

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusion: The need of *Satra* Culture

#### **Sankardev's *Satra* Culture:**

The most prestigious and significant sociocultural institution in Assam is the *Satras*. *Satras*, which date back to the early years of the movement founded by Sankardev, spread the Neo-Vaishnavite philosophy. The *Satras* are currently the origins of Assamese tradition and culture. The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement, which ultimately came to convey with the body of *Satra*, had a major effect on the growth of Assam's artistic past in regard to acceptable craftsmanship, academic pursuits, and of course research and cultural assets from the start of the 16th century till the entry of the British. At Bordowa, in Nagaon's area, Sankardev founded the first *Satra* or a prayer house. Later on, during his travels to the eastern region of Assam, he founded *Satras* in a number of locations, but the Barpeta District, where he lived for a long time, saw the greatest popularity of this *Satra* culture. *Satra* is perhaps like to a Buddhist monastery or a type of maths. A *Satra* consists of a place of worship for the local community, a centre for literary and cultural activities, and a place where anybody may learn about yoga, religious texts, painting, music, dance, and other performing arts. *Satra* was the name given to that particular area where Sankardev stayed and preached through group prayers and sermons.

The place of worship there is a special one for the Eka Sarana custom and important in that it spreads spirituality, religious teachings, and beliefs. It has been a crucial factor in shaping all of the Vaishnavite sects' religious endeavours. The word "*Satra*" was used to refer to a gathering of worshippers. It is a location where individuals of many castes and tribes congregate and preach about God during communal prayers and religious sermons. *Satras* of Assam have been commemorating a variety of cultural events including Bhaonas, Ras Leelas, Janmashtami, Dol Utsav, etc. that are capable of forging strong bonds between people. *Satra* institutions use a variety of religious rites to inspire the minds of ordinary people. The *Satra*'s leader is referred to as *Satradhikar*. In the Sarana procedure, the *Satradhikar* of *Satra* receipts the lead. Taking Sarana under the tutelage of a guru or *Satradhikar* lets one join the Neo Vaishnavite community. The individuals who initiated Sarana were referred to as "Sarantias," and by this straightforward procedure, they became a part of Assamese culture. Therefore, the *Satra* institution is a special religious establishment or center for the Eka Sarana ritual Vaishnavism was eventually embraced by

members of several downtrodden section of the society like the Moran, Kachari, Chutiya, and Deori. They abandoned many of their impurities, abandoned animism, and developed ever-higher levels of sophistication in their interactions. The inhabitants of tribes connected with the other tribes of the Hindu fold through this process, brought them into the Hindu fold. Therefore, the *Satra* institution plays a significant role in the context of improving the status of Assamese marginalized groups and surrounding communities.

However, in the latter stages of the Vaishnava movement, when some sections of the *Satra* group, including "*Brahma Sanghati*," "*Kala Sanghati*," "*Purusha Sanghati*," and "*Nika Sanghati*," were formed. It persisted as a barrier to reaching the true goals of Vaishnavism. The *Satras*, however, had a significant impact on Assamese society. In addition to giving Assam a wealth of religious literature, it was crucial in the revival and ubiquity of traditional dance and music. The primary goal of *Satras* is to achieve cultural unity with Assamese ethnic communities and tribes. Again, the Neo-Vaishnavite motion's founders founded the *Namghar* institution to propagate secular and democratic beliefs. Over time, this institution has become an important part of Assam. The *Kirtanghar* or *Namghar*, which served as the hub of the villagers' intellectual, spiritual, and cultural pursuits, plays a significant part in upholding unity and solidarity in Assamese society. Sankardev attempted to impose law, justice, and harmony in the local community through the establishment of this organization. Nearly every Assamese village has this institution. In some locations, many castes merged to form a "*Namghar*" (Rao 26). Here it must be mentioned here that *Namghar* and *Kirtanghar*, though sounds same with structural similarities and daily devotional activities, but a *Namghar* is a prayer house located in almost all the villages, but the *Kirtanghar* is also a prayer house which is located inside the campus of a *Satra*. Maheswar Neog in his Sankardev: The Great Integrator explains about the *Naamghar* as:

With the organisation of a satras came their decentralised replica, the institution of village *Namghar*, something like the parish church. From the beginning, the *Namghar* formed the hub of all village activities...many an evil act. In fact, this institution might be called the village parliament, and a parliament run too on broad democratic principles. (139)

"*Namghar*" has operated as the town hall for the past five hundred years, acting as a cultural hub and a place for the villagers to congregate in a welcoming and cooperative atmosphere. Based on democratic ideals, the hamlet of *Namghar* is controlled and managed. Since Srimanta Sankardev, the *Namghar* has been built and designed so that people of all races and tribes can readily join and participate in religious rituals and festivities there. It greatly enhanced Assamese social and educational life and made significant contributions to literature and the arts. Additionally, a *Namghar* with no walls is a representation of flexibility, showing that it welcomes everyone without making any distinctions between them and that its doors are always open. All social and cultural events in *Namghar* are centered on the *Singhasana*, which is home to a sacred book that was either written by Sankardev or Madhavdev. Therefore, these types of cultural acts in *Namghar* bring together all castes and classes and strengthen their bonds. The villagers meet at *Namghar* on numerous occasions to talk about issues affecting their community. Regardless of caste, creed, or community, everyone can gather at the *Namghar* and *Satra* institution. No obstacle existed for anyone who is unable to join the devotees in reciting prayers or in ritual worship in God's grace. Sankardev hopes that by doing this, all facets of society will participate, regardless of caste, creed, or community. Under the sway of his 'eka saran naam dharma' (devotion to a single God), various religious groups were brought together by Sankardev's straightforward and distinctive religious and cultural movement. With the help of his Neo-Vaishnavite Movement, Sankardev changed the Assamese society's perspective on the values of equality, fraternity, and humanism. As was already mentioned, the *Namghar* and the *Satra* institution both had a tremendous impact on people's social lives. Regardless of the caste and Varna systems in the society, this institution integrated the people. Sankardev incorporated a variety of ethnic groups into his organisation. He welcomed everyone to worship and chant prayers as well as to hear the Guru Bakya (message of the Preacher) in the *Namghar* under the same roof, making no distinctions based on class, caste or creed. His ideology was based on the ideals of nonviolence, equality, fraternity, and brotherhood. In his Bhakti, Sankardev united many Assamese ethnic and cultural groups, including the Garo's Govinda, Narahari of Ahoms, the Mishing's Paramananda, the Muslim's Chandasai, the Koch's Damodar, the Kachari's Romai, the Kaibartya's Haridas and Purnananda, the Naga's Narottam, the Brahmin's Ram Saraswati, Bhattadeva, and others. Additionally, Sankardev translated the Bhagvata Purana into basic Assamese so that it may be chanted, read, and easily comprehended by anyone. Previously, those holy writings were difficult to find and unsuitable for local languages.

There was discrimination in the religious practises that were in place at the time, no clear indication of a powerful and stable religious trend that could be easily followed, and a culture that was far apart from moral principles, spiritualism, and reality. Even a small segment of the population was forbidden from handling those holy books. Sankardev made it seem so simple that even someone who is illiterate can simply chant the slokas by taking part in the daily prayers. All this attracted every section of people and they felt proud of taking Sarana (receive ordination) under Sankardev. Those who attend daily in the *Satra* and *Namghar* to chant prayers, they were called *bhakata*, who dedicates their life in bhakti. Sankardev brought great changes in matter to cleanliness and correct social behaviour. He initiated a calm life, good conduct, cleanliness for the disciples. While all these *Satras* adhere to Shankardev's teachings, they often operate separately and independently from one another. For instance, Deol or Fakuwa Utsav of Barpeta *Satra* is famous festival, Natun Samaguri *Satra*, is renowned for its ability to create masks and continues to represent the Mukha Sanskriti branch of Neo-Vaishnavism. Like this, "Paalnaam" and Apsara dances are well-known in Auniati *Satra*. Furthermore, the Rasotsava-Raasleela Festival at Dakhinpat *Satra* is well-known. In *Satra* a traditional complex is a home to hundreds of celibate and non-celibate followers. The *Satras* are made up of a sizable prayer hall facing a modest shrine, flanked by monks' lodgings, and washing facilities. These *Satras* are large and are home to a wealth of cultural artifacts and antiquities.

The *Satras* produced a vast body of religious writing and began to revive and popularise the ancient arts of dance, theatre, and music. The Neo-Vaishnavite faith was intended to be made more widely known through the establishment of the village *Namghar*. The *Namghar* began to offer a forum for community social and cultural events in addition to religious ones (Neog, 2004). The village *Namghar* had been serving as the village court, parliament, cultural centre, prayer hall, and public meeting place by providing a common area for people to congregate democratically which was extremely significant and supported the idea of objectivity. As a result, the *Namghar* became the focal point for village cultural events. Without regard to caste or vama distinction, Sankardev's creation of the *Satra* institution and *Namghar* brought about social integration. By uniting them under the banner of Bhakti, Sankardev united numerous ethnic and religious groups, including the Ahoms, Chutiyas, Koches, Kacharis, Kaibartya, Mlesh, Garos, Khasis, Nagas, Brahmins, and Muslims. Sankardev simplified the Sanskrit text into Assamese, the dominant language of the area, to merge the people and unify them. His Bhagavata and Kirtana Ghosa were very well-liked and ingrained in every Assamese household. The

Bhakti movement of Sankardev emphasized a single way of living and urged different Assamese communities to adhere to a codified set of moral principles and religious practices. The theological teachings of Sankardev and many art forms were the centre of culture among the *Satras*. The *Satras* took up the role of torchbearers for a variety of creative forms, which Sanjib Kumar Barkakati added in Pan-India Perspective of Srimanta Sankardev, “While religious institution across the world had always been imparting religious education, there had never been such an integral approach covering secular cultural elements like dance, music, plays, crafts etc elsewhere as in Sattras” (263).

A few *Satras* have preserved the Sankardev movement's cultural customs in their pristine purity for many years. Over the years, the *Satras* have developed a close relationship with Assamese life and culture, paving the path for greater Assamese nationality. The *Satra* dominates Assam's social environment from Majuli to Koch Behar, and this network of *Satras* unites the entire state as one religious' entity. There are currently well over thousands *Satras*, *Namghar*, *Than* in Assam, with many Vaishnava householders belonging to one or more of the *Satras*. Therefore, the conservation of those is crucial, especially since they also include manuscripts, artifacts, and antiquities with significant historical value (Nath 51– 54). The devotees' daily practice of his *Naam prasanga* at the *Satra* and the Assamese population's integration was significantly impacted by *Namghar*. With no caste system and no upper-class monopoly, Sankardev's democratic type of philosophy helped him win the battle against animism. Assam is home to numerous ethnic groups that represent a diversity of cultures, languages, and dialects. They eventually became an integrated population and gave rise to the larger Assamese nation. With his Neo-Vaishnavite Movement, the Great Vaishnava Saint Sankardev helped to create the unified Assamese identity. The incorporation of numerous Indigenous and non-Indigenous components into Assamese culture has always been greatly aided by Assam Vaishnavism.

Because of Sankardev's Neo-Vaishnavism, a new nationalist ideology has emerged, one that emphasizes customs of culture and linguistics as the foundation of a country's identity rather than ancestral connections or race. Sankardev's preaching can be correctly categorized as an internationalist philosophy if the notion of "cultural nationalism" is applied. Srimanta Sankardev battled society's conservatives as the major figure of the cultural Renaissance, the creator of the Bhakti Movement, and a zealous follower of Vaishnavism. He had an inclusive and integrationist stance, teaching that Vaishnavism, which unites all of Assam with the rest of India, is the only common cultural thread (Acharya, 7–11). In this *Namghar*, religious discourses and Bhagavata recitations were

held. Through pantomime, he spread the word about his cult and created the genres of philosophy, art, and music. The *Namghar* provided a perfect venue for highlighting various artistic genres and inspiring the general populace to embrace Neo-Vaishnavism. The *Namghar* promotes two ideas: fairness for all people and acknowledging the value and compassion of every living thing. Because each Assamese location almost knows the *Namghar*, someone's individuality is closely entwined with the *Namghar* they participate in.

The Great Saint Srimanta Sankardev founded local self-government in the fifteenth century. The distinguishing quality of the *Namghar* is that it values social progress and communal wisdom because of everyone's involvement in community rehabilitation and stability. Panchayati Raj and community development were ideas that Sankardev developed long before the British Raj introduced them. As a result, the *Namghar* offers a useful environment for decentralized planning and decision-making. The *Namghar* ensures the growth of the community, the individuals, and those who live by encouraging the involvement of every household in the process of decision-making for the choice of social products and the distribution of assets for achieving them. *Namghar* was viewed by Surya Kumar Bhuyan as a little legislature (M Das 183). All types of disagreements and disputes among the inhabitants were resolved in *Namghar* by the locals themselves. Birinchi Kumar Baruah discussed the role of the *Namghar* in this context, stating that the *Namghars*, which emerged as the community's primary religious institutions, made significant contributions to the development of artistic and sophisticated living in the community and eventually served as the hubs for coordinating all facets of Indian society's economic, political, and social affairs. (134)

### **Sankardev's Nationalism:**

There is much debate about what Sankardev's view of Nationalism. Did Sankardev advocated Regional Nationalism or Indian Nationalism or was he more concerned of the cultural Nationalism? Most of the scholars have different views regarding the Nationalism outlook of Sankardev, so here we will try to find out what nationalism did Sankardev said of. In order to create a social reformation in Assam, Sankardev found the Vaishnavite order as the only order in present society by which the evils of the society can be wiped out. The pathetic political, religious, social and cultural aspects of Assam can only be integrated through the Bhakti Movement of Indian Sanatana Dharma. For it Sankardev founded a new order which was called Eka Saran Naam Dharma, which means devotion to one God. The

principles of his Neo-Vaishnavite order were derived from Bhagavata-purana, Bhagavatagita and Padma-purana. Sanjib Kumar Borkakati in his article 'Pan-Indian Perspective of Srimanta Sankardev' published in the souvenir of Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra, mentions that "He was not only a religious preceptor, but also a social reformer, who sanskritized the ethnic groups of the volatile North-East India and assimilated them with the national main-stream of Bharatavarsha through the tools of culture as well as philosophical perspective. Such an act is unheard in the entire world" (Borkakoti, 257).

Sankardev is considered as one of the greatest integrators of the Indian people. During his pilgrimage to rest of India, where he covered all the ancient religious places, he came across various sections of people having varied form of Hindu religious faith and belief. We all know that how Adi Sankaracharya, in 8<sup>th</sup> Century, stoned the four Math pillars of Sanatana Hinduism in the four parts of the country and restored the Hindu religion and philosophy. Sankardev through his extensive tours and pilgrimages not only visited those shrines but also visited almost all the parts of India related to Hindu culture and came in contact with the history and philosophy of the vast Bharatavarsha. In his lifetime he went twice for pilgrimages. Prafulla Pran Mahanta added that during this course of his pilgrimage, "He also realized that in spite of the over-riding unity of India there were still local variations which could never be ignored. He therefore, took some long term measures in order to forge a sentimental common men in Assam, could feel one with the vast country that is India" (376). After forging an abiding sense of unity among the various communities living in Assam, Srimanta Sankardev proceeded further in his mission of integrating inextricably the Assamese people in the mainstream of Indian nationality." Srimanta Sankardev continued on with his objective of merging the Assamese people inexorably into the mainstream of Indian identity after creating a lasting sense of oneness among the numerous communities residing in Assam.

Integration among the various section of the people was what Sankardev sought so. He brought Assam closer to India by instilling the idea of 'Bharatiya' or Indianness in the minds of the people. In his book Bhakti Ratnakara, in praise of Bharatavarsha, Sankardev included a complete chapter entitled 'Bharatavarsaprasamsa,' where he highlighted how punya-bhumi (sacred-land) is Bharatavarsha. Whoever is born in this holy area, Bharatavarsha, is blessed in life; it is the place where even God desires to be born. By virtue of the piety attained through numerous rebirths, one is able to be here. Even in his Anadipatana, Sankardev mentioned about Bharatavarsha, "This land is the best of all lands.

Even the gods find pleasure in being born here...How virtuous are we that we have the land we had desired day and night.” Sankardev was undoubtedly linked to Indian culture, and he deserves praise for giving the future Assamese nationality's socioeconomic consolidation efforts a culturally ideological bent. Therefore, the endeavour to portray Sankardev as the defender of two opposing political beliefs needs to be impartially assessed (Devabrata Sarma 651). Girish Barua mentioned that “Sankardev brought about a spiritual renaissance. His campaign entailed a message vitalized by an all-India perspective (Dhanya Bharata-varise). This nationalistic strain helped him in bringing about the much-needed national integration. Thus, Vaisnavism became a tonic to the malnourished people thanks to his endeavouring efforts.” (Baruah, 25)

Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, in his article published at ‘A tribute to Sankardev’ gave his view that, “The Eka-sarana Dharma of Sankardev deserved to be better known in other parts of India, but each area developed its own form of a common pan-Indian Vaishnava religion of faith in a loving God, and this, coupled with Assam's isolation, probably prevented a wider spread of the Eka-sarana faith in lands outside Assam.” (Chatterji) Sankardev gave Assam a new discipline of faith in a one God and it helped Assam to break away with a past complicated doctrines and unmeaning practices. He further stated that, “He was the greatest builder of Assam by bringing in a purer spiritual life, and although circumstances prevented his influence from being spread into other parts of India, as a religious leader he is unquestionably one of the greatest India has produced, and he deserves to be mentioned with Sankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Basavappa, Ramananda, Kabir, Chaitanya, Mira Bai, Guru Nanak and Tulasidasa.” (Srimanta 213)

The cultural and artistic works of Sankardev are unparalleled in the history of India at that time. His efforts can be cited as the first step towards planting the seed of Assamese Nationalism as he brought various tribes and communities under one umbrella by installing neo-vaishnavism and later the *Satra* culture in Assam. Sankardev is said to have laid the foundation of Assamese culture with some of his unique contribution of *Satra* and Naamghar, Ankiya Bhaona, Satriya Nritya, Music, Bargeet and lots more. With those performing arts, he tried to uplift the Assamese society and unite them culturally. His diversified contributions lead the society towards a cultural revolution and ultimately had an immense impact in restructuring the shape of a modern Assamese society. Nara Kanta Adhikary in this regard made an important statement that the formal satriya attire, which can be worn with a turban and a *galabastra* (cloth worn around the neck), combines mainstream Indian and regional cultures. (2771) The Mahapurusa strengthened and



tightened Assamese socio-cultural life in every aspect, including dramas, songs, tunes, clothing, and arts and crafts, while also incorporating it into all Indian socio-cultural life. It is surprising to believe that a great Assamese guy could have influenced Indian socio-cultural philosophy and be a major figure in it throughout the 15th and 16th centuries.

Maheswar Neog said that “Assam discovered herself as an integral part of the holy land of Bharatavarsha and gloried in that discovery.” (Neog, 4) The holy books which were mostly written in Sanskrit were barrier for the common people as they were not familiar with it. But what Sankardev created not only by translating the books in Assamese, but also created various other texts in the local dialect and led to the attachment and acceptance of Assamese language as the language of all. Moreover, Assam became close to India by the Vaishnavite movement and cultural attachment brought Assam as an integral part of Bharatavarsha. “The ancient kingdom of Kamrupa was now undergoing a huge change, and it was having almost a regeneration, political and social which timed well with the cultural resurgence initiated by Sankardev; and the first possibilities of a unified and modern Assam were now in evidence.” (Neog, 156)

In her prefatorial to the book of Maheswar Neog’s ‘Sankardev: The Great Integrator’, Navanita Varadapande stated that, “Sankardev-the great integrator of India had concentrated on medieval Assam to spread the benign message of love that had brought that part of India, on the highway of the great resurgence of the new-found faith. All the same, he had an all-India outlook, and he and his chief apostle Madhavdev, even sang a paean of glory of Bharatavarsha: “jayajayabharatavarisha.” Sankardev the great integrator tried to bring India closer to Assam, and his love for Bharatavarsha was best narrated by his chief apostle, Madhavdev, which he penned in one of his composition of Bargeet-

*“Dhanya Dhanya Kalikala*

*Dhanya Nara Tanu Bhala*

*Dhanya Dhanya Bharata Varisa”*

Which means glory to kali-yuga, glory to the life of a man, glory to Bharata-varsha. With this verse Sankardev tried to integrate the people of Assam in the mainstream of Indian Nationalism.

In the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> skanda of Bhagavata we find Sankardev praising Bharatavarsha-

*Bharata barishe Kalijug aito*  
*Harinaam narakai/*  
*Sariyo sanjog `mahabhagya aito*  
*Aro asa baat sai // (Bhagavata, 11/684)*

*Bharate Manushya tanu goto punya pai/*  
*sinta moni jonmo huwa hatote herai// (Bhagavata, 10/1601)*

*Devara durlabha bhatata naratanu/*  
*Kouti kouti kalpa abashane pai punu// (Bhagvata, 10/754)*

*Bharate manushya tanu koto punyo pai/*  
*Sinta moni jonmo hera hatote herai// (Bhagvata, 10/1607)*

*Bharate manushya jonmo napaiba senthore/*  
*Bhakata bandhobe nai madhabote pore// (Bhagavata, 10/1744)*

*Anadi-patana*, which consists of the third skanda of Bhagavata, is where Sankardev praised so many a times about the holy land of Bharatavarsha. Here are some-

*Dakshine Bharata kimpurusha tat pore/*  
*Aase hari barishe tahato anantore// (Bhagavata, 3/110)*  
*Prakashe uttar kuru jana tat paase/*  
*Saboto adhik aito Bharata barishe// (Bhagavata, 3/112)*

Moreover, sloka 112 to 120 in this part consists of the geographical description of Bharatavarsha. The sacredness of the land, the importance of this in socio-religious and culturally for the people living here. In the Kirtana-ghosa, Sankardev in his writings narrated the word Bharata, some of which are –

*Kunu dine aito soriroporoy*  
*Ketikhyone nei yama/*  
*Aro ki senthore bharata-bhumito*

*Hoibaha manushya-jonmo//*  
*KoutiKoutijonmo antara jaharo*  
*Aase mahapunya-rashi/*  
*Xi xi kodachito manushyahuway*  
*Bharatabarise aachi//40 (chapter 4, Ajamilupakhyan)*

(Its only once that human existence happens in Bharatavarshsa. After coming up of crores of sacred life, one can get birth in human form in Bharatavarsha)

*Joteko sanshar-noy sobe swapno mayamoy*  
*Antoke keshato aase dhor/*  
*Bharatata janmo pai bilamboko nujuwai*  
*Sodaye ghushiyo ram hari// 18 (chapter 2, Bali-chalan)*

*Krishna kotha suniyo somaje/*  
*Jonmo lobhi bharataro maaje//*  
*Aako britha kora kon kaame/*  
*Sudhiyo mukuti hari name// 100 (chapter 7, Sishu-leela)*

*Tumishi parama priyo atma narayana/*  
*Toju pada-pankaje mojoko moro mon//*  
*Bharate manushya jonmo nuhike senthore/*  
*Tumako nubhuji atmaghato kori more// 10 (chapter 2, Veda-stuti)*

Again in his 'Bhakti-Pradipa' also Sankardev uses the word Bharata-

*Bharatata dwijo jonmo dhor/ aasa kibo/*  
*Aito adhamara jivonota dhika dhika// 63*  
*Shuna sabha sodo pada saite krishnara kotha/*  
*Bharata bhumito jonmo nokoriyo britha//*  
*Devero banshani aati aito norokai/*  
*Jeno sintamoni hera hatote herai//116*  
*Bharate janmiyo yogi alpo aayu hoi/*

*Samsthe kori shreshtha tothapi howai// 969*  
*Bharate manushyo bhailo indriya sampuna/*  
*Janaho nichoy dhanyatam seijon//*  
*Sashasra sashasra jonme punyar sanchai/*  
*Kodachito bharatat manushye howai// 977*

In his Bargeet also, we find him praising the holy land Bharatavarsha-

*Beshayo bharate haate/*  
*Ayur beli naate//*  
*Chalite nibate bhoyo/*  
*Bhora diya jhante// (Bargeet)*

Sankardev's favourite disciple and chief apostle, Madhavdeva also praised this holy land Bharatavarsha in his bargeet Namamalika and Jonmorahashya. Girish Baruah, in this context also states that, "Sankardev never thought in terms of Assam. He always thought in terms of India, although at that time Assam was not politically within India. He always spoke of Bharata-varisa. He has made us understand that the land in which we are born and live is holy (punya bhumi), because it sustains us in our struggle towards mukti" (Baruah, 64). During the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century most of the part of India, including Assam was not politically united. The Mughals, The Rajputs, The Marathas, The Hyderabadas, The Vijayanagar, The Ahoms ruled their respective kingdoms. But we can't ignore the fact that all the places of the Indian sub-continent are linked and attached with the greater 'Bharatavarsha'. Bhakti Movement always advocated the theory of making this *punyabhumi* (Sacred or holy land) India a sacred universe, and only through practice of Bhakti the final realisation can come into exist. Sankardev too carried this motto of Bhakti, and according integrated the society.

Sivanath Barman believed that the ascent of the Koches in the west and the Ahoms in the east led to a sort of synthesis amongst various ethnic groupings. As a result, a composite Assamese society was created, and Sankardev's *ekasarana* dharma served as an ideological force to reinforce this synthesis. The idea of bhakti contributed to the survival of the civilization, which gradually took on a feudal structure. Sankardev here from came to be referred to as the "Father of Assamese Nationality" in this respect. Barman further mentions that "Sankardev also brought Assam closer to India by uncalculatingly the idea

of 'Indianness' in the minds of the Assamese people" (Barman, 283). But Devabrata Sharma criticizing Barman about his book *Srimanta Sankardev: Kriti aru Krititwa* (1986) as his Indian Sankardev stood opposed the Assamese Sankardev that had been propagated since the time of Laxminath Bezbaroa. Sharma makes a point that "the chief reasons motivating Bezbaroa to project Sankardev was the urgent need of the Assamese middle class to establish the Assamese Nationality as distinct from the neighbouring Bengalis" (D. Sharma 649). Though later, he opined that "Sankardev is now associated with two varieties of nationalism, Assamese as well as Indian" (651) as Sankardev must also be given credit for providing an intellectual cultural orientation to the effort of socioeconomic consolidation of the future Assamese Nationality even though he was not aware of nationalism in its purest form. Sankardev was undoubtedly affiliated with Indian culture. Consequently, the attempt to portray Sankardev as the defender of two opposing political beliefs needs to be objectively assessed.

But many of the scholars do say that Sankardev's concept of Bharatavarsha was not India, he considered the greater Assam as Bharatavarsha, as Bharatavarsha did not exist at the time of Sankardev's period. In this regard, Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti gave a scientific elaboration of what Sankardev meant of Bharatavarsha. In the writings of Sankardev, the concept of Bharatavarsha was not political, it was a cultural concept. The eulogy of Bharatavarsha in various texts, can't be considered as accidental, rather it was deliberate. "He termed the birth in Bharatavarsha as a great fortune for one's spiritual elevation. That clearly negated any political boundary for his Bharatavarsha. The ancient heritage of Vedas and the epics determined his Bharatavarsha. It was thus a religio-cultural heritage that he wanted to convey" (Borkakoti, 266). Sankardev's concept of Bharatavarsha was definitely the cultural part of the great Bharatavarsha which was so rich and which was developed in the Vedic period. To unite the people of Assam with the spirituality, to attach the people of Assam socially and culturally, Sankardev translated the Sanskrit religious text into Assamese so that they feel glory of this land called Bharatavarsha. "Thus the saint enlightened the people of Assam about the spiritual soul of Bharatavarsha. No other writer in any Indian Language has done so much like him single-handedly. The contribution of Srimanta Sankardev in achieving spiritual unity in Bharatavarsha is really unique" (Borkakoti, 266).

Maheswar Neog is of the view that, "It stands to the credit of Bhuyan chief of Kamarupa, Sankardev (1449-1568), to have obtained medieval Assam for this all-benign message of Love and brought that part of India on to the highway of the great resurgence of

the new-found faith” (Srimanta 210). The North-East India is a land of great diversity with hosts of tribal faith and religious belief stays here. Most of them were Non-Aryan or Non Hindu. Neog added that, “But they were soon reclaimed to Hinduism mainly through the door of Bhakti. This reclamation was a great gain to Indian nationhood and culture, for it brought about a sort of intellectual and spiritual and no less, political balance to this North-Eastern region. Maheswar Neog cites B.V. Keskar, former chairman of the National Book Trust, in his preface to the monograph of ‘Sankardev’ that, “But for the Sankardev movement the tribes of the North-East would have all gone Christian. Now, while a people’s conversion to Christianity could in itself be called no wrong, one could remember that there was in recent times a lurking suspicion that the underground movement for a sovereign Nagaland had the hand of foreign missionaries behind it, and that the fissiparous movements in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills (allowed to be new state of Meghalaya), and the Lushai Hills (now shaped into the State of Mizoram) were there, just because the people in these (then) Assam districts were predominantly Christianized. It is very much to be noted that the integrating force of the Sankardev movement did not extend as far these regions.” (Srimanta 211)

Maheswar Neog regarding this states that, “In the final analysis it would appear that there were difficulties of full Indianisation in the North-East where this had not already happened under the aegis of the bhakti movement. It would thus appear how effectively Sankardev stood and stands as the sentinel of Indian nationality and culture on the eastern front of India.” (Srimanta 211). Suniti Kumar Chatterji made a remarkable statement about the generosity of Sankardev. According to him Sankardev belongs to first rank of saints and sages of along with the other Bhakti Movement leader like Sankaracharya, Ramananda, Kabir, Dadu Dayal, Chaitanya deva and Guru Nanak. Sankardev is not only connected with Assam, but he belongs to the whole of India, for his universal quality. Another great Vaishnavite scholar, Sonaram Chutiya mentions that India's life is rooted in religion, and it is only through religion that India has interacted with other nations. No force on earth can conquer India as long as the Indian people do not lose sight of the tremendous legacy of their ancestors. He added, “Mahapurusa Srimanta Sankardev had introduced Assam to India and India to Assam. He had not mentioned even for once the name of Assam as a country but mentions ‘Bhārata Varisa’ hundreds of times in his vast literature” (Chutiya,). In this regard we can say that in almost all his creation, be it in literature, music, drama, painting, festivals there is a Vedic flavour in it. In literature, Vedic books were translated to Assam, in music the Dhruva Sangeet flavour of the Vedic period

are seen mostly in his Bargitas. Moreover, in sculpture also we can see Indian flavour of Sankardev. Just like the lionsgate (singhadwar) is situated in the temple gate of Lord Jagannath in Puri, the same architecture was introduced in the *Satras* of Assam, though it was not completely identical. His view of humanity accords equality to all creatures, not only to humans. One thing to note about Sankardev's humanistic worldview is that despite his call to perceive God in all creation, he placed more value on human life. Sankardev believed that since only man has a spiritual realm, he is superior. Except for humans, all other animals live far from this planet. As a result, Sankardev articulated all the elements associated with the concept of humanity before any other philosopher or thinker did. Sankardev incorporated all the tenets and components that made his conception of humanism a complete, well-rounded, and advantageous idea for the entirety of human society. Sankardev's humanistic philosophy ought to continue to be the most widely accepted theory and practice among all people. Sankardev always worked to bring together various groups of people. By fostering the idea of "Bharatiya," or Indianness, he moved Assam closer to India. His work encompasses the entirety of India, whether it is in literature, music, drama, painting, sculpture, or festivals. Sankardev is not only associated with Assam because of his universal qualities but also with all of India. Sankardev, the great integrator, not only successfully integrated Assam but also significantly improved Indian culture and nationhood.

Sankardev saw numerous cultural practices throughout his twelve-year first pilgrimage to various locations in India. He then developed a style of art that was acceptable for Assamese audiences while still retaining some Indian flavour. He established Assamese Nationalism through cultural nationalism, merging several tribes and communities to give Assam a language, culture, and literature; later, through composite nationalism, Assam came closer to Indian Nationalism. Nationalist projects have frequently used cultural icons taken from various native traditions in South Asian societies to support their claims of legitimacy. However, these schools have a distinct regional flavour thanks to the Assamese branches' support for local symbols and the Assamese language. As a multi-ethnic nation, India has undertaken numerous national-building initiatives simultaneously at both the national and local levels. We found it helpful to adopt Sanjib Baruah's definition of sub-nationalism, which he described as a group's propensity to identify most strongly with their land, which may or may not be susceptible to the imaginations of pan-Indian components (Baruah, 1999). In Assam, people of many caste, communities, and religions were united under one social structure thanks in part to

Sankardev. The Vaishnava faith enjoyed a large following among various caste-based Hindu social groups, but it wasn't until the twentieth century that it served as a topic for beauty debate or as a significant piece of Assamese heritage. Bezbaroa's thoughts and creative contribution to the Assamese language became more well known at this time. Even though the Bengal Renaissance had an impact on him, he was aware that he could not follow the same road in fostering Assamese nationalist awareness among its many ethnic groupings. He recognized the value of shared linguistic and religious symbols in forging a nation. He worked diligently to revive Sankardev's religious principles and realized that Without Sankardev's thoughts and consciousness, Assamese national life cannot be fully realised. (M. Baruah, 170). By tying the contemporary Assamese literary legacy to the religious writings written in the medieval era, linguists like Banikanta Kakati's work at the time contributed to proving its historical legitimacy. The most crucial step in this endeavor was designating *Axomiya* (Assamese) as the *jatiya bhava* (National sentiment). Sankardev's recognition as the *jatiya guru* was another critical step in this direction. The same can be stated in Bezbaroa's writing, which highlights the Mahapuruxia tradition concerning the Indian Bhakti tradition as a distinctive variant of Vaishnavism. Additionally, a distinction between Vaishnavism and Sankardev's Neo-Vaishnavism may be made for other studies that are not the topic of this research paper. The writings of Sankardev and his pupils, which would constitute a distinctive magnum opus to legitimize the polymath's contribution to Assamese language, literature, and culture, which may also be used to explore the battle between religious and political havoc throughout the era.

Sankardev may play the role of a religious saint in the Assamese society at large. But he is considered a Mahapurusha by the Assamese people because of his outstanding contributions to literature and culture. Sankardev's pioneering Cultural Revolution produced strides in the analysis of ideas and societal advancement. This revolution's expected and distinctive framework was provided by the text, bhaona, music, and dance. His play has two goals in mind: to end caste prejudice and foster racial harmony. His artistic production *Namghar* and *Satra* made a significant contribution to the spread of democratic values in society. Sankardev attempted to spread the message of education to the illiterate Assamese people through cultural activities. Even though Sankardev's entire body of literary and cultural work is largely concerned with promoting religious instruction, it has an enormous educational value that every Assamese institution incorporates into its curricula. There is another scope of study about the democratic value in *Satra* Culture, which researchers can find out.



We can sum up by noting that, due to the current unstable social order, the ideology of Sri Sankardev needs to be repeatedly mirrored across all communities through their activities. As a social reformer, artist, musician, religious or spiritual doyen, and scholar of exceptional reputation, Srimanta Sankardev's views, cultural contribution, and philosophy grew to be an essential part of Assamese people's lives. Sankardev's life has been the subject of numerous biographies, leading to numerous interpretations of his life and works from diverse angles. Additionally, not all members of the Assamese community adhere to Sankardev's *Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma*. This is mostly attributable to the old Brahminic (priesthood) culture that dominated the Ahom kingdom at the time. The Sakta Brahmins took every opportunity to exaggerate since they had the king's ear. (Gait 195) The cultural integrity of the Indigenous people of this area has also been hampered by the interventions of multiculturalism, which has prevented the development of "*Satras*" and "naamghar," the original concept of Srimanta Sankardev. Moreover, the division of *Satra* culture in four subsects namely, *Brahma-samhati*, *Pursha-samhati*, *Kala-samhati* and *Nika-samhati* also brought a division to the *Satra* Culture but was based on Vaishnavism. As a result, the current generation is unaware of the contributions of the polymath. Today, everyone is more aware of their fundamental cultural identity and shared goals than they were when Sankardev created the greater Assamese culture with the ideals of equality, compassion, love, and non-violence. However, if we adopt the idea of composite nationalism and use it as a vehicle for unity, as Sankardev did with his Bhakti movement, the true goal of unity in diversity would be achieved. The greatness of Sankardev as a preacher and spiritual reformer has been observed to occasionally overshadow his renown as a poet. The need of the hour is to bind the society with the message of Sankardev, erasing the mutual differences of opinion and perspective as shown by Harekrishna Mahanta with the ideology of Neo-Vaishnavism as a medium of unity.

Therefore, following from the discussion above and also in the previous chapters, it can be surmised that a society that is ridden with class and caste stratification will always be rife with smaller nationalities. Precisely, the hegemonic structure of a vertical society is structured to discriminate and create hierarchies. As seen in chapter 1, 2 and 3 one can see the role of the print capitalism, the rise of national consciousness based on economic function and political control of the society. As a result, the power struggle that is created due to social divisions based on class create more conducive environment for social stratification. However, on the contrary, the social structure that was founded by Srimanta Sankardev and whose legacy was carried forward by Harekrishna Mahanta not only helps

in resolving class differences, but also caste differences. The society in Sankardev's world is not vertical but horizontal, which is manifested through the creation of *Satras*. In conclusion, unlike modern Nationalism which fragments the society, the *Satra* Culture practised by Harekrishna Mahanta has helped in the integration and sustenance of socio-cultural fabric as evinced from Barangajuli *Satra*.