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Sri Śaṅkaradeva's Spiritual Mission: Its Relevance to Present Society

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Abstract:

Sri Śaṅkaradeva, the great medieval Vaiṣṇava saint of Assam, laid the concrete socio-cultural foundation through his lasting contribution towards philosophy, religion, literature, art and culture. His *Eka-śaraṇa nāma dharmā* was accessible even for the most ignorant and the humblest. Sri Śaṅkaradeva's faith acted positively in shaping the moral and social standards of an on, and spread the message of social harmony.

The recent economic, social, scientific and technological developments have made us to forget that there is a spiritual spark inherent in every human being. This serious issue alienates one individual from the other. But long ago, during 15th and 16th centuries, Śaṅkaradeva declared spiritual equality of all men and denounced caste system. He promulgated that a genuine spiritual life would mould the character of an individual. His spiritualistic humanism tried to wipe off the prevailing social and other evils of his time. This paper is a trivial effort to find out how Śaṅkaradeva's spiritual mission has been exercising and restoring healthy influence on the moral, philosophical and social outlook of individuals of present society.

Keywords: Sri Śaṅkaradeva, bhakti, Vaiṣṇavism, society, spiritual, religious

1. Introduction

Sri Śaṅkaradeva, the great medieval Vaiṣṇava saint of Assam was a prophet, philosopher, social reformer, artist, musician, dramatist, poet, painter and a linguist all combined in one. His sovereign personality revolutionized Assamese society and culture. As a religious reformer, he established his system of *eka-śaraṇanāma dharmā*, the religion of worshipping the One by uttering his name. He adapted the new religion to suit the need of the people. Śaṅkaradeva propagated his new faith of devotion based mainly on the teachings of the *Bhāgavata-Pūṛāna*. He articulately expressed most of the ancient works of *Sanskṛit* on Vaiṣṇava trend in Assamese and *Brajāwālī* language. Śaṅkaradeva tried to broadcast religious knowledge and evoke devotion among the masses. Eminent scholar K.N. Prasad Magadha adequately describes Śaṅkaradeva as an erudite scholar, a poet of considerable merit, a musician of high calibre. He also adds that Śaṅkaradeva was a pioneer in the field of drama and dramatic performance, a painter and above all a great social reformer and religious teacher-preacher-leader of the medieval Vaiṣṇava movement in Assam.

2. Objectives of the Paper

- To present a brief sketch of life and contribution of Sri Śaṅkaradeva
- To bring out the significance of his spiritual mission
- To examine the relevance of such mission in present day society

3. Methodology

The method used in this paper is descriptive-evaluative method. The study is mainly review based. It is purely supported by secondary and tertiary source of data, i.e. books, new editions of old scriptures, journals, papers and articles and internet.

3.1. Life of Sri Śaṅkaradeva

At the critical moment of religious catastrophe many saints arose in different parts of India. Ramananda, Kabir, Gyaneswar, Tukaram, Ramdas, Mira Bai, Nanak, Chaitanya, Sri Śaṅkaradeva were significant of them. Sri Śaṅkaradeva was contemporaries of famous religious reformers like Chaitanya of Bengal, Vallabhacharya of Andhra, Kabir of Banaras, Nanak of the Punjab and Tulsidas of UP. The religious movement of India, during 14th and 15th centuries gave birth to a new religion originated from the doctrine of *Bhakti* as revealed in the *Bhāgavata-Pūṛāna* which is considered as Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement. Śaṅkaradeva was essentially an activist of that significant movement.

Śaṅkaradeva's ancestors had migrated to Kamarupa from Kannauj. Kusumbar Bhuyan and Satyasandha were the fortunate parents of Sri Śaṅkaradeva. He was born in 1449 in Ali Pukhuri of Bordowa (in Nagaon district of Assam) and lived 120 years (till 1568). But,