

Sankaradeva

Vasudev Sharan Agrawal

Sankaradeva was like the glorious sun under whose warmth of mind Assam blossomed like a lotus of thousand petals (sahasradala kamala). It is difficult to imagine how deep and widespread was the influence of Sankaradeva on the cultural renaissance that burst forth in Medieval Assam.

Sankaradeva rebuilt the poetry of the Assamese language in its classical perfection. He himself wrote in several styles. He was the master of music, drama and musical instruments, and had a wonderful genius for creating musical performances which go by the name of Ankiya Nat. From his home in a small village on the Lauhitya, his vibrating notes echoed and re-echoed from every household and village in the extensive Brahmaputra valley. The still nights in the Assamese villages were resounding with the devotional themes of Sankaradeva. The imagination of the people were fired to new heights of divine inspiration and realisation.

Sankaradeva thought and realised the divine majesty in expanding new orbits and poured forth his spiritual experiences in words of great beauty to share them with the common people. His popularity was brought to every door. He had received the message of the Bhagavata and mingling it with the devotion of his own heart he created a religious literature that has few equals. It was Sankaradeva who brought divine Krsna to the common masses as their Bhagavan. He inundated with his charming lyrics based on the Dasama-Skandha of the Bhagavata not only in the state of Assam but also sent out their beauty and fragrance to the neighbouring provinces where the aroma of Sankaradeva continues to live even today.

There are poets and composers, there are saints and religious teachers, there are musical masters, there are preachers; but Sankaradeva was a genius in whom all these qualities were rolled into one.

Above all he was a true house-holder (sadgrhastha) soaked in the Bhagavata discipline of jnana and vairagya, yoga and bhakti. These four together are named in the Bhagavata itself in the dialogue of Kapila and Devahuti as adhyatmika yoga, altogether contributing to the massive welfare of man. Sankaradeva's mind had caught the spark of this Personal Religious Yoga, which flourishes in the individual centre and all the powers of the individual mind and heart compel the vision of the divine on the level of matter.

This was the miracle of the life of Sankaradeva, which filled the literature, religion and arts of the people of Assam. As long as the sun and the moon are set in their revolutions to announce the splendour of the Divine, so long will the spiritual warmth of Sankaradeva reflect in the heart of the Assamese people. Coming generations of enlightened Indians will pay their homage to Sankaradeva as one of the greatest benefactors of our nation. He lifted man to great heights of spiritual realisation and insisted that man should have a vision of the Divine on his own terms, on his own level and in his own domestic atmosphere.

May our respectful worship to Sankaradeva, his Ankiya Nats and Bargit compositions live long.

[Vasudev Sharan Agrawal was a renowned orientalist of India]