

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### DEVOTION IN ŚAṆKARADEVA'S PHILOSOPHY

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**Dr. Jutika Devi. DEVOTION IN ŚAṆKARADEVA'S PHILOSOPHY--Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(7), 10736-10738. ISSN 1567-214x**

**Keywords: Śaṅkaradeva, Vaishnavism, bhakti.**

#### ABSTRACT

Śaṅkaradeva, as an advocate of Neo Vaishnavism, assigned great importance to bhakti or devotion. Śaṅkaradeva had an immense urge to teach people that the part of devotion is the only road to purify the human mind and reform the society. Though he accepts all the paths that are recognized by the *Gītā* for liberation, yet outwardly Śaṅkaradeva's path towards realization of Īśvara is devotion. Bhakti should not be limited by idol worship. Inner spiritual practice is an end in itself. It is both *sādhana* as well as *sādhyā*. In other words, in Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy bhakti is considered both as means and end. Moreover, he emphasized on the concept of *dāswabhāva* as a co relation with bhakti. One can imagine himself as a bhakta. The bhakta through bhakti is trying to come out of his empirical level and tries to go to the transcendental level. So, he tries to show how through *dāswabhāva* the bhakta gets self transcendence. There is none but one whom we should worship. In Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy Kṛṣṇa is regarded to be the only God and among nine forms of bhakti only Śravana and Kīrtana is accepted by him. It is also necessary to direct our mind set because one can never practice bhakti without the mind set of surrender. He believes that mind can be purified only by chanting the name of Krishna. Śaṅkaradeva's intention was to bring a religion. Therefore, he regarded God as personal God.

This paper attempts to show that single-minded attention and utmost devotion is all what is needed for liberation in Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy.

#### INTRODUCTION

Śaṅkaradeva is a great medieval saint of Assam whose manifold contribution to the society not only placed his community on a sound cultural footing but

also helped to a great extent in giving a characteristic stamp and ethos to the Assamese life and society.<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkaradeva was primarily a social and religious reformer and not a speculative thinker. His purpose was not to propound a philosophically-based religion supported by discursive reasoning and abstract thinking, but to propagate a simple system of faith based on devotion. Śaṅkaradeva's Vaiṣṇavism has mainly derived its philosophic-religious contents from Bhāgavad Purāna. In the Bhāgavad Purāna God has been described as immanent and transcendental and having both Nirguna (attributeless) and Saguna (attributed) aspects. In his doctrinal work *Bhakti-ratnākara*, without denying the indeterminate and attributeless aspect of God, however, laid more stress on the Saguna aspect, because loving devotion Śaṅkaradeva demands a personal God. In his celebrated work *Kīrtana*, Śaṅkaradeva describes the two-fold aspects of God and says that as the indeterminate God is not comprehensible, devotee worship and adore his beatific form in the person Nārāyan. In other words, because God is not a detached spectator of the world process, He is to be reached by bhakti according to Śaṅkaradeva.

A social reform movement was swept across India between 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and bhakti movement was based on the liberal doctrine of bhakti or devotion. Bhakti implies ardent love for God which has been regarded as the safest and purest path for the realization of God. Apart from religious sphere this movement also had its impact on socio-economic and cultural life of the land.

In Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy the concept of bhakti has wide meaning. Bhakti is considered as the emotional process of realizing the Supreme. It is not an easy task to define devotion. Yet in Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy, bhakti or devotion has come to be understood in terms of love, faith, aversion, purification of mind, humility, meekness, worship, prayer, selfless service etc. Bhakti demands the complete faith in the Supreme by the agent. Complete faith signifies that faith must be accompanied by self surrender. In the words of Śaṅkaradeva, "leaving aside knowledge and action keep faith in Hari". Devotion in such comprehensive sense stands as the means for achieving spiritual unification. Again devotion should be accompanied by love which signifies the absence of fear, shame and desire. Similarly without aversion towards the material or worldly objects, devotion cannot attain its fulfillment according to Śaṅkaradeva. Likewise self surrender is the best method to make free from all kinds of earthly bondage and therefore it is the most essential factor to annihilate the anxieties and to concentrate one's mind on devotion. Infact Śaṅkaradeva proclaim the power of devotion to be the highest in spiritual realization of the Supreme. However, devotion does not neglect the knowledge of God and the performance of certain rituals. These two factors are considered as helping aid in realization through devotion.

According to Śaṅkaradeva, there are nine ways of practicing devotion. Though they function differently, yet they have the same purpose of God realization. These nine modes of bhakti are śravaṇa (hearing), kīrtana (prayer), smarana

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<sup>1</sup>Goswami. R.K.D(edt). *Essays on Sankaradeva*, p. 5

(remembrance), padasevana (service), arcanā (worshipping), vandanā (adoring), dāsya (attitude to serve), sākhyā (friendly attitude) and ātmanibedana (self-surrender).<sup>2</sup> Of these Śaṅkaradeva considered śravana and kīrtana to be sufficient as the religious endeavor of man towards the highest consummation possible. These nine forms of bhakti are not self-sufficient by themselves; rather they are complementary to each other. A full-fledged devotion to God requires all these factors. Even then Śaṅkaradeva is seen to put utmost importance to śravana and kīrtana. Śravana is hearing of Lord's virtues, sports in connection with His Divine Name and Form. Again Kīrtana or prayer is signing of Lord's glories.<sup>3</sup> He believes that as Kīrtana is sweet and pleasant, it can easily change the heart of people. An interrupted and habitual hearing and chanting of the name of Krishna with passionate love creates high stimulation in the hearts of devotees.<sup>4</sup> As a result of such an experience, the heart is filled with delight and the subject becomes madly God-intoxicated.

The official name of bhakti creed of Śaṅkaradeva is ekśarana nāmadharma, and he explains its cardinal principles, which enjoin worship of one God, that is, Viṣṇu, especially in the incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, and interdicts the votaries from the worship of any other deity and indicates its main form, which consists of the utterance of the holy names of the God, in singing of songs in his glorification. The words of the Lord what is called the final verse by the school of Rāmānuja in the *Bhāgavadgītā*, demanding unswerving devotion to him (sarvadharmān parityajya mam ekam śaraṇam vraja, XVIII.66), are to be remembered.<sup>5</sup>

According to Śaṅkaradeva bhakti is superior to mukti and it is stated further that the bliss of emancipation is inherent in bhakti. "mukuti rasako srave tomara bhakati" (Kirtan, 8). The reason of choosing bhakti as the highest means is that it is the easiest way and also the best as it is of the nature of niskāma and nispr̥ha.<sup>6</sup> Further he says that the eka-śaraṇa of Śaṅkaradeva asks for nothing in return, not even moksa (salvation) or mukti (liberation), except the privilege of devotional recitation of Lord's name. Devotion which originates as one path to salvation among others, comes to be valued as an end in itself.

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<sup>2</sup>Neog, M. *Śaṅkaradeva The Great Integrator*, p. 208

<sup>3</sup>Mahanta, N. *The Mystical Thoughts of Sri Sri Sankaradeva and Mdhavadeva*, p.48

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p.49

<sup>5</sup>Neog, M. *Śaṅkaradeva The Great Integrator*, p.207 & 208

<sup>6</sup>Sharma, N. *The Philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva: An Appraisal*, p.136