

bHakti-pHilosophy of sRimanta sAnkardeva

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INTRODUCTION : The Sanskrit word bhakti is derived from the verb root bhaj-, which literally means -to partake, attachment, devotion to, fondness for, homage, faith or love, worship, religious principle or means of salvation. In ancient texts like Shvetashvatara Upanishad, the term simply means participation, devotion and love for any endeavor, while in the Bhagavad Gita, it connotes one of the possible paths of spirituality and towards moksha, as in bhakti marga. Shvetashvatar Upanishad is also notable for its use of the word Devaprasada (grace or gift of God). One who practices bhakti is called a bhakta. Shandilya and Narada produced two important Bhakti texts the Narada Bhakti-Sutra and Shandilya Bhati-Sutra .

According to Narada bhakti is “Sa tasmin parama premrupaa”. That means “It is the nature of the highest love this one”.¹ According to Shandilya, bhakti can be define as “Sa paranuraktirishvare”. That means “bhakti is the unshakable attachment to the Supreme God”.²

The term bhakti also refers to a movement, pioneered by Alvars (which literally means those immersed in God), and Nayanars, that developed around the God Vishnu (Vaishnavism), Shiva (Shaivism). The bhakti movement refers to the theistic devotional trend that emerged medieval Hinduism. The bhakti movement originated in south India during the seventh century A.D, and spread northwards from Tamil Nadu through Karnataka and Maharashtra, and gained wide acceptance in fifteenth century Bengal and northern India.

BHAKTI-PHIOSOPHY OF SANKARDEVA : As in the rest of India, the social religious and political life in Assam was in a shambles resulting in a society full of chaos and disorder. Against the backdrop, Srimanta Sankardeva appeared on the scene. Srimanta Sankardeva was a great playwright, translator, redeemer of chaotic Assamese people in the history of medieval Assam. He was the founder of Neo-Vaishnavite religious thought of Assam, who was born in the year 1449 A.D at Alipukhuri near Bordoa of Nagaon district in Assam. After completion his study he went for pilgrimage, especially holy places of Hindu situated in the northern part of India. It was longed for twelve years. After completion of pilgrimage he propagated the Neo-Vaishnavite religious thought which has a great influence of experience of his pilgrimage. He studied many masterpiece of Indian holy text like Veda, Upanishad (vedanta), Purana , Samhita etc. Srimad Bhagavatamaha Purana, one of the great holy books of Hindu had influenced him most. He translated its verse into Assamese. Besides translation he created various forms such as drama, Bargeet, Kirtan-Ghosa etc based on this Holy Book. Sankari philosophy is basically based on Bhagavatapurana. In Bhagavatapurana it is said that “Krishnastu Bhagavan swayam” . Krishna is the Purna avatara (incarnation) of Sanatan Brahman (Supreme reality). Sankardeva wrote in the first stanza of Kirtan- Ghosa –

“Prathame pranamo brahmarupi sanatan

Sarva avatarar karona Narayan”

In his other transcreation Nimi- Navasiddha Sambad he wrote -

‘Tomathero bhagya ki kohibo ara
Gharat param Brahma”

Eka Sarana is the unique component of Sankari philosophy. Brahman is unknown, shapeless, omnipresent, omnipotent, but Sankardeva established Krishna as the Brahman, and chanting his name again and again. One can redeem from the jungle of birth-death circle. Everybody take shelter on the feet of Brahman (Brahma in Assamese) then he will redeem.

Excluding all other deities a devotee should worship only lord Krishna. Devotee, that wholeheartedly devoted towards Lord Krishna become a pure devotee of Eka Sarana. After having submitted oneself to lord Krishna, one should go on chanting His name and attributes with utmost devotion and dedication³.The devotion should never mixed or impure or qualified.The unique doctrine of Sankardeva was coined as Ek Saran Hari Naam Dharma by Madhavdeva.

Srimanta Sankardeva followed the Srimad Bhagavadgeeta in formulating his religious thought .In Srimad Bhagavatgita the Ek Sarana is narrated as -

“Sarvadarman parityajya mamekam saranam braja,
Ahang twang sarva papevo mokhsyayishyami ma suchah.”

Sankardeva also translated this in his own words as follows in Bhagavata ekadashskandha -

Sarva dharma eri ek sarana sakhyat
Sudriha biswase sakhi loiyoka amata.
Nakariba voy hera koru angikar
Samasta papat moyi koribo uddhar.

Ek Sarana means submission to the supreme God, lord Krishna .Ek Sarana Naam Dharma is based on devotion to the supreme Brahman, who is beyond all attributes. The concept of devotion to one God, Lord Krishna or Vishnu, which is derives from the Veda. Rigveda explicitly says that the same ultimate entity is expressed by different entities.

Ekam sat vipra bahudha badanti.

(Rigveda/1/164/46)

Sankardeva never define anywhere his religious thought as a school of Philosophy. In this context Dr. Birinchi kumar Boruah says –

“Sankardeva was not a philosopher, nor did he endeavour to evolve a new philosophy. Nevertheless his literary works are pointers to the fact that he was steeped in the lore of Hindu Philosophy. As well as the commentary

rendered by Sridhara Swami. Being familiar with the systems of philosophy, he gave admirable expression of his conviction in terms of art.”³

Though Sankardeva didn't mention his thought as school of philosophy but his religious doctrine can be coined as a school of philosophy. His philosophy is based on Vedanta (uttar mimamsa) philosophy which is founded by Maharsri Badarayan Vyas. Many Scholars try to naming Sankardeva's philosophy. Various philosophical term used to define as Sankari Philosophy, they are Adaitvavad by Dr. Maheswar Neog, Advaita-lilavad by Bapchandra Mahanta, Vivartanvad by Dr. Sanjib kumar Borkakoti, Abhed- Bhaktivad, by Dr. Nagen Saikia and somebody coined his philosophy as Ekeswaravad.

There is various commentary of Vedanta Sutra. It is written by various saint of India in different times. Sankardeva didn't wrote any commentary on its. He gave importance in Srimad Bhagavata Purana as the commentary of Vedanta.

According to Dr. Maheswar Neog-

“Sankardeva admits the nirguna Brahman to be ultimate reality and jiva to be one with Brahman. To him Brahman is indeterminate (Nirvisesa), Chargeless / Avikari and eternal (Nitya) . With this monistic view Sankardeva seeks to combine the theistic or religious idea of a determinate personal God which is the pivot of creed.”⁴

The religious doctrine Eka Sarana Naam Dharma founded by Srimanta Sankardeva is based on four pillar(things) which is known as Charivastu . These things are namely Guru (Preceptor), Deva(The supreme Reality), Naam (Chanting the name of God) and Bhakat or Bhakta (with other devotee/one who practices devotion).

Dr.Nagen Saikia explain about the unique doctrine of Sankardeva -

“Sankardeva makes no difference, between Brahman of Upanishad and Krishna of Bhagavata , between shape and shapeless , between known and unknown in his writings. Therefore, there is no doubt that, he established his doctrine as Abhed-Bhaktivad (Indifferable Bhakti) on its rigid philosophical foundation.”⁵

The religious practices of Abhed-Bhaktivad is Eka Sarana. Therefore, we can define his Philosophy as Ek Saran Abhed Bhaktivad. We can say that Sankardeva philosophy is based on Bhagavatapurana, and Upanishad and Srimad bhagavat Gita is its pillar of the base. In his thought there was no difference among donator, thief, sandal (one kind of sub race who engage in burials). There was no difference between saint and apostate in his thought. He treated all living creatures equally. Not only human but also all Creatures are son of God. All creatures are part of God. There is presence of God in the souls of all creatures. It is main thought of Srimanta Sankardeva.

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