

## ŚAṅKARADEVA, THE GREAT MANAGERIAL EXPERT OF ASSAMESE SOCIETY

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**Abstract-** *Śaṅkaradeva evolved a new management style through his socio-cultural-religious innovations. His handling of people led to the development of a new approach in human resource management. He evolved his own style of project management. He showed the world how to do Conflict Management. He trained a group of dedicated disciples and made them future leaders by his Decentralized Leadership Management. He impacted his unmatched knowledge among the teeming masses through his innovative Knowledge Management.” The qualities possessed by Śaṅkaradeva were very rare. Along with the religious reforms brought about by him, he introduced a reformed and refined order of the Hindu art and culture in fusion with the local people. Before Śaṅkaradeva, knowledge searching activities were confined only among the royal communities. But Śaṅkaradeva opened up the process of learning and searching knowledge for all. His unique model of leadership management was continued by his next generation leaders. Śaṅkaradeva maintained everything in a very diplomatic way. He was not only a good manager but also a good motivator.*

**Keywords:** Management style, innovations, reformed and refined, leadership

### I. Introduction

Śaṅkaradeva contributed much for the upliftment of Assamese literature enriched it and proudly introduced Assamese literature to the world. So, it becomes the duty for a researcher to know about the holy soul and his valuable creations towards the society. In present scenarios people are aware that Śaṅkaradeva was not only a ‘Dharma Guru’ but also he had a high managerial aptitude. The common people generally know him as a religious preacher, literary figure and cultural maestro. But he was more than that. He was a good innovator and planner. “Śaṅkaradeva evolved a new management style through his socio-cultural-religious innovations. His handling of people led to the development of a new approach in human resource management. Heterogeneous people came and stayed together under his banner because of his Team Management and Feedback Management. He evolved his own style of project management. He showed the world about how to do Conflict Management. He trained a group of dedicated disciples and made them future leaders by his Decentralized Leadership Management.

He impacted his unmatched knowledge among the teeming masses through his innovative Knowledge Management.”(Souvenir, Srimanta Sankaradeva, First International Festival, Guwahati, 2016, 74).

Simply, the definition of a manager is ‘a person responsible for controlling or administering an organization or group of staff.’ (www.businessdictionary.com) In general term a manager should have certain qualities either acquired or natural which makes his contribution towards achieving his desired goals in unique appropriate and efficient manner. Śaṅkaradeva was an expert of acquired and ability. By the help of natural ability or acquired ability Śaṅkaradeva successfully performed the role of a great manager of Assamese society.

## **II. Significance of the Study**

Śaṅkaradeva was not only the most illustrious amongst the religious preachers of contemporary India, but also the greatest revolutionary social reformer. Śaṅkaradeva was born in a society, where all sorts of evil practices, resulting from Śaktism, Trāṅtricism and decadent Buddhism were rampant. The priests, being guided extremely by selfish motives tried to dominate over the politics and the society of the time; and a reign of terror pervaded in Assam in the name of religion. The most tragic outcome of the Vedic heritage was the ugly concept of casteism in which the so called upper castes closed all doors of wisdom and devotion to the so-called lower castes. The lower castes people were deprived of all prestigious positions in the society. In the midst of disturbing social scenes, Śaṅkaradeva skillfully rescued the Assamese society by propagating his doctrine of Bhakti based on the principle of universal brotherhood.

## **III. Objectives**

The Study was conducted keeping certain objectives in view. These objectives are as follows:-

1. To study about the greatness and uniqueness of Śaṅkaradeva his teaching and contributions.
2. To find out how Śaṅkaradeva utilised the purity and sacredness of his to uplift the society.
3. To study the impact of religious faith on the social aspect.
4. To study the effects of caste system on the society of Śaṅkaradeva’s time.
5. To analyse how Śaṅkaradeva inspired the Assamese masses with his educative Value and how he skilfully designed his various idea in a proper and systematic way.

## **IV. Hypothesis**

1. Śaṅkaradeva movement positively affected the society of Assam.
2. The Contributions of Śaṅkaradeva uplifted the backward classes.

3. The Community center (Satra and Nāmghars) established by Śaṅkaradeva performed the same role and functions of Panchāyatīs of modern time.
4. Śaṅkaradeva's contributions have impact on the family and gave equal status to women in the society.
5. The Skills and techniques of Śaṅkaradeva helped to form a modern community in the society of medieval time.
6. Śaṅkaradeva's mission helped to develop adult education among the common masses of the society of his time.

## V. Methodology

The methodology of this paper is descriptive and analytical in nature. The data have been collected from various primary and secondary sources. To gather the primary information the researcher visited various places like Bordowā Than, Barpeṭā than, Pāṭbāusī Than and the Satras of Mājulī. To gather the secondary information various books, Guru-Carita, articles, journals, newspapers, research papers, published thesis and dissertation, magazines have been consulted.

## VI. Śaṅkaradeva, the Great Managerial Expert of Assamese Society

Śaṅkaradeva's contribution to the Assamese society was only incidental. In fact the Assamese society was instrumental to reach into the entire humanity. He was a perfect global citizen, because he never addressed the Assamese people but addressed the entire humanity. Moreover, he always refrained from criticizing any one believing in any other concept that was at variance with his own. Such type of broad-minded attitude is unheard of in the medieval era he lived in and it qualifies him as a human resource manager very easily. "The impartiality seen in Śaṅkaradeva is not academic, but purely practical and realistic. He taught tolerance and simplicity which was the primary ingredient of civilization, to a combination of intolerant ethnic groups".(Borkakati, 2015, 20).

The creation of Bhāonā is a major managerial milestone of Śaṅkaradeva. His followers and relatives urged him to show them in pictures the heavenly abode of lord Viṣṇu i.e.Vaikunṭha. To fulfill their desire Śaṅkaradeva composed a small drama and depicted the pictures of the 'seven Vaikunṭhas' of Lord Viṣṇu and staged the drama 'Cihṇa-yātrā' effectively. Thus, the stage drama 'Cihṇa-yātrā' came to be known as "Bhāonā". "Everything including the 'khol' (drums), Tāl (Cymbals), costumes for the actors, 'cho-mukhā' (Masks) made of bamboo etc. were used and training to the followers as actors, musicians (Gāyan-Bāyan) etc. Śaṅkaradeva depicted the pictures of seven Vaikunṭhas on pieces of cloth and painted it in various colours as is done in modern theatres" (Das, (ed), 1994, 29). He himself took the leading roles such as Sūtradhāra, Kriṣṇa etc. and could become very attractive and so many eminent scholars and general mass became devoted to spiritualism under the supervision of Śaṅkaradeva.

After his 1<sup>st</sup> pilgrimage, Śaṅkaradeva performed some remarkable social works. Here he installed a large tank 'Ākāshī Gaṅgā' (celestial a high dam) 'ṬembuāniBāndh' for control of flood caused by the mighty Brahmaputra. It is a notable managerial power of Śaṅkaradeva.

Having compliments from the people of Kāmṛūpa, king Naranārāyaṇa called Śaṅkaradeva to his court at Kocbehar. Having this message, the king's powerful brother Cilārāi and his man took him to the palace of Cilārāi. "Cilārāi was the Dewan and the general of the king who had married a niece of Śaṅkaradeva and as such, was a close relation with him" (Chaliha, (ed), 1978, 81). Śaṅkaradeva was sent to the king's court. At the first appearance, the king was charmed by Śaṅkaradeva's personality. While entering the court Śaṅkaradeva recited scholarly Sanskrit verse in honour of the king. The king was highly pleased and treated him with high esteem. This incident also reflects the good managerial quality of Śaṅkaradeva.

Śaṅkaradeva had been to Cooch Behar for more than a month and became victorious in his debate and discussion with the opposing section. The king was much impressed with Śaṅkaradeva and therefore got a Than established near the capital and appointed him the governor of Bāusīpārāganā near Barpeta. But Śaṅkaradeva relinquished it. Also the king was presented with a big piece of cloth known as 'Vṛndāvanīvastra' artistically prepared by the local weaver of Tāntikuchī under the supervision of Śaṅkaradeva.

The qualities possessed by Śaṅkaradeva were very rare. Along with the religious reforms brought about by him, he introduced a reformed and refined order of the Hindu art and culture in fusion with the local people. This venture resulted in unity of the people of different castes and communities. It is seen that many people of the world attain high excellences and claim respect and appreciation, but such personalities have an exalted position due to their excellence in a particular branch of knowledge, but Śaṅkaradeva attained excellence not only in the field of spiritualism but also in art and culture, music and musical instruments, literature and most importantly in organizing the society into a unified one.

According to Śaṅkaradeva, to practice Bhakti, devotion based on love, one need not necessarily be a Brāhmaṇa or a sage etc. This is why a large number of people were attracted towards his simple and liberal faith.

Śaṅkaradeva searched for a method which could be the way to attain knowledge for every individual of a society, from a scholar to a general cultivator. Before Śaṅkaradeva, knowledge searching activities were confined only among the royal communities, but Śaṅkaradeva opened up the process of learning and searching knowledge for all. He established 'Nāmghar' which became the central point of cultures of spirituality, art, culture, literature and education for the common people. Śaṅkaradeva used 'Brajāvali' language in his writings. It was an extra experimentation of Śaṅkaradeva which was a really unique and wonderful contribution to Assamese culture.

## VII. Reformative Works of Śaṅkaradeva as a Good Manager

As a good manager Śaṅkaradeva performed various types of reformative works, which helped to uplift the Assamese society to a standard level. His unique model of leadership management was continued by his next generation leaders. He pursued conflict management model very closely. As for example ‘Bhūyāñ-Kachārī’ conflict may be referred to. Śaṅkaradeva found out the conflicting tribes of Brahmaputra valley together by working on their positive qualities. “Śaṅkaradeva strongly believed that responsibilities never be centralized and decentralized leadership management is a responsible systematic behavior to reduce various kinds of leadership corruptions” (Souvenir, Srimanta Sankaradeva First International Festival, Guwahati, 2016, 74). He involved common people in decision making process. He was not only a good manager but also a good motivator. His disciples were very much pleased and encouraged to learn new knowledge and ideas, which reflects the knowledge management skill of Śaṅkaradeva. Among the disciples Śaṅkaradeva always emphasized on exploring the points of agreement. In the democratic system feedback plays a vital role. In the same way Śaṅkaradeva encouraged his disciples to give feedback. He understood the importance and necessity of feedback.

## VIII. To do Things the Right War

Though Śaṅkaradeva was a great scholar of Sanskrit literature, he used a common language which could be easily understood by the common people. He could do everything in a very right way and right manner. He went to the Naranārāyaṇa’s assembly with well-prepared way. When Śaṅkaradeva arrived at the Naranārāyaṇa court, Naranārāyaṇa invited him to come up to the platform. Consequently, Śaṅkaradeva began to climb those steps slowly and as he climbed each step, he sang one Sanskrit verse wishing the king for prosperity. Almost every king has self-respect and ego. Śaṅkaradeva knew the quality of king and he skillfully boasted the mind of Naranārāyaṇa by singing the totayā “*Madhudānavadāronodebabaram*”. It is also a managerial aptitude.

Śaṅkaradeva also managed his personal life very sincerely. For example, one may refer to his second pilgrimage. He decided to go to pilgrimage after his daughter (Manu)’s marriage. In his Vaiṣṇavism, he skillfully included the various people of various religions like Gāru’s Govinda, Nagā’s Narottama, Muslim’s Chāndkhān etc.

## IX. Adjustment and Adaptation to Any New Situation

Śaṅkaradeva in course of time due to several obstacles and problems had to migrate to various places like Dhuāhāta, Pāṭbāusī and Coochbehar. Though he migrated to different place in short intervals, he was able to guide his associates to follow a disciplined life by earning their

living and doing noble works. He was able to adjust to any kind of situations or places. One must agree that he was able to adopt the situation and it would be in the interest for the masses. Even his associates were safe and happy to follow his instructions. He was able to understand the mindset of the people of different places and worked accordingly to earn the interest of the people. Śaṅkaradeva never lost his patience and mental balance. For example, one may refer to the moment of the meeting of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Mādhavadeva was a believer in Shakti cult. As such he chose to remain miles away from Śaṅkaradeva. He used to sacrifice animals before the Devi whom he worshiped. Rāmdāsa wanted to bring about some change in the mindset of his brother-in-law. But Mādhavadeva was strict on his path. Śaṅkaradeva handled the situation very carefully and skillfully. Mādhavadeva was practically proselytized by Śaṅkaradeva after a series of religious and philosophical debates among them. Mādhavadeva accepted Śaṅkaradeva as his guru and mentor and became his chief disciple.

*“The self-command in sustaining the shock of the descent of the divine is symbolized by the story of Shiva and descent of Ganga upon his head. Among all the gods, Shiva only could retain within his matted lock the full fury of the descending river without being swept over by the current. The voluminous biographies on Śaṅkaradeva contain details of minute incident of his life, but there is no hint of any occasion when he lost his mental-balance or sanity” (Chaliha, (ed), 1978, 14). He kept himself wide awake whether singing, acting or reciting. Śaṅkaradeva was perfectly self-conscious in the midst of polemics with his religious opponents. Yet he had a keen sense of humor.”*

Śaṅkaradeva had also the organizing capability. The concept ‘unity in diversity’ was unthinkable in Assam during the period of Śaṅkaradeva. So like a master builder he had to bring ‘unity and diversity’. In every stage of life he brought out a system into our lifestyle, thinking and attitude.

## **X. Relatively Permanent Change in Behavior through Instruction and Experience**

The childhood of Śaṅkaradeva was simple in comparison to his later life. He began attending Mahendra Kandali’s ṭool (school) at the age of twelve. Till then he used to be sportive and did not care about intelligence or spirituality. But soon after he started attending ṭool, his personality was transformed and he wrote his first verse ‘Karatala Kamala’ (Neog, 1965, 34). He stayed at the ṭool during his teens and studied broadly about Indian scriptures. Śaṅkaradeva had his first literary work Hariścandra Upākhyān when he was at the ṭool.

It was believed that Śaṅkaradeva had some inborn talent and his unique and skillful works illustrated how he flourished in due course of time. Wherever he went for pilgrimage he tried to study various scriptures and books. “Śaṅkaradeva spent many years at Jaganāth Kṣetra at

Puri, where he read and explained the *Brahma Purāṇa* to the priests” (Borkakoti, 2005, 21). He tried to gather spiritual knowledge throughout his journey and his outlook and perception changed a lot, which are clearly reflected by his works and thoughts.

The development in his composition skills can be clearly illustrated from his first work “HariścandraUpākhyān” to “Rāmavijaya”, his last piece of drama. He never remained rigid to a particular achievement rather was flexible and tried for a constant upgradation in each of his works. His best contribution to Assamese people is the ‘KīrtanaGhoṣā’. (Neog, 1965, 166). The elaborations in it are so perfectly outlined that even an illiterate can gain knowledge from hearing it.

## **XI. Transformation of Individual Learning to Political Learning**

Śaṅkaradeva confined himself to establish a new social order in Assam by removing superstition, corruption, ignorance, untouchability, inequalities among people. He broke the seal of classical learning and made available its literature to illiterate masses. The good noble abstract ideas were hired and unveiled in concrete form of stories, verses and drama so that common people might apprehend them. These cultural entertainments are still affecting the mind of every village people. “As an important institution, the Nāmghar founded by Śaṅkaradeva, where he addressed the realization of God was not monopoly” (Chaliha, (ed), 1978, 36). It is a common practice in the Nāmghar to recognize individual ability and talent.

Śaṅkaradeva built up his relation with the Koch king Naranārāyaṇa in a very intelligently and never gave Śaraṇa to the Koch king for he was aware of the consequences when any Dharma becomes Rajāgharia Dharma (Royal Religion). He traveled every corner of India to gather knowledge and wisdom through experiences and returned to his own native Nāmghar and also directed the people to adapt to the goodness of his gathered experience for a disciplined life. When a man preferred as a Sūtradhāra to enact the plays (AṅkīyāNāts) or Gāyan(singer) or Bāyan (Instrumentalist) to conduct congregational music he does it not to achieve his social status but for his attainments in the respective spheres.

Though individual learning is selective, Śaṅkaradeva directed it towards a particular cause of mankind and was successful in spreading his doctrine even to other religion and tribes like the Gāro, Naga, Muslim etc.

## **XII. Combination of Proficiency and Aptitude**

Proficiency means mastery of a specific behaviour or skill demonstrated by consistency superior in performance against established or popular standards.(www.businessdictionary.com). Aptitude is express in interest and is reflected in current performance which is expected to improve over time with training (www.businessdictionary.com). Śaṅkaradeva maintained everything in a very diplomatic way. He skillfully established a new democratic social order in

the society with the Nāmghar at the base. The Nāmghar has become a solid base of the Assamese society in many aspects. Any political, religious and cultural change over in Assam has nothing to do with this democratic religion and cultural structure of the society, the base of which has been laid deep down the village community.

The elements of 'Eka-Śarana-Hari-Nāma-Dharma' of Śaṅkaradeva illuminates the skill of technique is the part of managerial aptitude. The second point of managerial aptitude is human skills. It is based on interpersonal relation of human beings. Śaṅkaradeva applied the conceptual skill of managerial aptitude. He converted his skills of technique to conceptual skills. Śaṅkaradeva could not use or point out any name of Brāhmins, who was against of him. This was the most powerful managerial quality of Śaṅkaradeva.

### **XIII. Conclusion**

There is no doubt and hesitation to note that Śaṅkaradeva was a management expert or a good manager. From the above discussion, one can find the extra ordinary managerial power of Śaṅkaradeva. He evolved a new management style through his socio-cultural-religious innovations. His handling of people led to the development of a new approach in human resource management. He evolved his own style of project management. He showed the world how to do Conflict Management. He trained a group of dedicated disciples and made them future leaders by his Decentralized Leadership Management. He impacted his unmatched knowledge among the teeming masses through his innovative "Knowledge Management." The qualities possessed by Śaṅkaradeva were very rare. Along with the religious reforms brought about by him, he introduced a reformed and refined order of the Hindu art and culture in fusion with the local. Before Śaṅkaradeva, knowledge searching activities were confined only among the royal communities. But Śaṅkaradeva opened up the process of learning and searching knowledge for all. His unique model of leadership management was continued by his next generation leaders. He pursued conflict management model very closely. Śaṅkaradeva strongly believed that responsibilities never be centralized and decentralized leadership management is a responsible systematic behavior to reduce various kinds of leadership corruptions. Śaṅkaradeva applied the conceptual skill of managerial aptitude. He converted his skills of technique to conceptual skills. Aptitude is express in interest and is reflected in current performance which is expected to improve over time with training. Śaṅkaradeva maintained everything in a very diplomatic way. He was not only a good manager but also a good motivator.

Over and above these, it is clear that the contributions of Śaṅkaradeva wielded tremendous influence in the social, religious and cultural life in the contemporary Assamese society. He not only succeeded in preaching the faith of his doctrine, but also brought about radical social reforms by the improvement of cultural work in the society. Śaṅkaradeva was the real designer and engineer of Assamese culture and society. Śaṅkaradeva initiated a comprehensive cultural revolution with unique creations in every field of art and culture, never



before and ever since accomplished by anybody else, which through its pervasive impact on the life of the common people, could ensure vast changes towards the development of Assamese culture. Śaṅkaradeva's cultural contributions have been for the last five centuries a source of delight, inspiration, consolation and wisdom to the Assamese people.

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