

**GOVERNOR'S SECRETARIAT
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
ITANAGAR**

PRESS RELEASE

The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh Shri JP Rajkhowa delivered a special lecture on 'Sankaradeva in the Koch Kingdom' at the Tezpur University, Tezpur, Assam on 23rd September 2015. The lecture was organised by the Centre for Assamese Studies, Tezpur University on the 567th birth Anniversary of reverent Saint of Undivided Assam, Srimanta Sankaradeva.

Speaking on the occasion, the Governor said that Srimanta Sankaradeva was one of the greatest Saints of Medieval India, who has left his mark in the history of mankind, as one of the most versatile legendary personalities of all times. He played the role of a Saviour of humanity, more particularly, in the eastern parts of Bharat Varsha-the vast North Eastern Region, known as Asama-Kamrupa-Kamata of the 15th and the 16th centuries, which comprised all the North Eastern States / provinces and Gaur-desa, which included the undivided Bengal and parts of Bihar.

The Governor, who has authored two well acclaimed books, one on Koch Generalissimo Chilarai and the other on Saint Sankaradeva, said that Sankaradeva immensely contributed towards composite Assamese literature. Sankaradeva's times are regarded as the 'Golden Age' of Assamese Literature, also popularly called 'Sankari Renaissance', in the same light the 'European Renaissance', is described in history. Sankaradeva produced a huge quantity of vernacular literature in Assamese, Prakit and Brajavali, and translated many Sanskrit scriptures into Assamese for the benefit of the common man. Sankaradeva's literary output is considerable, and consists of quite a wide variety: compositions in Assamese, Assamese-Brajabuli and Sanskrit: prose, verse and poetical prose; translations or adaptations, compilations from different texts, and lyrical effusion; songs and lyrics, longer narratives and a doctrinal treatise. Several typical forms could also be marked out among Sankara's literary works in Assamese: lyrics (e.g., Bargita (Noble Psalms) and Bhatima or hymns); choral songs (Kirtana-ghosa), which are objective in purpose; longer narratives or 'episodes' (Upakhyana) (e.g., Hariscandra-Upakhyana, Rukmini-harana-kavya); and Dramas (Anka or Nata).

The Governor, while highlighting the literary expertise of the Saint said that as a playwright, he wrote 'Cihna-yatra' depicting the seven 'Vaikunthas' in 1468 AD. Sankaradeva staged it through paintings, music and illumination to the delight of thousands of spectators, Sankaradeva playing the role of 'sutradhara' or linkman (between the actors and the audience). This work makes Sankaradeva a 'modern day' pioneer playwright of the world, which in fact preceded Shakespeare by more than a century. This fact is rarely known to most people in India, not to mention the outside world.

The Governor said that Sankaradeva was a master craftsman, an authority as a painter, designer and weaver, which was magnificently illustrated by his personal designing and on the job supervision' of the weaving work of the legendary Vrindavani Bastra, portraying the early life of sri Krishna at Vrindaban. It established him as an artist 'non pareil' of all times. The Bastra designed and woven in silk was 180 ft in length and 9 0 ft

in breadth and it took 60 men to carry. Presently, the Governor informed that, portions of the Bastra are found preserved in British Museum & Albert Museum (London), Musee Guimet, Paris and Virginia Museum of fine Arts in Richmond (USA), Philadelphia Museum of Arts (USA), unfortunately though, not a single piece is found in any museum of India. This extraordinary piece of work is also illustrative of Sankardeva's role, as a keen promoter of cottage industry, with unique attention to handloom weaving and designing.

Giving a vivid description of the time when Sankardeva was born, the Governor said that at the time of his birth, the people were following different religious faiths like extreme form of Saktism, Saivism, a debased form of Buddhism and many animistic faiths, as also demeaning practices and Tantric rituals, inclusive of human sacrifices at many temples. The moral forces of society were fully exhausted when Sankardeva commenced his mission. Sankara was more a religious ideologist and preacher than a litterateur as such. In order to educate the people in the core of his religion, and to attract the masses to his fold, Sankardeva introduced certain major innovations, which were his own. These are the 'Nama-ghar' or community prayer hall, several musical instruments, the Anka or One Act Play, the Bar-git or the 'Noble Psalm', the Bhaona or the Staging of his plays, 'bhaoria' or the actors, different masks (mukha) for different characters of the 'ankas', costumes of gods, kings, demons, warriors, jesters; 'alankar' or imitation ornaments of different kinds etc. He introduced different colour, using all indigenous raw material, i.e. hengul, haital, kajal, bali-chanda or silver dust etc. for the make-up of the players.

The Governor said that another unique gift of Sankardeva is the 'Sattrā' institution, which he started at Bardowa, by establishing, what he called a Than (monastery). The Sathras served as spiritual, educational, cultural and social centres for upliftment of humanity all people belonging to different racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious faiths.

Well read and highly acclaimed Assamese scholar Shri Rajkhowa said that it was in 1546 AD, when Sankardeva was 97 years old, that he entered the Koch kingdom from Ahom Kingdom. The two incidents, the beheading of his son-in-law by the Ahom King Gargaiyan on the plea of failing to hold an elephant during 'Kheda' operation, and the continued hostility of the priestly class embittered and hurt his feelings and Sankardeva decided to leave Dhuwahat or Dhuyahati near Majuli, then in the Ahom kingdom. He had heard that the Koch King Nara Narayana of Western Kamrupa, not only as a virtuous monarch, but also as a poet and scholar. Incidentally, this was the period, when Nara Narayana-Chilarai invaded Eastern Assam (Ahom kingdom) in 1546 A.D.

It was well-known that the Koch Kings made huge contribution to Assam and North East Region. 640 km Gohain Komal Ali, presently NH 52 was constructed from Koch Behar to Narayanpur. Renowned Kamakhya Temple was rebuilt, veterinary hospital set up and had built up a naval force with 1000 bachari or war boat each carrying 60 to 100 soldiers during the period. The Koch King Chilarai, thus became the founder of Indian Navy much before Emperor Akbar, who is credited as founder by the mainstream historians.

While in the Koch kingdom, for propagating Ek-saran Naam Dharma or Neo-Vaishnavism, Sankardeva and his close associates produced a large number of

valuable literature. Sankardeva formed the centre as well as ideal of all the literary activities of the age so that, the period is best described as the Age of Sankardeva.

Sankardeva endeavoured to form a casteless society in the spiritual front, it not on the social front by bringing into his fold people belonging to various tribes of the regions, including the famous 'Narottam'-an Arunachali Naga, who was also made a Sattradhikar and also Muslim named Chand Sai or Chan Khan, who was made an 'Atai' in the Sattra hierarchy, apart from several others from the then lower strata of society as 'Atai' and Medhi/ Raj Medhi etc. Sankardeva also fought protection and improvement of the neglected womenfolk, envisioned a strong and united India by speaking on the glories of Bharat-varsa and expressing his gratitude to the Almighty for having given him Bharat-varsa as his motherland.

His major contributions to literature were made during his 22 to 25 years stay in the Koch kingdom, which includes 'The Bhagavata tales, Bhagavata –purana, the tale of Rama and lyrics, twenty doctrinal treatise or Ankas mostly centering round Sri Krishna and many drama. Son of Siromani Kusumbar Bhuyan, the then Governor of the principality of 'Bara-Bhuyan', present Central Assam, comprising Marigaon and Nagaon districts, and born to Satyasandhya Devi, the daughter of a powerful Bhuyan landlord, Sankardeva died at a ripe age of 119 years & 11 months at Koch Behar.

The Governor concluded his talk with a hope that youth of the North Eastern region will imbibe the ideals of Sankardeva for development and prosperity of the region and selfless service to the society and unattached devotion to God through 'Dasya Bhakti' as propounded by the Great Master.

Vice Chancellor, Professor Mihir K. Chaudhuri, Prof. R.K. DevGoswami and Prof. P.J. Mahanta, Dean HSS also spoke on the occasion.

Later the Governor, accompanied by First Lady of the State Smt Rita Rajkhowa visited the Centre for Assamese Studies, Tezpur University, which started in 2011. He exhorted the officials to carry out researches on Assamese Literature and Culture and document all findings. He also requested the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor and Registrar of the University to take steps for learning of tribal languages of the North East.

Earlier, during his visit, the Governor and the First Lady interacted with students from Arunachal Pradesh who are pursuing various post graduation courses in the University and expressed happiness at their achieving good successes inspite of many odds. They advised the students to work hard and excel in performance in respective field.

PRO to Governor
Arunachal Pradesh
ITANAGAR, September 24, 2015