

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF SRIMANTA SANKARDEVA AND HIS RESEARCH METHODS

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Abstract: *Vaisnava Saint of Assam Srimanta Sankardeva (1449-1568) was not only the spiritual leader of Medieval Assam but also a Research Scholar. He searched knowledge by following methodologies like 'literature search', 'observation', 'experimental method', 'analytical method' etc. He applied his research findings in his creative works of literature, culture and social reform with spiritual as well as scientific attitude which is the back bone of today's modern Assamese society. The 'Satra' and 'Namghar' established by Srimanta Sankardeva are not only religious institutions but also the institutions of Knowledge Management. The libraries of Satra institution still reflect the quality knowledge management system of Srimanta Sankardeva.*

The Main Points

- Srimanta Sankardeva was also a research scholar and knowledge manager
- He organized a Knowledge Management System which includes production, collection, dissemination and preservation of knowledge
- He followed the research methods like literature search, experimental method, observation method, survey method, case study method etc.
- He had clear objectives of his research with great social relevance
- He engineered his research findings in creative activities and social reform
- Srimanta Sankardeva's Knowledge Management System is still relevant in modern society

1. Introduction

"There is no other [thing] sacred than knowledge..... Everything starts from knowledge and everything ends in knowledge" (Bhagavad Gita). Knowledge is regarded as sacred by the Indian society and searching knowledge is regarded as most noble work. 'Simple living and high thinking' was the ideal attitude of knowledge activists of ancient time. The knowledge society highly honors the knowledge workers. **Srimanta Sankardeva** was a knowledge activist, who started academic life under the guidance of great scholar Mahendra Kandali at Bardoa Sanskrit 'ToI' (Residential School). Mahendra Kandali discovered the

supernatural talent of Srimanta Sankardeva in the very beginning. The title '*Deva*' (Deity) was conferred on Sankardeva by Mahendra Kandali. Teacher Mahendra Kandali was astonished at his creativity as well as depth of knowledge when child Sankardeva composed a poem without knowing any of the vowels (except the first). Kandali recognized him as Deity and it is said that he took '*Sarana*' (became disciple) in Srimanta Sankardeva. When a 'Guru' (Teacher) becomes the disciple of his own student what it reflects! What could be the depth of knowledge of such a student!

2. Research and Knowledge Management System of Sankardeva

In the subject of Library and Information Science, 'Knowledge Management System' is characterized as production, collection, dissemination and use of knowledge. Knowledge is reposed in the form of books or any such reading material and collected and preserved in the libraries or archives. Knowledge is disseminated to the user through the process of teaching, performing arts, delivering reading writing materials etc. The knowledge users may be of different strata, occupation, age, of the society.

Mahapurush Sankardeva searched for such methods which could be the ways to attain knowledge for every individual of a society - from scholar to general cultivator. Before the age of Srimanta Sankardeva knowledge searching activities were confined only among the priestly and royal communities. But Sankardeva opened up the process of learning and searching knowledge for all. He established '**Namghars**' and '**Satras**' which became the centers of spirituality as well as art-culture-literature and education of the public.



Sankardeva managed knowledge for all the people from these institutions. Namghar and Satra were the production, collection, dissemination centre of knowledge for all the people.

2.1 Knowledge Production of Srimanta Sankardeva

Srimanta Sankardeva produced knowledge by research activity and creative activities. He did research by following the methods like literature search, analytical method, observation method, experimental method, survey method, and also the case study method.

2.1.1 Literature Search Method

Sankardeva searched all the Vedic literature in Sanskrit language of that time. He searched the four Vedas, eighteen Puranas and fourteen different Sastras (Books) of different subjects like Grammar etc. He had a big peer group from where he collected the contemporary literature of the time. Worth mentioning is Jagadish Misra, a Sanskrit scholar from Srikshetra (Puri, Orissa), who came to provide him the '**Bhagawata Sastra**'¹ when he was at Bardoa (Nagaon, Assam). He also searched the vernacular language and literature. He read all the writings of the scholars like Madhava Kandali which were highly influential literature of that time. By searching these literatures he achieved knowledge of philosophy, language, poetry as well as the society based on which he hypothesized his ideas. The outcome of this literature search was the output of creative literatures like '**Dashama**', '**Kirtana**', '**Uttarakanda Ramayana**', '**Bhakti Pradip**', '**Bhakti Ratnakar**', '**Nimi Nava Siddha Sambad**', '**Harish Chandra Upakhyan**', '**Rukmini Haran**' and so on. The philosophy of Vaishnavism and Bhakti (Total Surrender to God) was also developed by him by searching these literatures. He searched both Sanskrit and vernacular languages of that time from where he achieved the poetic quality of his language. He produced different Bhakti literature based on the findings of his research by such literature searching method. He searched the Sanskrit literature, analyzed and converted it to Assamese language by his own style of writing which was comprehensible to all classes of people.

2.1.2. Observation Method

Srimanta Sankardeva said that there is no need of visiting *tirtha* (holy places) in Kaliyuga. Then why did he travel twice on foot, for long twelve years to see the *tirthas* like Mathura, Brindavan, Puri-Jagannath etc! Actually he did not travel to these temples for '*mukti*' or '*punya*' (virtue) but to achieve knowledge. This was nothing but the observation method of research.

Srimanta Sankardeva set out on pilgrimage for first time in 1483 and returned in 1495. According to Hem Barua, "The post pilgrimage stage in his life is a period of great magic and creative fulfillment." He undertook another pilgrimage in 1552. Naturally he observed various societies and places to research their culture, literature, philosophy, etc. and earned necessary skills to create the arts like '**Bargeet**', '**Bhaona**', '**Nritya**', etc. He also created the musical instruments, choreography and costumes based on the findings of his research on dance and music. He wrote the first '**Bargeet**' (great holy songs) '**Mana Meri Ram Charanahi Lagu**' at Badarikasram, in the lower Himalayan Region.

He observed the paintings and sculptures of different famous temples of the then India. The sculpture of Satra and Namghar are also on the basis of the findings of the observation method of his research.

2.1.3. Experimental Method

¹ This was the *Bhagavata-Bhavartha-Dipika*, the commentary on the *Bhagavata* by Sridhara Svami -ed

Sankardeva did some experiments also. Actually a scientist or scholar does experiment to clear his doubts and to make his findings acceptable for society. Sankardeva experimentally played '*Chihnajatra*', at Bardoa after returning from his first-time visit of North Indian temples. The experiment was very much successful. The supernatural talent of Srimanta Sankardeva was established by this play and the intellectual society of Bardoa bestowed upon him the responsibility of propagating Vaisnavism.

Use of 'Brajawali' language in his writings was another experiment of Srimanta Sankardeva. It was really wonderful that he had not only created literature, art and music, but also created a whole new language. This experiment was also successful because it was easily understandable by all the people of North-East and North India and because no scholar denied this language. 'Brajawali' language is a unique contribution of Srimanta Sankardeva and it is nothing but an outcome of experimental method of research.

2.1.4. Survey Method

Srimanta Sankardeva applied survey method of research to achieve knowledge about social needs. To organize the society he required knowledge of organizational structure of a society and needs of the individuals. For this purpose he used interview method. He surveyed the society non-formally by using interview method. He talked to all people of different strata of the society from king, scholar to general people. He found out extraordinary talents from general people by using the survey method and the responsibilities of arts, music, literature, social works etc. were bestowed on them according to their qualities and talents. He created the titles like '*Gayan*' (Singer) '*Bayan*' (Musician), '*Sutradhar*' (Director), '*Pathak*' (Reader), '*Hatimata*' (Public Relation Officer), '*Gandhia*' (Librarian), '*Dhanbharali*' (Treasurer), '*Adhikari*' (Proprietor), '*Medhi*' (Manager), '*Oza*' (Instructor, Teacher), '*Kakati*' (Paper Producer), '*Lekharu*' (Copy Writer) etc. These professionals served the society according to their talents.

Srimanta Sankardeva also surveyed the places to establish Satras according to the productivity. He established 'Satra' institutions where agricultural production was rich. He also surveyed the areas from the point of condition of society, communication and life-style of the people. In 'Satra', there were four '*Hati*' surrounding the four directions. These '*Chari Hati*' were to secure the Satra institutions – '*Chari Phale Chareo Hati, Maha Bhaktagana*'. For communication, he searched the places where waterways were available.

2.1.5. Case Study Method

Srimanta Sankardeva's research methods also include the case study method. For instance, during his tour of India, He stayed for long six months at Puri of Orissa. According to the philosophy of Srimanta Sankardeva, worshiping idol is

prohibited. But, in Puri's temple people worship idol. Then why was he so interested in Puri? It was because, although there was the tradition of idol worshipping in Puri temple, the society of Puri was based on the philosophy of communism. The society of Puri was not divided according to communities or classes. All the devotees had '*Prasad*' or food on the same floor. Even there was the tradition of taking food from the same plate ignoring caste or community. This social system of Puri Temple impressed him and he studied the society with utmost involvement. He studied Puri society thoroughly and the findings were implemented in his organizing activities.

2.2. Objectives and Social Relevance of Srimanta Sankardeva's Research

Every research scholar has objectives and his researches also must have social relevance. Srimanta Sankardeva also had the objectives as a scholar. His main objective was to reform the society from violence, oppression, exploitation and ignorance in the name of spiritualism. His other objective was to propagate Vaisnavism and humanism following democratic philosophy. The society of that time was led by the violent administrators; the people were exploited in the name of religion. They were misled by some of the opportunistic people. They were not allowed to search for knowledge, even they were forbidden to touch the books. Sankardeva's research was thus extremely relevant from the point of reform and uplift of the society. According to Suniti Kr. Chatterji, "He was the greatest builder of Assam by bringing in a purer spiritual life and although circumstances prevented his influence from being spread to 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, Mirabai, Guru Nanak and Tulsi Das".

2.3. Hypotheses of Srimanta Sankardeva

Hypotheses are an important part of research. Srimanta Sankardeva's hypotheses were: -

1. God is one, He is omnipotent, and all the people are same so there is nothing of upper or lower class in the society; humanity is above all;
2. All the creatures are the part of God, we should worship every creature as the part of God;
3. We should surrender in front of God;
4. '*Naam*' means uttering God's Name; it is the only way to God Who can give us freedom from all the sorrows;
5. Non-violence is the only way to peace;

6. Literature, culture, arts are the ways to worship God and enjoying happiness in this materialistic world and, above all,
7. We should perform our duties without expecting results.

Sankardeva thesised his hypotheses in his writings and in the arts, culture and social life which is the backbone of Assamese society today. He is recognized as the 'Father of Assamese nation', because of his contribution to the language, culture, literature, sociology which created the foundation of Assamese nation and all his contributions were on the basis of the findings of his research activities. His research activities were not institutional or formal but the way he followed to unearth knowledge was the research following the above mentioned methods.

3. Knowledge Collection System of Srimanta Sankardeva

Srimanta Sankardeva got collected the books of Sanchipat in the libraries of the Satras and preserved by following scientific procedure. He made the copies of different books of Sanchipat and Tulapat by the professional copy-writers who were known as '*Lekharu*'. Lekharu were the experts in hand-writing. On the other hand, the '*Kakati*' were the paper producers. Kakati prepared the handmade papers and Lekharu copied different kinds of books. Some of the books were illustrated colorfully. Thus the libraries of 'Satra' institutions were big treasures of books of Sanchipat and Tulapat. The libraries of the Satra were the collecting and preserving centers of the books.

Libraries of that time were also the centre of book production because multiple copies of the original book were made by the hands of experts. Thus libraries of Srimanta Sankardeva's Satra were the treasury of handmade books of that time and a good number of people were involved in his knowledge collection and reproduction process.

4. Knowledge Dissemination System of Srimanta Sankardeva

The Satra and the Namghars were the main centres of knowledge dissemination in the knowledge management system of Srimanta Sankardeva. The devotees, disciples, social leaders, artists and even the politicians also visited these Satras and Namghars and they were served knowledge by the '*Pathak*' (Reader), '*Namgharia*' (Head of the Namghar) or '*Satradhikara*' (Head of the Satra) or any renowned knowledge personnel. The readers were provided books from the libraries. For the people who did not know how to read and write, knowledge was given in the form of '*Puthi-Patha*' (Book Reading) and '*Naam Kirtana*'. Pathak analyzed the knowledge of the sacred books like *Bhagawata*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, etc. in the Namghar.

The 'Pathak's were the qualified persons who read the holy books with lucid tune and analyzed the stories and philosophies of the '*Sastra's* (scriptures) attractively

for the listeners. These processes of knowledge dissemination system are still followed by the Satra and Namghars. Hundreds of listeners go to the Namghar and Satra everyday to enjoy such '*Path*' (Reading) and '*Nam Kirtan*' in the hundreds of Namghars of different parts of Assam. Some of the Satras like Barpeta, Auniati, Kamalabari, Madhupur, Bardoa, etc. are still preserving Sanchipat books in their libraries to disseminate knowledge.

6. Users of Knowledge Management System of Srimanta Sankardeva

The whole Vaisnava society of Ahom kingdom, Kamarupa and Behar (Cooch Behar) was the user of the knowledge system of Srimanta Sankardeva. Apart from Vaisnava devotees, the scholars and the members of royal families also used knowledge from the Satra and Namghar. Srimanta Sankardeva tried to educate the users with the help of performing arts and culture. 'Bargeet', 'Nam Prasanga', 'Bhaona', 'Satria Nritya', 'Chitra', 'Bhaskarjya', etc. were the tool to educate the users. These are also the instruments of mass-communication of his knowledge management system.

Worth mentioning is that the user community of Srimanta Sankardeva's knowledge management system is still continuing even after long five hundred years. The Bargeet, Bhaona, Nam-Prasanga are still popular not only among the rural masses but also among the intellectual classes. The western storms failed to uproot the knowledge system of Srimanta Sankardeva which is really a matter of hope for sustaining the high culture of the Assamese nation.

6. Conclusion

The Teaching of Srimanta Sankardeva is becoming more relevant day by day. His democratic attitude, non-violent philosophy, humanism and wonderful creative literature, art and culture have enriched the knowledge system of present period also. **Srimanta Sankardeva was not a professional researcher or teacher. But he sacrificed his life in toto for searching knowledge and teaching people. Ultimately he was a great research scholar. The purity and sacredness of his knowledge and his high ambition to uplift the society by using quality knowledge not only enriched the society spiritually, but also developed it culturally and socio economically.** His economic contribution may not be recognized by some of the scholars, but management of huge land and property of Satra and Namghars reflects that economic management was also a part of his knowledge management system.

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