

## **Similarity Between Shankardeva's Vaishnavite Ideology And Sufism: A Comparative Study**

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### **Introduction:**

There is an immense influence of Srimanta Shankardeva's religious ideology, traditional rules and practice of his belief form in Assamese social life. For this society, the subject of devotion is a unique essence of life. Assamese social life is highly enriched because of such traditional Discussions on Shankardeva and his beliefs practice of devotion and religion deeply. On the Other hand monotheistic Sufism has also played an equally important role in spreading ideals of Islam and the message of peace to all: irrespective of caste, creed or religion. Sufism played an important role in constructing a pragmatic classless society by spreading the doctrine of brotherhood and unity. Looking at the logical approach, similarity of ideals, convergence of goal and magnanimity of purpose, it can be easily summarized that Neo-Vaishnavite ideology and Sufism are the two sides of the same coin. Monotheism; the idea of a classless society, and socialism were given priorities in both the doctrines. They requested all to live in harmony by practicing such philosophical thoughts leaving behind all religious intolerances. At present, it seems very essential that both Sufism and Shankardeva's ideology will help to establish peace and harmony in our society. Practice of both the doctrines looks very relevant in today's society. This is the reason why a comparative discussion on similarity between Sufism and Shankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavite religion is emphasized here.

### **Objectives of the study:**

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To study about the Sufism and Shankardeva's neo-vaishnavite religion.

## 2. Find out the similarities between Sufism and Shankardeva's neo-vaishnavite.

### **Methodology:**

The present research is based on secondary sources of data. I have written the research

Article on the basis of analytical method basically. Data has been collected from reference books, published articles, journals, magazines and Newspapers etc.

### **Subject matter:**

Saint Srimanta Shankardeva was the pioneer who created the waves of Neo Vaishnavite movement in classless Assamese society devoid of caste, creed and religion in Assam. His simple, logical, philosophical and theoretical teachings had won the hearts of the mass and as a Result, the influence of vaishnavite religion spread all over Assam in no time. He along with his Disciple Madhabdeva wrote many books, songs, drama, epics, Bhaona and created dance forms which were easily comprehensible for the general public and helped to spread this religion to the masses. He discovered the concept of "Kirtanghar" or "Namghar" as a place of worship so that the people can practice his religious preaching in groups doing "shravan-kirtan" (listening-saying) en masse. On the other hand under their constructive guidance many "satra"s were established where arts, literature and cultural plays were practiced. According to both Shankardeva and Madhabdeva, the best way to devote God is all creatures must be treated as his own self and especially all humans should be considered as the parts of God. He taught not to discriminate people as high or low, touchable or untouchable in the name of religion. Not limiting his preaching's to merely Hindu society; Srimanta Shankardeva reached out to the Non-Hindu tribals also. Garo, Mikir, Miri, Kachari, Bhutiya, Musalman and many tribal groups were among his disciples. The proofs are evident in the history. His disciple Sandsai was from Islamic background. He was attracted by the Saint's personality and accepted as his Guru. There are proofs that even at present his offspring are practicing this "Naamdharma". Sufism is an ideology to attract people towards the religion Islam by spreading love, selflessness and integrating people without class based society. It is evident from the opinion of various literates and pundits that only those Islamic scholars are called Sufi who wear plain white cotton clothes, lead a simple lifestyle and an austere devotee of Allah throughout his life. They were also inspired by the vaishnavite

ideologies and took part in spreading Islam to the masses in plain and simple way. The main doctrine of Sufism is- to visualize the true form of Allah and to reach the path of spiritual enlightenment even after leading a normal life. Rules and logic is the basis of Sufism. It is also based on holiness, emotion and honesty. The idea of a classless society, doctrine of Islam without discriminating color or race, value of equalitarian society and religious yet progressive unorthodoxly blended with love and compassion, religious tolerance are the epitome of Sufism. It teaches to replace the subjective & materialistic thoughts by spiritualism, peace and good will among different people. Among those who came to Assam for spreading this ideology of Sufism were Giasuddin Aulia, Azan Fakir, Ismail Gaji and Nizamuddin whose names are worth mentioning. Amongst all Giasuddin Aulia was called the first religious Guru who preached the message of Islam in the state of Assam. In the year 1321-22, the Sultan of Bengal Giasuddin Bahadur Shah attacked and took over the province of Kamrup briefly. Giasuddin Aulia also entered Assam along with him. He established a Dargah in Hajo (Kamrup) and started preaching the message of Islam. Giasuddin Aulia was seen as an apostle of honesty and hence under his influence many Hindu Koch residents of Hajo took to Islam. At present his grave lies in Poa Mecca, Hajo.

At the dawn of seventeenth century, came Azan Fakir from the faraway land of Bagdad to preach Sufism in Assam. His birth name was Shah Milan or Miran. In close ties with Shankardeva's vaishnavite religion he spread the message of Islam throughout the state and laid the foundation of Hindu Muslim unity. Azan Fakir transformed himself into a true Assamese by developing an in depth understanding of Assamese traditions, rituals, folklores and cultural practices. The Jikir & Jari songs were composed by Azan Fakir taking inspiration from the local folklores. Flashes from both Madhabdeva and Shankardeva's Ghosha-pada can be seen in the Jikirs of Azan Fakir. These songs became equally popular amongst the Hindu and Muslim communities. Being inspired by the strong character of Azan Fakir, many Hindus were towards him and they converted to Islam. Owing to the fluid and unorthodox preaching of Sufism by Azan Fakir though Hindus and Muslims varied in religious practices, they were one socially.

### **A comparison between New Vaishnavism and Sufism:**

Whether there is a resemblance between the vaishnavite and Sufi ideologies, can easily be figured out by paying close attention to the statements presented below.

“One God one shelter- there is none other” is the prime motto of Vaishnava Dharma. The main motto of Islam is also same. In Islam “ La ilaha illallahu Mohammadur rasullah” means there is none to worship other than Allah. Mohammad is His Messenger sent by Him.

Secondly according to Sufism the prime duty of human is meditation and altar, prayers and reminiscence of His name. More elaborately it instructs all human to pray to the almighty Allah and more you pronounce His name more you earn virtues. The saint Shankardeva’s “Naam Dharma” also preached the same. According to Vaishnavite ideology also “Listening and Singing Hari Naam (Name of the Lord of the universe)” leads to Moksha (Ultimate Freedom/ Salvation).

Thirdly, according to Sufism underlying all religious and ethical philosophies is sheer love and compassion for all beings. Exhibiting the same amount of love for all kinds of beings is what comprises of dharma. It is believed that there resides a messenger of God inside each being. Vaishnavite philosophy also supports this ideology and hence professes that one should respect all fellow beings as equal to their own self.

One striking evidence of this can be found in Hem Saraswati’s Prahlad Charitra. Shankardeva mentioned in his scripture “ Kirtana Ghosha” that-

“Kukur, Srigaal, Gadarvaro attma Ram

Jania sabako pora koriba pranaam”

(God is the soul of all animals, knowing that worship all being)

In Sufism it is believed that in the path of worship, the disciple is benefited by the advice of his Guru. Similarly in Vaishnavism also the place of Guru is considered above all in all forms of worship. In Sufism “bhakti” (devotion to Lord) is assigned a higher priority along with the form of Allah, theory of creation and specialty of Koran and importance of Rasul. Similarly in Vaishnavism also it gives more importance to “Bhakti” without the need of salvation. Moreover in Sufism, one main criteria is –All beings in this universe is the forms of the supreme God, all activities of human are controlled by that supreme-soul (Paramattma). Sufism believes that behind the supervision of the entire universe there is Allah, who controls all activities of the world. Sufism relies the ubiquitous presence of one omnipotent super power whose heart is overflowing with love and compassion for all. This

ideology also resembles with the Vaishnavism of Shankardeva. According to Vaishnavism Lord Vishnu or Lord Krishna is the absolute truth or Absolute Brahma. According to Shankardeva it's not worth to worship other gods or goddesses except Lord Krishna. He says

—

“Anya devi deva nokoriba xeba

Prasado nakhaiba tar

Murtiko nasaiba grihe napasiba

Bhokti hoibo vybhisaar”

( Bhagavata, Second part)

(Never worship other gods & goddesses, do not accept the offerings of that, don't look at the idols, never bring it to home, or else devotion will be sacrilege or profane. So, it is evident that Vaishnavite ideology has striking similarity with Sufism. Perhaps this is the reason why Sufism did get the opportunity to spread in Assam without any controversy. Irrespective of religious divide between Hindu and Muslim, it was able to tie up the entire Assamese community with a rope of unity.

In fifteenth century, in pan Indian context, Sant Kabira's Doha catalyses unification of Hindus and Muslims. Because of the resemblance of monotheistic belief of Sant Kabira with Vaishnavite ideology, Sufism did spread all over India. It is found in “Charita Puthi” that during pilgrimage of Mahapurusha Sankardeva in this period, he reached Kabira's house and discussed about this with his family. So there is some substance to assume that Shankardeva's Vaishnavism had some influences from Kabira's doctrine. It is said that the Diha naams of Shankardeva were composed after inspiring by Kabira's Doha. Many advocates that in the same fashion the “Deha Visara Geet”s of Assam were also originated from Jikirs. Some similarity is also found between the literature and ideology of Geet and Pada of Vaishnavite period with the Jikirs composed by Azan Fakir. For example-

**Jikir:**

Ghosh:

Rahamar girihat,

tumi allah sahib hoi,

Jodi kora dariar paar.

**Pada:**

Chinto hera mor mon Allar namot

Bhajo hera Mor mon Gurure pawat

Paani more piyahot agni more jaarot

Khoda Rasul lukai ase Mominor Aarot.

(Ajan Peer)

**Bargeet:**

**Ghosha:** Gopale Ki goti koile, Gobinde Ki moti dile

Naath biphole boyos sab gelore

**Pada:** E bhova gahan bana aati mohe paxe sanna

taate hamo harino berai.

Fandilu mayar paxe kaal byadho dhaya axe

Kaama Krodha kutta khedi khai.

In this Jikir, “Khoda Rasul is hiding behind Momin” is similarly depicted in a Lokageet where “You are hiding inside the Manikut but we can’t see, Shankar Guru is ours, Madhava Guru is ours.”

Mahapurusha Shankardeva dreamt of a society where all people irrespective of their different castes, creeds and religions could live in a peaceful atmosphere and justice, equality and brotherhood were free for all in a broad society. Enamored by his magnanimity, his preaching of a classless society and religious tolerance for all, a Muslim preacher Sandsai wholeheartedly accepted to be his disciple. When Sufi preachers came to Assam for spreading the ideals of Islam, they soon realized that without understanding the ethos and basic values of Vaishnavism direct conversion of people into Islam was not possible. Perhaps this is the reason those Sufi saints and preachers took to the morals of Vaishnavism and tried

to spread their religious ideals. While doing so they never tried to hurt the religious sentiments of anyone rather they had moulded people of all hues with the values of Islam and Vaishnavism blending with brotherhood. This Jikir is worth mentioning here as a striking example-

Mor Monot bhed bhab nai o Allah

Mor monot bhin par nai o Allah

Hindu ki Musalman, eke Allar farman '

Mor monot eketi bhav

Hindu ke jhalabo hai o Allah

Musalmaanok putibo hai o Allah

Hai o ekekhini jaminor tol

(Azan Peer)

## **Conclusion:**

So it is seen that, because of the manifold resemblance of Sufism with the Vaishnavite Ideals the unity of Assam is preserved for a long time. Although that stability between Hindus and Muslims has been hit sometimes by the cruel clutch of time, but there is no distinct possibility of religious polarization to be permanent. All credit goes to Mahapurusha Shankardeva and those Sufi Saints who heralded the path of unity amongst all religions and made this unified society of Assam, a great place to live.

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