

# **HUMANISM AS REFLECTED IN THE LIFE AND LITERATURE OF ŚAṆKARADEVA: A CRITICAL STUDY**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)**



**JIBAKANTA NATH**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SANKARADEVA STUDIES**  
**MAHAPURUSHA SRIMANTA SANKARADEVA VISWAVIDYALAYA**  
**2018**

## CHAPTER-VII

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### 0.7.1 Progenitor of new –vaisnavite movement of Assam :

Śaṅkaradeva was the progenitor of Assam's Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement. The notable point in Śaṅkaradeva's proliferation of his religion is that he developed the basement of this movement by mobilising the common people. The ruling class and the elites of the society did not extend support to this movement initially. The *Santas* and *Mahantas* (votaries) emerged from among the so called insignificant men. In this way, he brought in self-confidence, religious and democratic sense to the life of common people. He roused the aspiration for study in the minds of common people. Through non-formal education he aroused the reading spirit. He imparted moral education to people through the reading of sacred books in *Nāmghar* (prayer house), shrine or at the residence of a *bhakat* (disciple). Reading and elucidation of the religious books composed by him became the centre of attraction of such events. As a result the common people with no formal education also began to learn from the sacred books and gained knowledge to upgrade their living standard to a better level. They also enlivened the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement by composing songs and poetry themselves. At the same time the foundation of literature also acquired a shape. Thus, the movement that he initiated with a humanistic principle by involving the common people eventually got endorse from the ruling class, the elites of the society and the section of people with Brahmanical orientation who had opposed him earlier. Consequently, the *Ekṣaraṇa-Harīnāma-Dharma*, preached and proliferated by Śaṅkaradeva was able to attain an extended form.

### **0.7.2 Śaṅkaradeva as Psychologist :**

The spirit of *Bhakti* (devotion) can arouse the quality of *Sattvaguna* (the quality of goodness) by removing *Rajoguna* (the passion for worldliness) and *Tamoguna* (more passionate for worldliness) from human mind. Śaṅkaradeva, being a far sighted social reformer felt this deeply. Therefore, he succeeded in transforming the mindset of the so called upper caste people, by rendering the *Bhakti Dharma*. Subsequently, a society of equality and solidarity formed out of the assimilation of the so called lower caste people with the so called upper castes. From this point of view, Śaṅkaradeva was also a successful psychologist.

### **0.7.3 Possessor of Progressive Personality :**

Śaṅkaradeva was the first revolutionist of the North East India, i.e. ancient Assam. The prime objective of his revolution was to transform the social ethics. He also laid importance on creating a congenial atmosphere for this transformation. Śaṅkaradeva was a religious as well as a spiritual humanitarian. Despite using religion as the medium, Śaṅkaradeva primarily emphasised on setting up humanism on the basis of spiritualism. Kindness, forgiveness, helping others, non-violence etc. were the main significance of his life as well as of the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Harināma-Dharma*, sermonised by him. In his social system of equality there is no division between rich and poor, man and woman, among communities etc. Progressive minded Śaṅkaradeva put more importance on logic than emotion. When assessed from this point of view, it becomes evident that Śaṅkaradeva's thinking was greatly impacted by modernity. Such perspectives may be up to date even if they come from an ancient era or may be conservative even if they belong to a recent time. In this regard Rabindranath

Thakur's viewpoint was the issue of modernity does not much relate to time but attitude.<sup>1</sup> In that sense, Śaṅkaradeva was much advanced attitudinally.

#### **0.7.4 The democratic features of Nāmghar :**

The impact of Nāmghar in the life of Assamese society is unanimously recognised. Nāmghar is the unique mark of Śaṅkaradeva's cultural life. Śaṅkaradeva accepted namghar as a cultural centre to apply the value based decisions of sacred books in practical social life. He utilised Nāmghar as the principal tool for incorporating humanism in society. People of all castes, irrespective of man-woman, young-old, learned-uneducated had access to the naamghar founded by him. All the people could participate in bhāona in the same level, perform nām-kirtana (hymn) and take food together. After all, the main distinctive feature of Nāmghar was democracy.

#### **0.7.5 Degradation of the glory of Nāmghar :**

It is noteworthy that in many of the Nāmghars in the present day of Assam the egalitarianism of Śaṅkaradeva's time has not been retained. In many places of the state community based Nāmghars have come up. There are restrictions in entering into all Nāmghars by different communities even within the Hindu religion. This trend is visible even in the Barduwā shrine that was set up by Śaṅkaradeva himself. A social reformer, erstwhile MLA of Nagaon constituency and a former President of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha Haladhar Bhūyāñ was once prohibited from entering into the Borduwa shrine. Haladhar Bhūñā in this regard has himself written – “When I was a class VI student in high school, I went to Barduvā to watch the Douf festival. There I was not allowed to enter the *Kīrttan Ghar* (prayer house). It was immensely depressing for me. My father's elder brother was the *Barmedhi* (clergy) of the Naruwā Satra. The *Sinhasāna* (royal couch) of the Douf festival was manufactured by him.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thakur, R. (2016 ). *Rabīndra Racanāwālī* p. 775

But then I was treated like an untouchable when the *prasada* was given. I have never forgotten that disrespecting behaviour. I stopped visiting Barduvā thereafter.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **0.7.6 Contribution in the formation of Assamese society :**

The role of Śaṅkaradeva in formation of the Assamese nation is great. Mainly two forces were in action during the initial period of formation of the Assamese community. One was the Āhom royal force while the other was Śaṅkaradeva. The Āhom royal force created an enlarged Assam by politically accumulating the small ethnic communities and the small dynasties together. Śaṅkaradeva on the other hand placed the people of Assam - Kāmrūp - Behār on a forum by instilling *Bhakti Dharma* in them culturally through a humanistic perspective. Śaṅkaradeva though attempted spiritually to minimise the Brāhmānic communal impact he cannot be termed as was fully successful. He was the pathfinder in the process of constructing the Assamese nation. This culture maestro is even rated in the levels of Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa and Leonardo Da Vinci.<sup>3</sup> The *Eka-Śaraṇa-Harīnāma-Dharma* of Śaṅkaradeva on one hand bestowed the folk society with humanistic values and on the other hand by eliminating the feeling of inferiority from the deprived, neglected section of the society. He infused courage in them to live along with the rest of society by maintaining equal rights and equal mentality. The positivity aroused in the life of people by Śaṅkaradeva's ideology of religious philosophy and humanitarianism in the fifteenth-sixteenth century has been instrumental later in the formation of the larger Assamese society.

---

<sup>2</sup> Bhuyan, Haladhar. (2005). ‘Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva Saṅghar Abhyuday’ Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva *Saṅghar Padadhikar Sakalar Abhibhasaṇ* (ed) J. K. Nath, p.79

<sup>3</sup> Rabha, Bisnuprasad (1997 1<sup>st</sup> pub.). ‘Jīvan āru Jīvan Smṛti, Prasaṅga Śaṅkaradeva’ *Biṣṇu Prasād Rābhā Racanā Sambha*, (ed) Das, yoges and others p. 1191

### 0.7.7 Sociability features of Sankaradeva :

Sociability is one of the primary features of Śaṅkaradeva's personality. Śaṅkaradeva was a person with an empathetic heart. He used to feel happy being in the company of people. Being a religious teacher, he had to maintain a good relation with common people all the time. His sympathetic heart could deeply internalise the happy and sad situations of people. Therefore, people from all levels of the society came to seek guidance from him. In response to them Śaṅkaradeva, with an open mind for the benefit of the public, used to generously share in the societal life the experiences that he had attained through self-analysis. At this point a remark of Sarvapally Rādhākṛiṣṇaṇ may be cited, "We may not love each other or like each other; we may at least talk to each other, try to understand each other. We must learn to put ourselves in the places of other people and realise how they feel." <sup>4</sup>

### 0.7.8 Admiration of Bhāratvarṣa :

Although there was equality, solidarity, fraternity in his compositions, Śaṅkaradeva placed Bhāratvarṣa (India) at a higher position. Acclamation for India is found in 55 places across his compositions. <sup>5</sup> For Śaṅkaradeva, India was great because of the fact that since the ancient time it had been a religious as well as spiritual country. Here the people had co-ordinated between the material and divine aspects. According to Śaṅkaradeva :

*biṣayaka kari bhogya Kṛṣṇar sevāra yogya*

*bhāratara nara kalevar /* <sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Radhakrishnan, S. (1972) *The Present Crisis of Faith* p. 45

<sup>5</sup> Chutia, Sonaram & et. al. (1998). *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyaṃṛt*. pp. 27, 34, 54 (two times), 86, 114, 142, 153, 165, 274, (12 times), 278, 291, 299, (two times), 305, 316, 407, 414, 489, 516, 519, 547, 556, 559, 567, 602, 677, 702, 709, 732, 765, 780, 988, 1002, 1078, 1079, 1102, 1235 (3 times) and 1236 (4 times).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 29

(People of India despite enjoying the material life remain submerged in the service of the Lord Kṛṣṇa) The fact is the man has a religious as well as spiritual life, which is not evident among the creatures of the world of nature other than man. Śaṅkaradeva said that man should not remain content in material pleasure like other creatures.<sup>7</sup> Śaṅkaradeva applied the word *Jambudwīp* as a synonym for ‘Bhāratvarṣa’ in his compositions.<sup>8</sup>

#### **0.7.9 Gainings of Pilgrimage :**

A remark made by Pānikkar on how Śaṅkaradeva had tied Assam with the cultural sphere of India, is mentionable – “It is to be credit of Śaṅkaradeva that he re-integrated Assam into the cultural and religious life of India...”<sup>9</sup> It is true that Sankaradeva as a pilgrim had been much able to draw Assam closer to the Indian culture. Panikkar realised this and therefore he remarked – “As a pilgrim he wandered all over India and the unity of Hindu culture became a deep conviction with him.”<sup>10</sup>

#### **0.7.10 Diversion of the Nationalism to Universalism :**

So far it has been found that even though Śaṅkaradeva was a humanitarian, a stream of nationalist thoughts flew through his compositions. Loving one’s own associates and motherland is considered as one of the humane qualities. But then extreme nationalism can never be an appreciated quality. Instead, it helps in destroying humanitarianism. Extreme nationalism hampers in universal fraternity and sometimes stands as a factor responsible for conflict. Śaṅkaradeva, although loved Assam as well as India, was not an extreme nationalist. Through his love for Assam and India, his humanitarianism moved further towards universal fraternity.

---

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit. p. 142

<sup>8</sup> Chutia, S. & et. al. (1998). *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmṛt*. p. 274

<sup>9</sup> Panikkar, K.M. (1956). *Survey of Indian History*. P. 148

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 148

### 0.7.11 Scientific features of *Nāmadharma* as well as divinity :

The main asset of the *Eka-Śaraṇa-Harināma-Dharma*, proliferated by Śaṅkaradeva is *Nāma* (hymn). *Nāma* is *sabdabrahma* (word power). *Nāma* embodies more power than the eternal power possessed by Parambrahma. A disciple can be equal to even Parambrahma by chanting *nām* conscientiously and continuously.<sup>11</sup> According to Śaṅkaradeva, a person who continuously sings *nāma* does not even need to visit a sacred place :

*hari hena iṭo                      duguṭi akṣara*  
*jihbā agre thākai jāra |*  
*gaṅgā gayā kāśī              prayāga setuka*  
*jāibāka nalāgai tāra ||*<sup>12</sup>

(The one who often pronounces at least two syllables of *Harināma*, needs not visit the sacred places like Gaṅgā, Gayā, Kāśī, Prayāga and Setukhand). *Nāma* is the essence of the faith propagated by Śaṅkaradeva and this fact had been briefly stated by him in a verse as :

*hari Rāma hari Rāma a mūlamantra |*  
*kalitā nāhi tapa yajña yantra ||*<sup>13</sup>

(Hari and Rāma – these two names are the essence, i.e. principal elements. In *Kaliyuga* or the present era, *tapasya*, *yajña* etc. are useless). Due to the negligence meted out to the *Eka Śaraṇa* policy and *Namdharmā*, the Vaiṣṇavites of present Assam have been coiled around by the *Vāmacāra* like parasites. The reason for the demeaning condition of *Eka-Śaraṇa-Harināma-Dharma* during Śaṅkaradeva's era and also in the society of recent time is the impact of Brahmanism. Laying emphasis

---

<sup>11</sup> Chutia, S. & et. al. (1998). *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanṭa Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmṛt*. pp. 40-42

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 53

<sup>13</sup> Op.cit, p. 60



on *Sakāma* (full of desire) devotion rather than the *niṣkāma* (without desire) devotional practices prescribed by Śaṅkaradeva, is another reason for non-application of the religious policy of Śaṅkaradeva. The main aim of the disciples of *Sakāma* devotion is to throw away the *Eka Śaraṇa* policy and perform rituals for appeasement of other gods-goddesses. In addition, in the *Rajoguṇa* rituals of the *Aāgama* sect now superfluous elements and luxury are occupying spaces. In contrary to this, people have started to exhibit disinterest in and disliking for *Eka-Śaraṇa-Harināma-Dharma*. This was not the end, but a cult called *Ratikhova Pantha* (night worshipper) emerged even within the Vaiṣṇava sect. Due to the assimilation of Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta sects of Assam a secret cult called *Ratikhova Pantha* came up from among the Vaisnavites too. In this regard, Satyendra nath Sarma said – “It may be surmised that the cult of night-worshippers is an admixture of Tantricism, Saivism and Vaisnavism.”<sup>14</sup> Lila Gogoi expressed his views clearly as – “It is clear that this cult was born as a result of an unconventional co-ordination among Sakta, Saiva, Bouddha and Vaisnava ideologies.”<sup>15</sup> In short, it is seen that the Neo-Vaisnavite *Bhakti Dharma*, preached by Śaṅkaradeva has put on a distorted figure in the society. Nevertheless, a few religious organisations formed during twentieth century are found to strictly follow the *Eka Śaraṇa* policy of Śaṅkaradeva. Among such organisations “Śrīmanata Śaṅkaradeva Saṅgha” is extra ordinary.

#### **0.7.12 Defamation of priesthood in Hinduism :**

Religion has influenced man greatly in the history of human culture. Particularly, the religious upheaval that had erupted in medieval period was able to influence on the history of development of human culture all over the world. While

---

<sup>14</sup> Sarma, S.N. (1966). *The Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and Satra Institution of Assam*. Gauhati University Press. p. 139

<sup>15</sup> Gogoi, Lila (1998) *Asamar Sanskriti*. p. 129

religion encouraged a section of the people to live life honestly, on the other hand it was used by another section of clever people to eke out living and they are doing this even now. Especially the priesthood tradition in Hinduism has destroyed the esteem of the religion. Realising the necessity to uproot the priesthood custom, Dayanand Saraswati wrote – “The priests of the event called Puja, are enemies of the society; like magicians they amplify their income by applying tricks. By decorating the idols neatly with glitters they earn livelihood through deceiving the straightforward public while themselves cherishing a splendid life. People under their influence manage to furnish money, gold, garb, food, fruits, milk, ghee, honey etc. even by borrowing and in the process the priests become richer and the unfortunates end up becoming more downtrodden.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Sankaradeva exerted the continuity to uprest the system of priest hood prevailing in the society.

#### **0.7.13 Śaṅkaradeva as a critique of literature :**

Śaṅkaradeva was not only a dramatist or poet; he was a critique of literature. He had the aptitude for reviewing the merits and flaws of poetry of the poets. He had specific aim and objective of composing literature. When he finds any obstacle to this objective he did not hesitate to criticise other’s literary works. An example of this was – as per Śaṅkaradeva’s advice, Ananta Kandali translated the middle and end portions of the *Daśam Skandha* (tenth chapter) of the *Bhagawata*.<sup>17</sup> But since in this composition Ananta Kandali had laid more emphasis on explaining about war by putting less importance on devotion, Śaṅkaradeva criticised his poetic effort.<sup>18</sup> Yet another criticism – The incident belongs to the initial period of Narayan Das Thakur Ata’s coming in to the connection of Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva asked Narayan Das

---

<sup>16</sup> Q.V. Kakati, Padmeswar & Goswami Sastri, Amarendranath (1988). p.60

<sup>17</sup> Supra, Chapter-II, p.

<sup>18</sup> Bairagi, C. & Lekharu, U. (2011) *Kathā- Gurucarit*. p. 164

as to who else were living around his residence and what they were doing. In reply Narayan Das told about a poet named Pitambar and said that he composed poetry. When Śaṅkaradeva asked about the kind of poetry Pitambar composed, then Narayan Das recited two lines of one of the poems of Pitambar. – “*bilāpa kari kānde Devī Rukminī, kona aṅge khuna dekhi naila Jadumani.*”<sup>19</sup> (Jadumani (Lord Kṛṣṇa) is not coming after he had seen some defect in the body of Rukmini and so she is crying inconsolably) since Pitambar’s narratives did not focus on the devotional sentiment of a disciple, instead there was much indulgence in body-centered love, Śaṅkaradeva criticised him with Śākta, Tāmasika etc. terms.<sup>20</sup> which meant taking interest in bodily pleasure. It is not true that Śaṅkaradeva found only faults in others; he also loved to praise others’ literary works and talents. Śaṅkaradeva loudly praised about the Ramayana of his predecessor poet Madhav Kandali. In his *Uttarā Kaṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa* Śaṅkaradeva praised Madhav Kandali as :

*pūrba kavi apramādī    Mādhava Kandali ādi*  
*tehe biracilā Rāma kathā |*  
*hastīra dekhiyā lāda    Śaśa yena phāre mārḡa*  
*mora bhaila tehnaya avasthā ||*<sup>21</sup>

(Poets of the earlier years like Madhav Kandali composed Rāma kathā or the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Seeing his work my condition has become like the rabbit that runs away at the sight of elephant-dung). King Naranarayan was not only an admirer of literature, he also created literature himself. Fascinated by his quality and talent, Śaṅkaradeva composed a *bhaṭimā* with the title “*Rājyabhaṭimā*” in praise of the king.<sup>22</sup> Although

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 74

<sup>20</sup> Op.cit, p. 74

<sup>21</sup> Chutia, S. & et. al. (1998). *Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva Vākyāmṛt*. p.974

<sup>22</sup> Supra, Chapter-II, p.

Śaṅkaradeva praised the king by composing *rājibhaṭimā*, he was not a flatterer of the king. Hiren Gohain's opinion is noteworthy regarding this context “..Sankaradeva never opposed monarchy anywhere. In those days, no socio-economic base had been formed relating to such thinking. ... After suffering from political insecurity and domination for a major part of his life, he was thankful to Naranarayan for the peace he had gained in the shelter of Narnarayan. The two royal hymns (*rājibhaṭimā*) is a manifestation of such gratefulness.”<sup>23</sup>

#### **0.7.14 Need of republication of Śaṅkaradeva's humanist ideology :**

Śaṅkaradeva with a deep sense of self-confidence taught many valuable principles of life and survival. Through the education on equality, solidarity, justice and fraternity Śaṅkaradeva carved out a positive human society. Eradicating the discriminations based on upper and lower status, touchable-untouchable, caste-tribe he gave away the education of humanitarianism to the human society. Considering all creatures – animals and birds as self he broadcasted the education of humanism. Through humanism he awakened love and trust within human heart. This liberal humane ideology of Śaṅkaradeva should be replicated.

#### **0.7.15 Essentiality of Sacrifice :**

Humanism as well as humanity comes to exist only through sacrifice. Humanitarianism cannot be established by way of consumption. Only through sacrifice will there be peace and harmony in human society and only then the pedestal of humanitarianism will be strong. A statement of the *Upaniṣada* on co-ordination between sacrifice and *Brahmajñān* is significant here :

*o isa vasyamidan sarvan yat kinca jagatyan jagat /*

*tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma gradha kasyasvidhanam ||*<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Gohain, Hiren. (1987). *Kirttan Puthir Rasbicār*. p. 50

<sup>24</sup> Sarma, Tirthanath. (2006). *Upaniṣad Aṣṭak*. p. 12

(All movable things of the universe are to be covered by the supreme God, with that sacrifice you guide your soul, don't nurture greed for other's money). Śaṅkaradeva possessed *Brahmajñāna* and was a learned person. Treating all as his own, he walked along the path of life by the principle of sacrifice.<sup>25</sup>

#### **0.7.16 Indomitable personality of Śaṅkaradeva :**

The main among all the brilliancies noticeable in the personality of Śaṅkaradeva, is his revolutionary character. During his lifetime the royal authority or the public authority of the community was not able to stop Śaṅkaradeva by posing obstructions. The revolutionary character of brave, outspoken, daring Śaṅkaradeva continued to exist through the whole life. The revolutionary personality feature of this person is complemented by a valuable statement of Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. The statement is – “Religious men will be revolutionaries as long as there are errors to be corrected and evils to be overcome. Their ambition would be to remove the greatest burden of man, namely, the exploitation of men by men.” Even Śaṅkaradeva tried hard all his life to abolish the load of exploitation, especially the load of religious exploitation from the society. It will be apparent in the present societal life that although many people of the community appreciate Śaṅkaradeva's humanitarian personality, very few of them follow his ideology and religious philosophy.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Supra, Chapter-V.p.136

<sup>26</sup> Radhakrishnan, S. (25.6.1956). *One Earth One family*, Broadcast of Kiev Radio.