

# Unity in Diversity by the Managerial Aptitude of Srimanta Sankaradeva: A Study

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## ABSTRACT

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva was a preceptor, a great litterateur and a rare social-reformer. He was a great sociologist and man of democracy. He tried his level best to make the Assamese a perfect and peaceful nation devoid of castes and creeds. Therefore, he had innumerable followers from different castes and tribes of Assam. The religion and culture propagated by Sankaradeva is universal. The religion has no conflict with any other religion of Assam, India or beyond. Therefore, the religion of Sankaradeva has attracted the hearts of various tribes of inner and outer Assam. He embraced different communities into his religious fold by initiation. Srimanta Sankaradeva was a versatile genius. He was a saint and preacher, poet and playwright, philosopher and social reformer, artist and composer all in one. He had an incomparable influence on Assamese culture and a great contribution to Assamese literature. His first identity is that he is the founder of the sect of Assam Vaishnavism. Sankaradeva brought the message of faith in the one Lord, Vishnu. Decentralized Leadership Management is a perfect weapon to reduce all kinds of leadership corruptions. His expertise in conflict management is well-known all-over India.

## KEY WORDS

Managerial aptitude, Religious innovator, Social reformer, Decentralized leadership, Humanism, Versatile genius

## INTRODUCTION

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva was a preceptor, a great litterateur and a rare social-reformer. He tried his level best to make the Assamese a perfect and peaceful nation devoid of castes and creeds. Therefore, he had innumerable followers from different castes and tribes of Assam. He had some Muslim disciples and a lot of followers also among them. His religion and Bhakti Movement had no conflict with any other religion. A great number of people think that Eksharana nam dharma belongs to only Hindus of Assam and it quite opposes the theology of some other religion. This thought is not true. This present paper will try to prove that Sankaradeva had the management quality enough to keep every caste and community of people together in harmony.

The religion and culture propagated by Sankaradeva is universal. The religion has no conflict with any other religion of Assam, India or beyond. Therefore, the religion of Sankaradeva has attracted the hearts of various tribes of inner and outer Assam. He embraced different communities into his religious fold by initiation. Some of his diverse disciples were Chandsai or Chand Kha (Muslim), Paramananda (Mising), Govinda

(Garo), Damodar (Bhutiya), Ramai (Kachari) etc. Govinda Nayak of Orissa, being attracted by the life and philosophy of Sankardeva wrote his biography namely 'Sankara Gosai Charit', in the Oriya language. Sankardeva was guru and social leader of Kirat, Kachari, Khasi, Garo, Miri, Yavana etc. of ancient Assam. He wrote:

*"Kirat Kachari Khasi Garo Miri*

*Yavana Kanka Gawal;*

*Aham muluk Rajak Turuk*

*Kubach Mlecha Chandal"*

## OBJECTIVES

Though a lot of researches have already been done on the matter of Sankardeva's wide notions and capacity of bringing people together irrespective of castes and creed in Assam but very few have touched it in the context of his managerial aptitude. Sankardeva never discriminated among religions, castes and creeds. So, he had disciples from every community. Therefore, a thorough study of Sankardeva is needed in the context of his managerial aptitude. The researcher would try to observe this aspect of Sankardeva in an elaborate way.

## METHODOLOGY

Through in-depth study of some historical books, magazines and critical books the facts are collected to evaluate Srimanta Sankardeva properly in the field of managerial aptitude. As the subject of the study is narrative, usually the method of narrative analysis is observed throughout the paper. The majority of the study's information is collected from a lot of secondary sources. A significant amount of data has been gathered from reputable publications also. These sources of data are found in both physical and digital libraries and are studied thoroughly. To establish the study more logical and reasonable, some texts are quoted directly from those sources as it is.

## DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Srimanta Sankardeva was a versatile genius. He was a saint and preacher, poet and playwright, philosopher and social reformer, artist and composer all in one. He had an incomparable influence on Assamese culture and a great contribution to Assamese literature. Dr. Vasudeva S. Agarwal observes rightly on Sankardeva's personality and his influence on Assamese life: "It is difficult to imagine how deep and widespread was the influence of Sankardeva on the cultural renaissance that burst forth in Medieval Assam. There are poets and composers, there are saints and religious teachers, there are musical masters, there are preachers, but Sankardeva was a genius in whom all these qualities were rolled into one." In this regard he may be compared with Tulasidasa who did the same for the people of Upper Gangetic valley. Above all, he was a perfect planner and good innovator. He evolved a new management style through his socio-cultural-religious innovations. His handling of people led to the development of a new approach in Human Resource

Management. Heterogeneous people were attracted towards him for his perfect Team Management and Feedback Management skill and formed a new nation with mixed up culture. He teaches the world about how to set Conflict Management. He trained a group of dedicated disciples and made them future leaders by his Decentralized Leadership Management. His all-round managerial aptitude is discussed below in a nutshell.

His first identity is that he is the founder of the sect of Assam Vaishnavism. Sankardeva brought the message of faith in the one Lord, Vishnu. He was an uncompromising monotheist who argues that since Vishnu was All God, there is no point in offering special worship to the other gods or goddesses of Hinduism. He was enabled to preach the new faith he had established for himself and for earnest seekers in his province, on the basis of the philosophical doctrines of *Geeta* and *Bagavata Purana* as its scriptures, on the new interpretation on the name of God (*nama*) and singing his praise (*kirtana*) in congregational worship, and finally on an absolute and complete surrender of oneself to the will of the Lord. However, the mission of propagating the new faith was not at all smooth sailing for Sankardeva and even for Madhavadeva. The situation had not much improved during the late Ahom and British years excepting a few *satras* that were bestowed royal munificence. With the advent of the western model of education and culture, the propagation of Sankardeva's faith has almost come to a standstill. Moreover, certain individuals and groups have always been indifferent and miserly in recognizing Sankardeva's versatility and greatness. Even in the face of all such constraints and hurdles the renaissance personality of Sankardeva laid the foundation of a composite Assamese society and culture unifying the three Assamese states of eastern India namely Asama, Kamarupa and Koch Behar, and adverse ethnic groups speaking different languages. Assessing Sankardeva's life and contributions, Dr. Banikanta Kakati rightly says, "Sankardeva has given Assam a new life, letters and a state. Rulers have come and gone and their kingdom perished in the dust, but Sankardeva's state endures, and in the heart of men his power survives."

To establish and extend his newly founded vaishnavism he founded *satras* or monasteries. He founded Patbausi Satra in Barpeta as the centre of his missionary work. He appointed a Muslim tailor named Chandsai at Patbausi Satra to look after this *satra* besides the regular duty of lighting it. Moreover, Chandsai was engaged in debate with Brahmins and he defeated many of them who opposed Sankardeva's neo-vaishnavism. Later, following the footprint of Sankardeva, Madhavadeva also appointed a Muslim named Yavan Joyhari to look after another *satra* Sundaridiya of Barpeta.

Decentralized Leadership Management is a perfect weapon to reduce all kinds of leadership corruptions. Sankardeva was a Kayastha (Sudra), but he initiated some of the most prominent Brahmin scholars of his time amongst his immediate disciples. To the first batch of Brahmin followers, he gave the *nama mantra* himself. They bowed to the sacred book placed on a tray. Later on, when a good number was converted, he entrusted the task of giving *mantra* to the Brahmins to his immediate disciple Ram Ram Guru. Thus Damodardeva, a Brahmin was initiated by him and Damodardeva and Madhavadeva were also entrusted to initiate other Brahmin disciples to *Eksarana Nam Dharma*. Sankardeva's practice was strongly challenged by hostile Brahmin pandits. Their question was how a *Sudra* could give *mantra* to Brahmins. But the reply

of Sankardeva to the Brahmin associated was that a *Sudra* was debarred from giving Vedic mantras only to Brahmins but there is no injunction against a *Sudra* giving *nama mantra* to any person. Sankardeva initiated disciples to his religion from various castes through the older disciples of the respective castes i.e. the Mising disciples through Paramananda, Garo disciples through Govinda and Kachari disciples through Ramai etc.

Sankardeva initiated Chilarai (brother of king Naranarayana) and hundred queens into his religious fold; but despite the request made by the king for his own initiation, he refused it. Sankardeva was sure that if the king were initiated, he would not be able to keep the dignity of *Eksharana* or he might use his religion for political purposes. He aimed to make the religion of common people; a religion of dignity. Sankardeva left for Madhupur, leaving his birthplace rather than compromising with the king. In spite of remaining within the framework of feudalism, Sankardeva developed a new stream of thinking that went against traditional thinking. Therefore, Sankardeva may be counted as a leftist. As the envious Brahmins laid a complaint to king Naranarayana against Sankardeva he decided to punish Sankardeva bitterly. Later, he realized the real Sankardeva and invited him to his palace. Sankardeva, when climbing the seven steps of the king's palace he sang his self-composed *Totaya: Madhudhanavadaranadevabarang.....HarikinkaraShankaraishapade,*

After this he sang a *Votima:*

*Joyjoy malla nripati rashaban*

*Jakeri gunagana nahike shaman*

After singing these, Sankardeva sat as asked by the king. The king asked Sankardeva to explain the meaning of the *Totaya* and *Votima*. Sankardeva asked the Brahmins and pundits first to explain the meaning. Every Brahmin and pandit remained silent pondering over the meaning but nobody could. Sankardeva got admiration explaining the both songs. King Naranarayana said to Sankardeva, "Listen Sankar, the Brahmins arising complaint against you that you don't take basil (Tulasi), you don't obey the Geeta, you have abandoned worship, *Homa*, *Yag-Yajna*, you have broken the images of gods and goddesses. Now answer all these." Sankardeva brought a garland of basil out of his hairs and told that he was preaching *Eksharana* religion, bringing Krishna from the *Bagavat*. Hearing the reply of Sankardeva the faces of the Brahmins grew darkened and began to make the king realize with some illogical sayings. The other various complaints against Sankardeva by the Brahmins were refuted by Sankardeva with arguments. The Brahmins being defeated in religious debate, they requested the king to invite some great Brahmin pundits from outer states. King Naranarayana brought some pundits from Kashi and Prayag, but they were also badly defeated by Sankardeva. The king chased all the Brahmins away with disrespect and thanked Sankardeva a lot.

King Naranarayana asked all the Brahmins and pandits to tell him the brief summary of the details on Krishna's admiration from the *Bagavata* the next day. All the pundits refused but Sankardeva told the king that he would try his level best. Taking the brief summary of the *Bagavata* Sankardeva composed *Gunamala* that very night and brought it to the king the next day in a *Bhuruka* drawing a picture of an elephant on it.

Sankardeva took neo-vaishnava religion as the tool of spiritual and socio-cultural development. To do this he used various branches of literature – poem, play, songs and also fine arts as the medium. The literary works of Sankardeva were mainly translation and adaptation. He composed only one work *Bhakti Ratnakar* in Sanskrit. His translated works are – the Kirtan Gosha, the Bagavata *skandas* 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11 and 12 and the Ramayana Uttara Kanda. To suit his purpose, he has some aspects in his translation – (1) He freely translates a story leaving details and thereby making the story clear and well-knit. He did not follow the order of description contained in the original. (2) He collects *Slokas* relevant to the subject of discussion in hand from different *Puranas* and *Upanishads* and translates them along with the *Slokas* of the story. (In the *Ajamila Upakhana* he has followed this method) (3) In some of the translations he has added new materials to the story with a view to attracting the reader. He has used this method in the Harmohana (The Enchantment of Hara) (4) In some cases he has not translated *Slokas* word by word. He takes the gist of the piece and composes a poem of his own keeping the central idea of the piece intact. (e. g. prayer made by Shiva to Vishnu in the Harmohana, the Enchantment of Hara, of Kirtana)

Other than the translation works mentioned above and *Bhakti Ratnakara*, all other works are only his adaptation. The sources of his works are *the Bagavata, Geeta or the Mahabharata*. Of course, though these works are not his fundamental works, but they are very perfect works from the very viewpoint of diction or style. All his works have an inseparable link with vaishnavism. He is successful enough to convey the message of neo-vaishnavism through all his works. Sankardeva is the father of Assamese play; no proof of any previous Assamese play is found. Drama literature is the result of Vaishnava movement. The purpose of the One Act plays of Sankardeva was to succeed neo-vaishnavite movement through entertainment making it easy even for the common people. He worked all his works in the Vrajawali language which is a mixture of various languages like Assamese, Old Kamrupi, Hindi, Sanskrit, Bengali, Oriya and Maithili. Sankardeva and other Vaishnava writers wrote in this language because the language has some extra sweetness and profoundness. Moreover, it has another advantage that common people understand the language well. Sankardeva employed *Sutradhar* in his plays but it is not as the *Sutradhar* that had been employed in Sanskrit plays. Sankardeva's *Sutradhar* was presented with the features of the *Sutradhars* found in *Ojapali* or Puppet Show. The special *Sutradhar* of Sankardeva has a great role throughout the play. The *Sutradhar* is the spokesman who performs the function of moral guardian, commenting on actions of actors and their consequences, sometimes it elaborates on the feelings of different characters like the allegorical figure called 'Bibek' in Jatras (Yatras).

Like that of literature, art was also inspired and patronized by religious movements. Sankardeva's distinctiveness as a creative artist lies in the fact that he conceived art and literature not in subordination to institutional religion. Instead, he considered art to be a close ally of the spiritual pursuit and the artistic consciousness was assimilated with spiritual consciousness. And this assimilated consciousness was allowed a free growth during the long course of Assam vaishnavism. His remaining 34 Bargeets, the Votimas, the Totayas and the *Chapayas* are full of Bhaktis to Lord (the only One) and effective arts in the field of Bhakti movement. The personality and genius of Sankardeva have not been reflected in religion and art alone, they are multi-colored and multi- dimensional where an integrated and sovereign human identity is found to be

reflected in taking together all these dimensions. So, Jyotiprasad overwhelmingly observes that in Sankardeva spiritual, mental, physical, social and cultural dimensions of the human mind are seen to have a perfectly balanced development. A genius of Sankardeva's variety is rare in the world. He is a symbol of perfect and great human culture.

Sankardeva was a great sociologist and man of democracy. By establishing *Namghars*, *Thans* and *Satras* he brings the people of society to an unbreakable unity through *nama- kirtana* and Sankari dance or *Satriya* dance in unison. His religion has no special hard and fast rules and rituals to follow like some other religions. His religious philosophy (*eka deva eka seva eka bine nai keva*) agrees with the universal brotherhood and monotheism of Islam, liberalism and love of Christianity and the greatness of Buddhism. Therefore, marching above the caste discrimination and communalism, he could declare:

*“Brahmanara Chandalara nibichari kula;*

*Datat chorat yena dristi ekatula.*

*Nichata sadhuta yar bhaila eka gyan;*

*Tahakese pundit buliya sarvajan.”*

His expertise in conflict management is well-known all-over India. In his days there were ethnic conflicts among various groups. There were ethnic conflicts of the Bhuyans with Kacharis, the Daflas with the Ahoms etc. in the places like Bardowa, Rowta, Dhuwahata etc. Srimanta Sankardeva brought the conflicting tribes of Brahmaputra valley together by working on their positive qualities. This was how he worked in the area of conflict management. People of Kachari tribe, who considered the Bhuyans as arch-enemies turned to the religious order founded by the saint within a few decades and the Bhuyan-Kachari conflict came to an end forever.

Though Sankardeva did not take part in direct politics, his political thought was purely democratic. His democratic governance is made successful by his Feedback Management. For example, the nomination of his heir may be cited. He nominated Madhavadeva as the heir of his religion during his lifetime. He did not nominate his own son Ramananda Thakur as the heir of his religion, and this reflects his democratic thoughts. Not only this, leaving aside the greed for power, Sankardeva rejected the post of *Gomasta* offered to him. He handed over this post to his relative brother Ramray. Moreover, he rejected the post of *Shiromoni Bhuyan* nominating of *Satradhikar* of Barpeta Satra, indicating the democratic thoughts of Sankardeva. He allowed everybody, even the illiterate disciples to address him and communicate with him very casually. He valued the feedback given by his disciples very seriously. Any devotee could communicate with him without any intermediary. Therefore, apart from being a religious teacher, Sankardeva was respectful to social equality and democracy.



Thus, from the brief discussion above, it is clear that Srimanta Sankardeva was a man of rare personality and quality not only in Assam or in India but in the entire world. He was a preceptor, a great litterateur and an artist. The aim and objective of all his works was to succeed his Neo-Vaishnavite movement by which he wanted to make a peaceful Assamese society devoid of caste and creed. He wanted to bring the end of *Brahmintantra* in society by this movement. On the way of his journey to do this he had to face a lot of trouble, yet he did not look behind and went ahead tackling all such troubles with courage and confidence. Sankardeva's skilled managerial aptitude in various fields as mentioned above made him a grand success.

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