**EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRIMANTA SANKARDEVA**

Srimanta Sankardeva (1449–1568), the saint-scholar, socio-religious reformer, and cultural visionary of Assam, developed an educational approach rooted in the Neo-Vaishnavite (Ek-Sarana-Naam-Dharma) tradition. His ideas about education were not formalised in textbooks, yet they are reflected in his teachings, cultural creations, and institutional practices in *Satras* and *Namghars*.

1. Meaning of Education

* Education, according to Sankardeva, was not merely the acquisition of literacy or worldly skills, but a holistic process of self-purification, moral upliftment, and social harmony.
* It was the means to:
	+ Develop spiritual awareness through devotion (*Bhakti*).
	+ Acquire cultural refinement through literature, art, and music.
	+ Cultivate ethical virtues like compassion, humility, and honesty.
* True education, in his vision, transforms the heart as much as the intellect.

2. Aims of Education

* Moral and Spiritual Aim – To lead individuals towards truth (*Satya*), devotion (*Bhakti*), and righteous living.
* Social Aim – To promote equality, harmony, and collective welfare, removing caste and gender barriers in learning.
* Cultural Aim – To preserve and promote Assamese culture through language, music, drama, and literature.
* Holistic Development Aim – To nurture intellectual, emotional, moral, and aesthetic faculties.
* Practical Aim – To prepare individuals for responsible social roles and community service.

3. Methodology of Education

Sankardeva’s methods were learner-centred, participatory, and experiential:

* Storytelling & Oral Tradition – Narration of epics (*Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavata Purana*) in simple Assamese for moral instruction.
* Arts-Integrated Learning – Use of *Borgeet* (devotional songs), *Ankiya Naat* (plays), and *Bhaona* (theatrical performances) for engaging and value-based education.
* Community Learning – Education in *Namghars* and *Satras* where learners actively participated in prayers, debates, singing, and drama.
* Mother Tongue Medium – Instruction in Assamese for better comprehension and cultural bonding.
* Practical Participation – Involving learners in organising cultural and religious events to develop responsibility and teamwork.

4. Examination & Evaluation

Although no formal written examinations existed, assessment was continuous and based on practical performance and moral conduct:

* Observation Method – Teachers (*Gurus*) observed the learner’s participation in recitation, music, drama, and community activities.
* Oral Recitation – Learners memorised and recited verses, hymns, or stories to demonstrate understanding.
* Practical Demonstration – Acting in *Bhaona*, singing *Borgeet*, or explaining scriptures to assess comprehension and confidence.
* Character-Based Evaluation – A learner’s honesty, discipline, humility, and devotion were considered primary indicators of educational success.

5. Unique Features

* Inclusivity – Open to all regardless of caste, creed, or gender.
* Integration of Culture and Religion – Education as a vehicle for spiritual enlightenment and cultural preservation.
* Lifelong Learning – Not restricted to childhood; adults too participated in learning through community gatherings.
* Moral-Cultural-Intellectual Balance – No separation between academic, moral, and cultural training.

6. Relevance to Modern Education

* Value-Based Education – Counterbalances moral decline in society.
* Mother-Tongue Instruction – Promotes cultural identity and deeper learning.
* Arts Integration – Enhances creativity and emotional intelligence.
* Continuous & Holistic Evaluation – Anticipates today’s *Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE)* approach.

Conclusion:
Srimanta Sankardeva’s educational philosophy stands as a timeless model of integrated learning, where knowledge, virtue, culture, and community life form one harmonious whole. His vision anticipated many modern educational reforms, making it a living legacy for value-based, inclusive, and culturally rooted education.

Core Tenets of Sankardeva’s Educational Philosophy

1. Foundation for Spiritual Education

* Education was a means to attain spiritual enlightenment and moral integrity.
* Emphasized devotion (bhakti) to Vishnu as a path to personal transformation.
* His teachings promoted ethical living, humility, and compassion.

2. Foundation for Moral Development

* Education was a means to attain moral integrity.
* Emphasized devotion (bhakti) to Vishnu as a path to personal transformation.
* His teachings promoted ethical living, humility, and compassion.

3. Cultural Preservation and Literary Contribution

* Sankardeva used literature, drama, music, and dance to educate and inspire.
* Authored works like *Kirtan Ghoxa*, *Bhakti Ratnavali*, and *Ankiya Nat* to convey religious and moral lessons.
* Promoted the Assamese language and culture through his writings and performances2.

3. Social Reform Through Education

* Challenged caste-based discrimination and promoted egalitarian values.
* Established *Namghars* and *Satras*—community centers that served as hubs for learning, spiritual practice, and social cohesion3.
* Education was accessible to all, regardless of social status, fostering inclusivity.

4. Holistic Pedagogy

* Integrated religious teachings with practical knowledge and artistic expression.
* Encouraged experiential learning through drama (*Ankiya Nat*), music (*Borgeet*), and storytelling.
* Focused on character building and community service alongside academic learning.

Educational Significance of Srimanta Sankardeva’s Educational Philosophy

Srimanta Sankardeva (1449–1568), the great saint-scholar, social reformer, and cultural icon of Assam, developed an educational philosophy that blended spirituality, moral values, social harmony, and creative expression. His approach to education was deeply rooted in the Neo-Vaishnavite movement and aimed at transforming both the individual and society.

1. Moral and Ethical Development

* Sankardeva’s teachings were grounded in *Bhakti* (devotion) and the Ek Sarana Naam Dharma, emphasising truth, compassion, humility, and service.
* Education in his model was a means to build character rather than merely impart knowledge.
* His philosophy promoted honesty, non-violence, equality, and self-discipline—values highly relevant to contemporary moral education.

2. Inclusive and Democratic Learning

* He opposed caste-based discrimination and opened the doors of learning to all, including women, marginalised groups, and tribal communities.
* His *Satras* (Vaishnavite monasteries) became centres of universal education, integrating learners regardless of social background.
* This inclusivity anticipated modern concepts of education for social justice.

3. Integration of Art and Culture

* Sankardeva introduced *Borgeet*, *Ankiya Naat* (one-act plays), and *Bhaona* (theatrical performances) as educational tools.
* These artistic forms combined storytelling, music, and drama to educate through entertainment—a precursor to today’s idea of *experiential learning*.
* His creative methods helped transmit moral values and religious philosophy to illiterate masses in an engaging way.

4. Promotion of Vernacular Language

* He used Assamese as the medium of religious and literary expression, enriching it with new vocabulary and literary forms.
* By using the mother tongue in education, he enhanced accessibility and promoted cultural identity—principles now recognised in National Education Policy 2020.

5. Holistic Education

* His curriculum in *Satras* and *Namghars* combined spiritual instruction with music, dance, drama, crafts, and scriptural study.
* This holistic approach developed intellectual, emotional, moral, and aesthetic faculties simultaneously.
* He believed education should prepare a person for both worldly life and spiritual growth.

6. Community-Based Learning

* The *Namghar* served as both a prayer hall and a community learning centre.
* Through collective singing, storytelling, and discussions, the community participated in the educational process—a form of participatory learning.

7. Relevance to Modern Education

* Emphasis on value-based education to address moral decline.
* Use of arts-integrated learning for better retention and emotional engagement.
* Advocacy of inclusive education to bridge social divides.
* Encouragement of local language as a medium of instruction to preserve cultural heritage.

Conclusion:
Srimanta Sankardeva’s educational philosophy holds enduring relevance. By blending spirituality, cultural creativity, inclusivity, and moral instruction, he laid the foundation for an education system that not only imparts knowledge but also builds a just, compassionate, and culturally rich society. In an era of technological advancement and globalisation, his vision serves as a guiding light for integrating moral values and cultural heritage into modern education.