

Introduction "Unveiling the Impact of Sankaradeva's Philosophy on Gorkha Society in Assam"

Kabyashree Baruah

PhD Research Scholar, Gauhati University, MIL & L.S Deptt., Assam

INTRODUCTION

Srimanta Sankaradeva, a revered figure in Assam's history, played a pivotal role in fostering peace, unity, and progress in the region through his teachings and the establishment of Ekasarana Namdharma. His vision aimed to break down societal barriers, emphasizing the importance of harmony beyond caste and religion. In this article, we explore the enduring impact of Srimanta Sankaradeva's ideals on the Gorkha community in Assam, showcasing their historical connection and shared cultural heritage.

The Ekasarana Namdharma Movement:

Srimanta Sankaradeva's Ekasarana Namdharma aimed to propagate Vaishnavism and create a society built on peace and unity. Breaking through societal divisions, the movement encouraged people from all walks of life to embrace a life of devotion, contributing to the creation of a pure and holy society. This liberal approach brought about significant improvements in Assamese society, influencing art, literature, and culture.

Gorkha Community's Response:

The Gorkha community in Assam has been a testament to the enduring legacy of Srimanta Sankaradeva's teachings. The historical connection between Assam and the Gorkhas dates back to ancient times, as evidenced by the extended borders of ancient Kamarupa reaching Nepal. The Gorkhas' association with Sankaradeva remains strong, with notable figures in the community tracing their lineage back to the great Vaishnavitesaint.

Spread of Neo-Vaishnavism among Gorkhas:

The Gorkhas, influenced by Srimanta Sankaradeva's ideals, saw a revival of Neo-Vaishnavism. Many Gorkhas embraced Vaishnavism during the post-Sankaradeva period, seeking refuge in the teachings of Madhavadeva. The Gorkhas residing in areas bordering Bhutan, particularly in Kokrajhar district, found solace in the Guru's teachings. They, in turn, played a crucial role in spreading Sankaradeva's message within the Gorkha society, contributing to the growth of Naamdharma.

Contemporary Contributions:

The Gorkha community continues to contribute significantly to Assam's cultural and religious landscape. Many Gorkha Vaishnava Bhakats actively participate in the functions of Namghar Satras, with figures like Mohanlal Upadhyaya furthering the ideals of Srimanta Sankaradeva. The translation of Sankaradeva's literary works into Nepali by figures like Loknath Chhetri highlights the community's commitment to preserving and propagating Gurujana's creations.

Cultural Integration and Literary Contributions

Furthermore, on September 26, 2003, Namti Kirtan Sangha took the initiative to stage the performance of bhakta prahalad during the Tribal Bhaona Mahotsav held at Chandmari in Guwahati. This production garnered acclaim not only throughout Assam but also received recognition. In another significant cultural event, the Gorkha community orchestrated the entire Bhaona team during the 'Bareshahriya Bhaona' Festival in Jamugurihat in April 2009. Utar Jamuguri Central Hari Kirtan Samiti in collaboration with the Nepalese people of Jamurihat participated in the 2023 Barechaharia Bhaona. At Sri Sri Kwamara Satra, the current Nepalese youth are actively participating in training sessions involving Ankiya Bhaona, Dance-Song, and more, holding roles in various capacities within the Satra Karkari Samiti as Vice President.

Additionally, Mahanlal Upadhyaya has been instrumental in promoting one-hundred bhakti dharma. He achieved this by conducting monthly study cycles and an uninterrupted akhand habibam kirtan, encompassing all of Assam, at the Namghar

in Jorhat village no. 2 (1994-95) of Telahi Mauja in North Lakhimpur. Over the course of 32 years, he dedicated himself to preaching the glory and principles of Vaishnavism inspired by Srimanta Sankardeva. Furthermore, Mahanlal Upadhyaya played a key role in propagating the concept of 'Naimisha Kshetra,' establishing Namghars and study cycles on a statewide scale, including Manikut Study Cycle and Hobbinam, at the residence of Chatiant Acharya Srijut Mohanlal UpadhyayaDev in Sonitpur district.

Dev Raj Sapkota undertook the translation of Mahapurush Shankardev's 'Kirtan and Gunamala' into the Nepali language, presenting the literary works to the 'Nepali Samaj'. Additionally, they played a crucial role in preserving Gurujana's compositions within the Gorkha community by translating the devotional piece, The Nimi-Noba Siddha Samachar, into Assamese. Recognizing that individuals within the Gorkha community, whether residing in Assam or beyond, might not be familiar with the Assamese language, efforts have been made to honor Gurujana through translated literature. Chabilal Upadhyaya has contributed significantly by translating Shankaradeva's Kirtan Book into Nepali and presenting the biography of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva in the Nepali language. For his commendable work, Devraj sapkota has been bestowed with the prestigious Madhavdar Award by Barpeta Satra.

Purusottam Upadhyaya's dedicated efforts in disseminating the spiritual teachings of Srimanta Shankardeva, particularly through works like Srimanta Shankara's Bhagavata Purana and 'Ajamila Upakhyan', have significantly contributed to the understanding and absorption of the Bhagavata Purana within the Gorkha society. His commitment to keeping the legacy and ideals of Shankardev alive is evident through the widespread recounting of Gurujana's stories in various corners of Assam, including regions like Lakhimpur, Kamarup, and Bharakuli Lotupukhuri. Discussions about Shankardeva's creations, coupled with Bhagavata recitations, have become integral in areas where Gorkha children actively participate in many satras, such as Kamalabari Than, Auniuti Satra, Badla Ataab Than, among others, under the guidance of satradhikars. The Gorkha-speaking community in Assam has become deeply engaged in Assamese cultural thought, actively contributing to the preservation of Assamese harmony. In educational institutions, particularly during the commemoration of Shankaradeva-Madhavadeva, students from the Gorkha community engage in soulful performances such as kirtan ghosha, harinam chanting, and borgeet renditions. Beyond the realms of Bhaona, the Assamese Gorkha community collaboratively participates in the Raas Mahotsav, portraying significant characters like Krishna and Radha. Notably, their performances in the Raas Mahotsav in the rangachakua area of Sonitpur district have earned them acclaim for their artistic interpretations embodying the essence of Brahma, Shiva, and others.

Gurujana propagated Vaishnavism, emphasizing that everyone could attain purification through dedicated service to Krishna, leading to liberation and joy. The Gorkhas, migrating to Assam for reasons ranging from political to biological, chose to settle permanently and actively contributed to the region's security. Displaying a strong commitment to preserving Assamese culture, many in the Gorkha community identified themselves as Assamese, attending Assamese medium schools and participating in movements for freedom and language. Living seamlessly as Assamese individuals, the Gorkha society has absorbed the teachings of Mahapurush Shankardev, responding to the call for unity and contributing to the formation of a cohesive Assamese nation guided by the guru's ideals. Their unwavering dedication to disseminating Gurujana's message has further strengthened the bonds of unity within Assam.

Conclusion: Building Unity Beyond Boundaries:

In conclusion, Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva's profound impact on Assamese society extends far beyond geographical and cultural boundaries. The assimilation of the Gorkha community into the broader Assamese identity stands as a testament to the enduring power of Sankardeva's ideals. Through religious, cultural, and literary contributions, the Gorkha community has played a vital role in building bridges of harmony, echoing the visionary message of Gurujana. Sankardeva's teachings continue to serve as a unifying force, fostering a society where diversity coexists harmoniously under the umbrella of Neo-Vaishnavism.

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