Selection of the Respondents:** The preliminary unit of observation was the households. Respondents constituted Śāṅkarī religious leaders, artisans, farmers, painters, actors, dancers, businessmen etc.

4) **Delimitation of the Study:** Study was delimited to Nagaon and Morigaon districts only.

5) **Collection of Data:** For data collection interview schedule was used by the researcher. The researcher personally conducted interview with the respondents to collect the data.

6) **Analysis of the Data:** The data so collected were tabulated, analyzed statistically by using simple averages and percentages, and interpreted to draw the conclusions.

1.9: Chapterization

The present study is divided into seven chapters keeping in view of the objectives of the study.

The first chapter introduces the present study with research problem, significance of the study and conceptual framework. It also deals with objectives of the study, hypothesis, different areas of the study, profile of Nagaon and Morigaon districts, methodology and a gist of the chapters incorporated in the thesis

The second chapter deals with the review of literature. Literature were reviewed in two categories— *Carita Puthi* (hagiographies) and modern work on Śaṅkaradeva and his *Bhakti* Movement

In the third chapter, life of Śaṅkaradeva and the contemporary economic background are discussed. Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement, socio-economic background of the movement and economic aspects of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement are also dealt in the chapter.

The fourth chapter tries to analyze Śaṅkaradeva's views on various economic aspects as recorded in his compositions and hagiographies, economic practices done by him and relevance of his economic thoughts in present time.

The fifth chapter discusses about the impact of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement on the human resource development of Assam, his views on human resources and the present scenario of human resource development of Assam.

The sixth chapter analyzes the impact of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement on the rural economy of Assam. In the chapter, primary data collected from Nagaon and Morigaon districts have been analyzed to show the impact of Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti* Movement on agricultural economy, cottage industry, performing artists and painters of the two districts. Discussions have been made and based on that hypotheses have been tested.

The concluding chapter provides a chapter wise summary of the whole research work. It also highlights the findings of the study and put forward some suggestions.

