CHAPTER-V

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

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Introduction

Analysis of data means categorizing, ordering, manipulating and summarizing of data to obtain answer to the research questions. The purpose of analysis is to reduce data to intelligible and interpretable form so that the relation of the research problem can be studied and stated.[1] It includes breaking of the complex factors into simpler ones and placing them in a new arrangement so that the purpose of the interpretation can be achieved. In the present study the investigator has analyzed the philosophy of Sankardeva, contribution of Sankardeva in the field of education in respect to aims of education, method of teaching, curriculum of teaching and also *Namghar* and *Satra* as educational institutions.

Analysis of data with regard to Philosophy of Sankardeva

–A great Vaishnava revival under Sankardeva in the 16th century has made Assamese people kindly, tolerant and humane. There is no sign anywhere of that form of untouchability which is to be found in south India. Assam is indeed fortunate, for Sankardeva has five centuries back given the Assamese people an ideal which is also my ideal of Ram Rajya.‖ This is what Mahatma Gandhiji had felt about Assam.

The spiritual glory of India has given everlasting thoughts to the world of Mahapurush Madhavadeva, the successor of Sri Sri Sankardeva.

The verse in his own words--

Dhanya, Dhanya Kali kala
Dhanya Naratanu bhal,
Dhanya dhanya Bharata varisey.

[Meaning: Glory to Kaliyuga, Glory to the Human life, and Glory unto Bharata Varsha.]

The inspiring word of Mahapurush Madhavadeva is relevant to all nations in the world. If the flow of humanity worked towards the glory of human life, man will overcome the walls of hatred, and be able to work towards peaceful co-existence.[2]

Srimanta Sankardeva was one of the foremost religious philosophers in the world. He tried to lay down a simple and practical path to salvation for the teeming millions. He was not eager to establish himself as a founder of new philosophical schools and therefore did not bother to arrange his philosophical thoughts systematically. But we find that there is indeed an original line of thinking embedded in his writing. This line is different from all established schools of philosophical thoughts prevailed in India.

This philosophy had some unique characteristics. The salient feature found in Sankardeva‘s writing having philosophical bearing are as follows

(i) *Brahma* is the supreme truth. It is shapeless and beyond all attributes.
(ii) *Brahma* and *Ishwara* (God) are the same, even though *Ishwara* is the abode of all attributes.
(iii) *Brahma* and *Ishwara* are there in every being.
(iv) *Ishwara* and His creations are not different.
(v) *Jiva* (creature) is a component of God. The former constitute the body of the latter.
(vi) The creation is temporary, but not unreal.
(vii) *Maya* (illusion) is an attribute of God and its influence can be avoided by the grace of God.
(viii) One becomes God as one realizes the identity of God and His creation.

While these features are seen in different branches of *Sanatana* Indian Philosophy in different degrees, but all these features are not available together in any one of the branches at the same time. Thus the uniqueness of *Vivartanavada* is the composition of his ideology in totality. While some of these features are found in different branches of Indian Philosophy individually, all these features are not available together at the same time in any of them. There lies the uniqueness of Srimanta Sankardeva‘s Philosophy. Moreover the *Vivartanavada* differs from the other Indian philosophies in many important aspects.[3]

A major characteristic of Srimanta Sankardeva's philosophy is that it preaches equality of the *Nirguna Brahma* and *Saguna Ishwara*. He says categorically in a verse of his magnum opus *Kirtana ghosha*,

Tumi Paramatma jagatara Isha eka
Eko bastu nahike tomato bytireka

(Kirtana ghosha / 519)

[Meaning : you are the universal self as well as the one supreme God of the creation. There is nothing other than you.]

Thus the *Paramatma* or universal self, which is beyond all attributes and Ishwara, the supreme God, who is the abode of all virtues are the same. No other branch of *Sanatana* Indian Philosophy had taken this position before Srimanta Sankardeva. That was why the branches of *Jnana Marga* (path of knowledge) and *Bhakti Marga* (path of devotion) had always remained wide apart in *Sanatana Hinduism*. It was Sankardeva who brought these two paths together and thus did a great service to *Sanatana Hinduism*. He wrote many treatises on devotion besides composing many devotional hymns and thus tried his best to enlighten his disciple about the true path to be followed in life. In fact, he composed thirty books in total. This brings out his stress on knowledge. He declared the importance of spiritual knowledge in a verse of his book *Niminavasiddha sambada*.

Howe jnanasunya / kona papa punya /karite napare sara
Bishaya byakula / samyake batula /nuguche jatana tara

(Niminavasiddha sambada/56

[Meaning: One who is devoid of knowledge cannot differentiate between vice and virtue. He gets totally immersed in mundane affairs like a mad man and his woes never end.]

Srimanta Sankardeva preached loyalty to a single supreme entity like the monists. There have been many monist saints in India, but most of them worshiped additional entities too. For instance, saint Jnanadeva eulogized Rukmini, Shiva and Parvati, though his personal God was Lord Krishna only. But Srimanta Sankardeva strictly adhered to his personal God, Lord Krishna. He was a puritan in this respect.

He banished any deviant from his order itself. There was no place of any entity other than Lord Krishna in Srimanta Sankardeva *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma*. No other order stuck to their avowed principle with such sincerity and strictness. Even Adi Sankarasaya worshiped five deities. So Srimanta Sankardeva was a truer monists than the theorist of monism. To tell it more precisely, it can be said that Srimanta Sankardeva practised the essence of monism in real life also.

Srimanta Sankardeva differed from the great monist saint, Adi-Sankaracharya in his attitudes towards creation also. Adi-Sankaracharya declared the *Jagat* or creation as *Mithya* or false. For him *Brahma* alone was true. He said *Brahma satya Jagat mithya*. But Srimanta Sankardeva treated the *Jagat* as the play field of God. And the object, which God relishes in, cannot be untrue. Srimanta Sankardeva said in his transcreation of *Bhagavata,*

Tumi Brahma tattva jagata jateka
Tomarese krira bhanda

(Bhagavata /3/157)

[Meaning: You are the supreme entity, *Brahma*. The entire creation is nothing but your play- field.]

According to Adi- Sankaracharya, enven *Ishwara* is *Maya* or false. He said,

Ekabupadhi parajivayostayoh
Samyangnivase na paro na jivah

(Vivekachuramani / 224)

Adi- Sankaracharya denied the existence of the *Saguna Ishwara*. He acknowledges the existence of only *Nirgunaa Brahma*. He said categorically in his commentary *Brahmasutra,*

Samasta bishesharahitang nirbikalpameba
Brahma pratipattabyang na tadbiparitam

(Brahmasutra Bhaishya/3/2/11)

But Srimanta Sankardeva considered *Ishwara* as non-different from *Brahma.* For him, *Ishwara* was above the *Maya.* He categorically said that *Bhagavanta or Ishwara* was the supreme entity as described in *Vedanta*. He said in his transcreation of *Bhagavata,*

Jito prakritita para prabhu Bhagavanta
Vedantaro mukhya bhage jake prakashanta

(Bhagavata/10/469)

[Meaning: God is above the *prakriti* or creation. The main content of *Vedanta* expresses Him only]

Since the monists like Adi- Sankaracharya did not think in this line, *Ishwara* was different from *Brahma* for them. So devotion to any entity including *Ishwara* could not be supported by their monistic theory. But Adi-Sankaracharya did exactly that, when he worshiped five deities. That means he did not practise his own monism. His theory was impractical. But Srimanta Sankardeva‘s theory was practicable because he equated *Brahma with Ishwara.*

Sankardeva advised the devotees to worship God in order to get His blessings so that God‘s *Maya* could be surmounted. He said this in a verse of his *Kirtana ghosha*

Harinama hiye dhari Harinama sada smari
Tebese Harira Maya tari

(Kirtana ghosha /599)

[Meaning: We can surmount *Maya* only by holding the name of Lord Hari in our heart and chanting His name always]

So it is clear that Srimanta Sankardeva considered *Jiva as* incapable of surmounting God‘s *Maya*. It could be possible only by the grace of God. But the monists think that Jiva can surmount *Maya* on his own. This is a basic difference between these two lines of thinking. So Srimanta Sankardeva‘s philosophy cannot be clubbed together with monism.

Another important point to be noted is that Adi-Sankaracharya held the human body in contempt. He said,

Matapitrormalodbhutang
Malamangsamayang bapuh [4]

(Vivekachurmani /287)

But Srimanta Sankardeva considered the human body as a holy tool for worshiping God.

Such a precious body could be had only after numerous births. He said

Devaro durlabha ihena janmaka
Vrtha kara kona kame
Grhate thakiya harika smariya
Moksa sadha hari name

— Ajamilopakhyana, Kirttana 4, v. 41

[Meaning: This (human) life is not attainable even by the Gods ; what for do you pass it in vain? Remembering Hari in the household life, obtain salvation by the Name of Hari] [5].

Such attitudinal difference arose due to the difference in attitude towards the creation which was treated as play field of God by Srimanta Sankardeva and as a false entity by the Adi-Sankaracharya. Srimanta Sankardeva did not share the negative *Neti Neti Neti* approach of the monists towards the creation. He sought to explain everything positively.

Srimanta Sankardeva‘s philosophy had elements of both *Parinamavada* and *Vivartavada.*

He considered *Jiva* as changed form of *Ishwara.* This is an element of *Parinamavada*. In other words it is a departure from monism. But at the same time Srimanta Sankardeva also alluded to the illusion of snake in rope while referring to the creation. This is an element of *Vivartavada.* Thus he blended *Parinamavada* and *Vivartavada* in his *Vivartanavada* which is unique thing. Such a blending is not seen in other philosophers.

Another feature of Srimanta Sankardeva‘s blending *Parinamabada* and *Vivartavada* is that while he termed *Ishwara* and devotee as different, he also accepted the identity of both in the final analysis. Such a feature is seen in *Daitadaitavada* of Nimbarka also. But Nimbarka was a strict believer of *Parinamavada* which refutes his theory of identity between Ishwara and devotee. Moreover he worshipped dual entities which are different from tenets of *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma* preached by Srimanta Sankardeva.

Srimanta Sankardeva‘s philosophy also differed from that of Ramanuja, the proponent of qualified monism. Ramanuja considered Brahma as summation of all sentients and insentient beings (SriBhashya 2/2/33) But Srimanta Sankardeva talked about a different relationship between *Jiva* and *Ishwara.* He treated *Jiva* as equivalent to *Ishwara* since *Ishwara* permeates all beings. The saint enjoined upon everyone to treat all beings as manifestation of Lord Vishnu (*Kirtana ghosa* /1820) Ramanuja analyzed sentient and insentient beings differently. He did not accept their identity or equality. Another difference of Srimanta Sankardeva‘s philosophy from that of Ramanuja lies in their distinct perspective about *Brahma.* While Srimanta Sankardeva termed *Brahma* as shapeless and beyond all attributes, Ramanuja termed *Brahma* as only attribute full and equipped with body. For him the Universe constitutes the body of *Brahma* (Sri Bhashya 1/1/1,1/4/72)

It is true that both Srimanta Sankardeva and Ramanuja accepted the existence of *Brahma* inside every creature. But there is a subtle difference between them regarding their conception of the ultimate end of the creature. The more prominent difference of Srimanta Sankardeva‘s philosophy with that of Ramanuja lies in the fact that Ramanuja abided by *Parinamavada* predominantly. In contrary to that Srimanta Sankardeva‘s philosophy *Vivartanavada* had elements of both *Parinamavada* and *Vivartavada*.

Srimanta Sankardeva‘s philosophy is an integral philosophy as it contains elements from different perspectives. It became possible only because he had an integral view of life. He even went beyond monotheism when he equated *Brahma* and *Ishwara.*

It is significant that he paid obeisance to the eternal entity in the form of *Brahma* at the very outset of the book *Kirtana-ghosha*.[6] In *Bhaktiratnakara*

Sankardeva explains that though God manifests Himself and takes forms as incarnation yet he is beyond time, and space and is infinite. In the very first verse of Kirtana Sankardeva salutes the formless *nirguna Brahma* as Narayana, the cause of all incarnations:

Prathamme pranamo Brahmarupi Sanatana
Sarva Avatarara Karana Narayana

[Meaning: At the very outset I bow down to Narayana, the eternal one in the form of *Brahma* the cause of all incarnations.][7]

His philosophy could facilitate from a journey from the gross to the subtle for the devotees as it covers ideas ranging from dualism to monism. It is the first ever practical philosophy of the world which is fully in the tune with religious system of the order. This philosophy is named as *Vivartanavada* considering its stress on spiritual evolution of the devotee from gross to subtle, from plurality to nonduality. Evolution is an important thing in Srimanta Sankardeva‘s writings. In fact he started his *Kirtana-ghosha* with description of the incarnation of *Ishwara*. This incarnation is nothing but metaphors for different phases of development of the creatures. So Srimanta Sankardeva highlighted the process of evolution. He accommodated beliefs of all stages in his philosophy, so that any devotee could rise through that philosophical system whatever be the philosophical state of the devotee. Starting from the devotees of primary level up to the devotees of the highest order of non-dual realization everyone felt at home in the philosophical system of *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma.*

The religious philosophy preached by Sankardeva had its genesis in the *Veda*. His ideology of *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma* was actually rooted in the *Veda*.

There are many explicit references to the *Veda* in Srimanta Sankardeva‘s own writings. One such instance is the chapter *Veda stuti* in his magnum opus *Kirtana-ghosha*. It is categorically said here that Narayana or Hari is the ultimate truth elaborated by *Veda.*

Hridisthita kari Hari samprati tomaka
Karoho upasa ami save Vedajaka

(*Kirtana-ghosha/1655*)

[Meaning: We the *Vedas* now worship thee, O Lord Hari by placing you in our hearts]

Srimanta Sankardeva also said that only those devotees, who uttered the name of Hari understood the *Veda* properly.

Sehishe kulina Vedaka buje
Jahara mukhe Hari-nama sije.

(Kirtana-ghosha/112)

[Meaning: One who understands the *Vedas*, one in whose mouth the name of Hari is properly utilized, belongs to the highest caste.]

Srimanta Sankardeva glorified the Vedas in many places of his innumerable writings. He advised the people to follow the path of *Vedas*. Those people who violated the instruction of *Vedas* are termed as unmeritorious while those people who abided by the *Vedas* were termed meritorious.

Vedara bihita satate acharoi
Sehijana punyavanta
Vedara nishiddha koroi jito nare
Sehito papi atyanta

(Bhagavata/6/137)

[Meaning: One who performs the prescription of *Vedas* is the meritorious one. One who performs the things prohibited by the *Vedas* is the demeritorious one.]

Srimanta Sankardeva said that the *Vedas* were nothing but saying of Lord Krishna. This put the *Vedas* in the same level as *Bhagavata* in the *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma.*

Vede bihoi jaka Janiba sakale
Krishnarese ajna bani

(Bhagavata/6/139)

[Meaning: Know that whatever is prescribed by the *Vedas* is but saying of Lord Krishna.]

In order to explore the similarity of Srimanta Sankardeva‘s ideology with the Vedic thoughts we will have to analyse the *Purusha-sukta of Rig-veda*. The *Purusha-sukta of Rig-veda* is an important exposition on *Brahma*. It says that the ultimate *Purusha* pervades every entity, both sentient and insentient beings. He is the past and present of every things and the controller of all beings. The universe is his attribute. He can be known by surmounting ignorance. So he is the *Paramatma*. All deities emanate from him. Actually all deities are nothing but metaphorical representation of the nature. This is explained beautifully by the *Bagambrini sukta of Rigveda*. So the Vedic idea about the deities is same as that of Srimanta Sankardeva who considered the deities as subservient to the supreme God. That the *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma* is also known as *Mahapurushiya Dharma* is significant in this context. This nomenclature itself means that Srimanta Sankardeva preached devotion and allegiance to one supreme absolute entity in the line of *Purusha-sukta of Rigveda.*

Another important feature of the *Purusha-sukta* is that it placed Vasudeva in the highest pedestal, which was also what Srimanta Sankardeva did. According to the *Purusha-sukta* the universe emanated from Vasudeva, which means that Vasudeva is the supreme God. Vasudeva is none but Lord Krishna. That is why Lord Krishna is worshiped as the supreme God in the *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma.*

Vishnu is the same as *Brahma* in the *Vedas*. *Sruti* defined *Brahma* as Vishnu, according to Madhavacharya. Srimanta Sankardeva also maintained a similar view. He said that God and *Brahma* was the same. So his path of devotion was in tune with the *Upanishad* too.

According to *Veda* the living beings are nothing but *Brahma*. It is said, *Jiva Brahmaiba naparah*. Srimanta Sankardeva also maintained a similar view. He said that the living beings were nothing but play of God. This is in tune with the Vedic concept about creation. The holy scripture *Srimadbhagavadgita* which was the essence of the *Vedas* said that the creation happened due to *Maya, Maya* in turns was attribute of Lord Vishnu, according to *Bhagavata*, another scripture based on the *Vedas.* Thus Srimanta Sankardeva‘s ideology was in tune with the philosophy of S*rimadbhagavadgita* and *Bhagavata.*

The main feature of Srimanta Sankardeva‘s philosophy was the concept of supreme absolute. Lord Narayana is the *Parama Brahma* and the supreme absolute in

his philosophy. Srimanta Sankardeva elaborated this concept in the chapter *titled Veda-stuti* of his scripture *Kiratana-ghosha.*

Tumisi parama tattva jani jnanijane
Sare papa taju guna shravana-kirtane
Anande Brahmaka jitojane bhaje swami
Tahara mahima ara ki kahibo ami

(Kirtana-ghosha/1653)

[Meaning: The wise ones get rid of all demerits by singing and listening to your attributes by knowing you to be the supreme entity, ‗O' Lord what shall I describe about the glory of one who worships *Brahma* happily.]

This philosophy of Sankardeva was in tune with the philosophy of *Vedas*. It was said categorically in the *Rig-veda* that one Supreme Being existed in all entities of the universe.

This Supreme Being is called by different people by different names.

Eking sat Vipra bahudha badanti [8]

(Rigveda/1/164/46)

[Meaning: The Supreme Being exists in all entities of the Universe and He is called by different names.]

The written philosophy of Sankardeva is known as *Kirtana* which has found a special place in every household.

Love, devotion and surrender of the self to Lord Krishna were what gave man eternal peace is the basic theme, the centre point of his work.

Sankardeva's philosophy is based on Dasya Bhakti; Krishna is taken as lord and the disciple as servant.

It is through this way of life the path to reach the creator was preached. The love for Krishna as Sankardeva has said.

—Advaitavada and Visista - daitvavada

Slokadhena Prabhakishami Yaduktang granthakotibhib
Brahma Satya Jagannmithya jeeva Brahmahi Kevalam.‖

[Meaning: Brahma is true and to get Brahma there is a specific way. I shall have to take the help of Avatars. Krishna is that Avatar through whom we have the knowledge of Brahma. Brahma is true for the world is false as the soul is the creator.]

Sankardeva‘s philosophy evolved in such a way that it acts as a bridge between different interpretation of philosophy. For instance Ramanuja‘s Philosophy –Worldly life has also got its meaning, if I don‘t have life how can I think of *Brahma*, though it is temporary‖ stood for the fact God is the only reality, the created world is as real as God. It is therefore not unqualified monism but monism of the one, qualified by the presence of many parts (*visistadvaitavada*).

Madhavacharya hold that Self and God are two different entities. This is dualism but to Sankaracharya the two philosophies, Ramanuja‘s and Madhavacharya‘s, are identical.

Srimanta Sankardeva found a link to reach the creator that is through devotion and self - surrender to Lord Krishna. The difference between the absolute self and the individual self is finally brought out by him in his noted treatise *Bhaktiratnakar.* The individual self under illusion is controlled by the absolute self. The individual soul can only shake off Maya only through devotion to Hari - Bhakti. The causes of *mayavandha* are many. In enjoying worldly pleasures and doing all karma‘s the individual soul gets tied up with the world and enjoys pleasure and pain accordingly. In process it forgets that it is a part of the absolute who does not perform any action. Besides taking sole refuge in God for attaining the state of detachment from the world and salvation, *Yoga* Buddhist philosophy of Sanyama is emphasized in Sankardeva‘s said work as well as in his *Anadi - patana.*

In general many people including the uneducated masses are not in a position to understand hard-core philosophy. The belief is that all philosophy goes out of the window when stomach is hungry. The practical side of life has to be understood and one has to react accordingly. But what man forgets is that the body is transcendental and the soul eternal. It is the strife for the eternal which gives salvation. It is therefore

that Sankardeva stressed in karma and jnana there should be bhakti. This is also the teachings of the *Gita*.

As in the Kali age bhakti, based on the Nama of Hari, known by the many names Krishna, Narayana, Rama is the best way to shake off *Maya* and to attain salvation. This creed became known as *Ek Saraniya Nama dharmas*. In fact Narayana, the eternal reality, is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe, through *Maya.* He is the only truth and the rest are delusions. Sankardeva thus states in his *Kirtana*

Tumise Kebala Sasa Sabe mayamoy
Tomatese hante Sristi huye sthiti layo
Jagata karana niranjana satyabadi
Yara mayapase ito sangsara nirmana.

[Meaning: Narayana, the eternal reality is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe, through *Maya.* He is the only truth and the rest are delusions.]

This only echoes the teaching of the *vedanta*, as also the views of Sankarcharyya. This *mayavada* is very prominent in Sankardeva. The created universe, though unreal, looks real. Sankardeva states in *Kirtana ghosha*

Tumi Satya bhrahma tomata prakase
jagata ito asanta
Jagata sada tumio prakase
antaryami bhagavanta.

[Meaning: The endless universe manifests in the Eternal truth *Brahman* and He, the knower of the heart of all, manifests even in the universe.]

This lies at the root of Avataravada, Sankardeva‘s theory of illusion is carried further. The individual souls, though created by God and He resides in all, have been placed under the illusion of unreality. This requires realization and is the beginning of bhakti, the search for the ultimate truth in the heart of the bhaktas, which the ignorant, not being aware of the truth, search for Him outside only in vain.

So the Kirtana Sates-

Samasta Bhutare asa hridayata
Tatta napai tomaka besere bahirata
Tumese kebale satya misa sabe ana
Jani ynani jane kare hridayata dhyana

[Meaning: Individual souls have been placed under the illusion of unreality though God resides in the hearts of all. It requires realization and a wise man searches for the ultimate truth in their hearts which the ignorant not being aware of the truth searches for Him outside in vain.]

Sankardeva heavily emphasized on Bhakti as the only way one could understand Brahma. So, Sankardeva states in Kirtana -

–To go through the path of knowledge to know Brahma.‖ As in Gita Lord Krishna is *Brahma* and therefore prays Krishna and take the Bhakti Marg.

Brahma is regarded as the Supreme Being, the God of God; of whom *Brahma* Vishnu and Shiva are manifestations. Amidst the various philosophies, Sankardeva's philosphy being simple and direct cascaded into the hearts of people giving them the strength to break the hypothetical self-styled setup innovated by man. For the first time radical Brahmins, who had preached a life pattern based on rituals stood challenged.[9]

On the metaphysical plane, Sankardeva holds a non-dualistic standpoint, unlike many of his vaishnava counterparts in the rest of India. This explains the absence of dual - images in his religion such as Radha-Krishna of Caitanya, Gopi-Krishna of Vallabhacharya, Rukmini - Krishan of Namadeva and Sita-Ram of Ramananda. He gives an unambiguous expression of this faith.

Prakrit purusa duiro niyanta madhava
Samastare atma Hari Parama bandhava

[Meaning: Madhava is the guide of both prakriti (Matter) and purusa (mind). Hari is the most faithful friend of all.]

Sankardeva accepts as ultimate three kinds of substance, matter (*acit*), soul (*cit*) and God (*Ishwara*). According to him, the subtle *Jivas* and the subtle material powers of the universe emanate from *Paramatman,* from whom both the conscious and the unconscious parts of the universe sprung forth. So he describes the noumenal self in this.

–Atman is immutable and immortal; it was neither born in the past nor in the present. Birth and death are the characteristic feature of the body and out of the body a fresh body emerges. Though associated with the body, Atman is yet distinct from the body as fire from the fuel it burns. Just as the sky limited within a Jar merges with the unlimited sky with the breakage of the Jar, the embodied self in a similar way merges with unlimited Brahma after the destruction of the body. Manas (Mind) which determines the quality and activity of body is a product of *Maya* and owing to ignorance created by the latter the embodied self-associates itself with the activities of the body. A lamp is supposed to give light so long there is contact between the wick, oil and fire; similarly the noumenal self goes by the name jiva and suffers pain and miseries of the world so long as it is associated with the body, mind and senses, But know it for certain that the worldly existence really concerns the body and the mind and not the self. Though the fire of the lamp apparently vanishes with the cessation of its contact with the wick and oil, yet it cannot be said that fire so long visible is altogether perished. Fire in the shape of great effulgence (*Mayajyoti*) can never perish, though it may not be apparently visible. Do not in any way doubt the teaching. Though associated with the body yet I am identical or the same with it. I am verily *paramatma*. I am *Brahman* and *Brahman* is I.

Sankardeva himself had shown to the disciple the way to the vaikuntha through a very simple devotion of taking refuse at the feet of one formless God (nirakara), and made them recognize the four pillars or principles (*cari- vastu*) of bhagavatbhakti viz. *guru, deva, nama,* and *bhakata.*

Sankardevayo punarapi dekhailanta
Guru deva nama bhakta cinai dilanta.

Guru: The religious preacher who evokes in the heart of the individual self (jiva) the ideal of *Bhakti* and shows thereby the way unto the God is called guru. There are three chief gurus—the father, who is the cause of birth, is the first guru, a

pious and a well versed Brahman is the second guru, and the giver of spiritual knowledge is the third guru.

Deva: The main principles of *Eka-Sarana-Nama –Dharma* is *_eka deva, eka seva, eka bine nahi keva,* meaning---there is only One deity, only one to be saluted; there is none but One. Lord Krishna, who is the manifestation of the unmanifested and attributeless God, is the only one to be adored with a spirit of self-abnegation:

–One only scripture is true (authoritative)
That which the son of daivaki had uttered,
One only deity—who is the son of Daivaki,
Salutation at the feet of the son of Daivaki,
This is the only work,
The only incantation (mantra)
Is His magical name.

Nama: Utterance of the sacred names and attributes of Lord Krishna is the only way unto God, and to secure liberation. In the *Nama-ghosha* Madhavadeva says:

–Krishna Nama and Virtue is Region Supreme,
Highest good worth mention;
Sweetness of songs of Krishna Only
Fruit of Bliss Liberation.‖

There is mention of the utterance of the Name (of Visnu) in the Veda also:

—O the praisers!
Know Him to be the ancient, the origin and the root of all,
And know Him to be the self- developed,
Be eloquent.
Should the knowers of Him—
Be eloquent in chanting His name.
O the great Visnu!
I take refuge in Thy benevolence (sumati),‖

Bhakata: There is no difference between Visnu and Vaisnva. In the Ratnavali Madhavadeva says :

—Know it (for certain) I do not have
The slightest difference
From my devotees;
Knowing this
Let the people worship Me
With my devotees (devout Vaisnava).॥

In this way, taking these four pillars or principles (*cari- vastu*) as indispensible parts of practising devotion, Sankardeva preached the *Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma* in North-East India.[10]

Sankardeva considers the Absolute Brahma as Narayana, the only objects of adoration. The first line of *Kirtana ghosa-*

—Prathame pranama Brahmarupi Sanatana
Sarva avatara karana Narayana.॥

[Meaning: At the very outset I bow down to Narayana, the Eternal One, in the form of *Brahma*, the cause of all incarnations.] [11]

Sankardeva regards bhakti as superior to mukti. Bhakti is also described as being itself the emancipation (mukti). In *Bhaktiratnakara*, he says :

—Though the state of liberation is all happiness, yet Bhakti is superior to mukti, in as much as, the latter is devoid of joy inherent in the service to the Lord, while the bliss of Mukti is inherent in the former (*bhakti*). Therefore, according to him, liberation is inherent in bhakti and comes automatically taking its own course. Bhakti consists in the firm and overwhelming affection for God with a full sense of His greatness, through this alone can there be emancipation. Though bhakti is the *Sadhana* and *moksa* is the goal, yet it is the *sadhana* stage that is the best. Those who enter into the bliss of Brahman have the experience of that bliss in their selves; but those devotees who do not enter into this state nor into the state of Jivan-mukti, are better than the Jivanmuktas. Thus supreme devotion is superior to Jnana, karma and yoga.12 Sankardeva‘s attitude to bhakti is amply illustrated in the following lines.

Bhakti is the mother, father, brother, kith and kin and the highest treasure of life. It is the movement (*gati)*, the principle (*mati*) and the guiding force of life. It is the highest desire of life, the vital breath of the body (*prana*) as it were. There is no other way of life save and except bhakti in the world and the next.[13]

Sankardeva mentioned that Bhaktimarga is the one and the only way to realize God. In this *bhakta* sees the Lord in everything in the world and finds Him revealing Himself in the form of Love. It is easier to picture God as love than to conceive of the absolute as truth. Above all, it is suited to all irrespective of caste, creed or colour. It may be remembered here that a real *bhakta* will not seek salvation and his constant wish is to remain in a state of perpetual enjoyment of *bhakti*.

Sri Sri Sankaradeva has prescribed certain qualifications necessary for a real *bhakta*. He must possess the qualities of sympathy, beneficence, forgiveness of heart and complete mastery over his passions. He seems to have laid more emphasis on the control of senses. This has been clearly explained in his *Balichalan*.

Above all, Sankardeva propagated *nama dharma* as practical method to bhakti. Nama Dharma consists in chanting the name of the supreme self with undeviating devotion, being pure in heart, thought and action. The advantage of reciting the name of Hari is that everybody can do it, irrespective of age, caste, stage of life, time or place. In *Bhaktiratnakara,* he says -

Aponora namar sanga nacarata Hari
Yeyi nama seyi Hari jana nistakari[14]

–Nindibaku Nahi, Baudhibako Nahi‖ - Tolaration of other‘s religious belief but not to join any ceremony of that kind of belief; in that case, your own (Bhakti) devotion will be affected. Another thing is that sat sanga is very essential in all sphere. The Hari - bhakti system at the time of taking initiation by a young man for the first time into this cult; so, having another young man taking this _Sarana‘ (initiation) is necessary. This man is called –Haribhakti‖ i.e. both to initiate together. So much so, even in marriage _Haribhakti‘ sits in the nuptial ceremony as if he is also equally to be treated as the Bride‘s actual groom. Significance of this is that in every man God resides. Even in lower kinds of sentient beings. So, in Sankardeva‘s Nam Dharma teaches that

in all created being even to a beast his ‑parmatma‖ resides and therefore his injunction give ‗Namaskar' even to a beast.

Sankardeva mention nine ways of modes of practicing devotion. They are-

(i) Sravana: That act of listening to the names and sports of Lord.

(ii) Kirtana: The act of chanting Prayers.

(iii) Smarana: The act of remembering the forms, sports and names of the adorable deity.

(iv) Padasevana: The act of serving the feet of the Lord

(v) Arcana: The rite of ceremonial worship of the image of the deity.

(vi) Yadana: The act of salutation and prostration at the feet of the Lord.

The next three elements of devotion cannot strictly be called ways or modes of Bhakti; rather they indicate devotional relationship between the worshipper and the worshipped.

Thus,

(vii) Dasya: Consist in serving the lord with attitude of a self-less faithful slave.

(viii) Sakhya: It is based on the sense of friendship between the adorer and the adored.

(ix) Atmanivedana: It signifies complete self-surrender of the above nine fold ways of Bhakti, Sankardeva especially extolled and prescribed the first two viz Sravana and Kirtana as highly efficacious modes for the inculcation of devotional attitude of mind. These are not subject to restriction of time, place and person. In these connection Sankardeva says, ‗Although there are nine ways of devotion to Madhava sravana and kirtana are considered to be the best among them.‖[15]

Choudhury, L. (1992) carried out a study on ―The educative role of temple, Namghar and Satra in Dakshin Kamrup area‖ and found that Satras are those place where the discussions by devotees relating to glory of the God and which are pleasant to God Himself are held through the practice of nine (9) ways of mode of bhakti i.e. *Sravana, Kirtana,* Padasevana *Smarana,, Arcana, Yadana, Dashya, Sakhya* and *Atmanivedana*. In another study ―The Mystical thoughts of Sri Sri Sankardeva and Sri Sri Madhavadeva‖ carried out by Mahanta, N. (1985) found that the most fruitful way of devotion are *Sravana* and *Kirtana* (singing) of the Glorious God. Sravana and Kirtana again have to be performed by the devotees with the spirit of complete self-surrender.

Sankardeva was a monotheist and he preached a religion of supreme surrender to the one and therefore, his creed is known as *Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma*. In *Eka-Saran-Dharma,* there is only one God, Vasudeva Krishna, and there is none else other than the one.' The worship of other Gods and Goddesses are strictly prohibited. According to Sankardeva, the Supreme God is Krishna who is the saviour of all. Thus Krishna said in *Bhaktipradipa* :

anya devi deva nakariba seva
nakhaiba prasada tara
murtika nacaiba griho napasiba
bhakti haibe vyabhicara

[Meaning: Devote yourself to me with a single mind, forsake from a distance all other gods, surrender yourself to me alone. Devote to me, and then will you be fit for Salvation. Never listen to the glorification of other Gods so that your devotion may remain unsullied.]

Sarma, M. (1997) in his study ―The religious concept of Sankardeva and Nanak‖ also found that the ideological framework of the thought of Sankardeva was provided by the Bhagavat purana and Gita and Sankardeva laid great emphasis on devotion to a single God i.e. Lord Krishna. Hence the religion propagated by Sankardeva is popularly known as *Eka-Sarana-Nama- Dharma*. Sankardeva is of the view that if Krishna is worshiped all other Gods are worshiped. So he says; ―As the branches, leaves and foliage of a tree are nourished by pouring water only at the root of the tree, as limbs of the body are nourished by pouring food only in the stomach, so

all Gods and Goddesses are propitiated only by the worship of Krishna.‖ Sankardeva upheld the philosophy in all. He comprehended one God, Krishna, one service, the service of Krishna, the supreme *Brahman*.[16]

Finally, it can be said that never before in Assam, a religion was propagated by a single individual at the same time based on a system of philosophy which comprehends all the aspects of religion, in its cosmology and even axiology. At a time when people used to help at tangent of anything non - material, Sankardeva underlined the fact that human life has a spiritual fringe of its own, and man can afford to ignore this fringe at his own peril. On a passage of gloom, Sankardeva‘s message shone like the brilliance of a mid-day sun and here is the light which survived the corridor of five centuries and still gives hope and inspiration to the masses of Assam. His genius lies in the fact that so lofty a philosophy is expressed in a language which is in the reach of common laity.

Analysis of data with regard to contribution of Sankardeva in the field of education in respect to aims of education, method of teaching and curriculum

Srimanta Sankardeva was an eminent scholar, skilled artist, saint, poet as well as a profound dedicated teacher for the entire masses. During the time of Sankardeva education was a privilege available to only a limited few belonging to the upper section of the society. People at large remained buried in the dark abyss of ignorance and illiteracy. The enlightened and socially conscious disciple constituted a microscopic minority in the vast sea of illiterate masses. But in spite of this Srimanta Sankardeva and his followers engaged themselves in the work of propagating knowledge and wisdom in their own ways. He authored many songs, plays, prayers and philosophical writings. This contained major portion of course material prevalent in the then residential school. The teachers of this school taught mostly the religious scriptures like *Vedas, Puranas, Srimadbhagavatgita* etc. The essence of curriculum was very much present in the writings of Srimanta Sankardeva. So when his plays were enacted, when his songs were sung, when his hymns were chanted people received the very knowledge which one received in the residential school and made one educated by the standard of those days. Sankardeva was not only a religious

leader like many people think but also a great educationist in his own inimitable way.[17] Srimanta Sankardeva made a lot of contribution in the field of education. His educational contribution may be discussed under the following heads---

(a) Sankardeva's aim of education
(b) Method of teaching
(c) Curriculum of teaching

(a) Sankardeva's aim of education :

The education imparted by Srimanta Sankardeva to the mass people was both formal and informal education. Sankardeva's Namghar and Satra played a very important role in this respect. In medieval times up to the British ruling education was not a concern to the state. There were tols and pathsalas here and there managed by private individuals. But these were like a drop in the ocean. With the development of Satra institution of Sankardeva the responsibility of imparting education came under its domain. The Satra institution voluntarily took upon itself the noble responsibility of enlightening the people through their own tols. All the important Satra used to maintain and are still maintaining regular band of scholars whose duty was to impart education specially in respect of ancient lores and scriptures including other branches of study like Vyakarana, Nyaya and Kavyas. Sankardeva's chief disciple-Madhavadeva himself taught Ramacarana, his nephew, Haricarana and Purosottama the youngest son and the grandson of Sankardeva respectively. Bhattadeva, the Satradhikara of Patbausi Satra and the father of Assamese prose literature conducted a regular tol in the premises of his Satra and it is narrated in the biography by Ramaraya that one thousand students received education from him.

The *Satra* imparted both formal and informal education. The formal education imparted by Satra was through the tols maintained by some affluent *Satras*. The informal education given by the Satra is more effective than the former in the cases of masses like congregational chanting of prayers, recitation and explanation of different scriptures like *Vedas, Puranas, Srimadbhagavatgita, Kirtana- ghosha* etc.

Namghar also plays an important role in imparting informal education like common prayers, recitation and translation of scriptures, religious discussion, dramatic performance etc.

Like the Christian monastery of the medieval times a Satra was a religious centre, a school and a library. Not only the existing books were preserved with outmost care but books were also imported from other places of India. Every Satra possesses a literature consisting of manuscripts to the extent of few thousand copies. Big Satras like Auniati Satra and Dakhinapat Satra once contained more than a thousand manuscripts, some of which are being preserved in the different antiquarian institution. It is not that only religious scriptures were preserved but books on music, dance, medicine, literature, philosophy and even paintings were carefully preserved. Some rare Sanskrit manuscript like Srihasta Muktabali, Satvata Tantra, Hastividyarnava have been recovered from Satra libraries of Assam.[18] Sankardeva's aim of education may be cited as follows---

Universal brotherhood:

Universal brotherhood of mankind and unity of whole human race was a profound belief of Srimanta Sankardeva. The undivided Assam or the North –East India has been a meeting ground of people with various tribes and races having various culture. So it is not an easy job to make unity among the various people. But Srimanta Sankardeva made it possible. He brought unity among the heterogeneous people of Assam by bringing them to the single fold of *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma* irrespective of caste, creed and religion.[19] He took the people of all caste like Boro, Kachari, Miri, Khasia, Naga, Jayantia including people from Mahamadan community which is mentioned by Sankardeva in his scriptures—

Kirita, Kachari Khasi, Garo, Miri
Yavana Kanka Goala
Asama Muluka Dhoba je Turuka
Kubacha Mlechcha Chandala.[20]

[Meaning: The Bodos, the Kacharis, the Khasis, the Garos, the Misings, the Muslims, the cow rearers, the launderers, the kochs, the untouchables, the pyre lighters in the land of Assam.]

Sankardeva was always dead against the various caste systems prevailing in the society and tried to abolish the caste barrier from the society. He took all devotees in his order who had to sit together in the same level inside the *Kirtana Ghar*- the

common prayer hall. There was no differentiation of people on the basis of caste or class in his order. The downtrodden in the society got equal status as that of the highly privileged class of the society in Sankardeva's order. His vision was to establish a classless society as he wrote—

Nabasai bhakati jati ajati.[21]

[Meaning : The devotion does not differentiate between the classes]

Mahanta, N. (1990) in his study ‗Influence of Neo-Vaisnavism on the Bodo Kacharies of Kamrup‖ (with special reference to Socio-Cultural aspects) also found that Sankardeva was not only the religious preacher but also a social reformer and promoter of cultural civilization in the society. Sankardeva tried to abolish untouchability from the society and established equality and social harmony in the country.

Sankardeva preached equality in the spiritual domain. He preached that everybody is equal in the eyes of God, so anybody has equal right to worship. The path of spiritual realization cannot be the exclusive right of a socially privileged few. In this connection Sankardeva said--

Yito candalara kvya vakya mane
sadaya sumare hari
Ache bahra vrata yito brahmanara
si si srestha tato kari.[22]

[Meaning: A *Candala* who remembers God with heart and soul is superior to Brahman observing religious vows.]

Sankardeva raised the vocal alarm against the social evil of untouchability in the fifteen century. He enlisted his disciples from all section of the people including Mahmadan.

Moral aim of education:

In innumerable passage of Sankardeva's writing the universally accepted conduct of right living has been extolled and vices have been deprecated. These moral qualities are truthfulness, indifference to worldly pleasure, kindness, hospitality,

temperance, contentment, patience, purity of heart, control over passions etc. Nonviolence or mercy towards all creatures has been recognized as a great virtue. In this regard some quotations from Srimanta Sankardeva's writings are given below.[23]

i. Truth elevates us to the higher regions while untruth (asatya) degrades us to the path of ruin. So try to maintain it.[24]

ii. One who bears false witness and cheats people in the process of buying and selling is punished after his death by the agent of God of death.[25]

iii. One should regard material wealth as dreadful as death as it is source of all evils.[26]

iv. Creatures in the grip of fear or danger should always be protected. A truly good man protects other's life by sacrificing his own, when necessary. Even the performance of millions of horse sacrifices is not equal to the one deed of giving shelter to a distressed creatures.[27]

v. One who oppresses others for the sake of one's own body verily goes to the hail after death.[28]

vi. Even if an arch enemy happens to come as a guest he should be served like a God without regard to his previous inimical behaviour.[29]

Sankardeva conceived of the universal equality. It is clearly expressed in the following verses in *Kirtana ghosa* :

Kukura candala garddabharo atmarama
Janiya sabako padi kariba pranama
Samasta bhutata atma budhi nohe jave
Kaya-vakya mane abhyasiba ehi bhave.[30]

[Meaning: Even the souls of dogs, *Candala,* asses are verity of God, considering this idea in mind they should be saluted.]

Social peace is to a great extent guided by the discipline life of an individual. There may come some situation when man suffers from many anxieties. In such cases one is prone to commit acts that may be injurious to society. Keeping such situation in mind he advised self-control:

Kariyo manaka baishya vidura samprati.[31]

[Meaning: Control your mind to keep yourself away from doing actions which may be injurious to the society.]

Sakardeva gave greater importance to human values than legal sanction, kindness, love benevolence etc. One who is closely related to the human values than to love, kindness to the weak, help to the distressed etc. are equally emphasized by him. Deception and oppression and inflicting pain to others were called papas. Throughout his life Sankardeva tried to elevate good deeds to status of social prestige. Such preaching are at several places of his writings:

Jagatara punya mane jana nista kari
Prani upakara alpako nuhi sari
Hena jani pranika abhaya diya dana [32]

[Meaning: All the animals should be helped and well protected considering them to be the souls of God.]

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

Nahi nahi ana dharma jana satya kari [33]
Satyase ache rahi mahi caracara
Satya sama dharma aru nahi purusara.[34]

[Meaning: Truth is the essence of all actions and it is the greatest virtue of man. There is no other dharma like truth. The whole Universe sustains because of the truth.]

His concern with truth is not only a percept but also an example. Sankardeva‘s Harichandra sells himself to the Candala for the sake of truth. Similarly he has sufficiently stressed on nonviolence and therefore preached against violence envy etc.

For healthy society Sankardeva stressed the need of moral purity in daily life. Hence he advised to keep away from greed, falsehood, desire, anger etc. and to live on truth, non-violence and self-discipline etc.[35]

In Sankardev‘s words :

Eribe sadaya kama krodha ahamkara
Tebese eraibe hata durjaya mayaka.[36]

[Meaning: Always keep away from greed, falsehood, desire, anger to overcome the *Maya*.]

Spiritual aim:

Srimanta Sankardeva has a profound belief in God and preached a common religion to the whole world i.e *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma* irrespective of caste, creed and religion which means surrender to the Supreme Brahma i.e Basudeva or Krishna and there is no need to worship other God or Goddess. Thus Krishna said in *Bhaktipradip*

Eka cite tumi moka matra kara seva
Parihara durate yetaka ana deva
Huyoka saranapanna eka mote matra
Moke bhaja huiba teve muktira patra
Nama nusuniba tumi ana devatara
Yena mate nuhibe bhakati vyabhicara [37]

[Meaning: 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.]

Sankardeva is of the view that if Krishna is worshiped all other Gods are worshiped. Sankardeva 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 propitiated by the worship of Krishna.*‖[38] According to Sankardeva bondage is due to the attachment of worldly objects. Liberation is possible through realization of God. It is produced in various ways like renunciation of all desires of enjoyments of worldly pleasures, self-control, self-discipline, respectful attachment of God, love for one‘s equals and complete resignation to God. Sankardeva regards Bhakti as superior to Mukti. Bhakti is also described as being itself the emancipation (mukti).[39]

He also cited nine ways or mode of practising devotion which are *sravana, kirtana, smarana, padasevana, arcana, vandana, dasya, sakhya and atmanivedana.* Out of these Sankardeva considers sravana and kirtana as the best of all. In Sankardeva's word-

Shravana kirtana smarana vishnura
Arsana pada-sevana
Dasya sakhitva vandana vishnura
Kariba deha arpana[40]

[Meaning: You will listen, recite, keep in mind Vishnu and dedicate your body with the feelings of servitude, friendship and prayer.]

For awakening and deepening the devotional sensibility Sankardeva lays a special emphasis on the indispensability of four elements viz *Guru*, *Deva*, *Nama* and *Bhakta*.[41]

Vocational aim of education:

Srimanta Sankardeva emphasised on the vocational aim of education as he realized that vocational education can give better livelihood of life and can make one economically self-sufficient. The *Satra* or the *Than* established by Sankardeva plays a vital role in imparting vocational training to the devotees of the *Than* or *Satra*. The devotees affiliated to a particular *Satra* or *Than* are encouraged to take up some vocational occupation. The expertise of these vocation is traditionally imparted by the older members of the *Than* or *Satra*. Such vocation includes handicraft like wood curving, cane and bamboo work, *Sanci-pat* preparation, *mask* making, illustration of manuscript, different types of paintings, use of natural dye- *hengul hiatal*. The *Than* or *Satra* patronises these vocations. Thus it is a vocational training centre for the artisans. The artisans trained up there are engaged in the construction of Guru asana (alter), in manufacturing of mask used by the actors of *Ankiya* plays of Srimanta Sankardeva, preparation of *Sancipat* or *sanci* wood leaves for writing manuscripts etc. The art of carving miniature wooden images of deities, throne and seats of ivory beautifully decorated and painted with various design are still in existence in a few *satra* of Barpeta and Majuli. This class of people professionally devoted to the activities of curving miniature wooden images is known as *Khanikar*. In the modern

period the vocation like mask making etc. have become commercial too as the demand of such commodities have increased outside the *Than* and Satra. So the *Than* and Satra have become facilitator for self-employment among the local people. They have helped in the formation of self-help group economically. Samaguri and Khatpur Satra etc. are famous for mask making.[42]

All round development:

Sankardeva gave much importance for all round development of individuals i.e physically, mentally and spiritually. Sankardeva himself practised yoga for which he could swim across the mighty Brahmaputra during peak rainy season. For physical development of the body he always encouraged his disciple to practice yoga. He also advised his disciple for self-control by means of practising *pranayama*.[43] Sankardeva emphasized on the development of mind for which he composed a number of songs and drama (*Ankiya Nata*) for entertainment of the people. He composed 240 numbers of Bargits and six number of Drammas or *Ankiya Natas*.[44] The cultural programme including songs and drama was performed in the Namgar and Satra for public enjoyment. For spiritual development of individual Sankardeva preached *Eka Sarana Nama Dharma* for the entire community irrespective of caste and religion which means devotion to single God. Sankardeva put much emphasis on sravana and kirtana as the sadhanas of bhakti. The necessity of supreme surrender to one is expressed in the following words of Lord Krishna to Arjuna—

huyoka saranapanna eka mota matra
moka bhaji haiba teve mukutira patra.[45]

[Meaning: Surrender yourself to me alone, devote to me, then you will be fit for salvation.]

(b) Method of teaching:

Srimanta Sankardeva was an eminent scholar, and a profound dedicated teacher for the entire society. He introduced some important methods of teaching for the mass education. These methods are now appreciated and adopted by the modern educationist of our time.

These methods are—

(i) Group discussion method
(ii) Play way method
(iii) Learning by doing method

(i) Group discussion method:

Sankardeva introduced the question and answer technique and group discussion method for mass education. Generally the common people of the villages who were illiterate came to the Namghar and Satra and took part in the discussion of various topics. Questions are put by the people for clarification of their ideas and the learned person discussed the matter in general and removed the difficulties/doubts from the mind of the people. This type of discussion drew the attention of the common people who enjoyed the peaceful environment of living.

(ii) Play way method:

Sankardeva introduced the play way method of teaching which is followed by the modern educationist today. The introduction of plays i.e *Ankiya Bhaona* made the teaching, learning situation easier. This method paved the way for public gathering (Loka Sangraha) and community enjoyment (Loka Ranjana) through which Sankardeva taught the social, moral and spiritual lessons to the masses. Thus Sankardeva introduced the technique of dramatization in teaching. His performance of *Chihna Yatra*- a drama through drawing and painting is the real symbol of integration of head, hands, hearts, minds and soul. Thus his method, technique and device are scientific and effective and are most relevant in modern days.

(iii) Learning by doing method:

Sankardeva appreciated the activity principle of teaching and learning. This learning by doing method was introduced by Sankardeva in the 15^{th} century through drum beating (Khola) with different mudras and gestures. He introduced the dances in various forms. He was a great artist and a painter. His painting works drew the attention of the common people and it developed the spirit of self service. The Bhaktas registered to a particular Satra were trained on various vocational activities like handy craft, mask making, cane and bamboo works, painting and wood curving

etc. Thus Sankardeva created a class of people known as *Khanikar* who is professionally skilled for mask making, musical instruments and construction of miniature wooden images with design. This led to the introduction of cottage industries in the villages of Assam. Thus he laid the foundation of practical teaching and work experience introduced in our modern education.[46]

(c) Curriculum of teaching:

In the study of the educational contribution made by Sankardeva it is very much clear that the subjects included in the curriculum of teaching were—Mother tonque (Brajawali, Sanskrit), ancient lores and scriptures (the Vedas, the Upanisadas, the Puranas, the Samhitas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, Vyakarana, Nyaya Sastra, Kavyas, Philosophy, Psychology, Yoga, Moral education and Vocational education including handy craft, drawing and painting, music, dramatization, dancing and cottage industry.[47] Sankardeva emphasized on the learning of three languages viz Assamese, Brajavali and Sanskrit. It is a credit to the genius of saint Sankardeva that he revived the Brajavali language through the Bargits and Ankiya Nat and inspired the vaishnava devotees of Assam to continue it till the 18th century A.D and even after. The language he developed was easily understandable and accessible by the common people who were not conversant in Sanskrit, the language of the upper educated ruling class. By writing in Brajavali he became the architect to bridge the gap created by the different dialect. This gave the initial essential drive to the spreading of Vaishnavite Movement in the North-East; subsequently it became a common language of the people of the Eastern India through which they exchanged their views, composed their songs and produced literary works document including inscription.[48]

Sankardeva also included the Puranas, Tantras and Samhita as subjects of teaching in order to provide the knowledge of moral education to his disciples. Among the Puranas are—*Bhagavata Purana, Kurma Purana, Narasimha Purana, Matsya Purana, Naradiya Purana, Vishnu Purana, Bramanda Purana* and *Brahn-naradiya Purana*. His disciples were also taught the knowledge of various Tantras and Samhita. Among the Tantras and Samhitas were *Satvata tantra, Kaumara tantra, Vashistha samhita, Vishnu yamala, Agasyta samhita, Patanjala samhita, Vaisvanara samhita, Katyayana samhita, Jaimini samhita* and *Naradiya samhita.*

In addition to the teaching of various ancient scriptures the knowledge of the Vyakarana was also imparted to the devotees for composing variety of vaisnavite literatures.[49]

Sankardeva also gave much importance for selecting vocational education as a subject of teaching curriculum because he realized that it was the only way to provide livelihood of life to the village people and making them economically self-sufficient. For this purpose devotees were engaged in different handy craft like musk making, cane and bamboo works, painting of *sanchipat*, wood carving etc. Now a days government has also given much importance in vocational education for employment to the rural unemployed youth.[50]

Sankardeva also included *yoga* in the curriculum of teaching as he realised that healthy body and a strong soul or mind, both are essential in one‘s life. Through *yoga* one can control one‘s desires and aspiration. It is yoga through which one can remove ignorance and achieve glimpse of God. Sankardeva included the subject of yoga in the Residential School (tol) in the 15th century. In one of the later sections of Bhakti Ratnakara, Sankardeva quotes the verses from 11th book of *Bhagavata* to explain the *Yoga* accessories as (i) *Yama* (ii) *Niyama*. (ii) *Ashana* and (iv) *Pranayama*. *Yama* means restrain from violence, untruth, stealing, debauchery and non-accumulation of wealth. In other words it is like non-injury to life, truthfulness, none stealing, continence and non-accumulation of wealth. On the other hand *Niyama* means observance like purity of body and mind, contentment, penance and continuous study of *Vedas* and complete surrender of self to God. *Ashana* means comfortable posture of standing, sitting and lying. *Pranayama* means the control of breath. Still now in the *Satra* institution the *Yoga* is a compulsory subject in the curriculum of teaching.[51] Now a days the modern educationist also advocates *yoga* as a compulsory subject in the curriculum of educational institution from the primary to secondary level. Government has also appointed a *yoga* teacher in the school. No doubt *yoga* is originated in India but it does not belong to India. Today 177 nations supported the U.N resolution proclaiming June 21 as International Day of *Yoga*.

In short Srimanta Sankardeva played a great role in the development of the cultural history of North-East India in respect of literature, fine arts and painting, craft, education and learning since the beginning of the sixteenth century till the

advent of British and we find that his method, technique and devices of teaching are scientific and effective and are most relevant in modern days. So we rightly call that Srimanta Sankardeva was a great Educationist.

Analysis of data with regard to Satra and Namghar as educational institutions.

The outstanding legacies left by Srimanta Sankardeva to the Assamese people are Satra and Namghar institutions. These institutions have a great influence on the social, cultural and community life of the Assamese people. The Satra institution has resemblance to certain extent with the Buddhist monastery system or the Maths institution of the medieval period.[52]

Assam is the home land where people of different ethnic groups having mixed cultures and speaking different languages and dialects live. People migrated into this region from Thailand, Burma, Tibet and Bengal etc. at various period of history become its inhabitants forming the population of Assam.[53] After a long time these people got integrated as a population giving birth to the greater Assamese nation. The identity of the amalgamated Assamese was initiated by the great saint Mahapurush Srimata Sankardeva with his Neo-Vaishnavite Movement which gave birth to new institutions of Satra and Namghar in Assam. These Satra and Namghar began to serve not only as the instrument spreading the faith, but also helped to sustain and to stabilize Vaishnavism by making it a part and parcel of Assamese social and cultural life. In real sense the culture of Assam is defined by the Neo –vaishnavism though it was a religious movement. The Neo- vaisnavism has also a great bearing in the creation of different livelihood. Sankardeva being the harbinger of Bhakti movement and doyen of cultural renaissance picked up the orthodox elements of the society and introduced cultural initiatives like *Bhaona* and *Borgit* etc. which had in actual defined the Assamese identity. With its dynamic philosophy of inclusiveness Sankardeva‘s Neo-Vaishnavism has given birth to a new cultural nationalism focused on a national identity shaped by cultural traditions and language, not on the concept of common ancestry or race. The cultural nationalism was brought forward to the indigenous people with the help of Satra and Namghar which has a major role to play in the preservation and development of the indigenous culture of the region.[54] The

institutions of Neo-vaishnavism, the Satra and Namghar has played an important role in the evolution of genesis of Assamese identity and its inclusiveness in nation building. In the genesis of the Assamese Identity, the Namghar is one of the major pole bearers, playing the multi-faceted role of cultural centre, proto-type panchayat, and forum for decentralized planning and decision-making. The Satra institution also played an important role in empowerment of woman for sustainable development of progressive and egalitarian Assamese society.[55]

Satra institution

It is a religious sittings or assembly where religious discussion is held. It is however to be noted that the Vaisnava establishment of Assam is called *Satra*. Bhusana Dwija one of the earliest biographers of Srimanta Sankardeva has used the word *satra-griha* in the sense of a house where Sankardeva immediately after his return from the first pilgrimage used to hold religious discussion. This is the first Satra set up by Srimanta Sankareva near his ancestral village at Bordowa. Bhattadeva one of the foremost religious teachers of the sixteenth century defines a Satra in his *Sarana mallika* as an assembly of holy persons where Bhakti in all its aspects is practised. He defines: That supreme place adored by Gods and vaishanavas where ardent devotees perform duties pleasing to Gods and where nine fold Bhakti daily prevails is called *Satra.* Vaishnava residing there prone to Harinama.

The use of the term Satra in the sense of vaishnava institution or establishment appears altogether to be a new one in the religious history of India. The word *Satra* is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit word *Sattra*. In Sanskrit literature the word has been used in two senses, firstly in the sense of an alms house and secondly in the sense of a sacrifice lasting from a few days to a year or more. In the opening chapter of the Bhagavata- Purana the word satra has been used to denote a long session of sacrifice of a thousand years durations performed by the sages in the forest of Nimisa. In course of the sacrificial session Suta-Urgrasrava recited and explained the *Bhagavata-Purana* to the assembled sages. This process of reciting and listening to the exposition of the Bhagavata most probably gave currency to the word satra in Assam. Sankardeva probably initiated his movement by reciting and expounding the stories of *Bhagavata-Purana* to a band of followers who clustered around him to listen to his religious discourse. Thereby Sankardeva reminded the listeners of Suta-Ugrasrava in

the assembly of holy sages in the Nimisa forest. The fact that the sacrificial session known as Satra easily led the people to think that Satra and holy association where Bhagavata used to be discussed were identical. Under this impression devotees began to term an assembly where Bhagavata used to be recited as Satra.

Structural feature of the Satra:

Satras are generally situated on quadrangles surrounded by walls. Each Satra is characterized by the existence of a *Batchara*, a *Namghar*, a *Manikut* and two or four rows of *Hatis*. Details of this structure are mentioned below.

***Batchara* :** The entrance leading to the interior of a Satra is marked by a small open house known as batchara or karapat. It functions as a gate house. Distinguished guest are first received at the batchara and they are escorted to the interior of the satra.

***Namghar*:** The centre of the main activities of a Satra is the *Namghar*. It is a large open hall which serves the purpose for community prayer as well as for holding different cultural programes, religious meeting and discussion. The *Namghar* is built with open wall having two rows of pillars with thatched or tin roof. The size of the *Namghar* varies with the number of disciples it has to accommodate.

***Manikuta*:** The actual shrine where the idol of the deity or sacred scripture is kept is called *Manikut*. It is smaller than the *Namghar* and is attached to the latter adjoining the eastern end.[56]

***Hati*:** Centering round the *Manikuta* and the *Namghar* there exist four rows of residential huts or long houses, each divided into a number of rooms on the sides. These are intended for clerical devotees. These four rows of huts or long houses with sets of rooms are called *cari hati*. The word *hati* is derived from the Sanskrit word *hatta* meaning a market or fair with rows of shopes. The individual hut or room are generally of an equal size except those on the eastern sides which are somewhat bigger being the residences of the superior called a *Satradhikara*, his deputy called a *deka adhikara* and the principal office bearer of the establishment. Minor Satras where monastic life is not observed could be identified as such only for the existence of the *Namghar* and the *Manikuta*. The system of *cari hati* is rarely noticed there. In one of the chief monasteries of Assam namely the Barpeta Satra there are two rows, the northern being called the *am-talar hati*, ‗residences under the mango trees', and

the southern being called the *kewaliya hati*, _celebates residences‘or *bar-baha*, _residences of elders‘.[57]

Evolution of Satra:

At the initial stage of the Neo-vaishnavite movement we find that the religious sitting or association where the Bhagavata was recited or explained was designated as a Satra. With the progress of time these association of devotees began to develop on a distinct line and ultimately emerged as a well-developed institution having a distinct structural features.

The first phase of Satra naturally began with the initiative of Sankardeva. But in his times the religious association organized by Sankardeva did not take the shape of a regular institution of permanent nature. Because the family of Sankardeva as the *sarita puthis* state had to pass through an embarrassing financial circumtances and Madhavadeva had to come on a few occasion to help him. Moreover the insecurity and temporary nature of his stay at different places prevented Sankardeva from organizing the infant institution on a permanent basis. It was in the time of Sankardeva‘s chief disciple Madhavadeva and Damodardeva that the Satra institution attained the second phase of its growth. After the demise of Sankardeva Narayana Thakur, an old colleague and disciple of Srimanta Sankardeva advised Madhavadeva (Sankardeva‘s chief disciple) who headed the religious order to plan and construct a Satra at Barpeta in a plan and attractive manner but at first showed his reluctance towards the suggestion made by Narayana Thakur but later on deemed it necessary to reconstruct the Barpeta Satra in a planned and an attractive manner. The prayer hall was tastefully decorated with various designs and curving. The lines of huts for celibates were also properly arranged. According to *Katha gurucarita* there were one hundred and twenty celibate devotees within the campus of Barpeta Satra during the time of Madhavadeva. The structural feature of the Satra received the final shape during these periods.[58]

Location of Satra:

Selection of site for a Satra also deserves notice. Usually Satras are established on the banks of Brahmaputra and its tributaries because the rivers were the high ways and by ways of communication and transport. There were road ways no doubt but the

numbers of road plodable in all the seasons were negligible in numbers. There were two more considerations while selecting the sites for Satra. The fertility of land and availability of fish and vegetables were also contributory factors in site selection. Secondly the nature and attitude of local people were also taken into consideration while selecting the place and site for a Satra.

Management of Satra:

For efficient management of Satras and for conducting the religious services regularly the Satradhikara (the head of the Satra) appoints from among his devotees several functionaries to hold different departments under his control. The number of such functionaries may vary according to the size and nature of each Satra. The management of big Satra establishment of Assam is conducted by the following departments: (i) *Manikut,* (ii) dhan bharal, (iii) caul-bharal (iv) general management.

Manikut management: Every Satra possesses one or more image of Vishnu. In Satra where the practice of image worship forms an indispensable part of the daily devotional routine the following functionaries are usually found to exist. The man who is placed incharge of worshiping image is known as bar-deuri. Under him there may be one or more assistant known as pali-deuri. Their duty is to prepare sandal paste, arrange naivedya and to kindle light.

Namghar management: A series of devotional functions are held in the Namghar from morning till the early hour of night. The Bhagavati or the Bhagati reads and explains the original *Bhagavata Purana*. He is assisted by one or more duwaliya (duwaliya= assistant) Bhagatis. The person who is in charge of reciting Assamese scripture is known as Pathaka and when he has his assistants he is called bar Pathaka. The person who leads the congregational prayer services is called bar namlogowa and his assistants are called saru namlogowa. The Satra orchestra giving musical performance during Prasanga (sevices) and dramatic representation is called gayana-bayana and is formed by the numbers of drammers (bayanas) and singers (gayanas) who carried big and middle size Cymbals in their hands. Lastly there are natuwas skilled in the art of dancing, dhuliyas (drum players) and kalias (flute players) whose duty is to entertain the deity as well as the devotees in the Namghar on different occasion.

Dhan bharal management: The treasurer (dhan bharali) of the Satra remains in charge of the dhan bharal. He is the custodian of the valuable properties. He keeps accounts of income derived from land, tithes, presents and gift from disciples and patrons. He is required to keep the regular accounts of expenditure incurred in connection with the management of Satra.

Caul bharal management: The store department (caul bharal) remains under the supervision of caul bharali. In addition to his normal duty of looking after the food provision of the Satra he is required to supervise works done by paiks or sevaits. Under the caul bharali there are a few functionaries in charge of the different branches of these departments. They are lon bharali (store-keeper of salt, oil and ghee), guva bharali, mithai bandha (incharge of sweet) and majinder (recorder).

General management of the Satra: There are few functionaries who are not directly connected with any one of the department but work for the general management of the institution. The hati-mata looks after or controls the hati (rows of huts) under his charge and the athparia keeps vigil at different hours of the day and night and makes provision for offering light in the Namghar. Then there are one or more bilonia (one who distribute the offerings made to the deity), a few thai mochas (incharge of washing or plustering the floor of the Namghar or Manikut) and a host of minor functionaries who supply the Satra with fuel, earthenwares, flowers, milk and other thing

The contact between the far flung villages and the Satradhikara is maintained through a village ecclesiastical officer known as Rajmedhi, Barmedhi, sajtola and pacani. The duties of a Rajmedhi is to collect guru kar (tithes), to keep a watchful eye on the religious of people under his care and to maintain a regular and close connection between disciples and the Satra through various ways of religious intercourse. Several villages constitute one cohar (diocese) over which the Rajmedhi exercise his religious power. Next to Rajmedhi is bar medhi who looks after the religious life of one or more villages under the supervision of the former. A bar-medhi is assisted by a few medhis, sajtolas and pacanis. Sajtolas are generally engaged in collecting materials to be sent to the Satra and pacanis duty as informants or carrier of order. The pacanis in return of their service enjoy revenue free land.

Formerly when big Satra had to maintain a close contact with the royal court of the pre- British days an officer known as Khataniyar was maintained to deal with all official business that had to be transacted in the royal court.

Funtionaries noted above are usually graded into three categories according to their responsibility and power. Persons placed in charge of different departments and branches of the Satra establishment are considered as the member of the first category. They are entitled to receive the maximum honour. They are called *bar-manowai*.

The functionaries of the second category are known as *saru- manowai* (saru=minor, manowai= man of prestige). These functionaries who generally perform the duties of assistants in the absence of their chiefs are placed in the second categories. They occupy seats next to the functionaries of the first order.

Of all the functionaries, rajmedhi belong to the first category, bar-medhi to the second and ordinary medhi and the pacanis to the third category.[59]

Income of Satra: The present income of Satra comes mainly from two important sources. These two sources are- (i) lands which are originally granted by the kings of the pre-British days and subsequently confirmed and recognized by the British Government; (ii) religious tithes (guru kar) contributed by disciples. All prominent Satras possess in varying degrees lands grants ranging from a few acres to several thousand acres of land, some of which are totally free of revenue and others are half free. As stated by the district gazetteers of Assam, 1905, Auniati, Dakhinapat, Kamalabari and Bengena-ati Satras possess 21,000 ; 10,000 ; 5,900 and 2,500 acres of revenue free land besides a large amount of acres, half free of revenue. After the independence this institution has gone back to the principle laid by the saint with most of their wealth liquidated or requisitioned by the government. The Satras now operate in self-sustained manner to a great extent. A part of the land belonging to them is given to the devotees, who reside within their satra complex for livelihood. The remaining land is cultivated upon and the proceed is used for the maintenance of the Namghar under the care of the Satradhikar, the head of the Satra.

The second source yields income according to the number of disciples; the greater the number of disciples, the higher is the income and vice-versa. Every

disciple is expected to contribute a small amount annually in cash or kind to his Satra. There is popular saying of ‑rajarkhajana‖ and ‑gurur kar‖ which enjoin the payment of tax to the king and tithes to the Guru.

In addition to the above regular sources of income, occasional presents or offerings from devotees and patrons and special subscription raised from disciples to meet expenses of important function are the two additional but irregular sources of income.

Types of Satra: There are four types of Satra institution found in different parts of Assam. There are a few satra which are purely monastic in nature. The Satradhikara with clerical devotees leads there the life of a celibate. No woman is allowed to stay at night within the four wall of Satra campus. Woman is not allowed even at day time to enter the Satra establishment except on religious ground. In the second type the Satradhikara and his devotees lead householder life with wife and children. In the third type the Satradhikara and deka- adhikara remain as celibates, but thereby they do not detach themselves altogether from the family. Although celibate they remain within the family like any other member. The fourth type is an admixture of both of the first and the second type. Here the Satradhikara and deka-adhikara are married but their devotees consist of both celibates and non-celibates.[60]

Role of Satra as a centre of education: The *Satras* established by Srimanta Sankardeva provided both formal and informal education to the mass people. It imparted formal education through establishment of various *tols* which were maintained by some affluent *Satras.* The informal education that was imparted by the *Satras* was very much effective in the case of the masses. Here the village people came to the Namghar in the Satra and listened to the recitation and exposition of various scripture like *Bhagavata-Purana* and *Kirtana ghosha*. They were also involved in various religious discussion and community prayer services and thereby they got very knowledge of the scriptures.[61] Goswami, R. (2006) in his study ‑Role of religious institution with special reference to Harimondira in imparting informal education among the people of the district of Nalbari‖ also found that the religious institution plays an important role in imparting informal education. The illiterate common people used to come to the Namghar and Satra and get informal education

through participating in various religious activities like recitation and exposition of various scriptures.

It should be noted that the Satra works both as seats of religious learning and residential school. The *bhakat* live here under the guardianship of the *Satradhikar,* who is responsible both for temporal welfare and spiritual progress. Further each pupil monk when he comes to enter the monastic life is immediately placed under the charge of a senior or elderly *bhakat*. During the probationary period the pupil monk serves as *aldhara* or personal attendant to the senior *bhakat* who guide/train him in monastic life, discipline, liturgy and doctrinal practices. The pupil monks also receive education from other functionaries of the Satra, particularly from *Bhagavati* and *Pathak.* They impart instruction both orally and through written test and services. Monks are further commissioned to translate Sanskrit texts to Assamese and compose original works either in Sanskrit or Assamese. It is a customary practice with the monks to copy and illustrate manuscript and to compile *Caritputhis*, biographies of vaishnava saints and leaders of Satra to illustrate vaishnavite ideal of individual life.

Occasionally discussion and debates are held in *Satras* to which the religious leaders and scholars from other places are invited. These meetings provide opportunities to the monks for solving many of their difficult problems arising out of the texts they are studying. As Sir Richard Livingstone remarks there is much to be said for this methods of debate and discussion in the old system of education. In discussion a man finds out what he does not know, what he has overlooked, where he is mistaken and –not less important—what he does really know and believe, where he is right; the soft strata of mere opinion are washed away by the steady spray of arguments and the hard rocks remains. In discussion too he shares new experiences and in commerce with stronger minds is lifted to higher levels and discerns new landscapes in the world of being. Much of this can be obtained from book, but not all. They suffer from the grave of disadvantages of not being able to ask or answer questions. (Some tasks of education). All these go to produce within the Satra successful teachers, religious leaders as well as eminent poets, scholars and philosophers.

Besides religious education and monastic practices the bhaktas are engaged in secular learning such as cultivation of art and craft. Since converts are drawn from the

villages, they naturally bring with them the skill and technique of their village. They are occupied in building and repairing the Namghar and their own dwelling huts and also for decoration of them. They make various useful articles of wood, bamboo, reed and ivory, and the article required in dramatic performances. They undertake to copying and illustrating manuscript as an act of piety and devotion.

The monks are taught music both vocal and instrumental by the Gayan and Bayan. Sankardeva himself was a master singer and an excellent instrumental player. The musical instruments, *khol*, is said to have been invented by Sankardeva. Sankardeva also made contribution to the sphere of devotional music, Bargits and Kirtan, and also to Ankiya-nats. Many other succeeding monks enriched the Assamese literature with their beautiful musical contributions and plays.

Dancing too forms a part of education of young pupil-monks. Various forms of religious dances like Sutradhari, Cali or Natuwa, Krishna and Gopi-nac were developed under the inspiration of the Satras. This tradition is still being kept alive by the bhakats of the vaishnava Satras.

The Satra institutions very much interested in the organization of the laity in the villages, and from the beginning of the movement this was done through the village Namghar. The Namghars which were worked to a large extent towards spread of intellectual and cultural activities in the village and in the course of time being nerve –centres of the village came to co-ordinate all the aspects of social, economic and political life of the Assamese people. Here not only sastras like the *Gita* and the *Bhagavata* are recited in a musical manner, Bargits are sung with proper melodies, nam-kirtan, singing the praises of the Lord, are held ,dramatic performances are enacted, festival are celebrated but greater problems of life, philosophy and religion are also discussed and debated. The Namghar further serve as Panchayat hall, where villagers gather to discuss and solve many of their day to day problems. These community centers have been found even to play political and judicial role.

Not only through daily Prasangas and Nama-Kirtans but through celebrations of regularly recurring festivals followed the year around, the Namghars create religious enthusiasm among all ages and sexes of the people, and become the main centre of attractions and cultural activities. In addition to the festivals, certain days in the year set aside for commemoration of saint and Satradhikars are observed with fast

prayer- services and dramatic entertainments. These religious observances naturally weave the faith into daily life of the people throughout the year. Sarma, S. N. (1955) in his study ‑The Neo-vaisnavite Movement and Satra Institution of Assam‖ also found that the institution of Satra and Namghar acted as a multidimensional institution covering various aspects of the society.

As central authority, the Satras also diffuse spiritual education, regulate and control religious life as well as administer moral discipline on the laity through the agency of the Namghars. The Satras very much encourage literacy and learning the laity. They enforce that not only the bhakats should study but the laity also should read regularly the Vaishnava sastras and remember them by hearts. The Satra-functionaries very frequently visit the outlying villages, come into close contact with the laity, and make earnest efforts to familiarize them with liturgical and religious texts. They hold in the Namghars special religious discourses and recitals. In expounding the scriptures, they always bring them down to practical issues, with the idea of giving the people guidance for everyday living. They occasionally enquire into their faults and failing in religious life and recommend penance and punishment. The Satradhikars by Satra functionaries pay periodical visits to the villages, and stay either in the Namghars or Bahars, temporary camps. The Satradhikars during their periodical visit give sarana to new disciple and bhajana to those who are already converted. The sarana or initiation is simple ceremony which consists in taking the refuge to four fundamental principles of the faith, namely Nama (-reciting the name of God), Deva (Surrender to God), Guru (acceptance of preceptor) and Bhakat (delight in the company of religious brotherhood). The bhajana is an elaborate religious ceremony meant for spiritually advanced disciples. They also acquaint themselves with the spiritual problem of their sisya and deliver surmons to rouse pious feelings, to strengthen conviction, to warn against dangers of faith, and to prepare for pure and moral life.

The important contribution of Satra is the empowerment of women for the sustainable development of a progressive society. Srimanta Sankardeva‘s vision of a progressive and egalitarian Assamese society was rested majorly on the upliftment of the status of women in the society. The inclusiveness of Sankardeva‘s Neo-vaishnavism signified the importance of the role of women for the sustainable and stable growth and development of Assamese society. Sankardeva pronounced his own

grand daughter-in-law, Kanaklata as a Satradhikari, the principle head of a Satra. She became not only the Satradhikari but appointed twelve numbers of Satradhikars to set up and organize more number of Satra. Sankardeva's idealism behind the inception of the village Namghar was also to empower the women folk of the village to take active part from the congregational prayers to the arrangement of the Prasad to the day to day running of the activities of the Namghar.

One other notable contribution of the Satra is their works towards the upliftments and betterments of the backward classes and the bordering tribes of Assam. Sankardeva from the very beginning of his missionary career led a crusade against the caste exclusiveness, untouchability, for a recognized equality of all men irrespective of caste or character in the eye of God and exhibited deep sympathy for the lower castes and down trodden classes. He again emphasized on the *Bhagavata* saying that even a *Candala* is purged of the impurity of his caste by firm devotion to God and sincere faith and devotion alone can uplift the soul to the eternal communion with the God. Each Satra acted as the only centre of Vaishnavite education for all classes of people and the most notable social contributions of such an institution was the upliftment of the backward classes. Hence the Satra institution contributed considerably to a great extent to the spread of learning and education in medieval Assam. Though Goswami, K. D. (1969) in his study ‗Purusa Samhat Sect of Assam Vaisnvism‖ admitted that the tradition of the activities of the Gosais in various fields still persists in the state but it is noticed that with the impact of western civilization and the growth of rationalistic ideals among the people, a process of gradual decadence in most of the Satra has long sect in.

The Satra style was evolved towards the end of the 15th century and in the early part of the 16th century when the vaishnava saints and reformers, artists and musicians composed their dance, dramas and songs and had to educate people in their lines. The special kind of dance specially performed in the satra has come to be known as *Satriya Nritya* which is on the march of gaining national honour and acceptance as the classical dance form of India. On the other hand the neo-vaishnavite preacher of the 16th century had revealed himself as the nation builder through the Satra institution.[62]

Namghar institution

Namghar is a large community prayer hall. It is built in a traditional style without wall or half wall with two rows of pillars with thatched or tin roof. Sankardeva was a great Architect. He designed the structure of Namghar which is different from other places of worship prevalent in India. Sankardeva used the locally available ingredients like thatch, bamboo, ekora reed, wood etc. which is not only a cheap but also eco- friendly and long lasting. This made the construction work cheaper and kept it within the reach of the common people who could construct the Namghar using the ingredient available locally. This is the sacred behind the wide popularity of Namghar in Assam.[63] The Namghar is built in an East-West direction. Its open sides are symbolic of acceptance of the people of every cast and creed. It has an adjunct, the sanctum-sanctorum known as *Manikut* where valuable scriptures are kept. In place of an idol, the *Bhagavata* or its concise version *Gunamala* is placed in the *Manikut*. Sometimes other sacred text-*Kirtana ghosha* or *Adi Dasama* (Bhagavata-X) composed by Srimanta Sankardeva; *Nam ghosha* or Ratnavali composed by Madhavadeva are also placed in the *Manikut.*

In passage of time some Namghar loose the rigor of their injunction against idoltary and allows the idol of Lord Vishnu or one of his avatars in addition to sacred books.

The *singhashana* or the wooden throne placed in the Manikut may be a three, five or seven storied with a canopy called the Chandratap over it. The shrine is adorned with gamocha woven beautifully by the villagers. The Namghar has a fixed drum which is known as Daba in Assamese. This is sounded twice a day once in the morning and once in the evening.

The eminent artist and film maker Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (1903-51) who on a visit to Barlin in 1930 saw there a few community centres which were constructed newly. He was very much impressed by the uncanny similarities in their design and concept to prayer hall, Namghar in Assam conceived by Sankardeva four centuries ago. After returning from Berlin in 1931 he closely examined the sculptures and paintings of Bordowa Satra.

Namghar is the greatest democratic institution where people irrespective of caste, creed or speech Chant the name of Lord Krishna during the broad sessions of Nam Prasanga a day marking the morning, afternoon and evening prayers. Madhavadeva later increased this to fourteen a practice followed to this day at Bordowa and Barpeta Kirtanaghar/Namghar. Worship in Namghar involves the burning of incense, lighting of earthen lamp and other sites. An *Akshaya banti* the eternal lamp symbolic of the light of faith is kept alive by a continuous supply of oil.[64]

Management of Namghar and its democratic spirit: The village Namghars operates and is managed on a democratic principle. Since the time of Sirmanta Sankardeva Namghar has been so designed and constructed that the people of all races and tribes in this part of the country can enter and take in the congregational prayers. The Namghar with open wall has a great deal of symbolic value in terms of promotion of the ideal of equality. An open wall Namghar underscores the point that its doors are open to everyone and that it is a democratic institution embracing all the people without making any discrimination among them in the artificial line of caste, creed and religion. For management of different activities of Namghar there are some important functionaries, they are Bhagavatis who recite and explains the Bhagavata Purana, the Pathaka who reads the religious scriptures like Kirtan ghosha, Namghosha etc., Deuries who distribute the mah-prasad, the sacred offerings after the congregational prayer, Bharali, the storekeeper of the Namghar.

The Namghar is constructed by the joint labour of the villagers. Every household is considered as a unit and therefore each household is required to place the service of at least one member of the family constructing and maintaining the Namghar. Every household must contribute proportionately to the Namghar according to its numbers of its members in cash and kind. Those who are not in position to contribute are required to put additional labour in constructing the Namghar .The daily religious functions held in the Namghar from morning till the early hour of night are performed on a co-operative basis. Task like the kindling of light, cleansing and sweeping of the floor and making arrangement of materials necessary to daily service are done by each household by rotation depending upon its capacity. Such a spirit of co-operation and egalitarian attitude hold good in case of social function as well. No discrimination is made between rich and the poor in distributing the roles of in dramatic performance or Bhaona held in the Namghar where all the villagers

contribute according to their capacity and attitude to make the performance a success.[65]

Role of Namghar as a centre of socio-cultural education:

Srimanta Sankardeva through his Namghar institution established a new democratic order in Assam which was institutional in providing a base for the evolution of Assamese socio-cultural life. The Namghar which were set up as central religious institution of the villages worked to a large extent towards spread of intellectual and cultural activities in the village and in course of time being nerve-centre of the village come to co-ordinate all the aspects of social ,cultural, economic and political life of the Assamese people. The most important contribution of Namghar is the upliftment of the backward class and minimization of the rigor of caste distinction. The so called untouchables and backward classes were taken freely to the religious fold. Namghar has also helped the people to achieve a better mode of living by arousing this level of social consciousness and promoting good conduct among them. In realizing the above the Namghar has lent itself as an ideal platform for social solidarity and informal education. The Namghar is the centre of cultural activities of the villages. Accordingly various cultural programme like musical recitals of *Gita* and *Bhagavata*, singing of *Borgits* with proper melodies, Nam kirtan, singing of the praise of the Lord, enactment of dramatic performance like *Bhaona* are held in the premises of the *Namghar*. The Namghar has thus contributed immensely to the socio-cultural development of the Assamese people. Bhuiya, A. (2007) in his study ― The socio-cultural and political role of Namghar in Assam : A comparative study of the Namghars of Borbhogia village and Bordowa Than/Satra‖ also found that the Namghar has a great influence on the socio-cultural and community development of the Assamese people.

Initially the Ankiya Bhaona was staged in the village Namghar on occasion like Janmastami, Nandotsava, Dol-yatra, Raspurnima and on Saint‘s day. Later on they are staged on the festive occasion as on full moon night, during seed time and harvest, in fact whenever the farmers were free from Agricultural work. Accordingly the Bhaona imparts citizen training to village folk. In fact when the literacy was confined to the privileged and the learning was essentially aristocratic the Bhaona played the role of most powerful agency in disseminating spiritual ideals to the

masses while providing entertainment. Such drama teaches them to create the standard of social life and moral life.[66]

The Namghar uses some forceful audio-visual means of communication namely Ankiya Nat or Bhaona, a theatre form introduced for the first time by Srimanta Sankardeva and which become increasingly popular with the masses. It may be mentioned that as the Bhaona makes use of sound and audio-visual element very prominently making the performance a forceful and audio-visual treat although it successfully transmit its inherent message to the audience. Action and deeds of morality to immorality, honesty or deceit, courage or cowardice committed by human and demigod characters of dramatic performance teach the spectators to react appropriately in realistic situation to righteousness and be ever conscious of one‘s social responsibilities on the one hand to oppose falsehood, injustice and oppression under all circumtances on the other. Besides, it also becomes the venue for celebration of yearly community festivals like Bihu. In all such programmes one‘s attitude and accomplishment are sole criteria for participation rather than any artificial consideration of caste or class. Anyone who is desirous of learning them is welcome and imparted appropriate training. Owing to their open nature the Neo-vaishnavite cultural activities are endowed with a wide spread of mass appeal with the Namghar playing a facilitating role in this regard. Ankiya Nat, Bhaona, Bargits etc. have been instrumental in defining Assamese cultural life. It may be mentioned here that the Bhaonas performed in the Namghar premises on festive occasions have helped to evolve a system of Satriya dance which officially has been given the status of a classical dance form of India. The Namghar as a venue for the Satriya dance stands at the heart of Assamese cultural life. The staging of such performance in the Namghar unites all castes and classes under a common cultural tradition in an egalitarian spirit.[67]

In maintaining discipline, order and morality of the villages, the village Namghar i.e. village chapels have been playing a prominent part during the last four hundred years. Exitance of a Namghars big or small is noticed in every Assamese village. Sometime it is very difficult to distinguish between two adjacent villages but this becomes possible for the existence of two Namghars. It is the institution around which all cultural activities of the Assamese village move. This institution is nothing but an extended wing or a miniature replica of Satra institution. The Namghar a gift of

the Satra institution is at once a village prayer hall, a village court and a village parliament.

The village people assemble here on various occasions to discuss matters concerning their village. The village elders assembles here to try moral and social delinquency on the part of any villager with the help of Raij-- Rajmedhi or Barmedhi, the local Satra agents and met out punishment according to the nature of offence and the rulings are binding to both the accuser and the accused. There are certain limitations also regarding the nature of the cases tried as such criminal cases are kept out of the jurisdiction of the Namghar and minor cases of moral and civil in nature are tried. Thus, the Namghar provides a common platform for the villagers to assemble and discuss on a collective basis and resolve their local disputes and problems in accordance with their local judicial procedures.

In the 15th century the great saint Srimanta Sankardeva laid down the foundation of the local self-government. The most important feature of the Namghar is that the importance of the collective wisdom is recognized by this institution. This institution also recognizes the social progress through participation of all for re-construction and stability of the villagers. Srimanta Sankardeva conceived the idea of community development and Panchayati Raj much before the concept was brought by the British Raj. A general body consisting of the eldest members of each household of the village is formed and is known as the Raij. The Raij takes decisions on various issues of their community life, be it reconstruction of the Namghar to the establishment of educational institutes. The Namghar thereby provides an effective forum of decentralized planning and decision-making. By facilitating the involvement of the whole village in the decision-making process for the determination of social goods and allocation of resources to achieve them, the Namghar is ensuring the development of the people, by the people and for the people.

The Namghar is more than a congressional prayer hall. It brings about bonding within the community through people praying together and participating in its various activities. It is a conference hall where various social issues including disputes and developmental activities affecting the community are discussed. Here all the sections of the society assemble and arrive at a decision through a democratic process. Nobody is barred from expressing his views on matters under discussion. In many respect

Namghar assumes the role of village parliament albeit with legal or judicial sanction and provides a platform for grassroots democracy and also decentralized planning and decision making.

The Namghar playing the role as a Proto-Type Parliament has traditionally been a vibrant centre of community development activities. Collective decision regarding various issues of community life like construction of roads, water tanks and drains to setting up educational institutions are taken up in the Namghar itself. Since at the Namghar, the people of the village themselves make decisions on issues which directly matter to them, the Namghar provides an effective forum for decentralized planning and decision-making.[68]

The Namghar also played an important role in creating awareness among the village people of the realities of their situation and their environment as necessary condition for their active participation in their own development. The role of Namghar in identifying on a collective basis, areas calling for positive action such as education and maintenance of health and hygiene in the villages, construction of public well to provide drinking water are case of points.

The most important role played by the Namghar is the economic organization of the society. During the pre-British economy of Assam importance was given in the constitution of mainly self-sufficient village communities. Nature was bountiful so that there was no scarcity of food. With no centralized governance and absence of any revenue system, the means of production in absence of any revenue system and without centralized governance was not well developed and as such no proper channels of irrigation was seen. Srimanta Sankardeva‘s activities were not confined to religion only. Sankardeva with the new social dynamics and his great management expertise used many concepts which are followed by the modern management experts. In order to develop work culture, Sankardeva inter-related work ethics with religion by denouncing the Bali System (Sacrifice of animals) and introducing the system to Prasad distribution in congregational prayer of the Namghar.

The Prasad consist of Sprouted Moong (Gram), Banana, Cucumber, Sugarcane, Ginger and Coconut. Belonging to the Bhuyan who were renowned agriculturist and being a Shiromoni Bhuyan himself Srimanta Sankardeva paved a path wherein the people belonging to a particular Namghar had to cultivate the items

used in the Prasad in their own village. This led to the introduction and development of various agricultural methods. So fruitful was the Agro-Economic concept of Prasad system introduced by Sankardeva in the Namghars that it led to the evolution of an agriculturist society in Assam.

Sankardev‘s Namghar which is more than 515 years old has been the focus of his ethical teachings in every nook and corner of Assam.