

# SPIRITUALITY IN THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN ASSAM: A STUDY ON GENDER PERSPECTIVES VIS-A-VIS OF SRIMANTA SANKARDEVA

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## Abstract

A number of opinions have dismissed religion, its ceremonies and traditions, as at pinnacle irrelevant and at worst an obstruction to collective, financial, rational, mental, emotional and opinionated evolvement. The relations flanked by confidence, belief, holiness and traditions with the women's direction are understandable correct in the course of the history of humanism and human development. Women's vital reliability as wives, mothers and conveyers of cultural, artistic and spiritual beliefs (Mukhopadhyay, 1995) makes it significant for their methods to be synchronized, in particular their sexuality, as the paternity of their children is of major topic to patriarchal civilization. The research paper tries to study on spirituality in the Religious Institutions of Assam with a study on Gender Perspectives vis-a-vis of Saint Srimanta Sankardeva.

**Key Words:** Spirituality, Religious, Institutions, Assam, Gender, Srimanta Sankardeva.

## Introduction

Sanctity and faith can control the interaction with common people. A good number of studies have observed the intricacy, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary connection between spirituality and religion. More often than not women of all ages are more likely than men to be revealed as religious, more allied to the particular religious affiliations and state a more positive view on their participation. The women manage as the interlocutors in the society and work multi-dimensional mission in the transactions of that particular society to which they belong. In the paths of the history of the Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam women have a lot of times faced with favoritism as obvious from the non-entry of women in the core prayer entry of one of the promising Sattras in Barpeta district of Assam in India.

## Review of Literature

- 1) Bora, S. (2018) in her article "Gendered Devotion in Neo-Vaishnavism: Women, Monks and Sattras of Majuli, Assam" highlights at the tones of gender dynamics inside the Sattras institutions, the neo-Vaishnavite traditions of Assam, positioned in the river island Majuli.
- 2) Gaurav, R.B. (2021) in his writing "Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam : Sattras and Namghar" indicates that the Neo-Vaishnavism movement or somewhat the Bhakti movement, leaded by Saint Srimanta Sankardev rooted not only an immense socio-cultural and spiritual development in Assam, other than, can also be interpreted as a ways of salvation i.e. entire surrender to God.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Women's mission and responsibility within societies is dominated by religious institutions at the family and in the echelons of society. Tradition and practice, often acceptable on religious parameters make certain women's constancy to conventional gender tasks, which can be the basis of helplessness, defenselessness and soreness.

## **Objectives of the Study**

- 1) To know the idea of Women's Spirituality in Religious Institutions in Assam.
- 2) To study the ideology of Srimanta Sankardev towards women in the religious institutions.

## **Research Questions**

- 1) Is there any perceptiveness towards women in the religious institutions of Assam?
- 2) Is there any viewpoint of Srimanta Sankardeva for Women in the religious institutions?

## **Rationale**

Women's position in the Neo-Vaishnavite institutions of Assam is a vital study for research.

## **Methodology**

The research is based on history with the descriptive method. The secondary sources are collected from different books, journals, edited volumes, periodicals, research papers, research articles, paper clips, newspapers, internet etc.

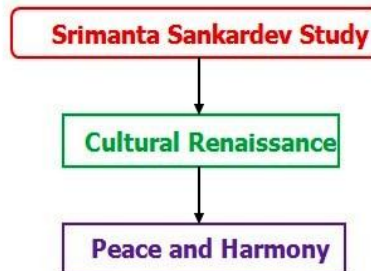
## **Spirituality and Religious Institution**

A historical and sociological study on religion highlights to recognized religious experiences around the world and how spiritualism is tied to other social institutions. Some sociologists try to resolve why religions take a particular shape and how religious activities influence society all together. It is a fact that religion is a method of trust and worship. In a true sense, religion is a social foundation connecting beliefs and practices based on an idea of the sacred.

## **Spirituality in the Religious Institution of Assam**

Spirituality is one of the significant organs of society. It conveys novel sources to society and culture and a society is depended in great level on religion in the upholding of social norms and importance. In the contemporary picture, religion and social development has become a widespread mark of each society, which is also observed in the societies of the ethnic communities of Assam.

## Why the Srimanta Sankardeva Study



Sankardeva brought a movement on cultural renaissance with all forms of arts, music, literature, poetry, dance, drama, painting, miniature, manuscripts, sculpture etc. coming under a spell of restoration in combination with religion. These are the identity for upcoming generations. Sankardeva's keen and passionate attention in bringing peace and harmony to the North-eastern region and important efforts are extensively valued. His writings are the symbols of unity, integrity and universal brotherhood. No doubt, Sankardeva was a resourceful genius. In conjunction with the proliferation of Neo-Vaishnavism and literary creation he left numerous contributions to the Assamese culture. That's why the study of Srimanta Sankardeva is important in contemporary times.

### Neo-Vaishnavite Movement and Assam

- 1) Sankardeva was the pioneer of the Neo Vaishnava faith in Assam.
- 2) With the generous persona Sankardeva presented cultural identity to the Assamese community.
- 3) The Neo-Vaishnava confidence initiated by Sankardeva is recognized as '*Ek Saran Nama Dharma*' i.e. attachment to one ultimate God. The Sattras, Namgharas and Thanas are the inspired outcome of this faith. These are the repositories of socio-cultural and religious energy of the Neo-Vaishnava community.
- 4) Sankardeva demonstrated the astonishing apprehension for the socially depressed and deprived where women initiated a significant place.
- 5) Sankardeva and a few of his disciples showed a special concern for the women and allowed liberty and fairness to them.
- 6) Women are measured for deliverance. However, women have not had any ceremonial responsibility in the Sattras. Still, there are no such examples of a lady taking hold of a Sattras. All are managed and implemented by men at the superior rank.

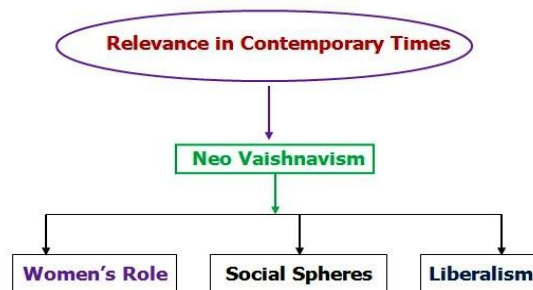
## Srimanta Sankardeva and Women

- 1) A glance in the history of the Neo-Vaishnava devotion would disclose the reality that women's position was a submissive one.
- 2) Some of the lines with reference to the definitive changes in the lives of women getting into the doorstep of a religious set up, up till now there are extraordinary exceptions also.
- 3) The biographies of Saṅkaradeva talk about his declination to announce women into his self-assurance on the ground that they would not be bright performers.
- 4) In later years, women became the spiritual 'Bhakta'. Apart from for the sacramental practices carried out by the male complements, women have been competent to make a way of their own.
- 5) Women's activism to the institution with the Sattras is not fresh and in more than a few ways it highlights the dynamics of a societal formation, social development, humanism and the course of social alterations within a definite social paradigm.

## Women's Impact in the Neo-Vaishnavite Traditions

- 1) Women's role plays a vital job in most of the Sattra Institutions of Assam, more often than not open-minded and unorthodox branches of the sect where they are not reserved from men. At this time, in such branches of the sect, women are usually not excluded from contribution in any socio religious activities.
- 2) Women's depiction within the governing formations of the Sattra Institutions remains insignificant.
- 3) The women as every day performers in the Sattras have highlighted more on the individual religious development of the self. Whereas, these women have played a noteworthy responsibility in conserving the traditional principles and day to day practices.

## Relevance in the Contemporary Context



- 1) Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam today, it is observed that women engaged a very significant position as they perform in every societal field.
- 2) Liberalism noticed the primary stage of the history of Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam was later on replaced by conservatism so far as its outlook towards the womenfolk is concerned.
- 3) As of the source and remarks collected from the areas, it is recognized that the Sattras have a range of thoughts with regards to the womenfolk.
- 4) The participation and involvement of women in the Namghar (prayer hall) is noteworthy where the women usually systematize the congregational prayers identified as duprasanga (prayers held by women at afternoon) at usual periods.
- 5) In some Sattras women are barred from entering the premises of the main prayer hall. The socio-economic rank and position of women has significantly being prejudiced by these socio-cultural and religious institutions.

### Concluding Remark

In India religious and blessed standards absorb a noteworthy task in controlling the women's lives in a variety of communities and most significantly the religious ones. While the grade of women in today's context has changed to an immense level, therefore, the women in the Neo Vaishnavite faith with the religious institutions of Assam has astonishingly changed and reacted likewise.

### Photograph



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