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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### TEACHINGS OF ŚAÑKARADEVA AND NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN THE LIGHT OF ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY

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#### Abstract

Śaṅkaradeva was not only a religious leader or social reformer but also the finest educationist, history has ever produced. In his efforts to reform medieval Assamese society and to remove social evils like caste-class distinction, gender inequality, religious exploitation, animal-human sacrifices in the name of religion etc, he took the responsibility of educating the illiterate mass of the north-eastern region of India then known as Asama, Kāmarūpa and Behāra. He knew that education is one of the best tools to fight the social evils and he used it as an equaliser against social hierarchy. He already earned fame as a skilled carpenter, weaver, instrument maker, painter, singer, actor, poet, litterateur, and an expert in the field of agriculture. Ethics constituted the main component of His teaching. His system of education catered to the aim of all round development of the individual as well as the society. Thus, He stood as a teacher of the entire society. He helped the people acquire knowledge of the scriptures as well as of behavioural science. As a means of generating income and as an expression of his art, Śaṅkaradeva taught the masses how to develop skills and also imparted vocational education. It's interesting to note that the current educational system places a strong emphasis on vocational training and skill development. This paper tries to find out the educational components of Śaṅkaradeva's Neo-Vaiṣṇavism and how they compare to National Education Policy 2020, particularly in terms of skill development initiatives.

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#### Introduction:-

Śaṅkaradeva was a brilliant educationist in addition to being a religious leader. He was aware that the only way to combat social ills and inequality in all its manifestations is through education. He believed that the greatest equaliser against social hierarchy was education. He assisted the populace in learning about behavioural science and the scriptures. His lectures were always replete with suggestions for the perfect way of living. . There were appeals to give up their aggressive nature. He urged everyone to avoid evil. The primary focus of his instruction was ethics. People were also cautioned against pride. He thus assumed the role of a society-wide teacher. He promoted living a disciplined life as well.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, education is important, but skill is most important, and it becomes the demand of time. Today, skill-based education is not a choice for India but a necessity, as we live in an era of unprecedented transformation.

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The demand for skilled professionals is quite high in comparison to skilled individuals. Schools must put more focus on skill-based learning along with academic education because it brings positive effects into learners's lives. The new educational policy emphasises practical, hands-on skilling rather than classroom-based learning, which Śaṅkaradeva advocated five hundred years ago.

**Benefits Of Skill Development:**

1. The introduction of skill development programs and skill-based education for the students will help them prepare for the future and also employability-skills.
2. Introducing skill-based training will help weak students to be academically strong.
3. Skill development programs will help to identify and develop the talent of the students.
4. Introducing skill development and skill based education for the students will help them to get an understanding of different career options.

**Objectives:-**

1. To comprehend the educational elements of Śaṅkaradeva's Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, especially the vocational one in the light of skill-based education promoted by the National Education Policy 2020.
2. To determine the relevance of teachings of Śaṅkaradeva in the present context and to comprehend how they can assist us in addressing the pressing issue of unemployment.

**Methodology:-**

This is chiefly a theoretical research paper based on secondary sources of data. The pertinent data have been gathered from different books, research papers, articles published in journals, magazines, dissertation, thesis etc. For analysing the collected data, the descriptive method has been adopted.

**Discussion:-**

At the time of Śaṅkaradeva, there had been no attempt to universalize primary education. As a result, the common people remained ignorant and uncultured. Education was a privilege available only to the upper class of society. Śaṅkaradeva and his followers propagated knowledge and wisdom through songs, plays, prayers, and philosophical writings. The teaching of Śaṅkaradeva was unique in several aspects. He derived the principles of education after much contemplation and offered a systematic line of instruction in his discipline. The educational ideas of Śaṅkaradeva in the broad aspect of education, that is regarding aims of education, method of teaching, curriculum of education, teacher and disciple, are the most relevant in the 21st century. Śaṅkaradeva wants to exalt human personalities from human to moral human beings. Education should help the individual adopt that perfect pattern. Śaṅkaradeva imparted the universalization of education because all human beings are equally the children of God. Humans should change and modify their physical environment according to their needs and purposes through their creative skills. Through this aim, Śaṅkaradeva wanted to develop the innate and creative powers of individuals. Śaṅkaradeva also emphasised that each child should enter into the cultural heritage of mankind, which is free from the limitations of the material environment, according to the best of his capacity, since man himself is the creator of the cultural environment. Śaṅkaradeva supported the language development. He used three languages in his writings, i.e., Sanskrit, Brajāwali and Assamese, so that local people could understand.

**Śaṅkaradeva and Aims of Education**

The philosophy and the socioeconomic, political, and religious demands of modern society determine the educational objectives. There is no set goal for education. The principles of life that Śaṅkaradeva imparted were derived from the social structure and religious doctrine of the day, which mirror the objectives of education. Put another way, the goals of education ought to be the realisation of the ultimate self and the removal of Maya, or ignorance. The aims of education of Śaṅkaradeva were based on universality, moral and spiritual, vocational, all round development etc.

**Śaṅkaradeva's Views Regarding Curriculum Of Education**

Śaṅkaradeva and his followers propagated knowledge and wisdom through songs, plays, prayers, and philosophical writings. Undoubtedly, these songs, plays, dramas, and scriptures contained a major portion of the 'course materials' prevalent in the then residential schools called 'to'. The teachers of these schools taught mostly the religious scriptures like the Vedas, Purānas, Geetā, the two epics, etc. Śaṅkaradeva was able to strengthen the Vaiṣṇava movement by comprehending the substance of all the scriptures. The primary goal of the curriculum is education,

according to the Bhāgavat Gītā. There was no room for idol worship in his curriculum. He also added "Health Science" instruction to the curriculum. "Teacher and student centric curriculum" is combined in his curriculum. Democratic ideals were reflected in his curriculum. For everyone, it was the same regardless of economic status, race, religion, or caste. Tantra Mantra was not included in the curriculum by him.

Thus, the essence of this curriculum was very much present in the writings of Śaṅkaradeva. So when his plays were enacted, when his songs were sung, and when his hymns were chanted, people received the same knowledge that one received in the then-residential schools. But there was more in the teaching of Śaṅkaradeva than what those schools used to teach. For instance, the value education imparted by him remains a crucial ingredient in modern education as well. The saint taught people by embodying his teaching in himself, not merely by uttering it. He was a personification of his own ideology.

Curriculum should be addressed from the domain of ideas and ideals. Śaṅkaradeva gave preference to the experience of the whole human race.

1. For aesthetic and moral development, Śaṅkaradeva included fine arts, dramas, poetry, ethics in the curriculum.
2. Śaṅkaradeva also gave preference on different types of skill development and physical activities, dance, gymnastics etc in the curriculum for the physical as well as mental developments of the disciples.

### Śaṅkaradeva and Teaching Method

Śaṅkaradeva's teaching system is particularly influenced by idealistic philosophy. He thought that the teacher should serve as an amplifier for information and provide the student with subject-matter expertise. A "questioning" system was also present. In this regard, his principal disciple, Mādhavadeva, was a trailblazer. Śaṅkaradeva created the tol method of education in the sattrā and nāmghar, where students were given sāñci pāt, tulā pāt, pen, ink and other materials for reading and writing. Institutions such as nāmghar and sattrā consequently emerged as the primary hubs for religious, spiritual, and ethical practices. Using the lecture format, he gave the students an explanation of the meaning and gave them the purpose and actual information. He also mentioned "pilgrimage" as a teaching strategy. This approach helped him personally. Even in the current era of science and technology, field studies and educational tours are used as teaching methods in schools, colleges, and universities. This approach, found in extracurricular activities, bears some resemblance to naturalistic philosophy. Other than the textbook nature, the naturalist ignored all other textbooks. The real, timeless, comprehensive knowledge comes from studying nature. Travelling can provide true knowledge with a profound psychological component, as the proverb "He who travels to various countries learns various things" suggests. Although he did not emphasise imitation of those who were ignorant of a subject, he also employed "imitation" as a teaching strategy. His teaching strategies included the use of "audio-visual aids." The use of "drama" or "bhaona," for instance, made it easier to complete this task swiftly, organically, and with less effort. Consequently, he used a "democratic" and "psychological" teaching style.

From the reading of different Carit Puthi (hagiographies), it could be understood that Śaṅkaradeva used various teaching techniques in educating the people, and they are the lecture method, discussion method, questioning method, listening method, and activities method. These methods are now appreciated and adopted by the modern educators of the 21st century. Śaṅkaradeva introduced the play-way method of teaching, which is followed by the modern educationists of the 21st century. The introduction of the plays "Añkiyā Nāt" and "Satriyā" made the teaching and learning situation easier.

He was a global pioneer in adult education programs. His plays, discourses, and prayer meetings were always full of people. People of all age groups, including old ones and ladies, invariably attended these. The main message conveyed to all and sundry was that there was no intrinsic difference between man and man, all being expositions of the same God.

Śaṅkaradeva's educational programmes were not restricted to religious aspects only. Despite the fact that the cultural tools adopted by him were seeped in the love of God, there were many secular tools in his dance, music, art and craft. He imparted these mainly to his disciples; but gradually those knowledge were passed on to the people at large. He took up the medium of art and culture and trained people in those. In this respect he went beyond the then residential schools which remained confined to theological teachings.

Śaṅkaradeva imparted knowledge of vocational education, i.e., art, craft, drawing, and painting, which is most important in the modern educational system of the 21st century. He laid the foundation for practical teaching and

work experience introduced in our modern educational system. Śaṅkaradeva laid the foundation of practical teaching and work experience introduced in our modern education. He was a master of his craft. He supervised the manufacturing of musical instruments. As well as other accessories used by his disciples in the rendering of his songs under his guidance. He had also been in charge of one hundred weaver families. He helped those people increase their productivity and income. He was an expert costume designer too. All the costumes for his plays were designed by himself. Over time, an institutional arrangement came up within the 'Than' to impart all these skills to the new entrants for earning their livelihood through self-employment. Śaṅkaradeva could understand that without food security, no one can lead an ideal lifestyle. Nothing is significant before starvation. Good things can happen when the stomach is full. Therefore, He showed His devotees the way of income and trained them in these professions as well. He trained in different economic activities like handicraft, agriculture, weaving, etc. There are many instances mentioned in Carit Puthi where he trained weavers to increase production and the quality of weaving. He always inspired them to continue professional activities like farming with spiritual activities side by side. He asked them not to depend on others and to be self-sufficient. He denied them to go for begging.

The National Education Policy 2020, also put emphasis on vocational training, communication development and skilled development programs for students, like Śaṅkaradeva did.

Śaṅkaradeva also taught them how to remain fit and fine. To keep His devotees healthy and mentally strong Śaṅkaradeva taught them Yoga. The 'Māti Ākharā', a practice related to Satriyā dance was one kind of physical exercise done by the devotees.

The educational system of Śaṅkaradeva was a shining example of inclusive education. He planned for a large scale education programme. In Assam, he was the first to promote mass education. Nobody should be left out of the educational system. Śaṅkaradeva claimed in his magnum opus Kīrtan ghoṣā that all livings are the creation of one God.

Kukura sṛigāla garddabharo ātmā rāma / jāniya savāko pari karibā praṇām // 1823

He believes that no distinction should be made based on caste. Everyone should get an equal opportunity to get education.

The National Education Policy 2020, alike Śaṅkaradeva, focuses on the holistic development of young personalities in their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects, inculcating good manners, discipline, responsibility, and cooperative citizenship, and developing respect for individuals and society. This is how Śaṅkaradeva worked throughout his life. Like Śaṅkaradeva had done, the NEP 2020 also emphasises the universalization of education by making education a basic right. The pillars of NEP 2020, like ethics, accessibility, accountability, equity, quality, skill based education, vocational education, and value-based education, are surrounded around them, which Śaṅkaradeva introduced five hundred years ago.

He lived for his time and for the generations to follow. Thus, he made him live after he died. At the bottom of the conclusion, it will be no wrong to say that the philosophical concepts of Śaṅkaradeva and his associates were the base lines upon which the present areas of Indian educational principles have rested and developed.

### **Conclusion:-**

As a conclusion, we can state that Śaṅkaradeva was a great educationist and philosopher in addition to being a writer, preacher, social reformer, artist, and dramatist. In today's world, the meaning of education, its objectives, its subjects of study, and its methods of instruction all stem from the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva are highly pertinent. The National Education Policy 2020 intends to incorporate proverbs, games, songs, traditional arts, vocational and skill-based education, etc. into children's education. The nāmghar and satra continue to be vital knowledge and skill-education tools in contemporary society.

In today's era and in the future, the basics of academic education will not be sufficient for students to be successful, get a good job, or run a business. Because all these will require some extra skills that they need to learn. Therefore, the education system must change the pattern of teaching and inculcate skill-based education to make students ready for the future. The National Education Policy places a strong emphasis on work happiness, emphasising the significance of education in providing students with the necessary skills.

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