

Collective Consciousness in the Teaching of Srimanta Sankardeva's

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Abstract: This study examines the teachings of Srimanta Sankardev (1449–1568), the pioneering saint, reformer, and cultural architect of Assam, through the analytical framework of Émile Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness. Sankardev's Neo-Vaishnavite movement, founded on the principle of Eka Deva, Eka Seva (One God, One Service), not only provided spiritual guidance but also generated a socio-cultural renaissance. By institutionalizing practices such as Naam-Prasanga, Borgeet, Bhaona, and the Satra–Namghar system, he created collective rituals that transcended caste and class boundaries, promoted moral discipline, and fostered psychological resilience.

Methodologically, this paper employs a descriptive–analytical approach, combining participant observation in Namghar rituals with secondary textual sources. Durkheim's theoretical insights into the binding force of shared beliefs are applied comparatively to demonstrate how Sankardev's devotional practices produced a collective vibration that functioned as both spiritual devotion and a form of psychosocial healing. The rhythmic chanting of God's name, accompanied by instruments such as the khol and nagara, is interpreted not only as an expression of bhakti but also as an indigenous form of sound therapy that harmonizes the body and mind.

The findings suggest that Sankardev's movement exemplifies the dynamic intersection of religion, culture, and psychology. His model of collective devotion continues to resonate in contemporary contexts, aligning with global discourses on community well-being, intangible heritage, and holistic education. The paper concludes that Sankardev's vision remains a relevant and enduring paradigm of unity, cultural resilience, and inner healing.

Keys words: Sankardev, collective consciousness, Neo-Vaishnavism, Namghar, cultural resilience.

Introduction

Srimanta Sankardev, one of the great Vaisnavite saints of Assam, was born in 1449 at Alipukhuri gaon near Nagaon, during a time of social and political unrest. He tried to bring society into one thread, balancing class and community differences through Saran Dharma. For him the path was simple yet deep — “Eka Dev, Eka Sev” — one God, one service (Eak bine nai kewe).

His life and teachings gave society a new direction. It was not an easy path, but through his vision, he created a culture where people stood together in unity. His transformation was not just religious but also humane, filled with meditation, resilience, moral values, and a sense of collective belonging. Through Nam-Prasang, dance, drama, and music, he created a cultural foundation where healing, joy, and devotion came together. The clapping of hands, the beating of nagara and khol, and the chanting of

God's name acted like sound healing, uplifting both body and mind.

A popular chant of Sankardev still echoes in the Namghars:

* "Hari Rama Rama Krishna Krishna Rama Rama Hari Hari"

This repetitive rhythm is not just devotion, but also an ancient form of sound healing that calms the restless mind and awakens inner peace.

This paper will explore how Sankardev's teachings can be understood in light of Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness and how they connect with spiritual traditions around the world.

Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this paper is to understand Śrīmanta Śāṅkaradeva's teachings in the light of Émile Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness.

The objectives are:

1. To show how Sankardev's philosophy created unity, healing, and social balance.
2. To connect his practices of Naam-Prasanga, dance, music, and drama with the idea of collective healing of mind and body.
3. To study the relation between collective consciousness in Indian spirituality and Durkheim's theory.
4. To highlight the humane and cultural values that Sankardev gave to Assamese society

Methodology

This paper is based on descriptive and analytical methods. The study uses:

Primary experience – my own visit to a Namghar and participation in Naam-Kirtan.

Secondary sources – books and writings on Sankardev, Assamese culture, and Durkheim's sociology.

Comparative approach – looking at collective consciousness in both Indian spirituality and Durkheim's theory, and then relating it to Sankardev's teachings.

Durkheim and Collective Consciousness

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) was one of the great founder French sociologists. He used the term collective consciousness in his work to describe the shared beliefs, values, and norms that unify members of a society. This collective consciousness creates social cohesion and guides individuals on what is acceptable behaviour within their society. Durkheim discussed this theory in several books including *The Division of Labour in Society* and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

Collective Consciousness and Indian Spiritual Tradition

In Indian spirituality we also find collective consciousness among all people, through which the consciousness of mind can be said as a reflection of a universal awareness or soul. It reflects the idea that our mind and body are bound into a link — the soul makes it tied to a deeper wave which is beyond just our physical body.

As Sankardev himself wrote in his borgeet:

* "Man re, Hari charana smarāṇa karo..."

(O mind, remember always the feet of Hari.)

This simple call brings the restless mind into harmony with the divine, showing how individual consciousness merges into collective devotion.

Sankardev's Teaching and Learning

Sankardev taught in the simplest way, creating a common platform that bound all together. He used

stories, songs, drama, dance, and nature to help people live in a better way so that all could absorb from nature. His teaching was all about the acquisition of harmonised social balance, moral and ethical values, and spiritual consciousness, making learning enjoyable and understandable.

The satra–Namghar system remains relevant as a model of community space where people can gather, share and heal together. In contrast to the modern world’s increasing individualism these spaces demonstrate the power of togetherness and shared spiritual energy. Here again Durkheim’s insight that collective practice generates a higher social energy becomes meaningful when applied to Sankardev’s movement.

Globally too, his ideas resonate with practices like collective prayers, yoga communities, and interfaith spiritual movements that emphasize unity, compassion, and inner calm. As Jung would suggest, such collective practices not only address surface-level emotions but also awaken archetypal patterns of unity and healing that lie deep in the human psyche.

A Visit to Nilachalpur Namghar

When I entered the Namghar of Nilachalpur, established in 1977, I noticed that the outer condition is not so good. The wall structure bore the marks of time, yet inside it was totally amazing. The inner side was so clean, serene and filled with a unique purity that immediately struck my eyes. It reminds me that the true strength of a Namghar does not lie in its outer form, but in the living devotion it carries within.

As I sat there I saw women gathered together clapping and chanting:

* “Hare Rama, Hare Krishna, Hari Rama Krishna...”

The sound rose in waves filling the space with sacred vibrations that bound everyone into one. This was the essence of Nam-Prasang — where voices merge and individual barriers dissolve into harmony.

The presence of women was especially powerful: their voices and rhythms were not just prayers but also the heartbeat of culture, keeping alive Sankardev’s dream and passing it to the younger generation. Modern science may call it sound therapy or group synchronisation, but for us it is bhakti — a healing energy that unites body, mind, and spirit.

When prasad was shared it carried the message of equality. Everyone received it equally — rich and poor, young and old, men or women — reminding us that before Krishna all are one. The Namghar is more than a prayer hall; it is a community institute, a living classroom of values. Through borgeet, bhaona and Nam-Prasang it teaches humanity, compassion and values. It is also the centre of our intangible heritage where art, music and devotion blend as one.

In the vibration and voice of the devotees I felt Krishna within me — not far but near, awakening my inner energy and reminding me that strength comes from togetherness. This was the inner glory that Sankardev wanted every soul to realize.

Contemporary Relevance

Today our educational institutions sometimes struggle to bind themselves with community values. The National Education Policy speaks about holistic development and value-based learning. But the Namghar has lived this model for centuries. If our schools and colleges can bring the spirit of Namghar into education, students will grow not only intellectually but also emotionally and spiritually, rooted in culture and unity.

After many years of service I feel blessed to have witnessed how these collective vibrations continue to act as torchbearers. In modern materialistic life, where people search for meaning but often find emptiness, the Namghar still provides belonging, vitality and inner peace. For the younger generation, coming to the Namghar can counteract negativity, instill positivity and give them cultural grounding.

As Sankardev reminded us

* “Eka deva, eka seva, eka bine nai kewe...”

(One God, one service, there is no other way.)

This eternal message guides us to live in unity and devotion

Conclusion

Srimanta Sankardev's teachings remain a living source of unity, healing, and collective consciousness. Through Naam-Prasang, music, dance, and drama, he offered Assamese society a spiritual and psychological foundation that continues to heal minds and bodies. Viewed through Durkheim's theory, these practices show how shared rituals generate higher energy, social cohesion, and individual peace.

In today's fragmented world, the Namghar continues to serve as a beacon of collective belonging, intangible heritage, and cultural strength. If preserved and revived, it can guide future generations towards harmony, compassion, and inner fulfilment — the very essence of Sankardev's vision.

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Nilachalpur Namghar



