

## CHAPTER – VI

### EDUCATIONAL CONTRIBUTION OF ŚAṆKARADEVA

#### 6.1 Introduction :

Śaṅkaradeva a great genius and a pragmatic idealist of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Assam. Śaṅkaradeva has recognized the merit of mystical intuitionism from the pragmatic standpoint. Śaṅkaradeva is an ardent follower of integral knowledge. Here he is using certain terms in specific sense. “Śaṅkaradeva had the prenotation of ‘mereological fallacy’ of Maxwell Benett and Peter Hacker, the neuro-scientists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For he never treated intuition as a partial physical power. Like the traditional Indian idealists, he treated intuition as the highest power which played a significant role in the experience of integral knowledge. Śaṅkaradeva could prophecy some of the significant teachings of ‘Ethical Intuitionism’ of G.E. Moore, Charlie Broad, David Ross, Alfred Ewing and Immanuel Kant. He did recognize the merit of intuition in discovering moral truths”.<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.2 Educational Thinking of Śaṅkaradeva :

The word devotion or love has been treated in a multi-connotative sense in Śaṅkaradeva’s thought. Devotion or love is not mere “*Bhakti*” of traditional *Vaiṣṇavism*. In the true sense devotion must be accompanied by knowledge. Devotion without knowledge or knowledge without devotion prove to be meaningless. Śaṅkaradeva says as –

*bhakti bihin jñāna yoga jiyane achare,  
nahi eko phal micha duhkha kari more.*<sup>2</sup>

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1 Sharma , Nilima (2017). *Rethinking Śaṅkaradeva’s Philosophy in the 21st Century*, p. 35.

2 *Kīrtanaa-Ghoṣā*, Sisulila, v, 675

Selfless devotion gives rise to knowledge. Devotion in the sense of selfless dedication gives rise to knowledge of higher order. It has the capacity of attaining the highest state of omniscience<sup>3</sup>. As a whole devotion consists of selfless service to mankind. A mere achievement of theoretical knowledge is not signified by devotion. Devotion comprehend the *Niskāma Karma* of the *Bhāgavadgītā*. Therefore it is free from all kinds of earthly evils. Devotion signifies integral experience, comprehending the positive aspects of sense experience, intellect and intuition. Śaṅkaradeva emphasis on *Sravana* is signifying the merit of perceptual knowledge. Śaṅkaradeva is putting importance equally on the testimonial knowledge which is derived from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavadgītā*, *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads*.

Śaṅkaradeva proclaimed before Hegel, James and Bradley that intuition is a source of the apprehension of truth and reality. In a Spinozistic manner, prior to spinoza, Śaṅkaradeva announced that intuition is an ‘immediate union with the thing itself’. Intuition is direct, immediate and self evident. The sponacity of intuition is made possible by selfless devotion or *Niskama Bhakti*. Intuition is Supra-sensual and trans-empirical. Intellect being indirect and mediate can provide us with only degrees of knowledge. It is progressive in the sense that it advances through arguments. As it is not free from errors, it cannot yield highest knowledge of truth.<sup>4</sup> Śaṅkaradeva says,

*nānā tarka bitarka grahane bhayaṁkara* <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Śrīmadbhāgavata*. X.v. 10986

<sup>4</sup> Sharma, Nilima. (2017). *Rethinking Śaṅkaradeva’s Philosophy in the 21st Century*, p-36

<sup>5</sup> *Śrīmadbhāgavata*. XI. v. 17959

Reasoning cannot realize the highest truth known as *Brāhmaṇa* as because it is dichotomous. Even the highest degree of intellect is insufficient of knowing *Brāhmaṇa*. In the medieval time, Śaṅkaradeva could forecast many of the views of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian philosophers : (i) Intuition is self-revealing. (ii) Intuition is subjective and leads to liberation (iii) Intuition is a higher level of experience as Mohammad Iqbal observed.

Śaṅkaradeva uses the word faith in the sense of intuitive knowledge. Śaṅkaradeva employs faith much before Kant, Alexander, Keirkegaard, Fichte, Jacobi. The faith was not employed in a dogmatic sense. It is a spiritual insight.

Śaṅkaradeva's cognitive thought works as a comprehensive process where sense experience has its significant role to play. Although it is immediate and direct, it is not self-sufficient to know the truth as it is not free from errors. Likewise intellect or reason promotes progressive knowledge which is partially true and not completely free from errors. It is *Nirguṇa jñāna* or *Maha-jñāna* or *Param-jñāna* or *Vaiṣṇava-jñāna* or intuitive knowledge or *Antah-prajna* which identifies itself with Kṛṣṇa or Super Nature and becomes completely free from all blemishes.<sup>6</sup> As Śaṅkaradeva stated –

*bhaktira bale jñāna labhila nirguṇa.*<sup>7</sup>

Each is *Brāhmaṇa*, the non-dual ultimate principle. There remains no difference between God, world and man. Śaṅkaradeva invites each and every individual of the society to realize, cultivate and promote spiritual harmony in this world. Because harmony is in all sections of beings-living and non-living is indispensable.<sup>8</sup>

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6 Sharma, Nilima. (2017). *Rethinking Śaṅkaradeva's Philosophy in the 21st Century*, p- 37

7 *Kīrttana-Ghoṣā*, v. 1956

8 Chaudhury, Parul. (2013). *The Concept of Puruṣa, Prakṛti and Lila in Śaṅkaradeva's Philosophy*, p. 293

It is the moral duty of everyone to promote equality and altruistic love for the welfare of all. Śaṅkaradeva says -

*brāhmaṇara cāṇḍālara nibicāri kula /*

*dātāta corata yena dṛṣṭi ekatula. //*

*nīcata sādḥuta yāra bhaila ekajñāna /*

*tahakese paṇḍita buliyā sarvvajana. //*<sup>9</sup>

“Observing no caste distinction between *Brāhmaṇa* and *Candala*, paying equal attention to both the donors and the robbers, imbibing the spirit of same regards to the pious and the mean the wise receives applause from all”.

“Śaṅkaradeva stresses upon the control of non-moral actions which are causes of crime, greed, anger, suffering etc. Śaṅkaradeva ascribes the source of all non moral actions to the mind, the *citta* and its ignorance. Like Buddha, Śaṅkaradeva also says that God is not responsible for man’s non moral actions or other miseries, sorrows and sufferings. Man has the freedom of will the choice to do good or bad. Therefore only mind and its mental states are responsible for our actions”<sup>10</sup>

Śaṅkaradeva has given an illustration from the *Bhāgavata* “Addressing Uddhava, Kṛṣṇa said that – He who desires to escape the sufferings for his past actions must first of all take the company of *Vaiṣṇava*. From *Vaiṣṇavas* he will hear my glories and he must sing my glories all the time. He must carefully think of my form in his

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9 *Kīrtana-Ghoṣā*. v. 1821

10 Chadhury, Parul. (2013). *The Concept of Puruṣa Prakṛiti and Lila in Śaṅkaradeva’s Philosophy*, p. 294

heart. He who sings and dances declaring my glory will have no fear and is sure to be sanctified”.<sup>11</sup>

### 6.2.1 Śaṅkaradeva's Views on Aim of Education :

Śaṅkaradeva observed that the function of education is to correct thinking and awaken the mind of the pupil to realize and mould his true nature. To promote self-realization is the objective of education. Jacques Maritain has said in his well known treatise on education, 'Education at the crossroads' - "The chief task of education is above all to shape man, or to guide the evolving dynamism through which man forms himself as a man"<sup>12</sup> Śaṅkaradeva stressed the dynamic role of the pupil in education. The concrete individual is one, - he is at once intellect, will, feeling and actor. Hence in education, it is a mistake to separate intellectual education from moral and moral education from social. The function of education is to bring about social development of the individual. The self-activity of the pupil is a major principle of education.

Froebel, Pestalozzi and Col. Francis Parker also put emphasis on the activity centred education Aristotle says. – "... Men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre ; so we do we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts". Education teaches man to realize the truth that unity always lies in diversity. Seeing unity in diversity man can feel the presence of all pervading universal self. The universal self is true, good and beautiful.<sup>13</sup>

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11 Kīrtana-Ghoṣā, v. 1818-1819

12 Sharma, Nilima, (2017). *Rethinking Śaṅkaradeva's Philosophy in the 21st Century*, pp 58-59

13 Ibid., pp. 58-59

Both formal and informal education was imparted to the mass people by Śaṅkaradeva in the 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century Assam. The *Nāmghar* and *Śaṅkari* Institutions of Śaṅkaradeva played an important and crucial role in this regard. The aim of education of Śaṅkaradeva may be point out as follows :-

**(i) Moral aim of education :** The universally accepted conduct of right living has been extolled and vices have been deprecated in innumerable passage of Śaṅkaradeva's writings. These moral qualities are truthfulness, kindness, temperance, hospitality, patience, contentment, control over passions, purity of heart, indifference to worldly pleasure etc. The universal quality was conceived by Śaṅkaradeva. These are expressed in the following verses in *Kīrtana Ghōṣā*.

*kukura śrgāla gardhabhara ātmārama*

*jāniya savāko pari karibā praṇama*

*samasta bhutara ātma budhi nohe jave*

*kāya-vākya mane abhyāsibā ehi bhāve.*<sup>14</sup>

(Even the souls of dogs, foxes, asses are verily God, considering this in mind they should be saluted.)

The discipline life of an individual helps to control the social life to a great extent. Sometimes some situation arises when man suffers from many anxieties. In such cases one is prone to commit acts that may be injurious to society. Keeping this type of situation in mind Śaṅkaradeva self control : (*kariyo manaka baishya vidura samprati*). Śaṅkaradeva always gave greater importance to human values keeping in

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14 *Kīrtana-Ghōṣā*. v. 1823

mind the kindness, love, benevolence, legal sanction etc. Love, kindness to the weak, help to the distressed etc. are equally emphasized by one who is closely related to the human values. Śaṅkaradeva tried throughout his life to elevate good deeds to status of social prestige. Such preaching are found in many occasions in his writings:

*jagatara punyā mane jānā nistā kari*

*praṇi upakāra alpako nuhi hari* <sup>15</sup>

(At the animals should be help and well protected considering them to be the souls of God)

Truth and non-violence are treated at social and individual level by Śaṅkaradeva. Truth is the essence of all actions. It may be individual, social or economic:

Śaṅkaradeva stressed the need of moral purity in daily life for a healthy society. Śaṅkaradeva always advised the people to keep away from greed, falsehood, desire, anger etc. and to live on truth, non-violence and self-discipline etc.

**(ii) Spiritual aim of education:** Śaṅkaradeva has a profound belief in God. He preached a common religion to the whole world i.e. *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* irrespective of caste, creed and religion which means surrender to the Supreme *Brahma*, i.e. Basudeva or Kṛṣṇa. Thus Kṛṣṇa said in *Bhakti Pradīpa* -

*eka cite tumi moka mātra karā seva*

*pariharā durate yetaka āna deva //*

*huyoka saranāpanna eka mote mātra*

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15 Chutia, S. and others (1998). *Mahapurusha Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vakyamrita*, p. 817

*moke bhaji huiba moha muktira pātra*  
*nāma nusunibā tumi āna devatāra*  
*yena mate nuhike bhakti vyabhicāra*  
*pāibā mohāmokhya sukhe mohoro sevāto*  
*tumi mohāmitra jāni kahilo tomāta //* <sup>16</sup>

(Devote yourself to me with a single mind, forsake from a distance from all other gods, surrender yourself to me alone, devote to me, then you will be fit for salvation. Never listen to names of other gods, that your devotion may remain unsullied)

Śaṅkaradeva believed that if Kṛṣṇa is worshiped then all other gods are worshiped. Śaṅkaradeva says – “as the branches, leaves and foliage of a tree are nourished by pouring water at the root of the tree, all god and goddesses are propiciated by the worship of Kṛṣṇa”. Śaṅkaradeva also cited nine mode of practicing devotion which are, *Śravaṇa*, *Kīrttana*, *Smarana*, *Pādasevana*, *Arcana*, *Vandana*, *Dāśya*, *Sakhya* and *Ātmanivedana*. Śaṅkaradeva considers *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrttana* as the best out of all these nine. In Śaṅkaradeva’s word –

*śravaṇa, kīrttana*                      *smarana viṣṇura*  
*arcana pādasevana*  
*dāśya sakhitva*                      *vandana viṣṇuta*  
*karibā deha arpana* <sup>17</sup>

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16 *Bhakti-Pradīpa*. vv.100-102

17 *Kīrttana-Ghoṣā. Prahlād Carita*. v. 340





(A *Caṇḍāla* who remembers God with the heart and soul is superior to *Brāhmaṇa* observing religious vows)

**(iv) Vocational aim of education :** Śaṅkaradeva always emphasized on the vocational aim of education. Śaṅkaradeva realized that vocational education can give better livelihood of life and can make one economically self-sufficient. The devotees affiliated to a particular *Nāmghar*, *Thān*, and *Śaṅkari* Institutions are encouraged to take up some vocational occupation. The older members of the *Śaṅkari* Institutions traditionally impart the vocation who are expert in a particular vocation. Such vocation usually includes handicraft like wood curving, cane and bamboo work, mask making, different types of paintings, illustration of manuscript, sancipat preparation, use of natural dye-hengul haital. In this way Śaṅkaradeva developed a class of people known as *Khanikar* who is professionally expert in the activities of curving miniature wooden images. So the *Śaṅkari* Institutions have become facilitator for self-employment among the local masses.

**(v) All round development aim of education :** Śaṅkaradeva gave much importance for all round development. He always thought for physical, mental and spiritual development of individual. For physical development Śaṅkaradeva encouraged his disciple to practice *yoga*. By means of practicing *pranayama* Śaṅkaradeva advised his disciple for self control. Śaṅkaradeva emphasized on the mental development. For this reason Śaṅkaradeva composed a number of songs and drama (*Aṅkīyā Nāṭa & Bargīt*) for entertainment of the people. Śaṅkaradeva composed 240 numbers of *Bargīts* out of which only 34 were rescued and others were burn by fire. He also composed six numbers of dramas or *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas*. The cultural programme including songs and

drama was performed in the *Nāmghar* and *Śaṅkari* Institutions for public entertainment. For spiritual development of individual Śaṅkaradeva preached *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* for the entire human races irrespective of caste, creed and religion. The compulsion of supreme surrender to one is expressed in the words of Lord Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna -

*huyoka śaranāpanna eka mot mātra*

*moka bhaji huiba moha mukutira pātra //*<sup>20</sup>

(surrender yourself to me alone, Devote to me, then will be fit for salvation)

#### 6.2.2. Śaṅkaradeva's views on Method of Teaching :

Śaṅkaradeva was an eminent scholar and a profound dedicated teacher for the society. Śaṅkaradeva introduced some important methods of teaching for the mass education. These methods are appreciated and adopted by the modern educationist. These methods are:-

**(i) Group discussion method :** For mass education Śaṅkaradeva introduced the question-answer technique and group discussion method. The illiterate common people of the villages came to *Nāmghar* and *Śaṅkari* Institutions for their daily religious and social activities. The common people take part in the discussion of various topics. For the clarification of their ideas people put questions and the learned person discuss the matter in general and try to remove the doubts and difficulties from the minds of the people. This type of discussion drew the attention of the common people and enjoyed the peaceful living environment.

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<sup>20</sup> *Bhakti-Pradipa. v.101*

**(ii) Play way method :** Śaṅkaradeva introduced the play way method of teaching. The introduction of plays i.e. *Aṅkīyā Bhāṇā* made the teaching – learning condition suitable and easier. This method paved the way for public gathering and community enjoyment through which Śaṅkaradeva gave the social, moral and spiritual education to the common masses. This method, technique and device are effective scientific and most relevant in the modern world education.

**(iii) Learning by doing method :** The activity principle of teaching-learning was appreciated by Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva introduced this type of learning by doing method in the 15<sup>th</sup> century through drum beating (*Khola*) with different *mudras* and gestures. The various forms of dances was introduced by Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva's painting works drew the attention of the common people. It developed the spirit of self-service. The *Bhakta's* were trained on various vocational activities like mask making, cane and bamboo works, handy craft, painting and wood curving etc.

### 6.2.3. Śaṅkaradeva's views on Curriculum of Teaching :

The subject included in the curriculum of teaching by Śaṅkaradeva were –

- Mother tongue (*Brajāvalī*, Sanskrit and Assamese)
- Ancient lore and scriptures (The *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣadas*, the *Purāṇas*, the *Saṁhitās*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, *Vyākaraṇa*, *Nyāya-śāstra*, *Kāvya*s, Philosophy, Psychology, *Yoga*, Moral education and Vocational education including handy craft, drawing and painting, music, dramatization, dancing and cottage industry).

The learning of three languages viz Assamese, *Brajāvalī* and Sanskrit were emphasized by Śaṅkaradeva. The common people were not conversant in Sanskrit, the language of the higher educated ruling class. Śaṅkaradeva developed a language which was easily understandable and accessible. Śaṅkaradeva included the *Purāṇas*, *Tantras* and *Samhitā* as subjects of teaching in order to provide the knowledge of moral education. The knowledge of the *Vyākaraṇa* was imparted to the devotees for composing variety of *Vaiṣṇavite* literatures in addition to the teaching of various ancient scriptures. Śaṅkaradeva included *yoga* in the curriculum of teaching. Śaṅkaradeva realized that healthy body and a strong mind both are essential in one's life. One can control one's desires and aspiration through *yoga*. One can remove ignorance and achieve glimpse of God through *yoga*.

### 6.3 Literary Contribution of Śaṅkaradeva :

Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568), the greatest spiritual leader and social reformer was also the leader of a great literary and cultural renaissance of Assam. As a matter of fact with the rise of the *Neo-Vaiṣṇavite Bhakti* movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva the Assamese literature came into prominence. The spiritual and social upsurge under Śaṅkaradeva did not end only in preaching and teaching. For the spread of the new message of religion and ethics, Śaṅkaradeva made systematic attempt through the media of literature, music, art and drama and thereby ushered in a golden age in Assamese literature and culture.

Śaṅkaradeva in order to propagate his religious doctrines began composing literary works, poems and dramas. He had translated *Bhāgavata*. This was the starting

point of enthusiasm and inspiration for Assamese literature. Śaṅkaradeva's intelligence is evident in the poem *Harischandra Upākhyāna* which was composed when he was in his teens.

a) Poetic works (*Kāvya*)

- i) *Hariśchandra-Upākhyāna* (*Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa*)
- ii) *Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa* (*Harivaṃsa. Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*)
- iii) *Ajāmil-Upākhyāna* (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Book VI*)
- iv) *Bali-Chalana*. (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Book VIII*)
- v) *Kurukshetra-Kāvya*. (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Book X*)
- vi) *Amṛt-Manthana* (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Book VIII*)

b) (i) *Kīrtanaa-Ghoṣā* (mainly *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*)

- ii) *Guṇamālā* (*Quintessence of Bhāgavata Purāṇa*)

c) *Bhakti* Theory (Doctrinal treatise)

- i) *Bhakti-Pradīpa*
- ii) *Anādi Pātana* (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Book II. III. V. XI. XII*)
- iii) *Nimi-navasiddha-Sambāda*. (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Book XI*)
- iv) *Bhakti-Ratnākara* [(in Sanskrit) *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other sources]

d) Transliteration (Renderings from Sanskrit Text)

- i) *Bhāgavat* Book I. II. X (1<sup>st</sup> Part). XI. XII
- ii) *Rāmāyaṇa. Uttarakāṇḍa* (Valmiki-Rāmāyaṇa. the final book)

Śaṅkaradeva's translation of the *Bhāgavata* is actually a transcreation, because he translates not just the words but the idiom and the physiognomy too. He has adapted the original text to the local land and people and most importantly for the purpose of *Bhakti*.

e) Drama (*Aṅkīyā Nāṭa*)

i) *Patni-Prasāda*

ii) *Kālīa-Damona*

iii) *Keli-Gopāla*

iv) *Rukmiṇī-Harana*

v) *Pārijāt-Harana*

vi) *Śrīrāma-Vijaya*

Śaṅkaradeva was the fountain head of the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭa*, a form of one act play. In fact, his *Cihnayātrā* staged by him when he was only 19 years old is regarded as one of the first open-air theatrical performances in the world. *Cihnayātrā* was probably a dance drama and not text of that show is available today. Innovations like the presence of a *Sūtradhāra* on the stage, use of masks etc were used later in the plays of Bertolt Brecht and other eminent play wrights. These cultural traditions still form an integral part of the heritage of the Assamese people.

f) Songs (Lyrics)

i) *Bargīt* (composed 240 but only 34 exist now)

ii) *Bhatimās* (Panegyrics, total-21)

a) *Deva Bhatimā*- Panegyrics to God

b) *Nāṭ Bhatimā* - for use in dramas

c) *Rāj Bhatimā* - Panegyrics to kings (to king Nara Nārāyaṇa)

iii) *Totaya* (a prayer song in Sanskrit in Totaka-meter)

The *Bargīts* (literally great songs) are devotional songs, set to music and sung in various *rāga* style. These styles are slightly different from either the *Hindustānī* or the *Carnatic* styles. The songs themselves are written in the *Brajāvalī* language.

g) Dance

*Śaṅkarī* dance that Śaṅkaradeva first conceived and developed and which was later preserved for centuries by the *Nāmghar*, *Thān* and *Śaṅkari* Institutions is now among the classical dance forms of India.

h) Visual Art

i) *Sapta -Vaikuṇṭha* -part of the *Cinḥayātrā* production does not exist today.

ii) *Vṛndāvanī - Vastra* - parts of this work are preserved in London.

### 6.3.1 Literature as a Means of Education :

Śaṅkaradeva was a versatile genius and a prolific writer. He built up a very rich literary tradition by composing thousands of verses original and translation, *Kāvya*s, doctrinal treatise, songs and dramas. Though well-versed in Sanskrit and compiled his



doctrinal work *Bhakti-Ratnākara* and composed some songs and *śloka*s in that language Śaṅkaradeva choose for his work language of the masses so that his message might reach the common man in the remote corners of the villages of Assam. Śaṅkaradeva wrote a large number of books in different literary forms and thereby raised the Assamese language and literature to a high level of excellence. Śaṅkaradeva's literary output is quite large and consists of a wide variety translations and adaptations, longer narratives, songs, dramas and doctrinal treatises Śaṅkaradeva's literary career may be divided into three parts corresponding to his stay in the

Bara Bhūñā territory upto	1516.
Āhom Kingdom	1516-1543
Koch Kingdom	1543-1568

Śaṅkaradeva's *Hariśchandra Upakhyana* with its story taken from the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, is considered to be the earliest work of the saint. It is also the first work in which Śaṅkaradeva indicated the teachings of his cult in broad outlines and fixed the four corner posts of *Bhakti* i.e. *Guru*, *Deva*, *Nāma* and *Bhakat* which are the four cardinal principles of Assam *Vaiṣṇavism*.

Śaṅkaradeva's *Rukmiṇī-Harana kāvya* is one of the most popular works in all Assamese literature. Based on *Harivaṃsa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* this *kāvya* is almost like an original work breathing the atmosphere of social life in Assam. Śaṅkaradeva introduces some variations in the story and adds scenes of common domestic experience which transforms the puranic story into a narrative of popular experience.

Śaṅkaradeva's *Kīrttana-Ghoṣā* is one of the most important books of Assam *Vaiṣṇavism*. Based mainly on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* each section of the *Kīrttana-Ghoṣā* contains several *Kīrttana* songs each relating a story. The message of *Bhakti* is here brought home to the commonest reader in extreme simplicity and felicity of diction. In the *Haramohan* section of the book through Śiva's prayer to Lord Kṛṣṇa the author has expressed the fundamental teachings of his *Vedāntic* philosophy.

The *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* has been exerting tremendous influence on the religious literature of India through the centuries. Śaṅkaradeva's translation of the *Purāṇa* into Assamese marks a new era in the history of Assamese poetry. The translation is not literal and contains explanatory passages where ever necessary. Assamese version of the *Purāṇa* may, therefore be called both a text and a commentary on the original.

Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhāgavata* I gives a running summary of the first books of the *Purāṇa*. Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhāgavata* II is a scrappy analysis of the contents of the original. His *Anādi Pātana* adapted from book III of the *Bhāgavata* is one of the important works giving his views on cosmology and cosmogony, philosophy and theology. In *Bhāgavata* VI, *Ajāmil-Upākhyāna* the main business of the poet is to hold hell's furies before our eyes and to show that the simple repetition of God's name can save us from the effect of a thousand sins. Śaṅkaradeva re-tells two stories from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* VIII in his two works *Amṛta-manthana* and *Balichalana*. The *Amṛta-manthana* describes the churning of the ocean of milk by the Gods with the help of demons. In *Balichalan* the story of Viṣṇu's dwarf incarnation is powerfully narrated.

Śaṅkaradeva's *Ādi-Daśama* or *Bhāgavata* X is another great contribution to Assamese *Bhakti* literature. It renders the pleasant tale of Kṛṣṇa's early life in lovely and glowing verses. The language is sober and fully mature. Śaṅkaradeva weaves new matter of imagination and beauty into the texture of this work. His power of description and narration is perhaps at its best in this work. Śaṅkaradeva's *Kuruksetra* is based on a few chapters of the *Uttarādhya* of the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*. The story describes the meeting of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma with Nanda, Yaśodā and the milk maids of *Vraja* in the war fields of *Kuruksetra*. Śaṅkaradeva's *Nimi-navasiddha-samvada* contains scholarly talks given by nine siddhas in reply to nine questions put by king Nimi, all the queries bearing upon *Bhakti* and *Nivṛtti mārga*.

Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhāgavata* XI narrates the passing away of Kṛṣṇa, the unbounded sorrow of Uddhava, Arjuna, the Gopies and others at the disappearance of their beloved lord and the death of the *Pāṇḍavas*. This is one of the maturest works of Śaṅkaradeva and can finely represent his mind and art, his poetical virtues and tenets of his creed. Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhāgavata* XII is a free and easy adaptation of the twelfth book of the *Purāṇa*. The philosophical passages are rendered here with much dexterity and clarity of vision. Śaṅkaradeva's *Guṇamālā* is a tiny work of 378 verses with four feet of six syllables in each verse. It gives a quick survey of Kṛṣṇa's earthly career.

Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti-Ratnākara* is a doctrinal treatise in Sanskrit. It is a compilation with commentary. It is a collection of 564 *slokas* from more than 20 sources of which the main source is the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*. This compilation is an

ample proof of Śaṅkaradeva's wide learning and analytical scholarship. It consists of 38 chapters on different topics which can be grouped into four real's or truths -

- i) The worshipful deity (*Deva*)
- ii) The celebration of the worshipful's names and attributes (*Nāma*)
- iii) The spiritual preacher (*Guru*)
- iv) The devotees (*Bhakat*)

of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* as propagated by Śaṅkaradeva. For an account of the theology and philosophy, ethics and religious doctrines of Assam *Vaiṣṇavism* in a single work, one has to turn to Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti-Ratnākara*.

### **6.3.2 *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* as a Means of Education :**

There is no other second person who is equal to Śaṅkaradeva in influencing the national life of this region of India. Śaṅkaradeva's multi-dimensional personality touched on every aspects of national life of Assam. He was a visionary personality. Śaṅkaradeva's lifelong endeavor, devotion and dedication to the cause of humanitarian uplift had universally accepted. Śaṅkaradeva can in no way be ignored as because of his relevance in the twenty first century. Śaṅkaradeva was the pioneer in the struggle for abolition of untouchability. Śaṅkaradeva wanted and succeeded in his effort to a great extent in establishing a classless society in Assam. Śaṅkaradeva succeeded in creating through his writings an emotional bonding among the diverse masses of this region as an erudite scholar, a social reformer and a great man of action. Be it social, cultural, spiritual or literary, the influence of Śaṅkaradeva's creative mind played an important

and crucial role on every aspect of Assamese life. One of his major contributions to the Assamese national life was the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas*. Śaṅkaradeva composed *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* in vernacular instead of Sanskrit. In his *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* Śaṅkaradeva enlivened with the introduction of local songs and dances.

Śaṅkaradeva realized the effectiveness of the dramatic medium in propagating his cult. He knew that nothing could serve his purpose better than the visual representation of scenes and incidents drawn from the life of *Kṛṣṇa* and *Rāma*. Therefore, he wrote plays which besides giving entertainment, acted as a powerful instrument for carrying the *Vaiṣṇava* ideals to the masses. The plays written by him are known as *Aṅkīyā Nāṭa* or *Aṅkas*. The *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas*, the staging of which is known as *Bhāonā*, exercised profound influences on the social, cultural and educational life of Assam. They helped not only the growth of popular stage, but also development of music and dance in Assam. Credit also goes to these plays for their special kind of poetry known as *Bhaṭimā* (hymns) and their contribution to the emergence of Assamese prose.<sup>21</sup>

The *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* grew mostly out of the indigenous materials. To a certain extent the influence of Sanskrit drama is also worth mentioning. *Nāṭya śāstra* of Bharat was the guiding force for Śaṅkaradeva in writing the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas*. *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* have immeasurable educative value in the process. These *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* have some elements which give these *Nāṭas* a special status in the history of the regional Indian languages. Śaṅkaradeva's *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* were not moulded on the shape of the classical Sanskrit

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21 Kalita, Biswajit. (2016). *Mahāpurusajyoti*, p. 42

play, though he was influenced by the dramas of the Sanskrit literature. Śaṅkaradeva wrote *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* with an eye to teach and preach his religion. He made an amalgam of classical and folk materials. Śaṅkaradeva borrowed from the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*, in some plays he borrowed plots from *Harivaṁśa* and *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*. *Rāma-vijaya* is based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Śaṅkaradeva was a scholar in Sanskrit literature and derived the source materials from the classical literature. Śaṅkaradeva was with the masses and sought to raise the social, spiritual and educational uplift of the most neglected section of the society. Śaṅkaradeva used the technique of folk drama and it was the most striking elements of his plays.

*Sūtradhāra*, the leading character of the play is the most important characteristic of the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas*. *Sūtradhāra*'s main function is to link the different incidents taking place in different places and at different times in the same scene. *Sūtradhāra* is a rare conception of Śaṅkaradeva as a playwright in the sense that this character has coalesced the purpose of the drama and the faith (*Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*). Śaṅkaradeva set an example of the combination for the purposes of breaching his religion and social, aesthetic and educational aspect in his dramas.

Lyricism is another characteristic of *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas*. Śaṅkaradeva begins and end his dramas with lyrics. Through lyrics Śaṅkaradeva makes his actors and actresses express their thoughts, emotions and feelings. These lyrics have got for reaching impact because of their literary values.

The use of *Brajāvalī* language is a remarkable characteristics of *Aṅkīyā Nāṭa*. For the convenience of reading and understanding of the people of outside Assam

Śaṅkaradeva used *Brajāvalī* language in his plays. *Brajāvalī* language was a lingua-franca of the different parts of India during 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century.

Lyrical prose is another characteristics of *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas*. Śaṅkaradeva was the first dramatist in India to use prose in a regional language.

Śaṅkaradeva rebelled against injustice, social inequalities, evil practices, superstitions, caste system, obstinacies and corruption of the contemporary society of the middle age. He aimed at establishing a new society based on justice, equality and fairness.<sup>22</sup>

In every play, Śaṅkaradeva's ideals have been focused. In all his plays from *Patnī-Prasāda* to *Rāma-Vijaya* Śaṅkaradeva has shown the conflict between forces of the good and evil that are into the vital of society and he did it for his great love for broad humanity.

M. Neog is silent on the non-Assamese performances, but speaks of the recitals of *kavyas*, *ojha-pali*, puppet-plays with a considerable stress on the irregular Sanskrit dramas.<sup>23</sup> Pundit T.N. Sarma opined that the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* acquired its unique form as a result of the confluence of the three fold elements early Assamese (performances), South Indian and the Sanskrit *Rūpakas* and yet they are none of them<sup>24</sup> The opinion of M. Ghosh is "But after a careful examination of its different features, it appears to be the relic of a form of drama which in all probability existed in India in the pre-historic

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22 Kalita, Biswajit. (2016). *Mahāpurusaṃyoti*, p. 45

23 Neog, M. (1965). *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times*, pp. 247-52

24 Sarma, T.N. (1989). *Panca-Puspa*, p. 125.

period of its art."<sup>25</sup> J.C. Mathur is of the opinion that the Sangitaka convention, a kind of producer's play unknown to the dramaturgists like Bharata, Viśvanātha etc. was the source of all medieval Indian dramatic works including the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas*.<sup>26</sup> K.N. Prasad Magadh, in his work *Śaṅkaradeva, Sahityakar aur Vicaraka* under the caption '*Preraṇā aur Prabhāb*' examined five tradition regarding the probable sources of the Assamese drama and finally confirms to the views of Dr. Mathur.<sup>27</sup>

S.N. Sarma elevated the similarities of the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* with the performances prevalent in from Assam to Gujarat, Ceylon to Nepal and even to some countries to the far-east along with all the probable literary sources without considering their anteriority or posteriority.<sup>28</sup>

Scholars are inclined to say that Śaṅkaradeva picked up the elements for his dramas from the semi-dramatic sources like the recital of the *Kavyas*, puppet-plays and the *ojhā-pāli* performance. The theory that Sanskrit drama originated from the *vedic* hymns, puppet-plays, shadow-plays etc. sounds proper in the context of total non-existence of a drama proper. It is crystal clear that Śaṅkaradeva was well conversant with the Sanskrit drama and dramaturgy, as he used unhesitatingly in his plays some features of the Sanskrit dramas viz- *Nāṇḍī* (the benediction), *Prarocanā* (the propitiation), *Prastāvanā* (the introduction), *Sūtradhāra* (the stage manager), *Śloka*s (the verses), *Bharata Vākyam* in the form of the *mukti-maṅgala-bhatima* (the concluding panegyrics) etc.<sup>29</sup>

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25 Ghosh, M. (1958). *Contribution to The History of Hindu Drama*, p.14

26 Magadh, K.N. Prasad. (1976). *Sahityakar aur Vicaraka*, p. 429

27 Ibid., pp. 428-35

28 Sarma, S.N. *Asamiya Natya Sahitya*, pp. 23-31

29 Bora, Suresh Chandra & Kalita Biswajit, (ed.). *Mahapurushajyoti*. p.149.



Śaṅkaradeva's contribution to dramatic art and presentation becomes all the more poignant if we assess him in the light of Indian drama tradition. The prevailing situations made Śaṅkaradeva to chose drama as an instrument for the establishment of his religion, the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. Śaṅkaradeva had a powerful drama tradition behind his back. "Śaṅkaradeva was the first dramatist of medieval India to write drama in a language that doesn't belong to any specific place or people. He wrote plays in a language that is adored by the people of a vast region comprising Assam, Bengal, Odisha, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. He wrote in a *Brajābuli* regularly dotted with Sanskrit *slokas* and *Brajābuli* songs. Sanskrit part was for the learned audience, while *Brajābuli* was for the common masses.<sup>30</sup> The formal history of Assamese drama was started with Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva's plays are described as *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas*. He never called his plays as *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas*. He mentioned his plays as *Nat*, *Natak*, *Yatra* and *Anka*.

The origin of drama lies in its primordial art-forms, subsequently developed as folk plays feathered with poetry and dramatic ingredients jumbled together. Śaṅkaradeva took drama for the propagation of his *Vaiṣṇavite* tenets amongst the masses.

In Assam the growth of drama is routed through a filtration in our folk life and culture. The popular performing art-forms are - *putalanac* (puppet dance), *dhuliyā* (drum-beat dance), *ojāpāli*, *kuśangan*, *palagan*, *dotaragan*, *kharapuran*, *bhārigān*, *apidhuliyān*, *dhepadhuliyān* etc. There are also innumerable semi-dramatic performing

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30 Pathak, Dayananda (2015). *Playwright-Preacher Śaṅkaradeva His Plays*. p. 32

art forms like as *mathoni*, *mohoho*, *posoti*, *katipuja geet*, *nagaranam*. Besides there are various kinds of *bhaonas*.<sup>31</sup>

*Aṅkīyā Nāṭa* is a dramatic innovation invented by Śaṅkaradeva for the propagation of his *Vaiṣṇavite* ideals amongst the people and for the expression of his literary sensibilities. Śaṅkaradeva's plays worked miracles amongst the common people. People took Śaṅkaradeva's plays with religious sentiments. "The religious, social and cultural commitment of Śaṅkaradeva, coupled with enormous popular response from all levels of citizenry made the performing art form wonderfully successful. Such plays worked as powerful and effective media of mass communication. Through his plays people got indoctrinated to both religious faith and literary art at the same time."<sup>32</sup> *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* is the source of the plots of the plays. It is considered as the guiding spiritual inspiration by the *Neo-Vaiṣṇavtes*. Kṛṣṇa is the pivotal star of the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*. Kṛṣṇa's birth and activities are delineated and enshrined in this holy book. The plays were written during the 15th and 16th centuries took Kṛṣṇa as ideal hero and enacted him in different roles. The plays enacted on the life and activities of Kṛṣṇa were enjoyed by the masses.

Śaṅkaradeva was searching for a specific, simplified and popular language for his plays. Śaṅkaradeva knew well that Sanskrit was a language for the scholars and well educated people. Sanskrit language was beyond the reach and accessibility of the common masses. A play must be written in a language that was relevant for a major section of the society. Śaṅkaradeva had chosen *Brajābuli* language for his plays and

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31 Pathak, Dayananda (2015). *Playwright-Preacher Śaṅkaradeva His Plays*, p. 34

32 Ibid., p. 36

other composition. *Brajābuli* was a easily accessible language by the *Vaiṣṇavite* fraternity covering a larger space that includes Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and the northern and western parts of India. Śāṅkaradeva's effort was to reach as many people as possible on the vehicle of his chosen language.

*Bhāonā* is the workshop of organizing the society. Through *Bhāonā* the transcendentalism, seed of moral education, provision of practice of art, search of artistic talent, literary enlightenment scholastic ability, bondage of integrity and collective identity is given to be illiterate people.

For removing fear *Bhaona* is correct medium. Organising the enactment of Bhaona for prevention of epidemic is a common belief in folk life. Through dialogues Sanskrit Slokas, songs, prayer, muktawali, *Bilap* etc one can attain higher education without any formal degree. This opportunity is for all sections of people. Bhaona is the suitable medium of uniting children, youth, old people, labourers, workers, urban people, villagers, talented people, scholars, artist, wealthy people of the society.

Through *Bhāonā* general people can attain higher education without formal degree. Sanskrit *Ślokas*, songs, dialogues, prayer, *muktawali*, *bilap* etc are the means one can gather knowledge of day to day life.

The role of *Gāyana*, *Bāyana* and *Sūtradhāra* denotes special status in the society. Writing play for *Bhāonā* and enactment decides the worthiness of a *Sūtradhāra*. Colours, costume, weapons, mask etc creates the great demand in the economy with the process of making, distributing and processing of enactment of *Bhaona*. The bamboo, wood, can, earthen pot, mask, *pat-muga*, kingkhap (Assam silk) etc. are the locally

product raw materials. All these processes help to stabilize social life and make the Assamese society self-sufficient. *Bhāonā* is a suitable medium of expression of intelligence and expertise. The subject-matter of *Bhāonā* and tales fables illuminate many instructional and imitative factors of teaching learning. Inclination to truth holding of the belief of non-violence, benevolence, sheltering in kindness love, virtue all these most useful behaviour rise up for social life through *Bhāonā*.

### 6.3.3 *Bargīt* as a Means of Education :

The *Bargīts* are Śaṅkaradeva's another kind of uncompromising literary product. These sacred songs were and still are sung for devotional purposes. During Śaṅkaradeva's time singing *Bargīt* was treated as an essential part of literacy. To have sung a *Bargīt* it has a cultural importance. *Bargīt* is treated as an ornament to the cultural items in public functions and in most of the school and college functions. Banikanta Kakati very rightly called them the "noble numbers" as they appear to heart and heaven.<sup>33</sup> *Bargīt* are more heart appealing than any other form of prayer songs, more poetic than any other poems, more informative than any other great texts, more attractive than music and at last more permanent than literature. *Bargīt* were original and own creation of Śaṅkaradeva which were written in *Brajāwali* language. Śaṅkaradeva wrote 240 *Bargīts*, but most of his *Bargīts* had been lost in a fire at the house of Kamala Bāyan. At present only 34 are found to be heard. Śaṅkaradeva felt so sad at the great loss and decided not to compose any more of the kind. Śaṅkaradeva advised his disciple Mādhavadeva to do it for him and Mādhavadeva did it accordingly.

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33 Neog, M. (1991) ed. *Banikanta Kakoti Rachanāvali*, p. 44

*Bargīts* are mostly divided into three parts. Some *Bargīts* for morning prayer, some for noon and some for the evening prayer. All these are with different *ragas* like *Aśhowārī*, *Natmaller*, *Dhansr*, *Gaurī*, *Shuhāi*, *Basanta*, *Śrīkedār*, *Kalyāna*, *Bhatiāli*, *Sindhurā* etc.

At the time of living at Barpeta Śaṅkaradeva performed most of his valuable writings. To Śaṅkaradeva Barpeta was most suitable place for living for the purpose. For Śaṅkaradeva Barpeta was a "Kashi and Mathura of Assam", a place of peace and comfort.

*asamar kashipuri*                      *dwarka mathurapuri*  
*asamar barpeta dham*<sup>34</sup>

A popular saying and fact is that a good student makes a good teacher. In case of Śaṅkaradeva one cannot deny the fact. Even Śaṅkaradeva confessed that he would be more widely established by the *Baḍar Po* the other name of Mādhavadeva. This nickname was given to Mādhavadeva by Śaṅkaradeva out of love and good will. Mādhavadeva, at an incident could weave the *Vrindavani Vastra* a little longer than Śaṅkaradeva. At that time *Guru* declared in open mind that his disciple Mādhavadeva was more efficient than himself in many occasions-

*'tumi motkai badar*  
*tomār dwārā mor sakalo bahrība'*<sup>35</sup>

You are more efficient than me, I and my all will surely be increased by you.

Śaṅkaradeva was always assisted by Mādhavadeva who was the best servant in his personal activities, a great assistant in his troubles, a good companion in his religious revolution, an obedient disciple in relation to his life and soul.

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34 Rajkhowa, Sailadhar. (1976). *Madhyamik Asamiya Kabita Chayan*, p. 121

35 Lekharu, U.C. (1952). *Khathā-Guru-Carita*. P.210

Every Śāṅkarī Institutions developed and popularized a centre for teaching-learning-performing of *Bargīts* and dance forms. Each Śāṅkarī Institutions was something akin to a *Gharana*. *Bargīt* tradition is still prevalent beyond the local variations. Some Śāṅkarī Institutions have given up *Bargīt* tradition from their precincts. Today *Bargīts* are taught-learnt-performed in Śāṅkarī Institutions or *Nāmghar* along with outside. In the auspicious occasion like as social, religious and cultural meet, a solemn beginning is made through *Bargīt*. Śaṅkaradeva's purpose was to create an atmosphere of spirituality leading to the liberation of human soul. The precise objective behind the *Bargīt* was to spiritualize the people. Basically Assam was rich in folk music. Śaṅkaradeva pick up abundantly from the rich reservoir of folk music and the popular quasi-dramatic institute of that time.

North-East was the habitate of several tribal and hill communities. Every tribal community had its own speech and cultural traditions. Śaṅkaradeva had to keep the society united and cohesive. As an adroit social scientist Śaṅkaradeva had to work out new designs to enrich and empower the multi-colored society of 15th/16th century Assam. In every step Śaṅkaradeva was impelled to conform and reform to suit his own holistic vision and the modus operandi to realize that vision. Music was no exception to it. Śaṅkaradeva had to work out fusion and de-fusion in his musical composition.

*Timing for Bargīt* : Like other classical songs *Bargīt* have its own ideal time for sung. The concept of ideal time changes from Śāṅkarī Institutions to Śāṅkarī Institutions depending upon their local practices. The ideal timings attached to each *Sattriya rāgas* are shown below:

- i) *Ahir, Shyām, Lolit, Kou, Shyām Gera*- Early in the morning.
- ii) *Gourī, Basant, Gāndhār, Śrī Gāndhār, Dhansri, Śrī, Māhur, Borāri, Bhatīyāli, Toor-Basanta*- Day time .
- iii) *Suhāi, Kānāra, Mallār*- Early night
- iv) *Bhupāli, Kamod and Madhyāli*- Late night.
- v) *Bhupāli, Purī* and so on- At dawn.

*Language of Bargīt* : *Brajāvalī* was the composing language of *Bargīts*. *Brajāvalī* is a language drawing elements from Maithili, old Assamese, Bengali, Uriya and Hindi. *Brajāvalī* was a mixed literary language, understandable and accessible to a major section of the Indian society. The language of *Bargīts* consists of words called from different local and non local sources. The source may be classed under *tatsama*, *ardhyatatsama*, *tatbhava*, indigenous and foreign words. (Arabia and Persian words in some cases). Śaṅkaradeva was a scholar in Sanskrit language. Śaṅkaradeva used *tatsama* words like *surjya*, *swamis*, *Nārāyaṇa*, *koustav*, *putra*, *botya*, *arun* and so forth are drawn from Sanskrit language. *Ardhyatatsama* words *mukuti*, *darasan* etc. and *tatbhava* words from the Sanskrit abound. Śaṅkaradeva also used some popular words of Arabic and Persian such as *sayeb*, *saheb*, *nafar*, *duniya*, *dokani* etc. in his *Bargīts*. Maithili and local and indigenous word drawn from the local ethnic communities. *Bargīts* constitute a major literary segment of the creative treasures left behind by Śaṅkaradeva. *Bargīts* played a vital role in propagating the new religion *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*. Through *Bargīts* Śaṅkaradeva gave the moral, social, educational knowledge to the illiterate masses.

#### 6.3.4 Śaṅkarī Nr̥tya as a Means of Education :

Śaṅkarī Nr̥tya is a classical dance form of India. Śaṅkarī Nr̥tya is devotional in character. In this dance form spiritual aspects (*Bhakti Rasa*) is predominant. Śaṅkarī Nr̥tya was evolved by Śaṅkaradeva in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Assam. Śaṅkaradeva was a social reformer and also a great performing artists. References of this dance form are found in the ancient Indian classical texts like *Nāṭya Śāstra*, *Kālikā Purāṇa*, *Yoginītantra*, *Abhinayadarpana* and also in sculptures, historical relics, etc.<sup>36</sup>

Śaṅkarī is a word derived from Śaṅkaradevas's name. Śaṅkaradeva united the various sects of Assam through his teaching in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Through congregational prayer Śaṅkaradeva established a universal social brotherhood of *Neo-Vaiṣṇavism*.

It has been convincingly delineated in the various cultural historical literatures of Assam that this dance form came into existence both as a means and also as a result of the *Neo-Vaiṣṇavite* movement which overshadowed the cultural landscape of Assam during 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In all probability, this dance style was devised by the master reformer Śaṅkaradeva himself, in order to use it as an effective communication tool to reach out to the masses with his spiritual ideals of liberal *Vaiṣṇavism*.<sup>37</sup> In post-Śaṅkaradeva times, the Śaṅkari Institutions or the *Vaiṣṇavite* monasteries of Assam became the centres of practicing this dance by the male dancer. The *Vaiṣṇavite*

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<sup>36</sup> Bhardwaj, Manohar. *Cultural and Traditional History of India*, p.127

<sup>37</sup> Mahanta, Pradip Jyoti (ed.). *Vaiṣṇavite Music of Assam its Institutionalization and Performative Context*. pp 170-171



literatures, music and dance-dramas became the cultural icons of Assam and they were brought out of the age-old confinements of the *Nāmghars* and *Śaṅkari* Institutions for public consumptions in relatively secular environments.<sup>38</sup>

Kusumvara father of Śaṅkaradeva as a gandharva incarnate has left a rich legacy of a style of classical Indian dancing. *Śaṅkarī* dance is one of the eight principal classical dance tradition of India. It remained a living tradition since its creation in 15<sup>th</sup> century by Śaṅkaradeva. To present mythological teaching to the people in an immediate and enjoyable manner is the core of *Śaṅkarī* dance. *Śaṅkarī* dance traditionally performed by male *Bhakata* as a part of daily rituals in *Śaṅkari* Institutions. *Bargūt* is an important part of *Śaṅkarī* dance. *Khol*, *tal* and the *flute* are the instrument used in *Śaṅkarī* dance. *Sūtradhārī nṛtya* is one of the classical dances. It is associated with *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā*. The vital feature of *Sūtradhār* is the dancing. *Sūtradhār* plays the leading role in the presentation of *Aṅkīyā Bhāonā*. *Sūtradhārī nṛtya* is classified into (a) *Sarubhaṅgī* (b) *Bara bhaṅgī* and (c) *Nāndī śloka*. *Natuā* dance is another type of *Śaṅkarī* dance. It is performed by *natuas* (dancer boys). The other classical dances are *Cālī nāc* and *ojapālī*. *Cālī nāc* is derived from *Aṅkīyā Nāṭa*. It is considered one of the characteristic forms of classical dances. *Ojapālī* consisted of a band of singers. *Oja* is the leader and the few other singers known as *Pālī* (helper).

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38 Mahanta, Pradip Jyoti (ed.). *Vaiṣṇavite Music of Assam its Institutionalization and Performative Context*, p. 171

*Bhakti* is the essential elements of *Śaṅkarī* dance. It supersede all other forms of life. In *Śaṅkarī* dance the dancers begin with prayer in praise of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The prayer is followed by *nritya* comprising *Ramadani*, *Cāli nāc* and *Rājghoriā Cāli*. The *Śaṅkarī* dance includes the dance dramas of Śaṅkaradeva. The young *Bhakats* played the female character who are experts in feminine voice and movements.