Sankardev : Livelihood And The Progress Of Humankind

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Abstract: This paper aims to present a picture of the Sankardev’s efforts to offer a structured and noble life to his people enlightened by spiritual consciousness. The base of the religion propounded by Sankardev was established upon the means of equality maintained for all kinds of illiterate, poor and helpless people in the state. This paper, with clear data seems to cast light on the role of Sankardev in the lives and occupation of people and with the observation of these data, an effort is made to get a view of its prospect.

Index Terms: Sankardev, society, equality, lives, occupation, Naamghar,

1 INTRODUCTION
The central role of Sankardev in the socio-cultural lives of the Assamese people was that of a religious saint. The source of inspiration behind his talents explored everywhere in literature, music and arts was his unique thoughts and actions towards the motive of the expansion of Krishna-Bhakti marg and its ideals. His unique understanding of the essence of art comes out as a complementary to his religious existence which is quite evident through the experiences conveyed by his disciples. A significant characteristic of his artistic consciousness is the means he used to communicate. He engaged himself through all his activities in uniting people of all communities under one roof through his philosophical justifications. The major objective behind his creations was the overall development of the lives and occupation of his people. Sankardev made his efforts to offer a structured and noble life to his people enlightened by spiritual consciousness. Even after five centuries, Assamese society has not been able to free itself from the influence of the Neo-Vaisnave movements pioneered by Sankardev. The impact of the movement is well spread across the creations and developments of Assamese society and culture. His philosophy of life did never include superstition, caste-discrimination and other social prejudices. He established Naamghars and Sattras guided by the motto “Sarba Dharma Sanatana” (All Religion is Sanatan religion). His religion viewed people equally irrespective of caste and class. By means of introducing Ankiya Naat, Bhaona, he brought in a cultural and social renaissance across the state.

While engaging ourselves in the task of the evaluation of Neo-Vaisnavite movements, we do always remain amazed by the well-expansiveness of the philosophy of Sankardev and its influence in the lives and occupation of Assamese people. The encyclopaedic meaning of ‘Occupation’ is ‘Work’. In other words, the means of earning a life can be communicated as ‘Occupation’. The main source of livelihood in an agricultural state like Assam was farming. But different paths came up in the field on occupation in the wake of the Neo-Viashnavite movement. People became economically well settled around the Naamghars and Sattras. They even started making their livelihood by making ‘Khool’ which is used in Ankiya Naats.

As a consequence, the Vaishnavite tradition did never remain within the religious confines and established itself as a unique trend of changing the socio-cultural lives of people.

2. OBJECTIVES
The objectives of the paper is -
1. To highlight Sankardev’s philosophy about life and occupation.
2. To analyze the Structure of Assamese society.
3. To study the way in which Sankardev’s vision help the people to live a better life.

3. METHODOLOGY
A fundamental and scientific discussion regarding the contribution of Sankardev is prepared with the use of the analytical method.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
General Concept regarding Life: Study of Life in Sankardev’s times:
Everyone has a general notion towards life. To win in life, one has to walk over critical and difficult stages of life. But one cannot even think of success if not ennobled by certain principles. According to Donald A. Corsby, “There is justification for life, but also no reason to live. Those who claim to find meaning in their lives are either dishonest or deluded. In their case, they fail to face up to the harsh reality of the human situation.” (guru charit katha, Introduction) The facts of Sankardev’s life and his contemporary could be obtained from “Shankar Charit” which is commonly known as “Guru Charit”. The book was written probably in the second decade of 18th century after the birth of Sankardev before three centuries. Banikanta Kakati assigned the editorial responsibility of the work to Upen Chandra Lekharu, eminent Vaishnav scholar. He published the work entitled “ Katha Guru Charit”. In the later years, Maheswar Neog edited the work with more dexterity and scientific composition which came out of the Press of Gauhati University as “Guru Charit Kotha”. The work includes detailed description of Sankardev’s life and the social, economic and political life of the medieval Assamese society. In the Preface, Maheswar Neog writes, “ It also gives us a broad picture of Assam of the days anterior to, during and
posterior to the life of the saint Sankardeva, in its own way it also bears evidence of the political, economic, social etc conditions of the region of those days.” (Sri Sri Sankardev, p. 110) In the history of Assam, the sixteenth century witnesses the new developments and innovations in the social life of the state. Different small states assumed the larger state forms such as Assam, Kamrup and Behar which brought in political balance in the Sankari state and hence helped in the development of a well-encompassing culture to a great extent. At that time, Devi Marg of religion and Shiva Marg of religion exploited the tribal people of the state in the name of spiritual religious practices. The Brahminist religious cult was spread in the Pre-Sankari era and Puranas were written in classical language but a serious effort was lacking behind to maintain religious unity amongst the people.But Sakardev did not accept the popular magic spells of Brahminism and embraced Vaishnavism and published “Chidananda-Ghana-Swarupa” of Upanishad and explored a revolutionary means in the history of religion. He created the image of Lord Krishna of Bhagawat Geeta for the understanding of the masses. The philosophy of Sankardeva enunciated the spirituality of Assamese society and established principles of social morality. His innovation explored the range of knowledge while remained within confines in earlier times. The grand old 400 years of tradition practised by the Sattras exhibit quite a vivid picture of social discipline and order.But it is to be noted that under several reactionary forces, the kind of communism that Sankardev spread across the state is not in execution I proper sense although many neighbouring ethnic communities have started living a socially well-disciplined mode of existence by accepting the Sankari religion. One salient characteristic of Sakerdev’s philosophy was that he was not at all a orthodox in any case. His attempts to enrich his own culture and society by means of importing ideals from other cultures outside the state to strengthen the own are widely known. It was the consequence of the assimilation of items of different cultures that came out as Sankardev’s achievement altogether. In the centres of Hindu religion in India, temples were built in permanent forms by bricks whereas in Assam, religious places were well architectured even in the early centuries. But Sankardeva built in the Naamghars and Manikuts with the help of essentials like bamboo, wood and thatching grass which was an easier practice for common people. (Adhunik Asamiya Sahityat Sankardev Prasanga, p. 4) The conservatives and the intolerant group of people did never accept Sanka for his stand against all existing principles of the society. Then he was turned to a marginalised person for the society and the leaders of the state. His social interest and the responsibility towards his society while denying all sorts of respect and fame derived from his existence as one member of the Bara-Bhuya community was not understandable for common people. The life of common people was full of difficulties. In Upper Assam, the Paik system was tremendously influencing the lives of the people. They lived like slaves under feudal governance. The picture of common people could easily be guessed through the act of sending Sankar and Madhab to catch elephants in the forests. But they came all over the obstacles and transformed themselves to savours of mankind from the hands of slavery. He abolished the discriminations existing at the level of class and caste and gathered all the people in the same floor. Sankardev would probably be one of the foremost rebels to abolish untouchability in the country. In the language of Naam-Ghosha: “Garo bhot jawane hori nam lo” and “ram buli tore miri oxom Kochari”. All these people have been well embraced in the same tie of nationalism being the follower of the same religion. The base of the religion propounded by Sankardev was established upon the means of equality maintained for all kinds of illiterate, poor and helpless people in the state. He did never spread religion preferring the kings and other elite classes in the society. He even famed those people which were dehumanised after considering them as inferior and untouchables in the society. The tale of Radhika Shanti is widely popular as the myth of reclaiming the lost identity of the fisherman community under the aegis of Sankerd. He could become the favourite of the mankind by making mankind free from all kinds of social enslavement and by engaging the people of the state in a peaceful and well-maintained social decorum. His main motive was to liberate women from the kinds of oppression and intolerance as maintained by the upper class people of the state towards the lower class people. Therefore, the tales of Kirat, Kachari and Chandal find a more convenient space in his discourse rather than that of the Brahmins, Kayasha and such upper classes. In his language:

Kirt kachari khasi garo miri
Jawan kanka gowal
Oxom muluk dhua je turuk
Kubas mless chandal.

A General Perspective on occupation: Livelihood of man in Sankardev’s times and the Role of Sankardev’s role:
Occupation is such an essential aspect of human life through which they make their lives save. Only occupation makes human life secure. At present, the central means of survival in the society is to search for an occupation. It is important to discuss the nature of tendencies of searching for jobs in the society where Sankardev was alive. Before five centuries, the central source of livelihood of people was agriculture. But this cannot be the only means of survival. Keeping in mind this aspect, Sankardeva took an initiative to open up different possibilities of means of survival in the state. The Viashnavite culture of Sankardev’s times is rich in the production of material objects. These include different wooden idols, masks, cool bed made of the teeth of elephant, flowery fans, Brindwani clothes, Image of Chihrajatra-Sapta Baikuntha, the art of the building of thrones, the style of preparing the leaves of Saachi for the creation of books etc. etc. The instances of architecture of the time could well be identified through the image of Naamghar, Kirtan Ghar, Devagriha, Sattra etc. All these monumental settings provided means of livelihood to the people. People started showing their interests in the earning of livelihood by engaging themselves in fields such as Barhoi, potmaker, Kumar, Painter etc. Besides, different posts like Naamghoriya, Sattradhiraj etc. were created to take ore of the institutions such as Naamghar and Sattra. Although these paths are not considered as paths of employment but through these ways, people could easily find out means of self-employment to a great extent. The essential artistic items were made out of wood, earth, horn and such materials. There was the tradition of the use of different instrumentalists in the Vaishnav society. Several new instruments were created centring around the Sankari literature and performance arts. These instruments could be obtained through the exercise of performance arts. Hence, Sankardev’s role in the creation of excellent instrumentalists engaged in the performance of instruments was significant.
Such instruments included Kahali, Mohori, Dhooll, Khul, Sankha, Bheri, Dububhi, Doba, Mridang, Taal, Raamtaal, Kartaal, Bipanchi, Dotara, Beena, Banshi, Tabla, Dogor, Dama, Manjeera, Suruj, Singa etc. All groups of people were involved in the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. Hereby, different paths of self-employment were opened up. In this context, Prafulla Bora remarks: "Different professional groups also became active members of the Vaishnava society even after standing at individual points. Sankardev found out singers, musicians, actors amidst such naive group of people and made them active artist in different fields. He engaged simple waivers in preparing different Chitrtrapats of Baikuntha, built up Singhaxon, Mayuraxon, Garudaxon and such kind of thrones for Manikutus along-with built up several instruments. Getting the courage of Sankardev, common people practiced classical music, dictated the Sanskrit slokas of plays clearly and performed Sutradhari dances. He could well observe the local cultures and the elements there because of his maintenance no difference between the king and the public and his maintenance of the authority of Shironomi Bhuyan. Therefore, by means of intermingling different elements of Putola-dance, Ujapali and Sanskrit dance forms, he could become the pioneer of an original dramatic art form in Assam."

(Adhunik Asamiya Sahityat Sankardev Prasanga, p. 5-6)

Maheswar Neog discusses the occupation and the role of Sankardev in the Occupation in Assam in the Third Chapter of "Sankardev and His Times: Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Assam". It is noted below: “In the Uresa-Vamana’ section of “Kirtana-ghosa’ Sankara mentions some of the professional castes of Assam: the Baniyas or goldsmiths, the Sutars or carpenters, the Candalas, he Kamars, the Kumbhakaras, the Natas and others. Many of these professional people are mentioned in the biographies of saints. Among the Vaishnava following of Sankara and Madhava were Kamalapati and Krishna, who were oilmen, and Haridasa, who was a Baniya. "Mnetion is made of snake-charmer Yogis and silk-worm-rearer Yogis (Katanis), Tatis with their group-leaders called Marals, Kamars, Carmars, Hirars and Kumars, Candalas or Carals, kaibortas, Dhobas, Napits or barbars, Salais or confectioners. These people were whose professions made an indelible mark on their caste or social position. There were other professional who were not castemarked-the ploughman, boatman, fueleellers, alkali-sellers or Khatiyars, traders in various commodities and others. The Muslims, in some instances worked as tailors…Spinning and weaving, like agriculture, were common occupations of people. Even ladies of high birth considered these a part of their common household duties...those who worked on handlooms for their own sake, they were the professional weavers(Tatis), who worked for money, and had to pay a loom tax to the government.""
“He came down to the level of the people and translated form Sanskrit these portions of Hindu sacred books, and presented them to the people of in their own familiar dialect. Relieved of a foreign tongue and from difficult and abstruse terms, the people could now chant the praises of their gods in their familiar language of childhood. They too among them like wildfire, and are to this day increasingly popular.” (Adhunik Asamiya Sahityat Sankardev Prasanga, p. 10)

Sankardev as social founder and the life and livelihood of the people and the people:
Man is a social animal. Without society no one could work anything perfectly. Therefore, individual and country development is determined by the work performed together in unity. Through the propagation of religion Sankardev attempted to change the society and united the people there. Sankardev was the first revolutionary of North-East India and the main motto of revolutionary was to change the social values and develop the entire society with the creation of an environment for that historical changes. Hegel remarked somewhere: “No revolution is possible without a renaissance.” “Revelation is the driving force of history, also of religion, of philosophy and all other types of theory.” (Selected Works, vol.1, p. 42)

Jyotiprasad’s thought on Sankardev was also thought provoking. He left his remarks on this ideal person in his songs, treatises and poems. He said in one of his songs: “xunor dexor, mohapuruxor, sankar-madhvavor, xunmuliya sanskritiye, puhor dea, aei prithiwit, xunor jiwonor” (Of the golden country, of great saints of Sankar and Madhav, The golden culture enlightens culture, brightens the world, in this earth, of golden life.” He dreamt that the villages which are considered as the centres of Baisnhav culture and also that centring the Naamghar, a larger society will be developed. He said: “amar ganoor namgharii prithiwik matiba...” (call the Earth, to the Naamghar of our village) Besides Jyotiprasad, Bezbarua and Bishnu Rabha and such scholars have also expressed their opinions regarding the creation of a larger society by means of study, explanation and application of Sankari elements in reality. Such instances reveal the fact that Sankari literatures tried to construct the society in well-structured form and decorum. Sankardev tried to build up a noble condition for the maintenance of a well balance between Hari-Hara with the consciousness of the prevalence of Shiva religious trend in Kamrup-Assam. He even let the Bihu-songs and Bihu festival entet the Sattra and Naamghars with religious fragrance. He transformed the Bihu songs to Husarish with the purified resounding of Hari-Naam (Name of Lord). Sankardev emphasized more upon the devotion of Lord Rama than any delicate feeling which was a cause because of the contemporary trend of the society. In the words of Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee: “The amoral and unsocial ideal of the figure of the parakiya moral turpitude and this was carefully averted by Sankardev.” Sankardev was able to identify the location of the soul and its existence within dogs and foxes which reveal the democratic and socialistic thought of this significant figure. As a consequence, the unthoatability was not able to spring its roots in Assam. In reality, he is the real founder of Assam. The central aim of this Bhalotia movement was the development of the lives of the people. The fact behind the transformation of the formless Brahma in Upanishadas to the formed Brahma in the Puranas was the awareness of the assumptions of folk arts. The origin and expansion of the Bhalotia Marg lies in the social system all around. The development of religion is possible only as a consequence of the engagement of folk religion with the Vedic system of Lord Bishnu’s worshipping. Therefore, Sankardev also added local artistic elements in the literary narratives and performance arts of his creations. Even in his translation of Bhagawat Purana, he did never hesitate to include the elements from the folk-culture. He adds an explanation for the critics in such stanzas:

“jiba kisu boha dekhisa
etu orporadh era
anu mohakobisoy
kabyorox nibondhoi
Tak nindoi kun hadhujon”

Sankardev and Social development through Mass communication medium.
The mediums which bear the capability of influencing a large section of people are regarded as Mass media. The role of mass media is quite a remarkable one when it comes towards the development of society through social awareness and the spread of social proclamations, religious, moral or didactic proceedings. At present times, Mass media includes Radio, Television, Newspaper etc. in its range. But during the time of Sankardeva, these mediums were unavailable. We have an inner belief that deities and lordattain satisfaction only through dance-music, orchestra, acting and dramatic performances. Lord Krishnahimself expressethis by addressing his disciple Uddhav in the holy Bhagawat Geeta as-

“upogayan grinar nitayan jarkamvanin mam
xot katha shrawyan shrinan muthurtwa khyaniko bhawet”

Here Lord Krishna advises Uddhab to enjoy eternal joy by celebrating his works like songs, dance, musical drama and chanting lines from Kirtana. (Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva, p. 22) Hereby we can state that Sankardev created “Borgeets” to generate spiritual consciousness and make people aware of the prevailing traditional beliefs. The Borgeets help broadcast the religious, aesthetic, ethical, moral values, recreation, socialization, social contract, social protest and help progress for favourable conditions through the medium of telecast, knowledge, cultural authenticity and social unity along with the preaching of religion. In the words of Bankanta Kakoti : “The songs of Sankardev and Madhavdev sprouted seeds of spiritual sensibility in those places wherever they fell like winged arrows...”.An author means of communication/mass media created by Sankardeva was “Ankiya Bhaona”. These means have contributed immensely in restoring morality, values and proclamations in other parts of India as well. Ankiya Bhaona is comparatively more powerful than music and dance. As Bankanta Kakoti mentioned: “Man is fond of entertainment and pleasure by nature and one advantage of Bhaona is that it gives a lesson to people along with joy and entertainment. In ancient Vaishnavite literature, the place of Bhaona is situated at the point of entertaining the folk minds and enlightening them through collection of folk items.” Both spreading of joy and promulgation of values can be obtained through acting. Dramatists awaken joy in the audience’s mind and for this assessment people of remotest areas assemble to watch the performances. In the later times Sankardev’s “Ankiya Naat” germinated to full-fledged dramas and even now it is developing and various dramas in the mother-tongue are sprouting. This also contributes to the...
development of social taste and choices. Besides producing exceptional directors this evoction also gave birth to innumerable well-wishers and spectators. Moreover, drama paved a new way to the artists for livelihood. Alike the growth in ‘Naats’ we witness progress in the way of living in the Assamese society too. Therefore by this deliberation we can easily reckon that Sankardev created songs, music ,dance, drama and Bhaona and used it as a medium to communicate with the mass and spread the Neo-Vaishnavite values, philosophy, beliefs along-with influencing people by means of spirituality for the progress in the way of living of the people altogether.

5 CONCLUSION

Although The impact of Assamese literature, which has Sankari literature as its base is profoundly reflected in language ,culture, philosophy, religion, science and tradition of the people. The teachings and the philosophical tracts of Sankardev convinced its people to make a distance from all prevailing decaying cultures and religious orthodoxy of the society and live a well-established livelihood. The way for better living and high thinking is always rewarded as the best of its kind. This research paper aims at providing a scientific, fundamental and national outlook on the aforementioned topic “The role of Sankardev in the lives and occupation of people”. The findings from the discussion of the topics are as follows:

1. The Neo-Vaishnavite preached/ propagated by Sankardev evoked socialist speculations in th society. This promoted the socialist mentality and exhibited a new horizon of the livelihood.
2. The reformatory cultural revolution of Shankerdeva made progress in the evolution of thoughts and development of the society. Borgeet, Bhaona, Music, Dance and musical instruments gave this revolution an exceptional and unique structure.
3. Sankardev’s dramatic thoughfulness attracted all people besides class division. This kind of concern is not only unique but rare. The motive f the ‘nats’ were to abolish caste discrimination in the society and create unity and allow everyone to assemble in the Naamghar.
4. Sankardev established Naamghar and welcomed a life style based on the democratic tradition. He also upgraded this life style with social justice which helped to obtain a well-to-do state.
5. The architecture of worshipping places during the Neo-Vaishnavite movement aroused a new democratic consciousness in the society. The materials necessary for worshipping were traditional and easily available. This gave a new dimension to the livelihood of the people.
6. Opportunities were provided to the deserved ones without discrimination due to the caste or creed they belonged to, for the performances and participation in Bhaona, activities in Naamghar brought values to the lifestyle maintained.
7. Couple of centuries even before Mahatma Gandhi, Sankardev denounced untochability and opted religious philosophy to erase discrimination due to caste. Reformation with radical thought was sought by Sankardev to abolish injustice and inequality. He deserves to be regarded as the forrunner of non-violence and peaceful co-existence. This created social unity and raised the value of living.
8. Sankardev discovered several professions and illuminated unique paths of occupation specially discovering ‘Mukha Xilpo’ Sankardev presented a distinctive art form which polished the talents and potential of the common mass.

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