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SHREEMANT SHANKAR DEV'S BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN INDIAN CULTURE

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Abstract:

Assamese culture and literature would be incomplete without Shreemant Shankar Dev. During his time, Assam or the north eastern part was totally unknown to the rest part of India and was considered to be in the swamp of darkness. He introduced a religion named "EK SHARAN NAM DHARM" which catches the eye of many people at that time. Through this medium he tried to bring light to the people of Assam and also to the north eastern part of India. Shreemant Shankar Dev travelled all over India for 12 years and made an effort to connect Indian culture with Assam and also the north-eastern part. By making coordination between religion and arts, in true sense he tried to make human race cleaner and discipline. In consequence of which, he succeeded in making a well- developed and culture rich society. This was an important step in regards to the unity of India.

Shreemanta Shankar Dev with his aptitude and literature (writing) established the Indian literature and culture in Assam and in the north eastern part of India. He brought the flow of Bhakti movement which was mainly influenced by Shankaracharya to Assam and north east India. Despite being connected to Adwetwad, Shankaracharya also knew the value of the culture vision. Shankar Dev is also believed to be the one who first introduced Hindi among the people of Assam by several researchers. Apart from this he also took the responsibility to introduce the concept of Vaishnav temple to the people of Assam. Shankar Dev established Sattriya Nritya, Borgeet which is now famous all around the world and it is considered to be a thing of proud for India. His disciplined and dedicated practices of his Bhakti vision flourished among the people of Assam not only in spiritual manner but together with the resources of arts had done an excellent work. As the Assamese people were known to carry an independent thought or nature, at that time Shankar Dev in one of his writing "Dhanya Dhanya Bharat Barish" tried to give them knowledge about nationalism (patriotism) which was a very influential step in Indian culture.

Keywords: Religion, Bhakti-movement, Culture, spiritual-devotion, literature.

Introduction:

Promoter of Vaishnav Dharam Shreemant Shankar Dev was born on October 1449 in one of a village of Assam named Bordowa at Alipukhri. His birth took place at such a crisis time when Assam happens to be surrounded in darkness from all sight.

In political area too, there was neither any strong central power nor any internal sympathy among kings and saamant. Even the Samantha does not possess any sympathy towards their people. At that time Ahom and Koch were the only two communities that were politically stable, but these two communities always had a struggle among themselves.

At that time, in the name of religion there was lot of derangement. It had lots of different way of worshiping God and Goddess, Bali vidhan (sacrificial act), Devdasi Nitrya on the other hand vamachari, tantra mantra dominated the people of Assam. Every cast and tribe had own way of worshiping also had a lot of different ritual and custom. Sheiv and Shakt were affected by tantra mantra. Ill sacrament, superstition and fornication had also dominated the people of Assam and the north eastern society. Because of all such stuff, the spiritual value and policy ideal were gradually disappearing among the people. During that severe time Shreemant Shankar Dev took an oath to unite the people of Assam and draw them out of this devastating darkness with the help of his Bhakti movement. He leads the society to a revolutionary path and helped them to change their mind set.

It also had differences in social vision, different cast, tribe and cult were non recognition among themselves at that time, and even the socio-economic side of Das, kisan, labor, badhua's conditions was very pitiful. Brahman, kayasths the match up among the tribe koch, Rabha, kachari, Miri, Missing etc. The concept about Hindu and Muslim was a completely different thing to be discussed at that time as even among the Hindu tribes they had lot of issues among themselves. Religious supremacy, cast and creed, education, way of living etc. due to all of those reasons they lack the coordination among themselves.

In 15th century Shreemanta Shankar Dev promoted vaishnav Dharam in Assam where he accepted adwetwad vision which was started by Shankaracharya 8th century. He had considered a dwetwad vision as the base and took the vision of Bhagwat, Mahapuran to promote his Dharma (religion). While promoting his religion he took the medium form of Sangeet kala, Chitrakala, Lalit kala, and Sthapatya kala which were composed by him. With disciplined and dedicated practice of Arts cultivation every individual would acquire a new life style and develop a free social vision, so Shreemanta Shankar Dev mixed dharma (religion) and Arts together. This step of Shreemanta Shankar Dev lifts the hearts of the people and leads them to the light of a new vision.

Shankar Dev's Bhakti movement and Indian culture:

In Indian history Bhakti movement had played an important role. This movement affects not only the Hind province but also the entire India i.e. hind province was also affected. In Assam Shreemanta Shankar Dev took the lead and responsibility of this movement.

With exact matches of Indian Bhakti movement, Shreemanta Shankar Dev with a background based on this event established a Nav Vaishnava Dharam in Assam. After travelling a complete 12 years to different pilgrimage in India, collected wisdom from monk and saint, all this knowledge can be seen reflected in his religion "EK SHARAN NAM DHARM"

Shreemant Shankar Dev considered every section, specially the lower section people; he was always apt and tried to make them empowered spiritually. His Vaishnav concept had basic premise from "Shrimad Bhagwat". Taking basic premise from "Shrimad Bhagwat", He had created a religious revolution in the North Eastern part of India. Before Shankar Dev there were many cults like Sheiv, Shakt, Bouddh, etc. which were already present, at that time all those cults were busy in proving their religious to be superior to the others. On the other side those people who worship power were totally insane; they were busy in performing puja, yagya, balividhan etc. At that time along with India people of Assam too, instead of having respect and devotion for their religious their lies, show off and other activities. People at that time were tempted, tantra mantra, also frightens and threatened to change their religion. The followers of one religion were seen with hatred by the followers of other religion. Shankar Dev has begun a new era by enforcing his religion "EK SHARAN NAM DHARM". During that time Multi God-Goddess worshipping, puja, yagya, ritual etc. were popular in Assamese society, which shreemant Shankar Dev tried to replace and established the concept of worshipping the ultimate that is the only one all might God. He gave the advice to the people to worship only the all might God lord Krishna instead of worshipping multiple God and Goddess. According to him as we pour water only to the root of a plant and the whole plant gets the water, the same way as we worship lord Krishna, all other God and Goddess will be pleased. He does accept the different avatars of God but insisted not to worship idol of God.

Actually, Shankar Dev was mainly a real anxologist. More than Philosophical method he mainly focused on making people life more discipline that's the reason why his philosophical moral values predominant. For council of knowledge to grow he started the practice of reading holy books like Gita, Bhagwat, Mahabharata etc.in Namghar, contemporaneously he was spreading education and enhancing the knowledge of elderly person. He made everyone understood that they should see every religion in this world with an equal eye. Shreemant Shankar Dev gave place to everyone in his religion, from Brahman to Chandal. The main specialty of Shankar Dev's movement was that he never degraded any tradition nor he ever made any attain to show the supremacy of his self-created religion. As people become aware of the culture and ideals of Shankar dev self-created religious, they get spontaneously attracted. Most important thing notice at that time was that he

along with one of his Muslim devotee was seen promoting his Bhakti movement. This can be taken as an example to see that how generous and tender heartedness person Shreemant Shankar Dev was. He considered upper and lower caste differences as a negative power for the society. People who support, Brahman-Shudra etc Shankar Dev strongly condemned those people. He breaks the wall of upper and lower caste differences and was always in an attempt to create social equality among people. An example is shown below

Kirat Kachaari Khachi Garo Miri
 Yawan kank gowal
 Asom mulak Dhowa je turu
 Kubach mlecch chandaal
 Aano papi nar Krishna sewakar
 Sangat pawitr hoi
 Bhakati labhiya Sansaar tariyaa
 Beikunth sukhe chalay.” (Hazarika, 2014:225)

(Gist: According to Shankar Dev people of kachari, garo, khasi etc...or whatever community a person belongs to the only way to save them is devotion which will lead them to the right path. Shankar dev says that only devotion to God will give us heavenly happiness. There is nothing in this world more than devotion.)

Shankar Dev imagine of such a community in Assam and the north eastern part where people from every classes of society could come together and lead forward so that Assam and India become empowered by the power of unity. That's the reason why Shankar Dev considers Hindu, Muslim, Jain, sikh, chirstian etc. had a portion of that supreme God. Apart from human he also considers trees-plants, insect, birds and all other organism etc. has a portion of the all might God.

“jato jiw jangam kit patangam
 Oga noga joga teri kaya
 Sabakahu maari purat uhi udar
 Naahi karatu bhutdaaya ||” (Mahanta,
 1992:67)

(Gist: everything in this world has a portion of the all might God (param Brahma). In the entire particle and every creature that supreme God is being seated as a soul.)

Due to such religious generosity, a person like Madhav Dev who was an eloquent speaker and was able to persuade people, could not stop himself and was forced to change his norms. After that he was the one who become the principle and the dearest disciple of Shankar Dev. In promoting and

spreading the religion "EK SHARAN NAM DHARM" Madhav Dev also played a very important role.

Shankar Dev used literature and Arts as an excuse for spreading his religion. In his culture along with humanitarian concern, cultural flourishing can also be seen. He had raised the concern of the ordinary people, instill a sense of brotherhood among them etc. were the specialty of his religion. Rather than religious purification he believed in moral, mind and heart purification. Shankar Dev's literature was pulling everyone in his religion. As all most all the religious books like Gita, Bhagwat etc. were written in Sanskrit language which were difficult for general people to understand so he translated them in Brajbuli (Brajaawali) language which was much easier and more comfortable for the people and together with that he introduced Hindi to the Assamese people.

Actually, Shankar Dev considering religion as a form of Arts, He wrote many Poems, Drama, Borgeet, Totay, Bhatima, Nam-prasang etc. However, his main motive was spreading his religious but together with his main goal; he also practices Arts which delighted the people of his society.

In the time of globalization, a country in order to move forward it has to be economically stable. Shankar Dev never advised to his people to spend their life only by worshipping God. He taught people how to live life with dignity and gave priority to work culture. The things that were required for his plays like mask, crown, cloths etc. were made by tailor, the potter, the carpenter etc. and that's how their economic foundation would get strengthen and also obtain a dignity of an artist. Shankar Dev's literature and his thinking were very inspirational for Assamese society and Assam. Together with literature, acting in a drama, performance of dance and songs, playing of musical instrument, making art and painting etc. he tried to bring a change in the mindset of irreligious and evil people so that he could build a transformed society as that was his goal. Shankar Dev together with his beloved disciple Madhav Dev and twelve other artistries prepared Bharat Gaurav named "Brindavani Bastra" with cotton and silk thread which was an unprecedented demonstration of Shankar Dev's creativity. In those cloths, the entire story from Krishan birth to Kansa slaughter was portrayed.

In the name of religion at that time, there were many ways of devotion, so taking them forward all together in pure form he made a successful effort with the help of his Bhakti Movement. For devotion Shankar Dev showed an easy and simple method. He gave major importance to these four elements; they are Name, guru, bhakt and Dev

Apart from this Shankar Dev under the propagation of his religious Nam-ghar and Shastra were built, which is currently the center of social, religious and culture in north eastern part of India. Shankar Dev's shastra can be compared with the middle age Buddhist Monastery. Both Nam-Ghar and shastra is the center of ethnic unity of the present era. Many foreign and Indian researchers have exploited Shastra. The speciality of Nam-ghar and Shastra is that there is a sense of equality in it, were there is no discrimination

for anyone. On the other side in Shastra people are given the approval of devotee no matter to what community they belong.

It is worth mentioning in this context that at present in India, Shastriya nritya is among one of the top eight nritya (i.e dance form) which was founded by Shreemant Shankar Dev. So in order to attract people toward his religion those were performed in (shastra) scripture.

Another special feature of Shankar Dev's Bhakti movement was, Pilgrimage or to offer worship there were lots of different ways, lots of different material were required which would lead to lots of expenses where as he practices a very general and simple way to worship God by performing Kirtan. To participate in Shankari culture man as well as woman had equal right. By giving woman a higher status Shankar Dev at that time carried a practice of preaching Nam, reading holy books like Gita, Bhagwat etc. in Namghar by both man and woman, which even today in other religions are not seen. In north eastern part there are still some religions where woman is considered to be the head of the house.

In the name of religion, at that time some selfish people who were making excuse of brahman, pandits, etc. were trying to rob poor people, making the path of devotion difficult. Shreemant Shankar Dev had openly opposed those corrupt people and with his religion "EK SHARAN NAM DHARM" gave people freedom from such rituals and traditional thinking. He considered Tirtha, brata, Jap-tap, Bhog, etc. as meaningless and said-

“Tirath brat jap tap bhog yog sugati

Mantr param dharma karam karat jati mukuti.”
(Bhattacharya, 1997:221)

(Gist: To reach God tap-jab, fast, etc... are not needed just chanting the name of God is enough, by pronouncing his name and doing one's deed which will give us liberation)

Actually, in Shankar Dev's culture ideal worshipping, yagya, violence, Bali-vidhan etc. discrimination between lower and upper class, hatred etc. were vehemently opposed. The aim of his bhakti movement was not only to attract people but to create a revolutionary change in the society, religious and all other field. In this context the important thing is, at that time in the name of bali-vidhan killing of innocent creature were done. By sacrificing those creatures they achieve a bestial happiness. It was once popular that, these people for their own well wishes, they even sacrificed human. Shankar Dev had opposed all such things. According to him God resides in all creatures and killing innocent creature was not a fair task but it is a sin. In his denomination all this were opposed. Due to this type of religious opposition, Shankar Dev in his own society had to endure blasphemy. Madhav Dev was angry on religious opposition nature and went to meet him. But after listening to the ideals of Shreemant Shankar Dev he was overthrown and there after lived as Vaishnav forever. The spirits of social reform in Shankar Dev's religion are all most similar to Kabir Das.

Actually, religion is one of a cultural affluence with human recognition and promotes human values. Shankar Dev sees religion as a form of art, as it shows human being the path, to maintain good and sustainable life. Shankar Dev's Bhakti movement leads to redressed untouchability, uplifting literary and cultural values landing in the field of spiritual and moral policy etc. while simultaneously revealing oneself in one's deed and showed the path to the truth. Shankar Dev considered human-being different from animal and reputed as a modest living creature. Due to the composite cast system the spread of discrimination based on cast, farmer, laborer, soldier, woman etc. and all those discontent of people in the society, so Shreemant Shankar Dev in order to bring equality and to improve the dissatisfaction factor from the society he establish the ideal of religious culture.

The kind of Arts which was establish by Shreemant Shankar Dev makes people happy, just the same unity, harmony and social justice system to were built. As well as social values with customs and spiritual concern provide direct relation with education, Shankar Dev explained to the people that religion is not for business nor for erudition or to torture others but by people's spiritual practices it will lead to spiritual flourishing and auspicious thinking for the people, thus this is what a religion, in true sense is. For whom he embraced the worship of one God. No matter how much we praised him it will be still consider less. So Madhav Dev while mentioning in one of his Bhatima about Shankar Dev said –

“Joi guru Shankar sarwa gunakar

Jaakeri nahike upama.” (Bhagawati samaj, 2007:45)

Conclusion:

The purpose of Shreemant Shankar Dev's Bhakti movement was to provide spiritual education to all the people of the society, to draw them from darkness to light, from discrete to true and from phantasm to salvation. He very well carried his responsibility and showed a new way to the society. At that time, he in place of pageantry, external worship system he advice the people to adopt the process of worshipping only the one all might God and tried to made the difficult path of devotion to a much easier and accessible form.

With the help of his Bhakti movement Shreemant Shankar Devs was able to establish the glory and pride of Assam in Indian cultural by reforming all the undisciplined and derangements of the society. While promoting and spreading his religion “EK SHARAN NAAM DHARAM” he faced many challenges and unfavorable situation. The way he carries India and Assam all together with his Nab-Vaishnav movement is a matter of great praise in true sense.

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