

## **Reaching the Unreached: Srimanta Sankardeva and Neo-Vaishnavite Movement in Assam**

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### **Abstract**

Srimanta Sankardeva started the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement in Assam for the duration of the medieval period. Sankardeva activated an outlook of universal brotherhood and humanity for improving the status of wide-ranging Assamese society in world civilization and twisted a melodious living form for diverse ethnic communities. For the cause of Neo-Vaishnavite Traditions and its principles Sankardeva highlighted oneness or singleness theory and supported Bhakti. His immense faith and conviction was recognized as “Mahapurushia Dharma” or “Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma”. A lot of people came to connect in his Neo-Vaishnavite idea. In view of the fact that Sankardeva’s perspectives are based on fairness, classlessness, equality and universal brotherhood that revealed in Neo-Vaishnavite Movement, hence, it is a cultural renaissance. Sankardeva highlighted his ideology to regulate the Vaishnava society and transformed a massive social change in the complete Assamese society. Reaching Sankardeva’s ideology is not an unreaching task but a question of research.

**Key Words:** *Reaching, Unreached, Srimanta Sankardeva, Neo-Vaishnavite, Movement, Assam.*

### **Introduction:**

The Bhakti movement in Hinduism stands to the thoughts and commitments which came out in the medieval age on love and attachment to religious ideas. One who performs the notion of bhakti is called a bhakta. The truthful sense of Bhakti is loyalty and dedication. However, the Bhakti movement highlighted the movement which stressed powerful dedication to divinity. The saints of the Bhakti movement stressed that there was no difference of class, colour, creet, caste and so on. Everyone had the right to deliverance i.e. liberty from the cycle of births and deaths.

The Neo Vaishnavite Movement was a socio cultural new beginning of the complete Assamese society, for this reason, Srimanta Sankardeva built a new notion of societal formation

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and his Neo-Vaishnavite Movement has its immense importance and is a topic of research. In the Socio-Cultural and ideological rebirth Saint Srimanta Sankardeva's Neo-vaishnavite Movement has its gigantic value. Therefore, the study is significant.

The objectives of the study are – i) To spotlight the notion of Srimanta Sankardeva's Neo Vaishnavite Movement in Assam; and ii) To glorify the historical importance of Neo-Vaishnavite Movement. The research questions include – i) Is there any conception of Saint Srimanta Sankardeva's Neo Vaishnavite Movement in Assam? and ii) What are the historical significances of Neo-Vaishnavite Movement?

There are studies on the theme from different perspectives. A brief of the review of related literature is found that - Boruah (2007) highlighted about the aspects of the neo-Vaishnavism movement; Nath's (2011) work is a collection of different research papers and articles which focused the impact of Neo Vaishnavism in Assam; Barpujari (2004) glorified about the growth and development of Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam; Rajguru (1998) is an outstanding material for the cause of folk cultural identity of Assam and also highlighted the influence of sattria cultures in variegated ways; Pathak's (2017) book also highlighted about Barpeta Sattria and Sankardeva and Assam Vaishnavism.

### **Research Methodology:**

A historical and analytical method has taken to answer the research questions. The data have been collected from the secondary sources that collected from different books, journals, edited volumes, periodicals, research papers, research articles, paper clips, news papers, internet etc.

### **Srimanta Sankardeva and Neo Vaishnavite Movement:**

Srimanta Sankardeva (1449 AD -1568 AD) was a significant character in the history of India who was a religious preacher and social reformer, who sanskritized the ethnic identity in North East India and unified them at the national and international paradigm. Sankardeva was an immense messiah, who salvaged the people of Brahmaputra valley from the regressive medieval practices who evolved a school of classical music, which is named after him.

The Neo –Vaishnavism Movement, which was pioneered by Srimanta Sankardeva is the most noteworthy socio-cultural and religious trend during the medieval period. The identity of Neo-Vaishnavism movement was rational and cultural rebirth. The highlighting involvement

of the Neo-Vaishnava movement is the *Sattras* traditions which are the essential element of the Assamese society.

The highlighting facets of the Neo Vaishnavite movement are:

1. The socio-religious and cultural facets.
2. The religious modification during the medieval period.
3. The configuration and development of the Assamese society.
4. Sankardeva's Eka-Sarana- Nam –Dharma (Bhakti cult) is stands on the viewpoints of brotherhood and equal opportunity.
5. To generate a philosophy of unrestricted and egalitarian society stands on brotherhood, unity, humanism, harmony, fairness and social equality.

### **Discussion:**

Historically, religion can be the significant facets for social development. Of course religion played an influential and dramatic change in the pattern of behavior in the formation of society. It is observed that before form of neo –Vaishnavism concept, there were a lot of religious confidence, trust and activism for example saktism, tantrism and so on that experienced by various tribes and sub tribes. Neo-Vaishnavism started by Sankardeva made a bottomless impact on the tribal society and his supporters like Madhavdeva, Damodardeva, Harideva etc. took up the social and religious identity to humanizing the standard of the tribal society. As a result, lots of tribal and aboriginal people came to link in the neo-Vaishnavism identity.

For the duration of the medieval period, some positive improvements took place in the field of faith and belief namely - Consolidation and development of puranic Hinduism, change of numerous ruling families by means of divinization, opening of neo-Vaishnavite traditions and its spirit, strength of spiritual toleration and nonviolent co-existence.

Neo-Vaishnavism notion is one of the remarkable religions of Assam where Vishnu named as Narayan, Krishna is worshipping as a ultimate and highest divinity. In Indian perspective, starting from 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century Madhavacharya, Ramanujacharya, Tukaram, Namdev, Shyamal Kavi etc. focused the concept of Vaishnavism or bhakti viewpoints. The bhakti thinking had begun a novel thought to the social, spiritual and cultural spheres even as it gave to birth an innovative ideology among the people which focused to make form of an upheaval. In the meadow of Assam, Saints Sankardeva, Madhavdeva, Damodardeva, Harideva, Bhattadeva highlighted plenty to proliferate the neo-Vaishnavism in later part of the 15<sup>th</sup>

century. The neo-Vaishnavism ideology played a vital part in the development of Assamese culture.

### **Major Findings:**

The highlighting findings of the research paper are:

1. Sankardeva used to broadcast his neo- Vaishnavism concept for the tribal and non tribal society.
2. The neo-Vaishnavism identity and its traditions pioneered by Sankardeva were based upon the classless and unrestricted epistemology.
3. The uniqueness of neo-Vaishnavism wanted to make a society based on the caste fairness, equal opportunity and synchronization.
4. Sankardeva energetically reversed to the idea of untouchability.
5. Sankardeva started the principle of widespread societal brotherhood.
6. The development and course of absorption of a variety of Aryan and non-Aryan basics took place under the canvas of neo-Vaishnavism.
7. The Neo-Vaishnavism identity was to make its impact on the non-Aryan tribes.
8. The tribal ample towards Sankardeva's religion was its straightforwardness both in theory and practice.
9. Sankardeva was an enormous economic positivist in Assam during the medieval age.
10. Sankardeva's literary activism assisted to endorse the artistic and rational activities in which a great Social change came out.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

Sankardeva's neo-Vaishnavism viewpoints started the socio-cultural ideology and rebirth in the Assam Valley for the period of the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The neo-Vaishnavism movement highlighted to the growth of vernacular literature, art, culture, structural design and other artistic actions that oriented with the traditions of the indigenous people. The paper is exposed about the neo-Vaishnavism movement and its facets that focused the Assamese Society and hence, Sankardeva made several great attempts in it and used his money-making and social idea for assembling the society.

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