

Sustainable Development in the Context of Contemporary Society and Culture, and Krishna-Culture Propagated by Sankardeva: An Analytical Study

Dr. Achyut Dutta

Assistant Professor, Department of Assamese, Cinnamara College

Abstract

The concept of 'sustainable development', which came into discussion around the middle of the twentieth century, has now become a subject of global discourse. Upon close examination, development that remains beneficial for future generations after generations is what constitutes sustainable development. If we examine the true nature of this Western concept, expression of this idea can be seen around 500 years ago in the writings of Sankardeva and his successor poets and literati of this vast land of Assam. By promoting and expanding the Krishna culture—which serves as the core foundation of sustainable development—with a refined and cultured aesthetic, Srimanta Sankardeva declared back then that "a tree is equal to ten sons" (dasa putra sama brikhya). Therefore, the discussion of the said topic in the context of present society and culture is considered to be extremely important.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Krishna Culture, Sankardeva, Society

Introduction:

The concept of sustainable development, which entered discussions around the mid-19th century, has today become a topic of global discourse. Upon closer examination, development that remains enjoyable and viable for generations, including future ones, is what constitutes sustainable development. When exploring the true essence of this Western concept, one finds that it was manifested nearly 550 years ago in the expansive land of Assam through the works of Sankardeva and his successor poets and litterateurs. By propagating and expanding Krishna-culture—the core foundation of sustainable development—with a refined and sophisticated aesthetic taste, Srimanta Sankardeva declared even back then: "Dash putra sama briksha" (A tree is equal to ten sons). Therefore, discussing this topic within the context of contemporary society and culture is considered extremely important.

Importance and Objectives of the Subject Study:

The concept of sustainable development, widely discussed across the globe today, was explicitly articulated in the thought and consciousness of Sankardeva, who was born in the land of Assam in the 15th century. Although extensive studies have been conducted on Sankardeva, analyzing this thought-consciousness is crucial for building a progressive society in today's socio-cultural context. Hence, the significance of the proposed topic is recognized.

The objectives of this research paper titled "Sustainable Development in the Context of Contemporary Society and Culture, and Krishna-Culture Propagated by Sankardeva: An Analytical Study" are as follows:

To evaluate the reflection of the modern global concept of sustainable development in the thought and consciousness of Sankardeva.

To assess the potential of Sankardeva's sustainable development ideology in building a progressive society.

Core Discussion:

In 1887, a week-long seminar was organized in the city of Brundtland, America, attended by the world's leading economists, educators, social scientists, and other thinkers. The objective was to devise strategies ensuring that the human society of the future would not face any form of deprivation or scarcity. At the end of the week-long discussions, they drafted a charter. It was named the 'Brundtland Commission' (Brundtland Commission/1987). As a result of this discussion, a dual-word phrase was coined: Sustainable Development. Leading visionaries from various global sectors believed that by embracing the principles and ideals specified by this commission, economic balance would be maintained across nations. They envisioned that realistic sustainable development would bring stability in economic equality, social justice, health, education, medical care, and security, paving the way for humanity to progress.

However, within a few years, their principles and ideals fell short. After sitting at the discussion table to identify the causes of failure, another word was incorporated: Spirituality. This time, alongside other guidelines, spirituality was integrated to keep society healthy and resilient, to establish humanism, and to accelerate the pace of social development. Yet, it is a matter of pride and encouragement for us that several centuries ago, Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva prepared a realistic blueprint for sustainable development based on a distinct set of principles. The primary foundation of that plan was the establishment of the Namghar or Kirtanghar, through which he succeeded in making the sustainable development model people-centric. The ideals of sustainable development shaped by him can guide our society toward new horizons. While this subject warranted extensive discussion in academic circles, such discussions have been notably sparse.

The role of the Kirtanghar established by Srimanta Sankardeva was vital in making Krishna-culture—the foundation of his sustainable development—people-centric. Sankardeva, who dreamed of building a progressive society nearly 550 years ago, adopted Krishna-culture as a scientific base. Unlocking the true mystery behind the word 'Krishna', Madhavdeva stated in the Ghosa:

"Krish hena shabda ito / prithivi bachaka bhoila / na anandata prabartaya / duiro eka pada bhoile / parama brahma rupa krishna / nama anandaka matra kaya."

'Krish' means to cultivate (To cultivate); the sum total of all such cultivations through which an individual's life, as well as a society and nation, can become progressive is 'Krishna'. Concurrently, through these forms of cultivation, individual and social lives are filled with joy. Out of an urgency to make it rewarding for the future generations of Assamese society, Sankardeva transformed 'Krishna', the ultimate truth of the Vedas, into something observable and touchable, rendering it a profoundly pure culture. This is Krishna-culture—a culture that, through the aesthetic education of cultivation and dedication, can build a highly civilized, cultured, egalitarian, creative, and humane society. For social life to endure, the cultivation of the intellect, the cultivation of art and culture, the cultivation of unity,

equality, and humanity, along with the cultivation of spirituality and a scientific temperament, are absolutely necessary. This was the primary objective of Krishna's manifestation.

According to Prabhat Chandra Das, the core purpose behind Srimanta Sankardeva adopting Krishna-culture as the base was:

"...to reform the deformed society, to integrate the dis-integrated society, to re-generate the de-generated society, to humanize the de-humanized society, to re-construct the de-composed society" (Significance of Sankardeva's View on Krishna Culture, p. 5).

It was within this consciousness that the seeds of sustainable development germinated, creating a vast treasury of language, literature, and culture, whose practice left room for transforming generations from the unbeautiful to the beautiful.

Contemporary Social and Cultural Environment:

Contemporary society is fragmented into many parts. Sankardeva dreamed of building a unified society rooted in equality and generosity. However, that dream has yet to fully manifest in reality. Nearly 550 years later, today's society remains divided, wallowing in malpractices and superstitions, where only rituals, dogmas, and bigotry are propagated in the name of religion. Sankardeva's ideals have remained confined to theory. Because Krishna-culture—the very Krishna born to destroy evil and establish culture—has not been embraced with a pure heart, instability has gradually gripped society, leading to its steady erosion. Not just Assam, but the whole of India appears to have become a land of superstitions and blind faiths, characterized chiefly by rituals, prayers, and festivals. Intellectual development is given very little priority in this land. The cultivation of humanity and science remains unsatisfactory. Particularly in Sankardeva's birthplace, imported cultures incompatible with Assam have destabilized the region's aesthetic environment and its high-standard socio-cultural foundation. Even religious ideologies have become entangled. In essence, Krishna-culture has gradually receded, while Duryodhana has risen to the top.

The Ideal of Nation-Building Through Intellectual Cultivation:

Without intellectual cultivation, a nation can never remain vibrant and strong. Language and literature are the indicators of a nation's progress. Future generations move forward by holding onto the rope of a glorious linguistic and literary past; hence, the presence of appropriate literary resources and assets in the pages of history is absolutely critical as a source of courage for them. It is universally known that Sankardeva initiated a human renaissance in the history of Assamese language and literature. Vast literary resources such as poetry, drama, and songs bear testimony to the intellectual progress of the nation. Through continuous inspiration and emulation of these works, the present stage has been reached. All biographical texts (Charit Puthis) highlight the rigorous training in various scriptures and grammar at Mahendra Kandali's school (Tol), an intellectual exercise that enabled the Assamese nation to acquire a priceless literary heritage. The influence of the ideals embedded in these literary contributions has kept society balanced to some extent. Through the complete practice of ideals favorable to the establishment of truth and righteousness, there is certainly a prospect for the comprehensive development of the nation in the future. Simultaneously, the expressive power of the language used by Sankardeva in his Borgeets and Ankiya Naats succeeded in taking the form of a universal language understood by people across different regions of India. People from all strata of

society have been drawn to the form and flavor of this Brajavali language, and will continue to be in the future.

Sankardeva's Nation-Building and Sustainable Development Consciousness Through Unity, Equality, and Generosity:

Amidst the instability of his contemporary society, Sankardeva constructed the Kirtanghar at Bordowa. According to the Guru Charit composed by Ramcharan Thakur:

Sehi mate jetiya basa gharak sajila.
Alipukhurir loka samaste aasila. (1615)
Sankare kirtan ghar sajibaka loila.
Bhithi bandhibaka lagi samaste aasila.
Aapuni Sankare pache koraka dharila.
Prithivit chaturbhuj murtika dekhila. (1616)

By establishing the Kirtanghar at Bordowa, Sankardeva created a central hub to bring order to an unstable and stagnant society. Keeping the Namghar at the center, Sankardeva captivated various castes and tribes with the nectar of Harinam, laying the foundation for democracy. Through seamless integration and a bond of harmony among different castes and tribes, he created an open platform for human unity, composing the core mantra for global brotherhood.

"Krishnara kathata jito rasika.
Brahmana janma tara lage kika.
Smaroka matra hari dine-rati.
Nabache bhakati jati-ajati."
(Pasanda Mardan, Kirtan Ghosa, 58)

Sankardeva would not have made such a grand declaration had he not lacked faith in the caste system. In the context of his contemporary society, he stated, "Brahmanara chandulara nibichari kula" (Shri Krishnara Baikuntha Prayan, Kirtan Ghosa, 1821), demonstrating his powerful stance on establishing equality. He expressed a profound yearning for unity and equality by writing: "Kukura srigala gardabharaba atmaram / janiya sabako pari kariba pranam" (Shri Krishnara Baikuntha Prayan, Kirtan Ghosa, 1823). He revealed the all-pervading presence of the divine entity not just in conscious beings, but even in inanimate matter:

"Sabato achanta jagata swami.
Sphatikara stambhe dekhoho aami."
(Prahlada Charit, Kirtan Ghosa, 396)

Acknowledging the omnipresence of God to establish a sense of equality in human consciousness, he stated, "Vishnumaya dekhe jito samaste jagata" (Shri Krishnara Baikuntha Prayan, Kirtan Ghosa, 1824), thereby planting the seeds for a future progressive society. Advising everyone to view all living beings as oneself, and eradicating the notions of high-low or caste-outcaste, he declared: "Samaste pranika dekhibaha atmasama / upaya madhyata ito aati mukhyatama" (Shri Krishnara Baikuntha Prayan, Kirtan Ghosa, 1824).

Future Society Building Plans Through the Cultivation and Practice of Art and Culture:

One of Sankardeva's greatest contributions to the 15th-century Bhakti movement in Assam is the bountiful repository of art and culture. Ankiya Naats, songs, dances, architecture, and sculptures were born. Keeping the reformation of contemporary society in mind, the cultural treasures innovated by

Sankardeva provided society with opportunities for cultural refinement, while simultaneously establishing a ground for building a sophisticated society in the future. Since the practice and cultivation of art and culture serve as tools to cleanse a nation's mind and intellect, his creation of six plays, Borgeets, various Bhatimas, Totays, and Chapays—alongside the integrated elements of the Khol, cymbals, dance, and song—became instruments for the future transformation of the nation. These are undoubtedly indicators of Sankardeva's sustainable development consciousness, representing a culture unparalleled in the world.

Spiritual Consciousness in Building a Society of Refined and Sophisticated Taste Through Krishna-Bhakti:

Gratification of the senses should happen only through refined art, and the easiest path to that elevation is Krishna-bhakti. Layering all forms of song, dance, instrumentation, and drama with spirituality helped make Sankardeva's creations profoundly refined. The birth and popularity of a religion depend on the needs of the masses. Religion imparts lessons of kindness, compassion, tolerance, love, and brotherhood. Just as the practice of religion requires a healthy and secure environment, religion in turn provides discipline to society, bringing peace and prosperity.

With the objective of molding individuals with high human ideals and creating an egalitarian society, Sankardeva formulated an educational framework. At the beginning of his translation of the Bhagavata, Sankardeva made it clear:

"Gramya katha kathane malina hoya bani.
Taka shuddha karo krishna katha bakhani.
Krishna charitraka mora maha labha ache.
Krishnara kirtane jati ajati nabache." (20)

The goals of Sankardeva's educational system and his own liberal outlook are evident in the quoted verses. Without discriminating between castes and outcastes, such an educational system can clear a space for a broad society on a single planet (Sankardeva Sandarbha, Malini Goswami, 265). This is the consciousness of Man-Making and Nation-Building. In human form, through human nature, and amidst humanity, Krishna is the Brahman in human form; He alone is worshipful and adorable. Setting an example himself, Krishna taught the understanding of life. Since common people are unable to realize the formless, attribute-less Brahman, he taught them to approach the divine through the form of Krishna. He taught individuals to bind their personal and social lives to a high frequency by learning all good virtues from Him. Through virtues like love, kindness, and compassion, alongside a sophisticated taste, this represents Sankardeva's consciousness of building a refined society. A society built on this consciousness allows generations to find fulfillment across eras. Therefore, to be nourished by moral knowledge and devotional rasa, the devotional society found models in highly principled characters like Uddhava, Damodara, and Arjuna, while also embracing and remembering Sankardeva's melodious words of wisdom. In this way, the strategies of human development became deeply integrated into Sankardeva's educational philosophy, profoundly impacting the Assamese nation—a truth any Assamese person can realize upon self-reflection.

Conclusion:

Even though modern society faces numerous problems and crises, it remains balanced to some degree by emulating the inherent ideals of the assets created by Sankardeva in the 15th century. In the post-

Sankardeva era, institutional divisions that ran contrary to his core ideology created obstacles to the propagation of these ideals, and their impact is still visible in today's society. Following the analysis of our proposed subject matter, the conclusions we arrived at are as follows:

The simplicity and generosity of the Krishna-culture propagated by Sankardeva held a strong potential to keep the Assamese society united, a potential that remains true today and will continue into the future.

Through the practice of the literature, art, and cultural resources created by Sankardeva, negative thoughts were purified, facilitating the holistic development of the nation and giving it an opportunity to shine in all its beauty.

The practice and cultivation of Krishna-culture led to the propagation of a scientific, devotional religious system. It provided an opportunity to establish equality by eliminating gaps between high-low, caste-outcaste, and rich-poor, allowing future generations to remain disciplined, peaceful, civilized, and brilliant.

The Kirtanghars and Namghars, established as the nerve centers of a democratic social system, became fields for spiritual, cultural, and intellectual cultivation, showing strong prospects for expanding and evolving the social system in the future.

Bibliography:

1. Kalita, Dambarudhar (Ed.). Bhaktitattva Darshan. Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha, Sivasagar, First Edition, 1988.
2. Goswami, Narayan Chandra. Srimanta Sankardev Sahityar Moulikata Bichar (Vol. II). Srimanta Sankardeva Sachetan Mancha Asom, Guwahati, 2010.
3. Goswami, Upendranath. Vaishnav Bhaktidhara aru Santakatha. Bina Library, Guwahati, Second Edition, 1987.
4. Goswami, Malini. Sankardeva Sandarbha. Jyoti Prakashan, Guwahati, First Edition, 2022.
5. Gohain, Hiren. Asomiya Jatiya Jivanat Mahapurushiya Parampara. Lawyer's Book Stall, Third Edition, Guwahati, 1990.
6. Chaliha, Bhabaprasad (Ed.). Sankari-Sanskritir Adhyayan. Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha, Asom, Guwahati, First Edition, 1978.
7. Chaliha, Bhabaprasad (Ed.). Sankari Sahitya Samiksha. Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha, Asom, Nagaon, Second Edition, 1998.
8. Devagoswami, Keshabananda (Comp.). Bharatiya Patabhumit Sankari Sahitya aru Sattriya Sangeet. First Edition, Banalata, Guwahati, 2009.
9. Neog, Maheswar (Ed.). Gurucharitar Katha. Guwahati University, First Edition, 1986.
10. Neog, Maheswar. Shri Shri Sankardeva. Chandra Prakash, Guwahati, 2006.
11. Bora, Deepak Kumar. Asomiya Bhakti Sahitya Adhyayan. Alibat Prakashan, Guwahati, 2014.
12. Barman, Sivanath. Srimanta Sankardeva Kriti aru Krititva. Jagaran Sahitya Prakash, Guwahati, 2008.
13. Barik, Kuleswar. Mahapurushiya Vaishnav Darshan. Dergaon, First Edition, 1973.
14. Baishya, Bhubaneswari. Vaishnav Yugar Asomiya Sahitya. Bimal Mazumdar, Guwahati, First Edition, 1963.
15. Mahanta, Kesada. Kavyatattvar Dristire Sankardev Tattva. Banalata, Guwahati, 2016