

A STUDY ON THE CONCEPTS OF GOD, SELF AND DEVOTION IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ŚAṆKARADEVA

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CHAPTER - VIII

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8.1: Discussion :

In this chapter, observation of the study along with the conclusion will be drawn after complete analysis of the study. The topic of the study is “**A Study on the Concepts of God, Self and Devotion in the Philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva**”. In this study, there are four objectives. These objectives are discussed below one by one.

The first objective is –

- (i) To find out and explain different *vedāntic* views regarding the concepts of God and Self.

On the basis of this objective, the third chapter is prepared. The title of this chapter is – “**Analysis of different vedāntic views regarding the concepts of God and Self.**” After investigating and deeply studying about the different *vedāntic* philosophers, the following points are observed–

- The term *Vedānta* came to mean all the thoughts that developed out of the *Upaniṣads*, which mark the culmination of the philosophical speculation found in the Vedas.
- All the *Vedāntic* philosophers believe in God, which is revealed in the Vedas.
- According to Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahman* alone is real, it is pure identity, absolutely undifferentiated, which is self-existent, self-delight, self-knowledge and self-bliss.

- The Supreme *Brahman* is *nirguṇa*, *nirākāra* and *nirviśeṣa*. *Sat-Cit-Ānanda* constitute the very essence of *Brahman*.
- The *nirguṇa Brahman* becomes a personal God or *saguṇa Brahman* only through its association with *māyā*.
- One and the same *Brahman* appears as the *jīva* or the individual self.
- The individual self or *jīva* is the *Ātman* or *Brahman* limited to individuated by the adjuncts of the body, the sense organs, mind, *buddhi* and *ahaṁkāra*.
- The one *Ātman* appears to be many individual selves owing to its immingling adjuncts (*upādhi*).
- *Brahman* or *Ātman* is the original (*bimba*) and the individual self is the reflection (*pratibimba*).
- According to Rāmānuja, God is the Absolute Reality, possessed of two integral parts, viz.--- matter and the finite spirit.
- According to Rāmānuja, God or *Brahman* is the Supreme Person, Who is also called *Puruṣottama*. Here, *Brahman* and God (*Īśvara*) are non-different.
- In Rāmānuja's philosophy, Viṣṇu is the Supreme God or *Brahman*.
- According to Rāmānuja, the individual self or *jīva* is self-luminous and manifests itself without the aid of knowledge.
- The individual self or *jīva* is grounded in God and sustained by Him. The self cannot exist apart from God; for it is His attribute or mode and inseparably related to Him.

- The individual selves are caught up in the meshes of *samsāra* and they are striving to be released.
- According to Madhva, God and *Brahman* are completely identical, Who alone is independent.
- God is the Supreme Person (*Puruṣottama*) Who is omniscient, omnipotent; perfect, eternal; extremely subtle and immutable. God is the efficient cause of the world.
- According to Madhva, the individual self or the *jīva* is different from God. There can be no absolute identity between them.
- The individual self or *jīva* gets release through the grace of God. Release is the original state of purity.
- According to Nimbārka, God is the highest *Brahman* and by His very nature, He is free from all defects.
- According to Nimbārka, God manifests Himself in incarnations, and He is identified with Kṛṣṇa.
- The individual self and matter have no independent existence and so they are not different from God.
- According to Nimbārka, the individual souls or *jīvas* are real knower, agent and enjoyer. They are atomic in size and they are many in number.
- The individual self is eternal; and yet it suffers births and deaths on account of its embodiment, which is due to *karma* and *avidyā*.

- The grace of God is ever ready to lift up the souls and make them see the truth of things, according to Nimbārka.
- According to Vallabha, Brahman is God, Who is the Supreme Person or *Puruṣottama*. *Māyā* or *avidyā* is His power through which He manifests Himself as many.
- According to Vallabha, God is the one Supreme *Antaryāmīn*, the inner ruler of the universe, Who is both material and efficient cause of this Universe.
- The individual self and matter are His real manifestations. They are His parts.
- According to Vallabha, the individual selves or *jīvas* are the spiritual atoms (*aṇu*) or *monāds*, which possess the quality of consciousness.
- The soul as a part of *Brahman* or God is identical with Him and appears as different on account of the limited manifestations of some divine aspect and obscuration of others.

The second objective is –

- ii) To explain Śaṅkaradeva's Neo-vaiṣṇavism and his philosophical thoughts.

On the basis of this objective, the fourth chapter is presented. The title of the chapter is – “**Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva and His Philosophical Thoughts.**” After complete analysis of this chapter, the following points are observed –

- The movement of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism was a great event in the North-Eastern India in the 15th -16th centuries and its founder Śrīmanā Śaṅkaradeva was a man of genius.

- Śaṅkaradeva's Neo-Vaiṣṇavism was based on the *Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* and the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. He brought the new message of a new religion of love as he proclaimed the eternal dharma based on truth and love.
- Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva does not support the worship of any other gods and goddesses. In this religion, there is only one God and that is Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who is Supreme Reality.
- Śaṅkaradeva's Neo-Vaiṣṇavism is also known as *Mahāpuruṣīyā Dharma*. It is also called *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma*.
- *Eka-Śaraṇa-Hari-Nāma-Dharma* of Śaṅkaradeva is the religion of taking refuge in One God, i.e., Śrī Kṛṣṇa as identical with the supreme deity Viṣṇu.
- *Eka-Śaraṇa* (surrender to only one God), *satsaṅga* (the company of the saintly) and *nāma* (chanting the names and glories of Lord) – are the three cardinal tenets of Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti dharm*. These three are taken from the *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatd Mahāpurāṇa* and *Sahasra nāma* section of the *Padmapurāṇa* respectively.
- In Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, Śaṅkaradeva held that *Jñāna* without *Bhakti* is futile.
- Śaṅkaradeva's Neo-Vaiṣṇvism is a great socio-cultural revolution to harmonize the people of Assam. It is the most liberal, tolerant, simplest and easiest way of attaining God and being able to attain social order.
- Śaṅkaradeva is not a philosopher in the strict sense of the term, because he has not presented a specific philosophy of the makeup of the universe or the nature of reality.

- Through the various writings of Śaṅkaradeva, his philosophical outlooks are reflected.
- Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy is practical in nature, which inspired people to have a direct, immediate and intuitive vision of the highest truth or the Supreme Reality.
- Śaṅkaradeva's philosophical thought is mainly based on the *Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* and the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, which Śaṅkaradeva took as the essence of the *Upaniṣadic Vedānta*.
- Śaṅkaradeva's philosophical thought is strictly monotheistic. In his faith, the only adorable deity is Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who is no other than God Himself.
- In Śaṅkaradeva's *Bhakti dharma*, idol worship is prohibited. Instead of the idol, the *Guṇamālā*, composed by Śaṅkaradeva, is generally taken as Lord Kṛṣṇa in worded form and it is placed on the holy *Guru āsana*.
- The best way unto the Lord is that of *bhakti* or devotion to Kṛṣṇa only. Of the different types of *bhakti*, Śaṅkaradeva prescribed and laid stress on *dāśya bhakti*.
- Śaṅkaradeva regards *māyā* as a magical power of *Īśvara*, which belongs to and is controlled by Him. The influence of *māyā* can be avoided by the grace of God.
- According to Śaṅkaradeva, this world is *Brahmamaya*, in which only Śrī Kṛṣṇa exists as both the cause and the effect.
- In Śaṅkaradeva's view, the individual self or *jīvātmā* is a component of God, which constitutes the body of God.

- In Śaṅkaradeva philosophy, there is no difference between the *jīva* and the *Brahman* or *Īśvara*. *Īśvara* is connected with knowledge, Who is *saccidānandarūpa*; but the *jīvas* are enveloped by ignorance or *avidyā*.
- Incarnation of God is another feature of Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy. The main aim of the incarnation of God is to restore truth and peace and to establish the sublimity of God. Kṛṣṇa is the *pūrṇa avatāra* of *Brahman*.

The third objective is —

- iii) To find out and discuss Śaṅkaradeva's views regarding the concepts of God and self.

On the basis of this objective, the chapter Fifth, that is, – “**The Concept of God in the Philosophy of Śaṅkaradeva**”; and the chapter sixth, that is “**The Concept of the Self or *Jīvātmā* in the Thoughts of Śaṅkaradeva**” are prepared and presented. After complete analysis of these two chapters, the following points are observed –

- According to Śaṅkaradeva, Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate reality, Who is one, without a second. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the *Supreme Reality* or *Param Brahman*.
- This Supreme Reality is *nirguṇa* and *nirvikāra*.
- In Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy, God is identified with *Brahman*; there is no difference between God and *Brahman*.
- *Brahman*, the Supreme Person is conceived as a concrete personality in the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

- According to Śaṅkaradeva, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*. Kṛṣṇa is the repository of all auspicious qualities like omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence.
- According to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, God is immanent and transcendental, Who has both *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* aspects. Śaṅkaradeva has laid more stress on the *saguṇa* aspect, without denying the *nirguṇa* or indeterminate aspect of God.
- According to Śaṅkaradeva, Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa is the cause (*kāraṇa*) as well as effect (*kārya*) of the creation. There is no distinction between God as the cause and God as the effect.
- The theory of incarnation is very important in Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy. There are innumerable *avatāras*, which flow from Hari.
- In the *Kīrtana-Ghoṣā*, Śaṅkaradeva enumerates twenty four incarnations. Though he gives the list of twenty four incarnations, first ten incarnations are given much important, which are called *daśāvatāra*.
- According to Śaṅkaradeva among all the *avatāras*, Kṛṣṇa is the *pūrṇa avatāra* (perfect incarnation) of the *Brahman*.
- Chanting and hearing the names and qualities of the Lord Kṛṣṇa is the highest means for a devotee to get release from the bond of birth and death.
- According to Śaṅkaradeva, the individual self or *jīva* is not different from *Paramātmā* or the Absolute. Because of the ignorance or *avidyā*, the individual self does not know this.

- Though the individual self is identical with the Absolute or *Brahman*, still, the individual self or *jīva* is not independent on the *Brahman*; it is completely dependent on *Brahman* or the Absolute; that is, Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- Śaṅkaradeva describes that the individual self or *jīva* is a part or *aṁśa* of God or *Paramātmā*.
- In Śaṅkaradeva's thought, it is found that the self or *jīva* is one, eternal and self-illuminating; but due to *māyā*, it appears as many.
- The individual self or *jīvātamā* is always doer or *kartā*. It enjoys or suffers according to its activities.
- The individual self or *jīva*, which is a part of the *Brahman* is encircled by *ahaṁkāra*.
- The finite self or *jīvātamā* along with the sense organs enjoys or suffers in the world and thinks the body to be the self or *jīvātamā*.
- Due to ignorance and *māyā*, the individual self or the *jīva* acts with attachment and such actions accrue *pāpa* or vice and *punya* or virtue, according to their nature of *karma* or action.
- The individual self or *jīva* can shake off *māyā* only through devotion to Hari or Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- According to Śaṅkaradeva, the individual self is changeless, all pervading, blissful and not different from the Supreme Self; but being enveloped in false knowledge, it does not know itself as such.

- According to Śaṅkaradeva, by the grace of God, man will have absolute knowledge, which will destroy the fetters of *karma* and the subtle body and prevent rebirth.
- The knowledge will destroy *māyā* and *avidyā*, enabling the individual to realize the identity of his self and the world with the Absolute one. Thus, the self or *jīva* attains *jīvan-mukti*.

The Fourth objective is —

- iv) To find out and discuss Śaṅkaradeva's concept of *bhakti* and its different kinds.

On the basis of this objective, the seventh chapter is prepared and presented. The title of this chapter is— **“Concept of Devotion or *Bhakti* and Its Different Kinds”**.

After analyzing this chapter, the following points are observed —

- The word *bhakti* is found in the *Śvetasvataraopaniṣada* for the first time, in which we find that the eagerness of the devotee to serve God and preceptor is called *bhakti*.
- In the *Bhakti sūtra* of Nārada, it is found that *bhakti* is an intense love for God. Nārada opines that *bhakti* is nothing but the surrender of each and every action.
- Śāṇḍilya defines *bhakti* as intense attraction for God. It is stable condition of inner pleasure and peace of mind. No contradiction between mind and *bhakti* is seen there.

- In *Bhakti-Pradīpa*, Śaṅkaradeva opines that hearing the name of God is called the best devotin.
- According to Śaṅkaradeva, *bhakti-yoga* is the crown of the spiritual *sāadhanā* and the only way to realize God.
- According to Śaṅkaradeva, *bhakti* is *mati*, *gati*, *deva*, *dvija* and the power of life. It is the ultimate goal of human life and the root of salvation.
- *Bhakti* is conceived to be the higher than *mokṣa* in Śaṅkaradeva's teaching.
- In Śaṅkaradeva's *bhakti dharma*, there are nine kinds of *bhakti*; namely, — *Śravaṇa*, *Kīrttana*, *Smarāṇa*, *Arcana*, *Vandana*, *Dāśya*, *Sakhya*, *Pādasevana* and *Ātmanivedana*.
- *Śravaṇa* is listening to the glories of God.
- *Kīrttana* is the uttering of the names and glories of God.
- *Smarāṇa* means remembering the glories of God.
- To offer water, flower etc. to God is *arcana*.
- *Vandana* is praising in veneration of God.
- *Dāśya* is to feel oneself as the servant of the Lord Kṛṣṇa.
- To trust God as friend is *sakhya*.
- To worship or adore God or His lotus feet is called *pādasevana*.
- To dedicate the body and mind in the name of God is *deha arpaṇa* or *ātmanibedana*.

- According to Śaṅkaradeva, among the nine forms of *bhakti*, *śravaṇa* and *kīrttana* (hearing and chanting the holy names and attributes of Lord Kṛṣṇa) are the best forms to attain salvation.
- *Śravaṇa* creates an interest in *Harikathā*, which naturally leads one to chant the names and attributes of God.

8.2. Conclusion :

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was the father of Assamese nationality. His high intellect and immense contribution to the nation in the form of drama, poetry, *Bargīt* etc. made him the father of the Assamese nationality. Śaṅkaradeva was primarily a religious reformer preaching the *bhakti* cult of Vaiṣṇavism. This Vaiṣṇavite culture and heritage, enriched by Śaṅkaradeva is doing as a cementing force in the process of integration among the diverse ethnic groups leading to strong cultural bond in the Assamese society.

Although Śaṅkaradeva was popularly known as the propounder of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, which is also known as *Eka-Śaraṇa Hari-Nāma-Dharma*, it is equally true that through his great contributions of art, culture and literature, very easily we can notice his thinking, the way of salvation, his concept of man, society, God, World, the individual self, *bhakti*, *mokṣa* etc. His Neo-Vaiṣṇavism had laid the foundation for a new religious philosophy.

The philosophical base of the spiritual realization of Śaṅkaradeva was the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Sahasra nāma* of the *Padma*

Purāṇa. From these three sources, Śaṅkaradeva took three elements; viz. — *Satsaṅga*, which means the assembly of *bhaktas* as a means of *bhakti*; *Eka-Śaraṇa*, which means to take shelter of one God, and *Nāma*, that is, chanting the name of God as *kīrttan* or prayer.

According to Śaṅkaradeva, *Brahman* is the ultimate Reality and that *Brahman* is nothing but Śrī Kṛṣṇa alone. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is also worshipped as *Hari*, *Viṣṇu*, *Nārāyaṇa*, *Puruṣottama* and so on. This Supreme Reality is non-dual and is devoid of all kinds of differences. To get this Supreme Reality or *Brahman* or Lord Kṛṣṇa, there is a specific way; that is— *bhakti*. In other words, Śaṅkaradeva found a link to reach the creator and that link is devotion and self-surrender to Lord Kṛṣṇa. His philosophy is based on *dāsyā bhakti*. In *dāsyā bhakti*, Kṛṣṇa is taken as the Lord and the devotee is as servant.

About the life and the Universe, the view of Śaṅkaradeva is very clear and wide. According to him, all beings are equal to one's own self; and he also said that man should take everything of this universe to be the reflection of God Himself. Śaṅkaradeva views the whole universe as the qualified form of the Supreme power, Who is *Brahman*, the Creator of all; but He is also very much there in all His creations. In the Universe, there is nothing without God. According to him, there exists only one God. The man, who views the whole universe to be the manifestation of One Absolute and Supreme power, feels akin to everybody and everything of the whole universe.

According to Śaṅkaradeva, there is no difference between the formless *Brahman* of *Vedānta* and Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. So, he preached that to love

Kṛṣṇa is to love *Brahman*. Śaṅkaradeva did not preach the philosophical knowledge that he based on; rather he based on love and devotion. He said that Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa is the qualified form of the formless *Brahman*. Man should dedicate himself to Kṛṣṇa alone; because Kṛṣṇa is the only God, Who gives shelter to his devotees. By chanting the name of Kṛṣṇa, one can remove one's all doubts and ignorance.

The disappearance of the distinction between the individual self or *jīva* and the *Brahman* or Supreme Self is possible even in one's lifetime and not only after death according to Śaṅkaradeva. It is clearly expressed in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as follows—

ahṁkāra gucile brahmaka jīve dekhe /
māyā eḍi āpuni buddhira gucāi bhrama //
nirmala hṛdaye jīve dekhe parambrahma /
yi kālāte jñāna astre chiṇḍe ahaṁkāra /
chiṇḍe karmabandha jīve teve āponāra
hṛdayate parama ānanda hove jāta
paripūrṇa ātmā hovai manata sākṣāta
dehako nedekhe jīve huyā brahma maya //

(Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa: Book-12; vs.177-179)

It means— the individual self or *jīva* perceives the *Brahman* when his *ahamkāra* (egoism) is removed. When the *māyā* and the error of intellect disappear, then the individual self perceives *Para Brahman* in his clear mind. When the *jīva* tears off the egoism with the sword of wisdom, then the self breaks the bondage of *karma*. The highest happiness arises in his heart and the *jīva* perceives the Perfect Self (*Brahman*) in the mind. Turning himself into the *Brahman*, he does not see his body.

In conclusion, it may be said that the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva are important for the present society. The upliftment of socially, morally and economically backward people of Assam may take place by following the path shown by Śaṅkaradeva — the sense of unity, untouchability, integrity, fraternity and the sense of humanity. Active sincere efforts and co-operation from the all levels of the society, irrespective of caste, creed, religion and organizations will make it possible. Such attempts from grassroot level to the elite classes of our country will certainly develop the sense of oneness, belonging to one nation and one human race preached by Śaṅkaradeva through his ideals and humanitarian philosophy.

8.3 Suggestion for further study

Finally, it is seen that Śaṅkaradeva was not only a social reformer and a religious preacher of Assam, but also a spiritual leader or mentor of the Assamese people. He prepared a way of ideal life for the common people.

Various works have been carried out on the literal works and other activities of Śaṅkaradeva, but there have been a little study on the philosophical and spiritual thoughts of Śaṅkaradeva. In this regard, it is the urge of the time to make a serious study on Śaṅkaradeva's spiritual and philosophical teachings. Considering the present day situation of the society, it is necessary to conduct a critical analysis on the ethical, spiritual and philosophical teachings of Śaṅkaradeva for the upliftment of the society and moral education of the upcoming young generation.

