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## The Core Management Qualities of Srimanta Sankaradeva: An Brief Analytical Study

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### ABSTRACT

Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449–1568) is widely revered in Assam as the architect of a Neo-Vaishnavite (Ekasarana) renaissance that transformed religious life and catalysed far-reaching social, cultural, literary, and institutional reforms. This paper highlights Sankaradeva's core management qualities—his visionary leadership, institution-building, inclusive social design, strategic communication, talent development, cultural entrepreneurship, and decentralized governance—through an analytical synthesis of historical and contemporary scholarship. The analysis argues that Sankaradeva operationalised a durable model of movement-building by creating scalable institutions (Sattras and Namghars), standardising practices (texts, music, theatre, dance), cultivating successors (notably Madhavdev, etc), and aligning diverse stakeholders (commoners, artisans, monastics, and later royal patrons). These managerial choices enabled continuity and growth of the movement for centuries, with demonstrable impacts on Assamese identity and arts.

**Keywords:** Srimanta Sankaradeva; Ekasarana Dharma; Neo-Vaishnavism, Assam; Sattras; Namghar; movement leadership; cultural entrepreneurship; inclusive institutions; Borgeet.

### 1. Introduction

The fifteenth–sixteenth century Bhakti milieu across the Indian subcontinent produced reformist leaders who combined spiritual message with organisational innovation. In Assam, Srimanta Sankaradeva established Ekasarana Dharma (the Neo-Vaishnavite tradition) and seeded a network of socio-religious institutions—the Sattras (monastic centres) and Namghars (village congregational halls)—that became enduring anchors of community life and Assamese cultural production.

Beyond theology, Sankaradeva's achievement is managerial: he designed systems, codified practices, trained cadres, and built institutions that scaled. This paper analyses those “core management qualities” and the mechanisms by which they enabled reform across social, economic, cultural, literary, and leadership domains.

### 2. Literature Review

Three strands of scholarship inform this study:

1. **Historical/cultural accounts** document Sankaradeva's life, works, and arts—Borgeet (devotional songs), Ankia Naat/Bhaona (theatre), and Sattriya dance—linking them to the religious message and the institutional life of Sattras.
2. **Institutional studies** of Sattras and Namghars examine governance, roles (Sattradhikar, bhakats, etc.), and their civic functions as cultural centres, dispute-resolution fora, and prototypes of decentralised social organisation in rural Assam.
3. **Management/leadership analyses**—a smaller but growing body—explicitly read Sattras as organisational models, highlighting role clarity, value-driven governance, succession, and resilience over centuries.

These bodies converge on a picture of Sankaradeva as a movement builder whose managerial and communicative strategy was as consequential as his theology.

### 3. Objectives

- To identify and articulate the core management qualities demonstrated by Srimanta Sankaradeva.
- To analyse how these qualities enabled the founding, consolidation, and diffusion of the Neo-Vaishnavite (Ekasarana) movement.

- To assess their impacts on Assamese social, cultural, literary, and leadership practices via institutional legacies.

#### 4. Research Methodology

This is a qualitative, analytical study drawing on secondary sources: peer-reviewed articles, theses, reputable encyclopaedias and government cultural portals, and focused monographs or institute pages. Triangulation was applied by cross-checking key claims (e.g., chronology, institutional roles, recognition of art forms, and the functions of Sattras/Namghars) across at least two independent sources wherever possible.

Limitations include uneven scholarly quality across open-access journals and the reliance on historical reconstructions where primary documentation is scarce.

#### 5. Background: Sankaradeva, Ekasarana Dharma, and Institutional Innovations

Sankaradeva (b. 1449 CE at Bardowa/Bordowa in present-day Nagaon) preached Ekasarana—exclusive devotion to one God (Krishna) through *naam-kirtan* and congregational worship. He and his successors consolidated this into durable institutions: **Sattras** (monastic centres headed by a Satradhikar) and **Namghars** (village prayer/community halls).

The institutional footprint was particularly visible in Majuli—one of the world's largest inhabited river islands—where notable Sattras took shape and later benefitted from royal patronage (Ahom and Koch dynasties). Standardised cultural productions—**Borgeet**, **Ankia Naat/Bhaona**, and **Sattriya**—reinforced identity, pedagogy, and cohesion. Sattriya was recognised as a classical dance of India by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 2000, testifying to the long arc of this cultural ecosystem.

#### 6. Analytical Framework: Core Management Qualities

##### 6.1 Visionary, Values-Centric Leadership

Sankaradeva framed a clear, compelling religious value proposition—monotheistic devotion, congregational singing, ethical discipline—expressed in accessible Assamese/Brajavali literary forms (*Kirtan Ghoxa*, translations/adaptations from the *Bhagavata Purana*). He had written numerous literatures for the next generations on his preaching and ideological foundations to carry forward the future years through all the forms of literature.

He engaged in dialogues and debates to other people, made them understand, realise and clear about the new vision. He always lead from the front.

This clarity of doctrine and practice enabled wide adoption and replication.

##### 6.2 Institution-Building and Role Design

He paired message with structure. The **Sattrā–Namghar** system provided:

- a **monastic core** (Sattras) with defined roles (Satradhikar/abbot; senior bhakats; novices), rules, and training;
- a **community interface** (Namghars) for daily worship, meetings, and social coordination—functioning historically as cultural centres and proto-panchayat spaces.

Scholars of management have noted that the Sattrā model blends leader-centred, follower-centred, and community-centred logics, which is rare yet effective for long-duration organisations.

##### 6.3 Decentralisation and Network Scaling

By proliferating Sattras and Namghars, the movement adopted a **federated network** structure. Authority was normatively central (shared doctrine and texts) but operationally local (each Sattrā/Namghar managing daily affairs). This decentralisation facilitated resilience and geographic spread across the Brahmaputra valley.

##### 6.4 Inclusive Social Design and Change Management

Ekasarana initiation practices and congregational worship lowered ritual barriers and welcomed diverse communities, reducing caste rigidity relative to contemporaneous Brahmanical orthodoxy. This shift was strategic as well as crucial. Accounts emphasise initiation across castes—and even inclusion of Muslims—reflecting a consciously **inclusive onboarding** strategy for the movement. This inclusion, together with vernacular liturgy and participatory arts, helped embed the religion in everyday social life.

### 6.5 Strategic Communication: Language, Music, Theatre

Communication is the most important quality of a manager. Srimanta Sankaradeva leveraged **multi-modal communication**—poetry, music (*Borgeet*), theatre (Ankia Naat/Bhaona), visual arts, and didactic texts—to teach doctrine, delight audiences, and train cadres. These forms standardised content, ensured repeatability, and made learning socially interactive.

### 6.6 Talent Development and Succession Planning

A hallmark of robust organisations is **leadership pipeline development**. Sankaradeva mentored **Madhavdev**, who became the seminal successor and author of *Naam Ghoxa*, further codifying practice. This **codification and succession** ensured continuity after the founder's death.

### 6.7 Stakeholder Alignment and Resource Mobilisation

The movement navigated shifting political terrains, at times facing opposition, at other times obtaining **patronage** (notably from Koch and later Ahom rulers in certain periods), which facilitated institutional consolidation (e.g., the royal Sattras). While details vary by site and era, the broader pattern demonstrates **stakeholder mapping**, risk mitigation, and alliance-building to secure land, labour (paiks), and legitimacy.

### 6.8 Cultural Entrepreneurship and Identity Formation

By creating new, high-prestige cultural products that were reproducible (scripts, melodies, choreographies), Srimanta Sankaradeva effectively **entrepreneurialised culture**—turning arts into cohesive, identity-bearing practices that reinforced the movement's values and brand. Sattriya's modern recognition as a classical form underscores the durability of these design choices.

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## 7. Analysis: Cross-Domain Impacts

### 7.1 Social and Economic

- **Community governance:** Namghars functioned historically as deliberative spaces and informal dispute-resolution fora, aligning moral authority with community decision-making—an example of **embedded governance**.
- **Human capital and livelihoods:** The Sattra ecosystem nurtured artisanship (mask-making, musical instrument craft, textiles), theatre troupes, and pedagogy, sustaining skills and micro-economies around festivals and performances, especially in Majuli.

### 7.2 Cultural and Literary

- **Literary standardisation:** *Kirtan Ghoxa* (Sankaradeva) and *Naam Ghoxa* (Madhavdev) became canonical congregational songbooks, unifying worship and pedagogy across sites.
- **Performing arts:** Borgeet and Ankia Naat/Bhaona integrated doctrine with aesthetics; Sattriya codified dance vocabulary and repertoire inside Sattras, later recognised nationally (SNA, 2000).

### 7.3 Leadership and Organisational Practice

- **Role clarity:** The Satradhikar's spiritual and administrative authority, supported by senior bhakats and novices, reflects **distributed yet accountable** leadership.
- **Resilience over time:** The Sattra system's longevity (centuries) indicates robust **knowledge management, ritual standardisation, and apprenticeship pipelines**, comparable to enduring monastic orders elsewhere.

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## 8. Findings & Discussion

1. Sankaradeva's **clarity of doctrine**, expressed in accessible language and art, acted as a unifying "operating system."
2. The **Sattra–Namghar architecture** operationalised the vision: a scalable network with local autonomy and shared standards—a classic recipe for diffusion and resilience.
3. **Inclusivity** (relative to context) widened the recruitment base and legitimated the movement among diverse communities.
4. **Codification and succession**—texts, music, choreographies, and grooming of Madhavdev—ensured continuity post-founder.
5. **Stakeholder alliances**, including episodes of royal patronage, anchored institutions geographically and economically.

6. The **cultural entrepreneurship** of Borgeet, Bhaona, and Sattriya created sticky, identity-forming practices that doubled as training and community-building tools.

Together, these core qualities illuminate Sankaradeva not only as a saint-scholar but as an exemplary **movement manager** whose design choices remain instructive for institution-builders.

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## 9. Conclusion

Srimanta Sankaradeva's lasting impact on Assam emerges from a synthesis of spiritual message and managerial acumen. Visionary leadership, inclusive onboarding, federated institutions, standardised cultural-pedagogic media, leadership pipelines, and strategic alliances collectively enabled a centuries-long religious-cultural renaissance. The Sattra-Namghar system continues to shape Assamese identity, arts, and communal life, offering a rare South Asian case of **value-driven, decentralised, and culturally embedded management**.

## References

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(Selected, representative sources used in the analysis)

- Assam / Majuli & Sattras (context; early satra foundations and Majuli's role): Encyclopaedia Britannica entries for Assam (People/Government & society).
- Ekasarana Dharma (doctrine; core texts): Overview of Ekasarana, *Kirtan Ghoxa*, *Naam Ghoxa*.
- Sankaradeva life/background (biographical anchors): Curated biography portal.
- Institutional roles & community functions (Sattras/Namghars): IJSSM article; Antrocom appraisal; Namghar heritage study (IJSR); role analyses and historical development papers.
- Management/leadership framing of Satras (organisational models, role-sets, longevity): IJERT "Leadership Lessons from Satra Institutions"; IJSTR "Models of Management and Satra Institutions"; recent ethnographic/academic treatments of sattra structure.
- Cultural productions (Borgeet, Ankia Naat/Bhaona, Sattriya) and national recognition: Indian Culture (GoI) note on Sattriya recognition; SNA portal context; articles on Borgeet; broader cultural overviews.
- Network scaling and royal patronage (pattern-level support for satras): Indian Culture (Majuli); Britannica notes on major Sattras; research noting royal/kingly support and the growth of satras.