



# Naamghar Association of America

## NEWSLETTER

[HTTPS://NAAMGHAR.ORG/](https://naamghar.org/)

Volume 6/Issues 1/ January-March 2023

### MESSAGE FROM THE BOR-MEDHI

**D**ear community members and well-wishers of NAAM,

We are pleased to observe that life is progressing well towards a Covid-free scenario, though it is good to practice safety precautions, particularly in a crowded situation. Let us all follow the prescribed guidelines not only for our own safety but also for the safety of all others around us.

Now coming to this first quarter newsletter of 2023 from NAAM, it is my pleasure to highlight a few key points:

- We are obviously very happy to organize our Sankardeva Janmotsav in 2023 in a physical setting on a performance stage. We are hoping that it would be in a hybrid mode to accommodate those who may not be able to travel. We hope to recover the cost of the venue with a nominal ticket price and your donation to go with it. Given that the Assam Convention – 2023 will be in the PA area in July this year, we were carefully looking at the dates, and arrived at September 30, 2023 as our selected date for the event in the NJ area.
- I wanted to highlight a few key learnings from a lecture delivered at the local Bridgewater Balaji temple recently on Sanatana Dharma. I had similar exposure in an academic setting at the HUA (Hindu Univ of America) a few years back. Some of my thoughts are shared below covering a few key points of Sanatana Dharma.

*Dharma* is same as law or “code of conduct”. *Sanatana* refers to Eternal (or অনাদি অনন্ত, that is “no beginning and no end”). Thus, Sanatana Dharma implies the “Eternal (or the Ancient) Law”. It refers

to the Code of Conduct which holds for all times, for all living beings and for complete social harmony and integration. It is “not a religion”, but a way of life that explores the nature of reality by combining science with spirituality. Its “religious rituals” are part and parcel of this Dharma. Even Sri Rama and Sri Krishna followed the Sanatana Dharma.

**The Sanatana Dharma**  
The '*Sanatana Dharma*' is very old – perhaps older than the most ancient!

- Sanatana = ETERNAL (permanent in nature)
- Dharma = LAW or CODE OF CONDUCT (*dharma*, that which holds, firm)

Sanatana Dharma = the Eternal (or the Ancient) Law  
the code of conduct which holds for all times, for all living beings and for complete social harmony and integration.

**Sanatana Dharma**  
→ Not a religion, but a way of life that explores the nature of reality by combining science and spirituality!

Religion and religious rituals are part and parcel of this Dharma (even Sri Rama and Sri Krishna followed the Sanatana Dharma!)

### A slide from the talk

Sanatana Dharma covers Shruti and Smriti, which give us the Puranas and Itihasas. Itihasas are the great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, which have the three components of history, storytelling and the “code of conduct”.

Culture, Religion and Spirituality are interrelated. Culture encompasses it all. Culture describes the evolution of human beings, their collective knowledge and social heritage. Religion is a part of that culture. Spirituality is the quest to know ourselves and it is not the same as religion; it relates to all humanity

I am including an article as well in this issue comparing the key attributes of Hinduism / Sanatana Dharma with those of Christianity and Judaism, based on written summaries in the diary of my late father, Dr. Nobin C. Bordoloi. I am also trying to include a few key points for comparison

with Islam based on my interview that I conducted in Assam with late Dr. Kutubbudin Ahmed of Jorhat. Would welcome your thoughts and critique on that article.

Finally, we offer our heartiest greetings for the upcoming Rongali Bihu to all of you and your loved ones.

I am looking forward to your feedback and continued co-operation to drive the processes for our Naamghar mission.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Dr. Binoy K. Bordoloi, *Bor Medhi*

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## UPDATE ON FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

- **DONATION TO NAAM FOR TAX BENEFIT:** Consider making NAAM as one of the beneficiaries of your estate planning and/or donate for potential tax benefits for the current tax year (please consult your tax adviser for details).
- ***If your employer matches your donation to a charitable organization (direct or thorough payroll deductions), please add "Naamghar Association of America, Inc." as one the beneficiaries.***
- NAAM is soliciting your donations via its website (<https://naamghar.org/>), NAAM Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/NaamgharAssociationOfAmerica/>), and the "DONATE" button on this page to fund a community Naamghar in North America.

- NAAM is looking forward to an active participation of the community (Assamese diaspora) for realizing a common dream of building a Naamghar in North America. Please use the "DONATE" button below and/or contact Dr. Binoy Bordoloi at [binoy.bordoloi@gmail.com](mailto:binoy.bordoloi@gmail.com) for additional information. Thank you!



Please contribute to NAAM's effort to build a naamghar in North America:



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## RECENT AND UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

### *Srimanta Sankardeva Janmotsava*

NAAM is pleased to announce that we will celebrate the Srimanta Sankardeva Janmotsava Tithi again this year and we invite the community members in the NY/NJ/PA/DE area to join us. Here are the tentative details; additional details will be available in due course of time.

**Date:** September 30th, 2023

**Venue:** to be announced

Please contact NAAM at [naaminfo@naamghar.org](mailto:naaminfo@naamghar.org), if your or your group is interested in performing at the cultural program part of this event. Thank you!



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## FEATURED ARTICLE #1

### **SREEMANTA SANKARDEVA: SAVIOUR OF THE SUBALTERN**

**By Dr. Gitali Saikia**

**Dr.** Sarvapalli Radhakrisnan's famous sayings in "Earth one Family" is: Religious men will be revolutionaries as long as there are errors to be corrected and evils to be overcome. Their ambition would be to remove the greatest burden of man, namely the exploitation of man by man (Broadcast on Kiev Radio, Russia, 26th June, 1956). Religious people must think about those who are helpless, who are always oppressed by the powerful; they must think about the freedom of those downtrodden, *dalit* people, the untouchable, who are the victim of social injustice and discrimination on the basis of religion, class and creed. The great devotee Bhakta Prahlad once said: "*Naitan bisay kripanaan bimumuksho ekah.*" (I don't want to attain freedom alone without thinking about these unfortunate people). Eminent Assamese litterateur Lakshminath Bezbaroa makes a comment in the Introduction to his great work 'Mahapurush Sreemanta Sankardeva and Madhabdeva': Sankardeva went against the tyrannical *Raja* (King) and powerful evil-minded Brahmins and propagated his religion fearlessly at the risk of his life (Bezbaroa, [1914]: 2009), that should be realized by everybody to feel his unselfish fearlessness and piety as well as steadfast believe in God. Both Sree Sankardeva and Sree Madhavdeva gave up their material prosperity and worldly happiness for the common people.

Sankardeva's *ek saran hari namdharma* teaches one to keep unconditional, steadfast believe on one God, i.e. Krishna. Krishna was the son of Daivaki and Basudeva who were tortured and oppressed by King Kangsa. Basudeva Daivaki submitted before King

Kangsa and gave their seven children immediately after their birth to fulfill his cruel desire, i.e., to be killed. Basudeva secretly kept Krishna in Mathura. He was brought up by Nanda Raja. It is also note-worthy that Nanda was the king of cattle-herders. The word Krishna originates from the Sanskrit word 'Kris' meaning 'karsan', 'to plough'. Scholars like Dr. Amalendu Chakrabarty opines that Krishna symbolizes Solar cult (Saura Sanskriti). The sun helps vegetation. It is the source of Krishi (agriculture). So, by establishing Krishna as God, Sree Sankardeva gave emphasis on *krisikarma* and *krishok* (farming and farmer). In an editorial to *Pracya-Prajna*, Vol I, 1996, Dr. Chakrabarty says that propagating bhakti religion across the larger section of the Assamese society, erstwhile enamoured and ridden by ritualistic tantric (*bamanay*) cult, he brought together with the Aryan race of this region all those non-Aryan ethnic races such as Nagas, Bodos, Garos, Kacharis, Khasis etc. and took upon himself the great responsibility of raising and developing them to the spiritual level of solar cult.

Krishna is the Saviour of the poor, the oppressed, the subaltern. The myth of Krishna shows how Lord Krishna killed the oppressors. He killed Kangsa *Raja* (king) and rescued the oppressed *praja* (subjects), including His parents Basudeva- Davaki. The colour of Krishna is also significant. Krishna is *kola* (black), just like hard workers, he is called *kolia*, not so called 'sophisticated' white coloured. Krishna's friends and favourites were also from lower class, viz., Damodar Bipra, the poor



Brahmin, Ankur, Udhava, cattle herders, women of Braja, Kuji, an old lady etc.

The social milieu in which Sankardeva was born and brought up was full of disorder and chaos where common people had no democratic right. They were made silent and submissive by powerful class. “The socio-cultural phenomena, viz., power-cult, feudalistic culture, tantric culture, magical practices, animal sacrifices, even to the extent of human sacrifice, religious materialism, mentality of hunting community—in short, all those religious traditions and customs associated with an inordinate love of power had already eaten up to the core the vitality of the then society, it is against these trends that Sankardeva gave birth to an ideal of love, wisdom, tenderness, compassion, delicate intellectual and ethical perceptions and creativity in spiritual life on the basis of the ancient Krishna –cult of the agro-industrial stage of Indian Civilization” (Chakravarti). Dr. Amalendu Chakravarti again comments, there was in the contemporary social life the worship of power, and the acts of oppression perpetrated by the powerful in society, on the other, in religious life there was the amoral worship of Nature coupled with the horrifying practices, worship of phallic and female genital emblems. Sankardeva preached against all this amoral culture and religion and set devotion “as the highest form of worship”. B.N. Sumitra Bai is right when she comments: “the propounder of ekasarana-hari namdharma brought the message of the religion of ‘love’ to the people, released the soul of the common man from the oppressive burden of sacerdotalism.” and thereby insisted on their “voice”. He again preached the message of eradication of caste system and tried to raise everybody to a true devotee (*bhakta*). Moreover, he emphasized on inculcating virtues and values by each individual. Above all Bhakti Movement gives emphasis on the faith that communion between God and man dependent on the virtues of each

individual. The Vedic Yajna was very ceremonial and needed lots of materials and money. In place of Yajna (Vedic Sacrificial Ceremony), he founded a very scientific religion, a high culture against Saktism which was strongly prevalent at that time. (*harinama bine japa yajna dane sadhiba nopare gati*). Love for every living being, devotion and total surrender to God (Narayana) will surely bring salvation (*Moksha*).

*papora antaka ki kaibo namoka  
namease mokshara sima.*

**(Bhagawat: 5543)**

(Chanting of His name ends sin, and it brings salvation)

During Sree Sankardeva’s time, it was a much rigid caste-ridden society ruled by precepts sanctioned by the Brahman priests. People were held in great fear lest they would be treated as ‘low caste’ (Neog: 2007). In such a backdrop, the great work done by Sankardeva is, no doubt, the eradication of casteism and teaching of equality and fraternity. In this multi-lingual and multi-religious state there have been living people of different castes and creeds; several small and big tribes have been living. Lower class people and the tribes were treated inhumanly. He propagated the ideology of equality and fraternity in connection through his religious philosophy. Instead of advising men he himself practised the ideology. He says:

*Kirat Kachari Khasi Garo Miri  
Javan Kanka Gowal  
Asom muluka Rajaka Turuk  
Kuvacha Mlecha Chandala  
Ano jata nara Krishna bhakatara  
Sangate pabitra hay.*

**(Bhagawata: 1270/1271)**

(In Assam the Rajaka, Kavash, Mlesha, Chandala or the untouchables are created by Lord Krishna, and all will Become holy in the company of the devotees or *bhakta*)

Sree Sankardeva appeared as the Saviour of mankind, or Messiah. The Savior came and

rescued the sufferers. He was able to establish a new social order. He established truth, faith and social justice in the disordered medieval society. In this respect he is a true humanitarian social worker, a distinguished reformer.

He showed everybody in practice how to inculcate equality and fraternity and thereby he tried to uplift the “subaltern”. The term subaltern is used to mean the entire people that is subordinate in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office, or in any other way. In other words, any person and group of inferior rank and station, whether because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. The subaltern is always suppressed and exploited by the king, land-lords, religious authority, rich, elite or those who is any way in power. Govinda, a Garo, Jayhari, a Bhutia, Chand Sai, a member of the minority Muslim were his disciples. What was done by Sankardeva to these aboriginal tribes and subalterns were to give them an identity, a voice, a distinct way of life—a religion. Removing their hesitation they came to take part in social institutions. It is important that he glorified the folk art, folk dance and song through his innovation. His songs and dances were greatly influenced by Assamese folk art: song, kavya, drama, dance etc.. Eminent scholar of Assam Dr. Prahlad Kumar Barua says that music of Cihna -yatra, his first *Ankiya Nat* was modelled on *Ojapali*. *Ojapali* is a kind of Folk dance performed by a group of people, where they act, dance and sing. But Sankardeva innovated the folk form of performance with his genius and introduced new Ragas and the execution of unusual melody –modes like Timira, Meghamandala and Megha Mandali Raga and Bayu Mandali Raga here. Bhima *Bayan*, Lakshman *Bayan* and Bolai *Bayan* helped him in creating these Ragas. It is again to be mentioned that the artists of that performance being mostly the rural people who were liable to omissions and commissions at every step

( Saikia 100). One old lady, Chandari Aai pointed out a mistake done on the portrait of Seven Heavenly Abode (*Sat Baikuntha*) as Sankardeva forgot to draw the picture of the *Kalpataru* tree on the portrait made of *tula-pat* or cotton made paper. Sankardeva requested her to point out the position where he would draw the tree, and she did. Dr. Maheswar Neog comments, the background paintings on paper of the ‘Seven Vaikunthas’, which feature is not encountered in the other dramatic performances of the guru.( 154). The process of giving these people a social status was the greatest work done by Sree Sree Sankardeva.

Sree Sankardeva was a realist, philosopher-preacher who emphasized objectivity in all his work. Dr. Sunity Kr. Chatterji praises him as a saint, religious teacher and social reformer in one. His *ek sarana hari naamdharm* was a reaction against the rigid orthodox medieval society as well as against disharmony and chaos. Sankardeva propagated *ek saran hari namdharm* among the illiterate poor people. His chief purpose was to liberate them from *Abidya* or ignorance, to liberate them from fear and anarchy and to unite them for the uplift of people on the individual as well as in societal level.

He refused royal patronage. He even did not give *Saran* (religious teaching) to kings. Powerful Ahom king wanted to punish him for propagating against prevailing cult. He was able to overcome all the hurdles and created an independent and powerful culture, i.e. a spiritual culture, as well as a very simple religion, i. e. listening and chanting the name and attributes of God, Vishnu-Narayana. In “Ajamil Upakhyān” (Story of Ajamil) in Kirtana, Sree Sankardeva shows how wicked Ajamil at his death bed says the word Narayan. Narayan is the name of his third son. But the messengers of the king of Death, Yamraja, could not carry his soul to Hell. Ajamil got place in Heaven, that means he got Moksha (Salvation).

To convince the people he narrated the story of Ajamil in Ajamilar Upakhyān ( Kirtan) elaborately.

*Brahmanaka dhari jiva baja kori  
Bandhilika hata tuli.*

*Bhaye Ajamile putraka dakila  
Aisa Narayana buli.*

*Marante biprar mukhata suniya  
Harir kirtana bani.*

*Prabhu nama lowe buli khedi aila  
Vishnuduta sari prani.*

**( Kirtana: 177)**

(Holding Brahmana and taking his soul out the messenger of Death was ready for going; in fear the Brahmana called the name of his son Narayana. Listening to Narayana's name the messengers of Vishnu ran towards the Brahmana and chased the Yamduts.)

Universal brotherhood and humanism are the basic needs to be a 'niskam' bhakta(a devotee of God). Again, Sankardeva says of Dasya Bhava (complete surrender to God) to attain happiness in life. Suniti Chatterji says this was certainly a purer and a more spiritual form of religion than what the Sakta cults with their cruelty of bloodshed and the semi-Hinduised animistic religion of the Mongoloid masses could offer.

His oft-quoted message is:

*kukura Srigal gaddarvaro atmaram  
jania sabako koria pranam.*

**( Kirtana:1823)**

(Respect and love even the dogs, foxes, asses, God is within their souls)

Wordsworth's pantheism i.e. presence of God in every element of the world is equal to Sankadeva's preaching of Oneness.

In Kirtan- Ghosa he voices everyone's right:

*nahi bhakotito jati ojati bisar  
Krishna bhakti somoatore adhikar.*

**(Kirtan)**

(There is no difference of upper class or lower class in worshipping God, it is the birth right of all to worship God)

*samasta bhutate byapi aso moi hari  
( Bhagowata)*

(I am present in every element. Behave everything as the part of Vishnu)

The concept of God, the Supreme being, created by Sree Sankardeva is one who is always satisfied with little offerings of bhakta. So, Sankardeva's idea of 'prasad' is also unique. 'Prasad' originated from Sanskrit word, meaning satisfaction. In Bhagawata it is said by Sankardeva:

*jihetu tumi hari bhakatite tusts howa  
etekese nis jati ami.*

*sankaka eria natha tomar mahima mai  
jopo budhi anusare aati.*

**( Bhagawat: 7181)**

(O God, as you are satisfied easily only with devotion ; so, we, the lower-class people offer our devotion to you. Giving up hesitation of mind we steadfastly think of you)

Again Sankardeva says in Prahlad Charitra:

*tapa japoyajna dana bidamvana  
kavala bhaktita tusta hanta Narayana.*

**(Kirtana: 380)**

*nuhi puspa bhala nuhi banaphula  
jadiba nadira jale*

*nuje bhakti kari nomo Krisna buli  
muhuro pada kamala.*

**( Bhagawata: 16112)**

(I don't want any beautiful flower or delicious fruit as offering; I like you pronounce my name with bhakti with sincere devotion and complete surrender to me)



The utterance of the names of Krisna would eliminate fear of mind. Subalterns are always living in fear :

*Biswarupa badati sunio harihaya.  
ehi Narayana nama Kavasha durjaya.*

**(Bhagawat: 5788)**

(Biswarupa said to Harihara that the name of Narayana is the unfailing protector for all)

In Bargeet Sankardeva specially mentions the species of meaner things: *Jata jiva jangama / kita patangama*. that bear the existence of His body. Insects or flies are also the outward appearance of the reality of God. So, never behave them as ‘untouchable’.

In Guru Charita the story of Sati Radhika is narrated. While Sankardeva tried to build the dam of Tembuani, water broke it again and again. Brahmins , dvijas came. They failed At last Sankardeva was invited to solve the problem. He said that one Sati(chaste woman) had to give water upon the dam taking water in a *polo*. Ladies from aristocratic and upper class Brahmin family could not do that. But Radhika , a lower class woman was able to perform what was impossible for high caste women. Tembuani dam was built. Radhika was a Kaibarta woman. Through this deed Sankardeva wanted to establish the importance of lower class people in general and woman in particular. In Patni Prasad, one of his *Ankiya Nats* he expresses the profound devotion of the wives of the *Bipros* (Brahmins). The Brahmins could not realize the greatness and grandeur of God. It was only the woman folk who had detached themselves from worldly objects and went in pursuit of the Supreme Soul. Lord Krisna appeared before them as the ‘sole source solace’ for them.

*nalage bhakotito deva dvija risi haibe  
nalage sambhrita sastra vistara janibe.*

**(Prahlaad Charitra, Kirtan Ghosa: 380)**

(To be a bhakta or a devotee there is no need to be a god, priest, saint or a hermit, no need to have lots of knowledge)

Every common man can pray God by simply chanting His name, by singing Almighty’s greatness. “A conscious reformist he was, Sankardeva simplified the modes of religious practices with great emphasis on ‘bhakti’ (*bhakatita pare dharma nahi samsarata*), which was made accessible even to the lowest in the society by rendering the holy scriptures into the language of the people (Chutia:2006). It is the process of singing His song attentively and feeling His presence within one’s soul. So, the prayer itself is an innovated way which is able to uplift one who practises it wholeheartedly:

*bhai mukhe gowa nam hridaye dhora rupa  
tebese mukhuti paiba kohilo swarupa.*

(O brother, sing the hymn of God and feel His form in your heart, you will attain salvation)

While Sankardeva says about salvation it is not only the emancipation of the body; it is the emancipation from worldly aspirations, material prosperity or all that is evil. This salvation is actually the emancipation from ‘*abidya*’ or ignorance as well as illusion (*maya*). Following Sankardeva, his disciple Madhavdeva says that ‘*muhamati*’ or ignorant human being does not know how to acquire ultimate truth. (*Moi muhamati najano sewa tomar*). (*Namghosa*). Sankardeva established a new democratic social institution in his society i.e. *Namghar* (community prayer hall). The sanctity of this hall arouses spiritual thoughts and respect. *Namghar* is not only the place for *nam-kirtana* , it becomes the common meeting place to maintain social justice, mutual co-operation and fellow feelings as well as sympathy for all. Through *Namghar* and *Namkirtana*, they “have resisted the hegemony of the high castes by using their particular version of” Krishna cult “to voice their claims of



autonomy against Hinduism and high-caste hegemony.”(Heuze,2012: 11) by rejecting idol worship and caste rules strictly observed by high class people, especially by Brahmans.

To give the subaltern a platform to voice their suppressed culture and art Sree Sree Sankardeva led a cultural revolution. He had all the qualities of a great leader. He innovated all the vehicles for individual uplift of people of all castes, creed and tribe through participation, by learning and doing wholeheartedly with devotion. The songs, dramas or *nats* (*bhaona*), musical instruments immediately became popular among them. This saint poet had knowledge, wisdom, experience, power to adapt, to acquire, to feel, to understand and above all, to innovate and to compel them to participate whose influence on Assamese society still lingers more than before.

#### Notes:

1. Subaltern and Subaltern Studies: “Subaltern” was used for the first time by the Italian Marxist writer Antonio Gramsci, to mean “the inferior rank”. ‘**Subaltern**’ was used for the first time by the Italian Marxist writer Antonio Gramsci to mean “the inferior rank” of people in the society. The word combines the Latin terms for “under” (sub) and “other” (alter). Originally the term was used in military hierarchies for subordinates (Gopal, Dr. Abhishek). Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist writer, used it in non-military sense to refer to those people who are outside the established structure of political representation. The term “refers to subordination in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture and was used to signify the centrality of dominant/ dominated relationships in history” (Prakash 1477). Today the term is used to denote any person and group of inferior rank and station, whether because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. The subaltern is always suppressed and exploited by the rich, elite or those who have power.
2. *Prasad*: *Prasad* consists of raw Bengal grams, green grams, banana and some other available raw fruits, eaten after *Nam-kirtana*.
3. *Nat* : A Sanskrit word for drama.
4. *Ankiya Nat*: The Ankiya Nats have largely been developed out of native and indigenous materials, the

influence on it of the Sanskrit drama and dramaturgy is also perceptible to a great extent. Sankardeva himself styled these dramatic compositions *nat* and *natakas* after Sanskrit names. ( Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barua, History of Assamese Literature, p 33). These dramas abound in dialogues, dance and songs. The language used in these plays is Vrajavali, innovated by Sree sree Sankardeva.

5. *Gura Charit or Charit Puthi*: Biography of Sankardeva, written especially by his disciples such as Ramacharan Thakur, Daitari Thakur, Bhusan Dvija, Ramananda Dvija, Baikuntha Dvija. These biographies are based on oral literature and manuscript or *Sasi*.
6. *Polo*: *Polo* is a kind of fishing tool made of bamboo slits. Its top and bottom parts are open.

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## FEATURED ARTICLE #2

### COMPARISON OF BELIEFS IN HINDUISM, CHRISTIANITY, JUDAISM, AND ISLAMISM

By Dr. Binoy K. Bordoloi

This article is divided into two sections as follows:

- Summary of the Essential Elements of Sanatana Dharma (or Hinduism)
- Comparison of Beliefs in Hinduism, Christianity, and Judaism; Islamism is attempted to be included only where adequate information was found

Hinduism, a religion of universal harmony and peace views mankind as one large family. It is concerned with the principles that define the universe, the individual, and God. In Hinduism, there is the eternal pursuit of the purity and true knowledge that are essential to recognizing the brotherhood and oneness of all mankind. Hinduism is a fellowship of all those who believe in the following seven essential doctrines:

- A) Divinity of the Individual Soul
- B) Universal Tolerance and Harmony
- C) Diversity of the Human Mind
- D) Purity of Reasons and Freedom of Thought
- E) Non-violence and Peaceful Co-existence
- F) Reverence of All Forms of Life
- G) Laws of 'Karma' ("As you sow, so you reap")

Hinduism is a terminology that was coined much later and it is synonymous with Sanatana Dharma. *Dharma* is same as law or "code of conduct". *Sanatana* refers to Eternal (or অনন্ত

অনন্ত, that is "no beginning and no end"). Thus, Sanatana Dharma implies the "Eternal (or the Ancient) Law". It refers to the Code of Conduct which holds for all times, for all living beings and for complete social harmony and integration. It is "not a religion", but a way of life that explores the nature of reality by combining science with spirituality. Its "religious rituals" are part and parcel of this Dharma. Even Sri Rama and Sri Krishna followed the Sanatana Dharma.

Sanatana Dharma covers Shruti and Smriti, which give us the Puranas and Itihasas. Itihasas are the great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, which have the three components of history, storytelling and the "code of conduct".

Culture, Religion and Spirituality are interrelated. Culture encompasses it all. Culture describes the evolution of human beings, their collective knowledge and social heritage. Religion is a part of that culture. Spirituality is the quest to know ourselves and it is not the same as religion; it relates to all humanity

Now coming to compare the four leading religious beliefs, a table is prepared highlighting over a dozen key features in each and presented below.

Hinduism is respectful of all religions as shown in *Jnanayoga* (Gita, Chapter -5, Shloka-11). The section on Islamism is not explained below in each of the key areas as there was inadequate information collected from the interview by the author of the article.



## Comparison of Beliefs in Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism (and Islamism where data were found)

Hinduism	Christianity	Judaism	Islamism
<b>Key features in each</b>			
A. Hinduism is the world's oldest surviving religion. It has no human founder, and is beginning-less, as it predates recorded history	A. Christianity was founded by Jesus of Nazareth about 2000 years ago in Israel	A. Judaism, the religion of the Jews, began about 3700 years ago in Israel. The founders were Abraham and Moses.	A. Islam, the religion of the Muslims, began in the 6 <sup>th</sup> century in Arab countries. The founder of Islam is Hazarat Muhammad, 570 years after death of Hazarat Isha
B. Major scriptures are Vedas, Bhagawad Gita, and epics and other Shastras	B. Major scriptures are Bible, Old and New Testament	B. The major scripture is The Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament and Talmud)	B. The main scripture of Islam is The Quran
C. Hinduism has three main denominations: Shaivism, Sakticism and Vaishnavism	C. Christianity has three main denominations: Roman Catholic, Eastern Catholic, and Protestant, which has numerous denominations	C. Judaism has three main denominations: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed	C. Islam has different denominations like Siya, Sunni, Hanifi, Wahibi, Humbli, etc.
<b>Major beliefs : The key points are selected and summarized here from the original writeup</b>			
1. There is only One Supreme being. He is both immanent and transcendent; both the Creator and the Manifest Reality. There is no duality of God and the world, but only unity	1. There is but one God, who reveals Himself as Father, Son and Holy Ghost. God is Creator, but He is distinct from his creation. There is duality of God and the world	1. There is one God, who is incorporeal and transcendent, beyond the limitation of form. God is Creator of the world. There is duality in God and the world	1. There is only one Creator, named "Allah". Allah is the Creator of all human being and the world.
2. There is no beginning or end of the universe. Universe has existed eternally, and only undergoes cycle of creation, preservation and dissolution	2. The world was once created by God, but corrupted by sin. Under a divine scheme, the world moves towards God for final perfection	2. The universe is created by God and will be destroyed by Him. Therefore the universe is not eternal	2. The universe is created by Allah and will be destroyed by Him. The ending of the world will come through "Qiyamat".
3. Each soul is potentially divine. Sin is of the mind and not of the soul. Man commits sin because of the ignorance of his own. The soul is not created by	3. As a result of original sin (Adam's), the human race is spiritually corrupted and alienated	3. None is borne a sinner. Man has two natural impulses – good and evil. He can either follow	3. The soul is created by Allah. The soul disappears after death.

God, but it is a part of God.	from God. Thus, man is a sinner.	God's law or rebel and be influenced by Satan	
4.The ultimate goal is the personal and direct experience of God, which frees the soul from cycle of birth and death	4. The goal is eternal life with God in Heaven, by accepting Christ as Savior and Teacher.	4.The goal of man is obedience to Torah, which can alleviate the plight of man on society.	4. ---
5.Each soul evolves towards union with God by his own efforts. No savior can achieve this for him. No soul would be eternally deprived of the union with God. The soul suffers in the world only until it frees itself from the cycle of birth and death.	5.Salvation is only through the Savior Jesus Christ, that is God's only begotten son. Those who obey God's commands will have eternal life.	5.Man's spiritualization is only possible through adherence to the Torah. God punishes those who rebel against this law.	5. ---
6.The soul incarnates evolving through many births until all its Karmas have been resolved and liberation attained.	6.It is ordained by God. The human subjects die once and after that face the judgment.	6. It is ordained by God that the human beings die once and after that face judgment.	6. ---
7. The soul is not created by God but it is part of God. It suffers in the world due to 'Maya', or cosmic ignorance.	7.The soul is created by an act of God. It suffers in world for original sin.	7.God is creator of soul. As the spirit of God is man, the soul is immortal.	7. ---
8. A spiritually awakened master ("Guru") is essential to realize the Transcendent Absolute, performing the personal discipline, good conduct, purification, self-enquiry, Yoga, and meditation.	8. God has given the revelation in Jesus and the Sacred Scriptures. Prophets, apostles, and Evangelists are empowered by God to guide the individual.	8. No one can intervene in the relationship of man and God, nor can God be represented in any form , nor can any being be worshipped other than one God, Yahovah.	8. ---
9. Hinduism believes that there is no one religion that teaches an exclusive way to salvation. All genuine spiritual paths are valid and all great religions are equally true.	9. Christianity believes that it is the only true religion and the only path to salvation. It believes that the Bible is the only word of God.	9. Judaism believes that God has established a unique spiritual covenant with the Hebrew people. Jews, thus consider themselves a chosen people apart from all other people of the earth.	9. ---
10. The laws of Karma, that is the laws of cause and effect is the divine law of justice by which an	10. Through God's grace and favor, the lost sinners are rescued from the guilt and eternal consequences	10. Proof of God's love come from the obedience to the Torah, which pleases God.	10. ---

individual creates his own destiny through thoughts, words and deeds.	of their evil thoughts, words and deeds.		
11. Hell and heaven are not physical places, nor are they eternal. They only exist in the astral realm, the hell being the lower astral region. Hell and heaven exist in periods of Karmic intensity or suffering, a state of mind in life or between lives.	11. On Judgment Day the physical body of every soul that ever lived will be brought to life. The pure soul will be consigned by God to Heaven to enjoy the everlasting life, and Sinners to Hell, a physical place where the soul suffers eternally.	11. Obeying God's law brings rewards in the future life when the Messiah will come to overthrow evil and reward the righteous in God's kingdom of earth. Thereafter soul enjoys God's presence and love.	11. --- 
12. Upon death the soul enters the astral world and remains there until it re-incarnates in accordance with the Laws of Karma. The soul is born again and again as Karma resolves. God neither judges nor punishes the soul, and as such there is no Judgment Day. Salvation (union with God) is the goal of religious life	12. The soul enters heaven or hell depending on the quality of life. On the Judgment Day, the dead is brought to life again and rewarded or punished with eternal life with God or eternal hell, respectively	12. The soul migrates to heaven or to hell depending on the quality of life. On a certain Judgment Day Messiah appears and dead shall arise to life everlasting	12. The soul enters heaven or hell depending on the quality of work of life and salvation to Allah. On the Judgment day, Israil, the messenger of Allah is appointed to take the soul away at the last minute of death 
13. Hinduism believes that there is neither any intrinsic evil nor any force in the world to oppose God. Man commits evil due cosmic ignorance ('Maya'), or remain separated from God suffering in the world until he attains salvation.	13. There is indeed genuine evil in the world. The evil is embodied in Satan (Devil) who opposes God's will and is the personification of evil, deception and darkness.	13. There is indeed genuine devil in the world. The evil is embodied in Satan leading God's action astray.	13. --- 
14. Proof of God's existence lies in direct communication with Him, through the grace of a Guru, who guides an individual on a spiritual path	14. Jesus is God for the earth and therefore only sure path to salvation. Other religions may offer spiritual insights, but only Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.	14. Moses was God's foremost prophet, delivered the commandments of man's highest laws, revealed to him by God on Mount Sinai	14. Allah is non-visual. Hazarat Muhammad is the last prophet of Allah. Proof of God depends on belief only
15. Worship of God is in the form of a deity (a particular manifestation	15. Worship of God is congregational with simple rituals centering	15. Worship of God is through devotion rituals and prayers centering	15. Worship of Allah is through "Namaz" or timely prayer centered



of God) , a point of concentration, and is both ritualistic and meditative, centered around the <b>Temple</b> or home Shrine, or the <b>Naamghar</b> or Kirtan Ghar created by Guru Sankardeva	around the place of worship in the <b>Church</b>	around the <b>Synagogue</b> and home	around the <b>Mosque</b> or home
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## Universal Prayer

Universality of prayers is a great feature of Hinduism. Hindus do not pray for themselves alone. Their prayer is designed for all of mankind. This is evident from the following typical prayer that millions of Hindus sing every day at the conclusion of their worship or religious ceremony:

- সৰ্বেভবক্সুখিনঃ / “*Xarbe Bhabantu Xukhinah*” (May all of mankind be happy)
- সৰ্বেসক্সনিৰাময়ঃ / “*Xarbe Xantu Niramayah*” (May all of mankind be healthy)
- সৰ্বেভদ্রাণিপস্যক্স / “*Xarbe Bhadrani Pasyantu*” (May all of mankind experience prosperity)

- মাক্ষিচিৎদুঃখঃভাগভবেৎ / “*Maa Kachitt Dukhbhaga Bhabett*” (May none in the world suffer)

## References:

- a) Based on written summaries in the diary of author's late father, Dr. Nobin C. Bordoloi.
- b) Author is also trying to include a few key points for comparison with Islam based on his interview that he conducted in Assam with late Dr. Qutbuddin Ahmed of Jorhat.

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## Q&A

### **Q: What is NAAM?**

**A:** Naamghar Association of America, Inc. (NAAM) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit spiritual and cultural organization formed to construct and manage a Naamghar for the Assamese diaspora to celebrate and perform the spiritual traditions and philosophical teachings of Srimanta Sankardeva. With strong ties with all the *Satras* of Assam, NAAM seek to provide a forum for learned spiritual leaders and traditional artistes to share their knowledge and talent with the current and future generations of the Assamese diaspora.

### **Q: What are the immediate goals of NAAM?**

**A:** Some of the immediate goals of NAAM include spreading awareness on NAAM initiatives, build a digital media platform, plan for fund raising, and participate regularly in Naam-proxongo. NAAM seeks volunteers from the large Assamese diaspora across the United States to achieve these goals. Please join us (details at the bottom of this newsletter). In our planning activity, the first

priority is to identify what is needed to establish a temporary *Naamghar*. This will make the *Guru Axon*, consecrated by the Sri Sri Auniati Satra Satradhikar, more easily accessible to the public, while we work on the longer-term project of building a permanent *Naamghar*.

### **Q: Does NAAM collaborate with other organizations?**

**A:** NAAM is actively seeking to collaborate with all community organizations which are willing to help achieve NAAM's mission. NAAM plans to have meaningful discussion with all organizations in our community; please contact us if you would like to be a part of this conversation (contact details at the bottom).



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## HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH NAAM?

**JOIN THE NAAM WORKING GROUP (WG):** We need your help in achieving the dream of building a Naamghar in North America. Therefore, NAAM is open to everyone who is interested in building the Naamghar.

If you are interested in getting involved actively in NAAM's mission, please join the NAAM by

sending an email to: [Naaminfo@Naamghar.org](mailto:Naaminfo@Naamghar.org). The WG meets regularly via teleconference/video conference to discuss various issues that are related to NAAM and its mission and goals.



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## NAAM WORKING GROUP TEAM MEMBERS

Following individuals comprise the current NAAM working group (WG) team. ***We invite all individuals who are sincerely interested in the Mission and Goals of NAAM to join the NAAM team.*** The current WG members are:

- Iswar Agarwalla, NC
- Tutumoni Baishya, Assam
- Niraj Barbara, PA
- Dr. Sanjib Bhuyan, NJ
- Pranab Bora, WI
- Lolit Bora, PA
- Subhasini Bora, NC
- Dr. Babul Borah, OH
- Utpal Borah, VA
- Dr. Binoy Bordoloi, NJ (Bor-medhi)
- Manoranjan Bordoloi, NJ
- Monidipa Bordoloi, CA
- Susanto Bordoloi, CT
- Chirayu Kr. Borooah, CA
- Malabika Brahma, NJ
- Debojit Chowdhury, CA
- Niren Choudhury, NJ
- Dr. Bikul Das, MA
- Namita Das, VA
- Dr. Pradip Das, MO
- Rupam Das, Assam
- Shyam DevChoudhury, PA (Secretary)
- Dr. Saswati Datta, OH
- Hemanga Dutta, NJ
- Panchali Dutta, NJ
- Sawmick Dutta, CA
- Prandeep Gogoi, NJ
- Ajoy Hazarika, NY
- Kamalakshi Hazarika, NJ
- Suranjoy Hazarika, NJ
- Priyadarshini Inman, NC
- Dr. Jukti Kalita, NJ
- Lalita Kalita, IL
- Rashmi Kalita, CA
- Sangaurav Kaushik, NC
- Nilanjona Mahanta, CA
- Nabanita Mazumdar, WA
- Chayanika Mohan, NC
- Rachna Nath, AZ
- Shakhyar Neog, NJ
- Dr. Yashwant Pathak, FL
- Lelkhika Pathak, Assam
- Anu Perlmutter, VA
- Nilakshi Phukan, NC
- Gayatree Prasad, CA
- Dr. Purandar Sarmah, NJ (Treasurer)
- Vavani Sarmah, CA

### Contact Us

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**Website:** [www.naamghar.org](http://www.naamghar.org)

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