

# The Relevance of Sankari Culture in 21st Century

Achyot Kr. Saikia

In building the edifice of Assamese ethnicity, the contribution of Sankari Culture is undoubtedly remarkable. The equidistant centre of Sankari Culture is the Satras, so the Sankari Culture is also known or addressed as Satriya Culture or Satra Culture (Sangskriti). The word "Culture" (Sangskriti) is very vast, large and extensive. The word "Culture" holds the entire human race and its conventional conducts and ideologies; the system comprising of the accepted norms, values, customs and traditions of a society. Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, an English Anthropologist, the founder of Cultural Anthropology has put forward the definition of "Culture" in this way, - "Culture or Civilization is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society." [E. B. Taylor, Primitive Culture, (1871) Vol-1, Part-1]

The main aims and objectives of Culture is to make the lifestyle of human being decorous, civilized and reformed.

"Shankar swarupe hari                      niz ongkhae obotori  
 Bhakti pradip logai thoila  
 Madhav swarupe aahi                      tate toil bonti diya      Ogyan  
 andhar dur koila ||

Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva was highly influenced and inspired by the National Baishnav Bhakti Andolan, and in the 15th and 16th century he himself started the campaign of Nava Baishnav Dharma doctrine in Assam, Kamrupa-Kamata states. In doing the campaign and extension of Nava Baishnav Dharma Srimanta Sankardeva took the help of Geet (Songs), Nirtya (Dance), and Naat (Drama). By taking the entrails of Fine Arts, The Sangskriti Guru (The Cultural Pundit) Srimanta Sankardeva through the medium of Art, Ceramic, Sculpture, Architecture tried to uplift the excellence of spiritualism of Assamese people and connected the entire society with cultural heritage. By Ek Saran Naam Dharma, Sankardeva started a campaign among the mass and with the ideologies of Bhagavad tried to establish Lord Krishna in the eyes and minds of the general public.

With the cause of the campaign of Nava Baishnav Dharma Sankardeva through the channel of cultural predilection he not only vitalized the social life of Assamese people but also cemented the edifice of religious-cultural ethnicity. The cosmos of religious-cultural ethnicity and it's components which are created by Sankardeva is known as "Shankari-Shangskriti".

This "Shankari-Shangskriti" has been contributing in various ways to the development of Assamese social life. In this regard, we can impute at the following topics given below:

- A) Shankari-Sangskriti and National Unity Resource.
- B) Literature in Shankari-Sangskriti.
- C) Shankari-Sangskriti and Artistic practice.
- D) Courtesy in Shankari-Sangskriti.
- E) Food, Costume and Colloquialism in Shankari-Sangskriti.
- F) Physical Artistic Practice in Shankari-Sangskriti.

### **A) Shankari-Sangskriti and National Unity Resource**

#### 1. Role of Shankari-Sangskriti in building National Unity:

Ethnic harmony plays the major role in Sangskritik (Cultural) formation and development. Shankari-Sangskriti have been playing a significant role in formation of larger Assamese ethnic race in Assam. During the Conflict between Ahom and Koch States, Mughals invasion for possession, Kachari's atrocities, when the mass people of Assam were about to disintegrate and bemuse at that time Sankardeva took the Shankari-Sangskriti as a main tool or component to attract people of various tribes to Vaishnava Dharma and giving them the unity in diversity. From the atrocities of Brahmana, Muslims, and even that time when the society look down upon as inferiors like Garo, Bhut, Mikir etc. were given shelter and shield by Sankardeva as Eksharan Bhakti.

2[Dimbeshwar Neog, "Juganayak Shanrkardeva" page – 293].

### **B) Literature in Shankari-Sangskriti:**

A society without literature can't be a cultured one. Socially encumbered writer Shankardeva used to create and composed literature to enrich the Satriya Sangskriti. The main purpose of this series of literature was to provide religious, ethical and spiritual teachings to the mass. The main aim was to provide and to give courage and to uplift a bright picture of spiritualism and socialism to the general public those who have been deprived in the lowest category for years and years. (Satyanedra Nath Sharma: Asomiya Sahitya Samikhyatmok Etibritti, page 111). That's why the cities have coined and acknowledged the Vaishnava era as the most productive and creative one in Assamese Literature. No other Indian literature have been able to compete with this vast period from 13th Century to 19th Century. Satriya Sangskriti Sutradhar (Anchor) Shankardeva and Madhavdeva took the content and resources from

Bhagavad, Puran, Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. and preached Vaishnava scriptures and the translation tradition to perceivable Assamese language has enriched the base of Assamese Vaishnava literature. These literature has not only reinforced the store house but also the main subjectmatter of Shravana-Kirtana and as a result it received the reverence of the Bhaktas (Devotee) quite easily and eventually a new tradition got it's reputation in the Satriya Society. As a result of the esteemed patronage of the Satras Vaishnava Literature got it's popularity everywhere. "Sumarjita Sangskriti Satyar Nirmal Soundarjyar Jeutiya Rang Sorabo Paaribo. Sahityar Jugedi Sangskriti ye Gar Loi." (Nalinibala Devi, article "Sankardeva Darshana"

### **C) Shankari-Sangskriti and Artistic Practice:**

Shankari Art & Culture means the geet (songs), natya (plays), baidya (instruments) which has been created by Gurujana. There is a regular practice of Geet (Songs) & Nritya (Dance) in the Satras. The renowned and experienced Bhakats (Devotees) used to teach and train geet (songs), nritya (dance), baidya (instruments) to the new learners.

#### **Geet (Songs):**

The music culture of Assam used to reach it's loveliness best by the Vaishnava geet which has been practised and rehearsed in the Satras. The somber tunes and melodies of these raag, taal, and maan with the Vaishnava thought which praised of the worshipable received special significance. In the initial stage the Gayana used to train and teach raag (melody) and geet (songs) to the new learners. Khul and Taal doesn't clubbed together. There are 13 types of Raags in Shankardeva's Borgeet and 30 types of Raags in Madhadeva's Borgeet has been mentioned. The Raags which are used in Borgeet is - Ohir, Ashuwadi, Kalyan, Kedar, Gouri, Tur, Basanta, Dhanashree, Mollar, Mawur, Suhai, Bhopali, Kou, Borari, Bhotiyali, Srigandhar etc. The inner most Assamese Vaishnava devotional culture has been coherent in a ceaseless in the Borgeet. Apart from the obtainment of four pillars dharma (religion), artha (wealth), kaam (lust), muukh (salvation) of Assamese society, an excellent combination occurred in the Vaishnava ideal, moral values, and equality. [Girikanta Goswami, Borgeetar Bhaxha: Boigyanik Gobekhona, page 21].

#### **Nritya (Dance):**

Nritya (Dance) is one of the major components of Satriya-Sangskriti. Through the medium of Geet-Nritya, Vaishnava Literature-Cultural components can be presented in the most elegant form. The drill to practice the Nritya rehearsals introduced by Shamkardeva is known as 'Maati Akhora'. Maati Akhora is the primary part of Satriya Nritya. Maati Akhora is one of the smallest components of Nritya. Those who are expert in NrityaKala (dance forms) are given the privilege to teach Nritya in the Satras. The young learners who learn Nritya or those boys who dance at

Satras are known as Natuwa. The Satra Nritya is mainly associated with the Bhaouna. Some of the main Nritya or dance forms which are used in Bhaounas are

as follows - Sutradhar Naash, Krishnar prabesh bhangir Naash, Gopi bhongi Naash, Nandi bhongi, Poyar bhongi, Chaali Naash, Baalakar Naash, Naayika bhongi, Nadu bhongi, Juddhar Naash, Ghetamara, Jaaman Naash, Dutor bhongi, Kharmaan bhongi etc and among the Satriya Dance these are the main form of Nritya or Dance which are in vogue. In these dance forms Hand Feet movements are based on Sastras or Scriptures where the existence and influence of native and traditional components are eminent. Apart from these dance forms we used to see the movements of various dances where hands and feet are used by the Gayan-Bayan.

### **Naat (Play):**

To broadcast religious consents and to have an impact of skill execution of audio-visual, the father of Assamese theatre literature SriSankardeva created and written Naat (play). It's a benign contribution to the Satriya Art & Culture to use "Bhaouna" as a tool for public recreation. To elevate with the combination of Nritya, Geet, Baidya, Bhaouna has been able to show the devotee the devotional path of philosophy. Through the medium of Satriya Art & Culture, the use of sculptural work in Bhouna, the actors body gestures and movements, the gorgeousness of atosbaji (crackers) is the implementation and materialization of mental excellence.

### **D) Courtesy in Shankari-Sangskriti:**

Apart from providing spiritual and ethical teachings of Satriya Sangskriti to the general public, it also preaches how to lead a healthy life as well. Therefore, apart from providing religious teachings, there are certain provision for terms and policies related to courtesy which have been determined. Courtesy are of two types:

1. Spiritual Courtesy.
2. Material Courtesy.

### **E) Food, Costume and Colloquialism**

In Satriya-Shangskriti, plenty of entrust have been given upon the food processing system. Though boiled rice is the staple food of Satriya-Shangskriti but than also to take Kumol Shawul, Curd, Molasses Breakfast, raw mumps grind, parched rice, puffed-rice, sandoh, maah prasad, fruits etc. is a firm policy of the Satras. The Vakatas used to follow fastings, rituals etc during Omaboishya, Full-Moon, Aekadoshi, Janmashtami, lunar days of Gurujonas. It's really noticeable that how the Vakatas keep their concerns related to food consumption. There may not have any rationality related to racism but there is a clear cut point related to food consumption.

## F) Physical Artistic Practice in Shankari-Shangskriti:

Apart from the aesthetic loveliness, the physical artistic practices also have been fulfilling the need of practical use in the flow of Satriya life. The artists and craftsmen of Satras have been able to give lively touch with the help of vermilion-yellow arsenic to the things which are made up of bamboo, calamus rotang, wood, kuhila, soil, tusk etc. Apart from the wood crafted Gohain idol, fish-alligator, Narashingha, flying lion, tortoise cut throne, elephant, horse, the naamghar, satra, gateway, agnigar etc on wooden pillar or creeper cut in the marolit and fabricated flower artistic craftsmanship were unconventional and extraordinary. Mask art or craftsman is among the pabulum articles which are required to perform Bhaona is worth notable or mentionable. Ten headed mask of Ravana, masking Brahma, mask of Kaali, mask of Jambawanta etc are among the notable.

### Discussion on the relevance of Shankari-Shangskriti in 21st Century:

Shankari-Shangskriti is the name of the most powerful and influential Shangskriti which is the intellectual outcome of a genius man represented during 15th century B.C. Since 15th century to till date, the Shankari-Shangskriti has been able to give active and sprightly touch. The movement of Shangskriti is just like the movement of a river. It's not abnormal or anomalous that the rivers which are knead and variegated during monsoon also become shallower during drought. The Shangskriti gets the mobility with the mobility of an era. With the passing of time the Shankari-Shangskriti is also come under the coordination of harmony. Even in the 21st century, both positivity and challenges have been observed in the Shankari-Shangskriti. Attempts have been made to bring the relevance of Shankari-Shangskriti under discussion in the 21st Century.

Illiterate people of 15th century and highly educated people of 21st century. 15th century people "Haishya-Moitshya anupam gram, aekobingkha satikai haishya horise moitshya horise..." People of 21st century are hedonist, city centred, directed by mechanical way of life, and having educated with westernized education and culture. Unbelievable progress and prosperity, on the other hand unsteadiness of life of human being and the whole world is progressing through this towards 21st century, with plenty of hopes and aspirations. A sort of unbearable pain suppresses the hale and healthy life of human. Religion faces humiliation. In the quarrel and collision of virtue and enormity the equilibrium of life became tremolos and shaky. 4[Srimanta Sankardeva aaru Aamar Honghati: Syed Abdul Malik]

At the threshold of the 21st century, the people who are attracted towards the Shankari-Shangskriti often faces a few queries from their guardians to the new attracts, "By hanging the khul (drum) on one's shoulder and by reciting the boson (dialogues) of Bhaouna, will someone be able to earn their bread and butter?" At this juncture, our answer to those guardians is that "food is for hunger but hunger is not for food". It has come to the notice that due to the fast pace competitions and the impact and influences of commercialism, the pain of the century has

brought jeopardy and challenges to the Centres of Shankari Shangskriti like Naamghars and Satras. Few of the jeopardy and challenges which have been brought to the 21st century Shankari Shangskriti are mentioned below:

**Crisis:**

Narrow and self-centered mentality and modern life style has brought jeopardy to the Shankari-Shangskriti. Making the Shankari-Shangskriti conservative by the so-called spoonful watchmen or sentinels seems superstitions and dispute-discords have engulfed it. Mahapurusha Shankardeva built the edific of Bor-Axom (Big Assam) by leaving and abandoning the caste difference, narrow-mindedness, and accepting entire folks as "Bhaktas". In the recent times, among these Bhaktas 'Namo Namo Parijat' identical spoonful sentinels are trying to divide and creating differences on the basis of caste and community, and as a result, in the Brahmaputra basin plenty of tribal people started to accept Christianity is itself a sad and woe-begone thing.

**Probability:**

It's really delightful to know in the recent times that to broadcast the doctrines of Gurujona and with a view to provide the various knowledge and wisdom of Shankari-Shangskriti among the tribals and thus by establishing Naamghars in the tribal villages. There are some hopeful responses and probabilities which have been seen and noticed among the tribals who are educated with the Shankari-Shangskriti education distributing 'nirmali' among the bhaktas during the time of Holi which is observed and celebrated at Borduwa than. 5[Received information: Satradhikar, naruwa barduwa: Devananda Devagoswami]

**Crisis:**

The 21st century has brought peril to the Ankiya Bhouna/Naats (plays) created by Gurujona. Some sort of mental wound and threat has been received by the artists of Shankari-Shangskriti as when Bhounas has been held at the Naamghars there is a very sparse presence of audiences. It's really sad and unfortunate that among the best poetical brilliance of Ankiya Naat by Gurujona "Kali Gopal" which has been presented and exhibited in the most distorted and deserted forms in various parts of the state. It's alright to have electric-lights in some of the Ankiya Naats (plays) like "Aariya", "Sou-Tora", but the organisers should not avoid the original subject matters and distort the Ankiya Naats (plays).

**Probability:**

It is an extraordinary achievement of the artistic cast of Ankiya Naat (plays) in Shankari-Shangskriti in recent times. To translate the Ankiya Naats of Gurujona to the local tribal dialects and in achieving grand success in exhibiting and presenting it by the tribals is itself a huge probability to the 21st century by the initiative taken by "SetuBandh" program.

**Crisis:**

Notwithstanding the symbolic NaamSingha at the main gateway or door, Wild Lion has been seen at the 21st century Naamghars. It is also come to the notice that in the Naamghars instead of "Koths" (mats) plastic carpets are used, entering Naamghars without wearing the national attires are carrying evil proclamation to the era of Shankari-Shangskriti.

**Probability:**

To get rid of the above mentioned crisis, emphasis should be given upon the Shankari painting style, kuhila silpa (art), practice of mask craftsmanship, and national attire and costume, and there is the necessity of every conscious person related to Shankari-Shangskriti to entrust of value and importance upon these things.

In the recent times, the Sri Sri Management Committee of Battadraba Thaan has made it mandatory to wear national costume to enter the Battadraba Thaan is itself an excellent initiative. The new generation has given tremendous support and response to this initiative.

**The significance of Shankari-Shangskriti in the 21st Century:**

1. In the recent times, at the beginning of various meetings Bargeet, Satriya Nritya (Dance), Dashavatar Nritya (Dance), etc are used to be performed. As a result, we get the proof that with the passing of the era the Shankari-Shangskriti also got it's movement.
2. The style invented by Srimanta Sankardeva in yoga and pranayama in "Maati Aakhora" (Earthen Practice) related to Satriya Nritya (Dance) and this "Maati Aakhora" used to make the entire mankind hale and healthy. The physical and dance practice of primary works of the artists who used to perform the "Maati Aakhora" was more delightful and extraordinary than the pranayama of Jugguru Ramdeva whose practice reached it's pinnacle of popularity in recent times.
3. Special accomplishment has been achieved by Shankari-Shangskriti in bringing wantonness of youth's mentality methodical and systematic order. Shankari-Shangskriti has been able to put an end to ethical decline of human life due to the catastrophe created by the age, apathy towards life, sense of death etc. The deliberate purpose of Shankari-Shangskriti is spiritualism. Through Bhagwat Bhakti (devotion) to establish the connect between soul and almighty is the manner of Shankari-Shangskriti. "Saran/Bhajan" (Worship/Asylum) is such a kind of agenda through which to show the way to make human life successful.

In recent times, the value of Shankari-Shangskriti is on every steps of life. At the end, we can say like this with the words of Leela Gogoi -

"Shankardeva, the way he put the banyan tree sapling of Bhaishnav tradition of Assam and Shankari-Shangskriti with the grand principle afterwards flag bearer of various institutes and agencies tried to surround as vasum album (Raghumala). 6[Axomor Sangskriti, Leela Gogoi, page no 91]

Now it's an appeal to the each and every person of Assam that to save the Banyan tree of Shankari-Sangskriti from the vasum album (raghumala) of uncultured and it's a duty and responsibility of everyone to make it an Evergreen one.

### **References:**

Satyandranath Sarma: *Axomiya Sahityat Xamikhyamulok Etibritto*.

Leela Gogoi: *Axomor Sangskriti*.

Goswami: *Bargeetar Bhaxha: Boigyanik Gobesona*.

(Edit): *Srimanta Sankardevar Somaj aaru Sangskriti* .

Girikanta

Pradeepjyoti Mahanta

Achyut Kumar Saikia: *Satrajugal* .

