INTRODUCTION

(a) Man from 'Cave to the space'

(b) Sankardeva as an Educator, Philosopher, Idealist and Psychologist.

(c) His needs and deeds to the people.
INTRODUCTION

Education is as old a subject as human being is. The moment man feels that he is a living being, perhaps education started with him. History of man's education cannot go back to a certain date nor can it tell when and in which part of the world it originated. Certainly it came with the first man Adam when he suddenly felt the necessity of a companion and with the first woman Eve when she suddenly felt the eagerness of covering herself, with tree leaves and flowers.

Years pass and changes the climate with the ways of living. These ways of living and the necessities of life from time to time determine what education should be. In fact education has no definition like a term of grammar. We tell about education what it is, what it was or what it ought to be. Accordingly with the change of definitions the aims of education also differ from time to time. There was a time where education aimed at only knowing of God which was "Brahmajnanam" or the knowledge of the supreme being. Once there was a great conflict between the Gods and Giants regarding the divine slokas.

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Siva acted as the judge and distributed the 33 lakhs of slokas between them - the Gods and the Giants had found that still one lakh remained. He again distributed them equally amongst them and kept only two sounds and perhaps the best two for him which were Ra - ma. By reading and reciting these two sounds (akshara dvai, the two letters) he claimed to be educated (a siddha).

A detailed and deep knowledge of Ramanama was the sole aim of education at a time when life was divine and living was spiritual. The ancient princes on the other hand had to learn almost all branches of knowledge - Veda (Vedadhyayana), Military training (astravidya), politics (Rajavidya) and many other trainings relevant to kingship. That was an age when the aim of education for a special class was to make them scholars and philosophers, rulers and fighters all at a time. On the other hand present day education does not aim at making a man only a great philosopher like Aristotle or a noble ruler like Akbar. In this complex world of today he must live as a good and fit democratic citizen. And hence 'Training for citizenship', 'democratic education', 'Education for National Integration' are the slogans of the present day educational objectives.

It is an undoubted truth that at every age, in every place every aim of education is and was to make a
man fit for living a good life. At different parts of the world at different time some great men felt changing necessities of life and living and thereby tried to train the people in that direction and the contemporary supporters called it to be education, rather new education. Jesus Christ, Hazarat Mahammad, Milton Bacon, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Gandhi, Tagore were some of such great men with a direction of education of their own and Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva with his contemporary associates was also another of the line. Like many others Sankardeva and his associates had also their own view of life which was not other than education. In this sense they were also among the great educators of the world and their introduction is no less an important task.

Primarily the great Vaishnavite leaders like Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva, Madhabdeva, Harideva and Damodardeva were not philosophers like Aristotle and educationists like John Dewy. They were never a Gandhi nor a Kothari either. They were religious preachers for propagating a way of devotion to the supreme almighty. They did never tell a word of course, on the term "education" as we mean it today. But they had a high degree of education and a good knowledge of philosophy. Though

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their tongues and pens were silent to speak on education, their life and work can tell a lot on it. However in the field of education at least of that time, these Vaishnavite educators had covered a big area of contribution, sometimes openly and often behind the screen. Though religious preachers and social reformers their basic aim was to educate people in moral education.

As good Psychologists they could understand the mind of the mass of people and very easily they attracted them towards their ideals and their Philosophy of education. Their religion was the religion for all, their language was the language of the common people and their education was the education of the uneducated as well as the scholars. In a word they were the symbols of democracy - men from masses and men for the masses. They accepted the minds of the common people and accordingly used their language, their interests and their abilities in their works and teachings - so that the common people could learn and read. They wrote or spoke to amuse all the educated and uneducated, and their art was also connected with the interest of the mass. A democratic leader and social reformer Sankar-
deva was a complete University in himself, all faculties of learning being in himself. He was the Dean and Faculty of Art and literature, social Science and culture. He was a poet, a dramatist, a prose writer, a translator, an artist, a player, a preacher, a teacher, a reformer and even a strong rebel.

His associates Madhabdeva, Harideva and Damodardeva also thought and taught in his line. They were deeply influenced by the great qualities of the great saint and they accepted him to be their friend and guide.

Equality was of top priority when they thought of their disciples. To them no rich was richer than a poor, no poor was poorer than a rich, but all were men, created by same God. No Brahmin was born with the Veda in his head nor a Kshetriya with swords in hand. To them none was more touchable than another. The principles of abolition of untouchability took its root five hundred years ago through the teachings of these Vaishnavite leaders and only recently in the twentieth century M.K. Gandhi, the father of the Indian Nation could think of it.
The period covering the 14th and 16th century was a period of outburst in the field of religion and culture in Assam. It was a time when a religious revival was an urgent need. A new type of ideals on the liberal doctrine of Bhakti began to grow in different parts of India.

"dharma sangsthapanarthaya
sambhabami yuge yuge" 1

I will take birth always at a time when it becomes necessary to reestablish 'dharma' or justice in the world.

Everywhere in India a democratic movement against untouchability and caste prejudices was felt to be a must. The Geeta reechoed in the form of Chaitanya in Bengal, Guru Nanak in the Punjab and

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1 Bhagavadgita - Chapt. IV, Jnana Joga, sloka Vol. 8
(Ed. by Anathbandhu Kavya Vyadanta Tirtha) Akshai Library, Calcutta, First Edition (undated)
Sankardeva, Madhabdeva, Harideva and Damodardeva in Assam. Kayasthas by caste Sankardeva and Madhabdeva and Brahmins by caste Harideva and Damodardeva but men by birth, they all dreamt of a new shape in the religious, social cultural and literary life of the people of Assam. Sankardeva started the revolution and his associates made him glitter like the Moon amongst the twinkling stars.

It was a time when the sakta religion strongly occupied a place among the leading men of the Hindu society. Sankardeva's father and forefathers were saktas, his friend and foes were saktas, and even the Ahom kings were perfectly sakta devotees at that time. He met people who were saktas, he argued with people who defended saktism and he had to be a pupil of the great scholar Mahendra Kandali who was also a worshipper of sakti (Devi). So there was no atmosphere in the soil to sow the seed of Vaishnavism safely and certainly. His associates also had to suffer the fates of pains of failures on many occasions.
On the other hand the political air of Assam at Sankardeva's time was not peaceful. At that time Assam (Asom) was politically divided into a number of states under kings and tribes. The eastern part was under the Chutiyas, the Kacharies ruled the southern side and to the west there was Kamata kingdom which came to be known as Coech Behar under the Koch kings. The rest of the Brahmaputra Valley was under the Ahoms. There existed rule of force both in politics and in religion. During that time of crisis, Sankardeva stood with a commanding force. He accepted the common language of the people for developing the culture, religion and language of Assam. For this he started religious movement leading to manifold expressions in Art and literature.

Of course that was a time when the Koch rulers patronised scholars to translate the Mahabharata and the Puranas. The Ahom kings also encouraged different literary activities including a new type of prose history known as "Buranji". But Sankardeva had to suffer a lot as his ideals were quite strange and unacceptable to the sakta Brahmins. But the saint Sankardeva was the man of the age, an "ațatara" for
a specific purpose, which was the establishment of the supreme ideal of Vaishnavite philosophy - eka sarana nama dhama, a religion on the one alone, the only name of the Almighty. To this "eka sarana" all ages, all castes, all stages and any time and place were freely allowed irrespective of place, time, person and caste of a devotee. He told and taught people on a democratic type of education about humanity, national feeling and untouchability. Thus he made an attempt to introduce Assam to India and whole of India to Assam. There are poets and composers, there are saints and religious preachers, there are musical masters and social reformers, but Sankardeva was the genius in whom all these great qualities were rolled into one. Throughout his life Sankardeva waged a relentless crusade against social evils like untouchability, casteism and religious persecution and taught the lesson of Unity and brotherhood. He also enjoyed the co-operation of his associates in this democratic form of teaching and preaching and could expand his ideals through them to the mass people of the remote corners.

It is not an easy task to sum up Sankardeva and the others of his time - they are the lives of
unique living, they are a literature of wide horizon, they are a culture of unheard origin. And amongst them Sankardeva was the most divine and most boundless. The romantic poet Jatindra Nath Duwara dared not attempt to write the endless biography of the saint Sankardeva

"tomar jibani dev likhe
Ene sadhya kar,
Gotei Asom juri bistrita
Jibani jar." ¹

- who can write thy story, 0 great saint?
Thou art here and there and everywhere in the soil and air of Assam. The same Sankardeva was here, the same Sankara was there rather he is still everywhere from Art to work, from Education to Culture.

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1. "Sankardev", a poem,
"Tahito Sankara, ahito Sankar"  
- Sankara is here, Sankara is there -

He was among the Garos and Mikirs, among the Nagas and Bhutiyas, and also among the Ahoms and Brahmins with Harinama as his chief ism. He conquered the sky and air with the Harinama, the sacred utering of the name of the supreme -

"Akashat Harinam Batahat Harinam Harinam Sishur Mukhat" 2

- In the sky there is the Harinam, in the air there is the Harinam, and amongst the children there is the Harinam. In short he was not a mortal but a God - all the great and divine qualities being

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2 Barpeta, a poem, by Sailadhar Rajkhowa, Madhyamik Asomiya Kabita Chayan, (SEBA) 1983, pp. 121
prevailed in him. The colour and power, the work and manner, the life and lot rather all of God were inheri-
ted by the great saint — "Jakeri nahike upama" 1
with whom none can be compared. There are concrete and interesting examples of beauties that Srimanta Sankardeva was really strong and beautiful. He was at a time a poet, a dramatist, he was an artist, a musician, he was a religious preacher, a revolutionist, he was a social reformer and a scholar with a complete long human life of 120 years. He lived a life of purity and sacrifices, a life of success and sufferings and a long life of pleasure and work. Besides, he encouraged his associates to be competent with him by giving them some of his responsibilities of preaching and accordingly he talked and sat and ate with them as friends and family members.

To introduce Sankardeva and his other contemporary associates as educators is an attempt for a detailed study on their life and living and on their

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1 Guru Bhatima, by Madhabdeva - (Ed) Nam Prasanga Pranali
Asomi Prakash, 1989, pp 82.
works and activities. Unfortunately enough they had to suffer throughout their life for their great truth and idealism. Like Hazarat Mahammad, Jesus Christ, Galileo and Socrates they had also to suffer from troubles and anxieties for the reason that they had an opinion which was going to be accepted by all the people at that time as the only way of living a good life. They had to shift from one place to another seeking for safety and security not of their own lives but of their ideals, pens and papers. The relevant chapters of their lives and activities will show how boldly and patiently they had to struggle for life, suffer from obstacles and wait for success. But they could do all these because they were meant for this purpose particularly.