

# Integrating Spirituality with Economics: Analyzing Srimanta Sankaradeva's Economic Ideals

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## ABSTRACT:

The article addresses the revolutionary effect of the teachings of Srimanta Sankaradeva on Economic Development of Assam. In current situations individuals know that Sankaradeva was not only a Dharma Guru, but he also, possessed high managerial capacity. Most ordinary people are accustomed to him as a religious preacher, literary character and cultural genius. But he was more than that. He was an excellent innovator and planner. Decentralisation of power was initiated by Sri Sankaradeva in Assam in the form of Name Ghar and therefore he first presented the concept of local self-administration. Handicraft skilled weaving was in use at the period of Sri Sakaradeva. His commercial idea has best been illustrated by the creation of "Vrindavanani Vatsra. Social, political and economic implications of the movement of Bhakti and its applicability even to date about the socio-economic upliftment of the society is also addressed by the paper.

**Keywords:** Economic Development, Local Self-Administration, Decentralisation of Power, Vrindavani Vatsra, Bhakti Movement

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

One saint-scholar and social reformer of Assam was Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449-1568) who was not a modern economist but had profound socio-economic effects on Assam influenced by his teachings and institutions based on egalitarianism, knowledge-sharing, and creativity. The most prominent spiritual and social reformer in northeast India was Sankaradeva, who drew inspiration by the pan-Indian Bhakti movement of the 15th and 16th centuries and formed a movement referred to as Neo-Vaishnavism in the area covered by three states, Asama-Kamarupa and Behar. The explicit object of movement was to wipe out all evil in the society along with providing the needy with economic salvation. The movement under this movement was a new ideology known officially as Eka Sarana Hari Nama Dharma which he preached [3]. He initiated shared prayer halls (Namghars) and monasteries (Satras) which served as spiritual learning centres, cultural and moral education centres. Devotional music (Borgeet), literary works, dramatic performances (Ankiya Naat, Bhaona, etc.) led by Sankaradeva allowed religious ideas to be made available to the masses in the vernacular Assamese language [1].

Published: 30 January 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/SPIJSH.2026.v3.i1.45492>

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## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:**

The literature and the teachings of Srimanta Sankardev are of great value to Society and Economic Development of Assam. It can be said that the teaching and preaching of Sankaradeva not only influenced the socio-cultural life of the Assamese people, but also its economic situation. The whole Assamese society was united in his Neo-Vaishnavism idea. Nonetheless, there is need to research his concepts and philosophy in terms of socio-economic perspective, which is a crucial subject of study.

## **3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:**

- i. To know the economic factors of the teachings of Sankardeva, particularly, Neo-Vaishnavism and its influence on Assam economy.
- ii. To find out whether the teaching of Sankardeva is applicable in the current context.

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

It is a theoretical research paper using secondary sources of data. Different books, research papers, journals, magazines, dissertations, theses etc have been used in collecting the data. The descriptive method has been embraced in the analysis of the data collected.

## **5. DISCUSSIONS & RESULTS:**

Sankaradeva put forward his opinions on different economic features and it is casually documented in his work. The economic factors of the teachings of Sankaradeva and the applicability of his teachings in the contemporary times have been attempted to be expressed in this chapter.

The idea of local self-direction was initiated first in Assam by Sankaradeva with Satra, Namghar and Thana; hence, he brought about the inspirational devolution. Weaving was an art that was taught at Sakaradeva. The best example of his money-making reflection is the making of "Vrindavani Vastra. He also travelled a great deal in Assam to arrange the uniting of Vrindavani Vastra. The wearing of silk clothes Borkapur, Elephant teeth, Japi, is salvaged in the hagiographies. Land was advertised under the name of various disciple who stayed at Satras through which they practiced their livelihood. He utilized other raw materials in his resourceful and creative activities. It was the era of cultivation of Jaluk.

In Assam, the principal mode of production was agriculture given the fact that there was very limited industrialization during those times. According to Qadri, mode of production in Assam though essentially feudal differs greatly in magnitude and in produce quality with the rest of India. The forces of production are dissimilar.... [5]. The local industries and crafts were not being developed because of the un-demand. The demand was limited to some amount of local demand. The technology was kept at a low level since there was no motivating factor of high demand. It was a subsistence economy. The whole was done to produce the goods just sufficient to be consumed locally [2].

Sankaradeva was the extremely powerful personality concerning the development in the nature of weaving and figured cloth. His exceptional personal interest was handloom weaving. He was the marvelous planner and patron of the weaving work of the famous Vrindavani Vastra.

Sankaradeva had a mission of embroidery weaving at the bequeath of the brother of the Koch king named Chilirai, where he involved the weavers of Tantikuchi or Barpeta in the work. Sankaradeva mobilized to the advantage of cottage industries in the Satras, Namagharas and Thanas. He promoted the wonderful handicrafts and handloom industries and introduced numerous musical tools which were ready in the institutions. The art of costume designing was one of the key parts of the identity of Sankaradeva. He initiated training of traditional Asomiya ornaments. In this respect, it is of much value that Mukhas did this work. The resources such as hengul, haital, engar, gerua-mati, neel that had been prevalent since times immemorial were created in the times of Sankaradeva. Traditional objects like mayurasana, thaga, garudasana, xarai were made by the artisans. There were materials prepared by the bhakats of the saints made of bamboo such as dala, kula, pachi, kharahi, bisoni, japi, kath, chalon, etc and also of wood such as pira, safura, wooden chests, bar-pira, etc. Crafted handwear, like gamocha, dhoti, eri, muga, chador, pat and so forth were made separately. The management of the extensive land and property of Satra and Namghars might fail to be recognized by some of the scholars, researchers, yet, Sankaradeva economic involvement is an aspect that was also included in his knowledge management system.

In the economy of Ahom Kingdom very minimal amount of monetization occurred during those days. Money (kari) was only used in limited purposes. It had a barter system that was extensive when compared to it. This was especially true in the countryside the people sold and bought among themselves the daily products of daily usage without visiting the market. In 1543 A.D. Coin was first issued by king Suklenmung.

The saving culture among the individuals was minimal because most of them were linked to subsistence economy whereby they only produce in order to consume them. The ones who had excess were preserved as gold. They excavate holes in the soil and bury the cash in them. Consumers had borrowed money to spend and to conduct business. At the death of their father, Madhavadeva went back to the house of a man whose elder brother had a loan of rupees sixty. In other reference it was established that one individual would borrow some commodities in form of rupees to conduct business with another merchant. It was estimated that after seven years the accumulated interest and principal of the rupees five hundred.

Sankaradeva was also an advocate of trade and commerce. We can see that his most important disciple Madhavadeva was directly affiliated to trade. His trade and commerce were also among many of his followers. Sankaradeva encouraged Brass and Bell Metal industry by introducing various types of Tal (cymbals), which were common in Nam-Kirttana used by his various followers all over India. The economic perspective of the evolution of the Brass and Bell Metal industry was a very critical occurrence. Special types of utensils: ban-kanhi, bera-kanhi, dugdugi-lota of silver, bata, sarai, generally with stand and dome cover top, made of bell metal, sital pati, tamar kalah, ghata, thal and many more were also created by professional craftsmen (Pathak, 2004, 192). It assisted in enhancing the industry of the society during that time.

The kings levied both direct and indirect taxes on the people. The officials and artisans were subject to payment of income tax. The subjects could pay the tax in the form of money or as a fraction of their total product, or give physical labour to the state. The citizens were supposed

to pay tax on the use of land, forest, water resource and other mineral resource. They were obliged to make payments to get possession and pleasure of land, jalkar to fish, beth to use forest etc. The businessmen were taxed by cakis/duvars (outposts in the road) and phats (outposts in rivers). Various forms of customs and general trade duties such as dan (sales tax), hat (tax on buying or selling in the market), phat were raised. Cakiyal, phatoval or phatkhoa, tekela etc. were used to collect tax officers. [6].

### **Relevance of Sankardeva's Economic Thoughts in Present Time:**

The economic thinking of Sankardeva is applicable nowadays due to his advocacy of the local economic development, ethical work culture, and socio-economic inclusivity. His insistence upon employing local resources to cultural and religious endeavours, his compulsory saving system of socio-economic progression (Mustidan) and his handling of various people through one system offer eternal themes of sustainability of local economies, community building, and management of human resources.

Some of the most important points about his thinking on economics and its importance in the modern world:

#### **i. Local Resource Utilization:**

Sankardeva advocated that he uses locally available materials in his projects, and cultural activities, a principle that resonates with current developments in the idea of sustainable development and economic empowerment of local economies through an increase in local production.

#### **ii. Ethical Work Culture:**

His teachings also promoted hard workers among his followers which is considered to be a pillar towards increasing productivity and contributing to positive working environment in any economy.

#### **iii. Socio-Economic Development Programs:**

The practical model of micro-finance and community driven development, the Mustidan system, in which households hoarded rice as a socio-economic development strategy applies to the present-day microfinance institutions.

#### **iv. Human Resource Management:**

The fact that he was able to unite and lead various individuals through his revolutionary socio-cultural-religious system demonstrates the concepts of team management as well as the concept of community building, which is applicable to the current mutual harmony in organizations and society.

#### **v. Decentralization and Self-Governance:**

He also provided a kind of local self-rule through such programs as the Name Ghar system, which opened the path to decentralization and empowerment of local communities, a strategy that remains essential in the proper governance and local economies.

#### **vi. Commercial and Professional Trade Promotion:**

The division of his commercial skilled weaving as seen in the development of the so called Vrindavani Vatsra, and trade in other local products such as silk and elephant tusks is an indication of early realization of creation of commercial enterprises and local crafts in the modern times that can be used to inspire development of artisan and local industry.

## 6. CONCLUSION:

Srimanta Sankaradeva is a social reformer who is more dominant. There is massive importance in his ideas of economic development. The influence of Sankaradeva reminds our psyche of the all-round development that is related to the present development. In this case, the great examples are the adult education and Panchayati Raj. The teachings of this man still shape the revivalist and reformist movements up to the present and his memory is still present in the minds of the modern generation in Assam such that his importance is not merely historical. But even economic features of Sankaradeva movement are not studied in details till now.

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