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Jai Guru Sankara

The Rise of Sankaradeva Sangha

Haladhar Bhuyan

Tr. by Arunava Gupta

ATributeToSankaradeva.org presents the (partial) English Translation of Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha founder **Haladhar Bhuyan**'s Presidential Speech delivered in 1962. This Speech is invaluable not only because of its immense importance in chronicling the rise of the **Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha** as a religious organization born to meet the twin-challenge of caste-distinction and doctrinal distortion, but also because it serves as (a) source-material for the study of the **Sankaradeva Movement** in modern times (20th century) and (b) a historical document for re-constructing the social history of Assam in one of its most axial periods. Its sociological value also cannot be denied. Audrey Cantlie of the University of London, for instance, utilizes it in her study of religion, caste and sect in the Indian context (See, [The Assamese, Chapter 11, 'Sri Shankaradeva Sangha', pp. 273-291](#))

We are grateful to the translator for sending us (the translation of) this invaluable document along with a copy of the original in Assamese - editor

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Excerpted from The Padādhikār's Speech of Sangha Founder Haladhar Bhuyan, 31st Annual Conference, Boko, 513 Sankarabda, 1962 AD, 'SRIMANTA SANKARADEVA SANGHAR PADAADHIKAAR SAKALAR ABHIBHAASAN', A Collection of written speeches of Presidents (Padādhikār) of Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, Compiled and Edited by Jibakanta Nath, Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, 1st Ed. Feb 2005

[Translation follows on the next page]

The Rise of Sankaradeva Sangha

By the Grace of Jagat-Guru (World Preceptor) **Srimanta Sankara** and the direction of His invisible Hand, the **Sri Sri Sankaradeva Sangha**, out of the sincere wish of propagating the Glory of His pure creed of **Nāma Dharma** and the undeviating faith and devotion of the **devotees**, has come into being. It has a history behind it which I recount before you all.

It is this wretched feet-dust of Thee who is the founder of this Sangha. I was a vehement opposer of regressive social practices, social disunity and of those Gosāins and Mahantas who used to preach *dharma* as *a-dharma* and *a-dharma* as *dharma* and of the Brahminical rite-ritual ridden mode of worship. I have unflinching faith in pure **Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma**. This faith was firmly implanted into my heart in my childhood by the teachings of my father's elder brother, Late Madan Chandra Bhuyan, and the other Bhaktas like the Ojā Ātoi of Hatigad and the Bahuwā Ātoi of Baligaon. It is this [belief] that, in course of time, grew stronger.

Once, when I was reading in Class VI of High School, I had gone to Bardowa to see the Doul Utsav. There they did not let me enter into the Kirttanghar. I was greatly pained at heart. My father's elder brother was the Bar-medhi of Narowa Sattrā. The *simhāsana* (sacred throne) of the Doul was constructed out of his own hands and yet they offered me *prasāda* treating me as an untouchable. That insult I have never forgotten in my whole life. I stopped going to Bardowa.

Secondly, at one time, I suffered greatly from Malaria. Even though my britti (scholarship) had expired, I was exempted from paying the school-fees because I was an orphan, having lost both my father and mother. But, when, after my frequent missing of school, I was informed that the free studentship would get canceled if things continued like that, I began to [re-]attend school without even fully recovering [from the illness]. But, one day, I fell ill at school itself and the master also granted me leave. I started for home with my body burning with fever but due to the very high fever, I became unable to walk. I then made a desperate request to two passers-by at two different places to hold me. But they did not even touch me. It was at that moment that I thought, "The days of this religion are numbered". Afterwards, after studying the *Kirttana-ghosa*, *Dasama*, *Nama-ghosa* and the other books of the **Mahāpurusas**, I found that there was nothing wrong with the religion. It is man who is responsible for this and on account of the inability of the *dharmacaryas* (spiritual teachers) to uphold

the true doctrine and ideology, such a state of affairs has resulted.

After this, my karma-jivan (work-life) began. I joined in the Freedom Struggle being led by Mahatma Gandhi, in 1921. It was then that I had to make a clear study of the political, economic, social and the religio-ethical condition of India as well as Assam. Sacrificing everything, even my job, I got busy in the work of Swaraj.

But even at that time, I did not forget the matter of corruption of the Mahāpurusiyā faith. Only I simply neither had any means nor any time to take up anything in hand.

At this time, I happened to meet our most venerable Srijut **Ramakanta Muktiyar Atoi** at the residence of Late Birendra Mahanta, BL, the Nagaon Municipal Chairman. After subsequent interactions, my closeness with him increased. I thought to myself, it is only through him that the task of the Jagat-Guru can be realized, because he knows the scriptures and the *tattva-katha* (metaphysics) pertaining to the Mahāpurusiyā faith very well; secondly, he is a Udāsin Bhakat (celibate monk) having no burden of family etc; third, he knows the history as well as the rules and regulations of many Sattras.

One day, he, very kindly, came to my house and I, taking the opportunity, asked him if he was willing to establish ‘**Sankara Mission**’ and propagate the faith and whether he could do it or not. He said that he could do it, certainly. Then I told him, in that case, we have to select some Asrama-like center in some place from where we could spread our ideology. He managed to arrange for the setting up of such a Kendra (Center) at **Palasani** village and informed me. The gentlemen **Srijuts Sanatram Bora, Cheniram Nam-lagowa, Yajnaram Bora**, Late **Thuleswar Saikia** and many others, with great earnestness, pledged to engage themselves in the task of spreading the Gurujanā’s ideology. I don’t remember exactly - this took place either in 1927 or in 1928.

After that, I thought, there is no person in our land with such an influential personality that his words were heeded by one and all. Therefore, it is better to form a Dharma Sabha bringing together all the Santas, Mahantas, holy persons and Vaisnava Bhakatas of Assam. In that Sabha, all would form a consensus on the Mahāpurusa’s true Eka-Sarana-Dharma, Sarana, Bhajana, etc. and in accordance with His ideology, on matters such as social reform, removal of untouchability, etc., and would release a Vyavasthā Puthi (Code of Conduct; Action Document; Guideline Book) and everybody would have to abide by it. Then our work would become easier. In this regard, I had an audience with Sri Sri Gadmur

Satrādhikār Prabhu, the Dihing Satrādhikār Prabhu, the Bardowa Satrādhikār Prabhu and many other Gosains and Prabhus and took their approval on this matter. After this, on 1st January, 1930, the Satrādhikār of Auniati, Prabhu Srila Srijut Hema Chandra Goswami had a meeting with Srijut Rama Muktiyar Ata in the Auniati precincts of Nagaon district. And we brought up the above-mentioned objective. He, in order to arrive at any conclusion regarding this, took one month's time and after one month, dispatching his Mazumdar from North Guwahati, sent word that such work was not his cup of tea. It was then that I informed him that, in that case, we would ourselves form the proposed Dharma Sangha and accomplish that task and afterwards, he would not have any right to point a guilty finger at us. And I really did inform him of it through a letter, after forming the Sri Sri Sankaradeva Sangha¹.

After this, what Will of God, I don't know; there was the bereavement of mother of the renowned judge of Golaghat, Late **Jogen Barua** and he, observing *dasāh asauca* (10 day ritual impurity), performed the *srāddha* on the 11th day itself, according to the formulation of Pandit Siromani (Crown Jewel of Scholars) of Golaghat Late **Gopika Ballabh Goswami**. On this issue, there was a great commotion all over Assam. Our Sangha accepted it (the 11th day observance). A Sabha (Meeting) of eighteen renowned Pandits of Kamarupa under the chairmanship of the Principal of Cotton College, Pandit Lakshmi Narayan Chatterjee was convened at the Phulaguri Stage House, in which many Brahmana and Sudra people, including my own teacher Late Pandit Kanak Chandra Kavyatirtha, assembled together. From our side, **Pandit Bhuban Chandra Vyakarana Tirtha, Tarka Sastri**, was present. In that Sabha, after the arguments and counter-arguments of both the parties, I had, of course, said a few words. I said that the Brahmanas have always been the object of our salutation; all those quotations [in support of the 11th day observance] employed in today's Sabha - all are from the *sastras* (scriptures), written by Brahmanas only. Therefore, if somebody followed the *dasāh asauca* (10 day ritual impurity), then it will be acting in accordance with the *sastras* only and then nobody would be 'fallen' (*patita*). The important thing to note is that, today, the times have changed. In this *yuga* (era), if you keep the people suppressed by trampling upon them, they will definitely revolt. Therefore, you pronounce both the viewpoints as *sastriya* (sanctioned by scripture); otherwise, people will leave the Brahmanas and, in course of time, everybody will become *Nāma-Kirttaniyā* - this [fact] you can put down in writing.

¹ The Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha was earlier (upto 1970) named as 'Sri Sri Sankaradeva Sangha'. This name continued up to 1970 when, in the Lakhimpur Session of the Sangha, it was changed to 'Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha'.

Then, those renowned Pandits of the said Sabha took such a step which was indeed a very unfortunate step. They issued a small booklet pronouncing that, for the Sudra, the *dasāh* was contrary to *sastra* and altogether prohibited. Only if he (the Sudra) waits upon a Brahmana or, in other words, stays as his servant, and if that Brahmana says that he does not have any *cuvā* (impurity) after 10 days; only then he can act (i.e observe the *dasāh asauca*) as the Brahmana's *parichārak* but, even in that case, he may perform the *srāddha* only on the 31st day.

This *Vyavasthā Pustika* ('Guideline Booklet') was put in my hand by Srijut Girish Chandra Barua, currently a resident of Guwahati. Receiving it, the advice of the prominent citizens of Nagaon district was sought and inviting the Gosains, Mahantas, Brahmanas and many other gentlemen, a public Sabha was convened under the Chairmanship of Late **Rai Sahab Dambarudhar Barua**, at the residential premises of Late Bhujendra Nath Mahanta Deva. In that Sabha, a great many eminent people from the towns and the villages were present. Among the Brahmanas, the name of Late **Cheniram Srutikar** is noteworthy; he had supported the 11-day Movement till his last breath.

In that Sabha, Pandit Sri Bhuban Chandra Bhuyan Vyakarana Tirtha Tarka-sastri Deva and respected Muktiyar Ata had mesmerized the people with their speeches. There I gave a proposal to establish the '**Sankara Mission**'. Then Srijut **Mahikanta Mahanta** made an amendatory proposal [suggesting] that the name should be '**Sankara Sangha**'. All of us accepted that proposal. On that day, the first **Sankara Sangha** came into being with Late Rai Sahab Dambarudhar Barua as Sabhapati (Chairman) and myself as Sampadak (Secretary).

An Executive Committee was constituted with Sri Matiram Bora, Late Bimala Kanta Bora, MLA, Late Bhujendra Nath Mahanta, Sri Ramakanta Muktiyar Ata and others as members. Keeping Pandit Sri Bhuban Chandra Deva at Nagaon for six months, an intense campaign was organized. After this, at the Sri Sri Sankaradeva Mandir, the *Bārsik Adhibesan* (Annual Conference) of the Nagaon district Sankara Sangha was held. And in that Sabha, many people from village and town participated. In that Sabha only, the *Prādesik (State-level) Sangha* was constituted. In the year 1933, the first *Prādesik Sangha* under the chairmanship of the enlightened Pandit from Golaghat, Gopika Ballabh Goswami Deva, had its sitting at Natun Bazar, Nagaon. Participating in that Sabha, the noble gentlemen such as sub-judge Late Jogendra Nath Barua dāngariyā² and Bagmibar Srijut Nilamani

²

An honorific epithet of address

Phukan dangariya had enhanced the gravity and importance of the Sabha. In that Sabha only, as per the proposal of Bagmibar Phukan dangariya, in place of ‘Sankara Sangha’, the name ‘*Sri Sri Sankaradeva Sangha*’ was given. Again, it was in this *Adhibesan* that the Asis Vani (‘Message of Blessings’, Best Wishes) of **Lakshminath Bezbaroa** dangariya, the most deeply devoted follower of the Mahapurusa, was read out. We had sent a query to Bezbaroa, ‘From the Sangha, a monthly paper named ‘Yuga Dharma’ is sought to be launched’. What was his opinion on it? He had, in that message, advised that in place of ‘*Yuga Dharma*’, it should be ‘*Nama Dharma*’. The Sangha had earned praise from all quarters for carrying out that work [of bringing out the paper], but, due to lack of subscribers, it (the paper) appears to have become almost extinct. This is most unfortunate and shameful. It must be admitted that this does not reflect well on the Sangha members.

After that, the *Prādesik Sangha* had its session in 1934, in the Namghar of Kalayugi village, on the banks of the Potani near Barhampur, under the chairmanship of Late **Haliram Mahanta Deva**. In the next year in 1935, the *Prādesik Sangha* met under the chairmanship of Srijut **Nilamani Phukan** on the stage of the Hindu Sabha which was having its session on the banks of the Kalang. The *Prādesik Sangha* met after that at Suwalkuchi. Even though the Sri Sri Gadmuriya Satradhikar Goswami Prabhu had given his word to be the Sabhapati (Chairman), he did not come and the agenda of the Sangha’s *Adhibesan* was carried out under the Chairmanship of Late Rai Sahab Dambarudhar Barua dangariya.

In this *Adhibesan*, to anybody who could prove that the *dasāh asauca* implemented by the Sangha was *a-sastriya* (contrary to scripture), a reward of Rupees 2,000 was announced, and the money was kept wrapped in a bundle on the table. [But] Although many pandits of Kamarupa had assembled, nobody uttered a single word. On behalf of the Sangha, Pandit Sri Bhuvan Chandra Kavya Tirtha, Tarka Sastri, had delivered speeches citing proofs from the sastras.

After this, we could not hold the *Prādesik Sabhā*. Due to the 1937 Assembly Election and the piling up of the work of the Congress, I personally could not give attention. But Muktiyar Ata and the other workers [of the Sangha] were carrying on the work of propagation. Of course, I did express the opinion that it would not be correct to carry out the work of the Sangha solely through speeches delivered orally. Therefore, I requested [the Sangha members] to put down the slokas of the sastras, relating to *asauca*, in the vernacular so that the stri-sudras and all others could easily understand. The

books entitled ‘*Dasāh Asaucar Vyavasthā Puthi*’, ‘*Vivāh Vidhi*’, ‘*Srāddha Nirnay*’, through Late Gopika Ballabh Goswami Deva and one ‘*Vivāh Vidhi*’ (Procedure to be followed in Conducting the Marriage Ceremony) and another ‘*Srāddha Vidhi*’ (Procedure for Conducting the *Srāddha* through Hari-Nama) through Pandit Srijut Bhuban Chandra Deva were got written. By Srijut Muktiyar Ata, ‘*Antyesti Kriyā Vidhān*’ (Procedure for Performing the Last Rites), ‘*Mrityu Mangal*’, etc. were written. The exceedingly generous Srijut Radhakanta Handique dangariya and tea-planter Srijut Mahendra Nath Barua Deva had assisted in the printing of the books.

In the meantime, when, after becoming MLA in the year 1937, I requested the generous and extremely ardent follower of the Mahāpurusa, Srijut Keshav Kanta Barua dangariya, and impressed upon him the necessity of a Seva Mission (Service Organization) named after the Mahāpurusa, he pledged to render help in every possible way. And proceeded to take up the task in hand. He bought 25 bighas of land in Kadhali Gaon and got constructed buildings. He gave also the grain out of his own land in Puranigudam, to the Mission. Late Rai Sahab Dambarudhar Barua became the Chairman of the Mission, Sri Rajmohan Nath, the Deputy Chairman, Barua Deva himself the Secretary and myself and Ramakanta Muktiyar Atoi, the members of the Executive Committee. Muktiyar Atoi was nominated as the Adhyaksa (Superintendent / Head) of that Mission. Young men were brought from the villages to the Mission and imparted training in the procedure for conduct of marriage (vivāh vidhi) and in *Nama-Kirttana* and (devotional) song and music. Meanwhile, on my going to jail in the 1942 Mass Movement, that training centre got dismantled and due to other reasons, Srijut Barua Deva stopped his contact with the Mission.

After three years, I came out of jail. After coming out, I saw that the work of the Mission had completely ceased. Here, there was a disagreement between Muktiyar and me and Muktiyar Ata stopped communicating with me.

After this, under the Chairmanship of **Sri Sri Gadmuriya Goswami Prabhu**, the *Adhibesan* of the *Prādesik Sangha* was held, with the effort of Muktiyar Ata; [but even though] I was the General Secretary, I was not called to the Sabha. Since then, the *Prādesik Adhibesan* of the Sangha is being regularly held, but I did not have any participation. I joined in at the *Prādesik* held at Kuwaritol and became the Sabhapati (Chairman) of the Nagaon Jilā (District) Sangha.

In the meantime, I am trying hard for the [re]establishment of the Srimanta Sankara Mission. In

the Sabha held under the Chairmanship of Late Lokapriya Gopinath Bardaloi dangariya, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Gate of Suwalkuchi's Sankara Mandir, the proposal to establish the Srimanta Sankara Mission was put forward and a committee was constituted with Bani [Kanta] Kakati and several other eminent people [as members]. But no support was forthcoming from any one of them. Only Kakati Deva wrote to me, "Leave aside all sabhas and samitis - you start the work by yourself; otherwise it is difficult to accomplish these tasks through sabhas and samitis".

In accordance with that advice, the **Srimanta Sankara Mission** was established in the year 1950. In this work, Dr. Lalit Barua helped me by functioning as my right hand.

Although I was not there, I have not neglected the work of Sri Sri Gurujanā (Sankaradeva). The Mahāpurusa's 500th [Birth] Anniversary Utsav (Celebrations) were observed at Bardowa and in the Sabha held to mark the Utsav, Srijut Mitradeva Mahanta presided as Chairman and Srijut **Nilamani Phukan** dangariya put forward a proposal to dissolve the two Namghars of Bardowa and make them into one. Accordingly, after much effort, this most inferior one was able to secure the approval of all except for some three persons belonging to the '*saru-phāla*'³ ('little-end'). And I placed a project-proposal before the then Finance and Revenue Minister, Srijut Matiram Bora dangariya.

It was from Bardowa, the birth-place of the Mahāpurusa, that the literature, dance, arts, etc. of **Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma**, had radiated. Now we must rise keeping Bardowa at the center. In order to do that, construction of one Kirttana Ghar of Bardowa has been completed. Here a Sanskrit college of high standard must be set up. There, our promising youth showing an eagerness to learn should also be taught regional and foreign languages and after imparting to them knowledge of all religions, they should be sent to other parts of the country and abroad for propagating the Mahāpurusa's religion and also other branches of liberal education. Only then will the fame of the Mahāpurusa spread world-wide and the face of the Assamese shine with brilliance.

Moreover, for those people who go looking for *tirthas* to places like Kasi, Vrindavana and Puri, for such people, arrangement should be made for their stay at Batadrava (Bardowa), because **Batadravā Thān** is the essence of the Seven Vaikunthas. Staying right here, doing the fourteen *prasangas* (services / matins), Nama-Kirttana, religious discourses and discussing the Vaisnavite

³ The Bardowa Sattrā is divided into two Sattras, Narowa and Salaguri, the 'big end' and the 'little end'.

religious texts, they will be able to realize all benefits, spiritual as well as temporal, for themselves and for the community. Along with the beautification of the *Ākāsi Gangā* and the *Doul Mandap*, guest-houses also need to be constructed and arrangements should be made for water-supply, toilets, etc.; and once entire Bardowa is made to look gorgeous and splendid, it will be possible to transform Bardowa into one of the magnificent, top-class pilgrimage sites in India and also draw international tourists. Among these works, the construction of one guest-house is now complete.

I appeal to the Hon'ble Revenue Minister not to lease out the Reserve Land surrounding Bardowa. Because, in future, I have a project in mind - to set up a '*Batadrava Vishwavidyalaya*' (University), similar to Bolpur, Shantiniketan Vishwabharati.

This proposal should be taken from the Sri Sri Sankaradeva Sangha's side and it should take it upon itself to execute the above-mentioned project. The job which Srijut Bora dangariya has done is extremely praiseworthy and the blessings of the people will always be with him. May the *kripa* (Grace) of Sri Sri Gurujanā shower upon him.

The Sri Sri Sankaradeva Sangha had a great and noble aim.

To propagate **Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma** in its true form and, cleansing it of the dirt and filth of retrogressive practice which was keeping it concealed, and by propagating Pure Devotion (*nirmal bhakti*), putting an end to all caste distinctions.

To establish equal rights for all *varnas* and to secure harmony between communities living in the hills and plains of entire Assam.

That it will be difficult for the Assamese community to maintain its existence unless we are able to construct a broad society, in line with the Mahāpurusa's ideology, by rooting out the evil of caste-distinction and the 'touch-me-not' mentality that afflicts us today in the plains - this cannot be today denied by anybody except the extreme idiot.

Formerly, the Sattras and the Namghars had been set up in order that *this* great and liberal dharma is spread, but today, the Satradhikars themselves are groping in utter darkness. They have, by completely forgetting the Mahāpurusa's objective, brought about the doom of this land. Some

Satradhikars have only managed to turn themselves into zamindars (land-lords). They do not have any time for the propagation of dharma - they are ever busy taking stock of the accounts of their farms, lands, etc.

[For the original speech in Assamese, click [here](#)]

[Although we have tried our best to faithfully adhere to the original, we admit that it is impossible to convey the spirit of the original in the case of writings of this stature. As such, our translation is most imperfect and we seek forgiveness from all, including the author, for any lapse on our part – translator]