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Reflection of advaita vedantic thoughts in the kirtanghosa of sankardeva

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Abstract

Kirtanghosa is one of the most popular and important religious book composed by *Sankardeva*. The *Kirtanghosa* is a valuable contribution to the literature, religion and ethics. This holy book is considered to be one of the four texts forming the corner stone's of the teachings of *Sankardeva*. He composed this book with a view to preaching the principles of '*Eka-Sarana-Nam Dharma* – the religion which appeals for surrender and prayer on the part of devotees to one ultimate reality symbolized as Krishna. A reflection of non- dualistic thought is distinct in the *Kirtanghosa* and other works of *Sankardeva*. *Sankardeva* advocate *Ek Sarana* (self surrender to the One and to the One alone). '*Ek Dew, Ek Sew Ek bine nai kew*' (One God, One shelter, non else but one) are the watchwords of his faith. It is monotheism uncompromising. As a matter of fact, different non-dualistic aspects have found in the different places of *Kirtanghosa*. In many places of *Kirtanghosa* lays stress on *Advaita*. *Sankardeva* suggest the views of abstract monism here. There is no doubt that *Sankardeva* was greatly influenced by *Advaita Vedanta*.

Keywords: Sankardeva, kirtanghosa, advaita Vedanta

1. Introduction

Kirtanghosa is one of the most popular and important religious book composed by *Sankardeva*. The *Kirtanghosa* is a valuable contribution to the literature, religion and ethics. This holy book is considered to be one of the four texts forming the corner stone's of the teachings of *Sankardeva*. He composed this book with a view to preaching the principles of '*Eka-Sarana-Nam Dharma* – the religion which appeals for surrender and prayer on the part of devotees to one ultimate reality symbolized as Krishna. *Kirtanghosa* contains twenty eight chapters i.e. 1) *Chaturvimsatiavatara Varnana* 2) *Namaparadha* 3) *Pasandamardana* 4) *Dhyanvarnana* 5) *Ajamilopakhayan* 6) *Prahladacharita* 7) *Gajandrapakhayan* 8) *Haramohana* 9) *Balichalana* 10) *Sisulia* 11) *Raslila* 12) *Kamsabadha* 13) *Gopi Uddhava Sambada* 14) *Kujirbanchapurana* 15) *Akrurarbanchapurana* 16) *Jarasandhar Yuddha* 17) *Kalayabanabadha* 18) *Muchukundastuti* 19) *Shayamantakaharana* 20) *Naradar Krishna Darsana* 21) *Vipaputraanayan* 22) *Damodar Vipra Upakhayan* 23) *Daivaki Putraanayan* 24) *Veda Stuti* 25) *Bhagavata Tatparya* 26) *Krishna Lilamala* 27) *Srikrishnar Vaikuntha Prayan* 28) *Uresa Varnan*. The *Kirtanghosa* is taken as the essence of the *BhagavataPurana*. Among the many systems of Indian Philosophy, the Vedanta is both philosophy and religion. Different vaisnavaects in particular have been built upon Vedanta. *Sankardeva* in his *Bhakti Ratmakar* quote the following sloka saying that the purana is the essence of all Vedanta, and *Madhavadeva* renders the same into Assamese in his *Namghosa*:

“*Sarva Vedanta saramhe Srimadbhagavatam isyate
Tad rasamreta trptasya nayyatra syad rathih kvacit.*”

The religious thought of *Sankardeva* is based on the *Bhagavata Purana* interpreting the purana *Sankardeva* almost invariably followed the *Bhagavat Bhavartha Dipika* – the monistic commentary of *Sridhar Swami*; which is popular among all section of *Vaishnavas*. Therefore a reflection of non- dualistic thought is distinct in the *Kirtanghosa* and other works of *Sankardeva*. In the present study an attempt has been made to highlight the difference *advaitavedantic* thoughts as reflected in the *Kiranghosa* of *Sankardeva*.

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2. Advaita Vedanta: Advaita Vedanta is one of the major school of Vedanta philosophy. Sankaracharya was the founder of Advaita Vedanta. Advaita Vedanta refers to the non-duality between Brahman and the self. Ultimate reality; according to Sankaracharya is Brahman which is pure consciousness, which is devoid all attributes and all categories of the intellect. Brahman associated with its potency maya appears as qualified Brahman. Saguna Brahman is the creator of this world. Avidya is the root cause of the individuality. In liberation, when avidya is destroyed by jnana and the jivais realized as the Brahman which it always is. Sankaracharya emphasizes that from the phenomenal point of view the world is quite real. It is not an illusion. The world is quite real so long as the true knowledge of the nature of world is not down. "Brahmasatyam Jagatmitya Jivo Brahmaibnaparah" - is the summary of Advaita Vedanta. Advaita Vedantic thoughts may be summarized as follows-

1. Brahman is the Supreme truth and only reality.
2. The world is Ultimate false.
3. There is no difference between Brahman and individual soul.
4. Maya is the root cause of individuality.

2.1 Brahman is the Supreme truth and only reality:

According to Advaita Vedanta the Brahman is the Supreme Truth. This Brahman is Nirguna (unqualified), Nirakara (shapeless) and beyond all attributes. Brahman is the only one reality and there is nothing real except it. But Nirguna Brahman appear as Saguna Brahman i.e. Iswara from the practical standpoint which is unreal.

Sankaradeva hold the same view in Kirtangosa. Brahman is both efficient and material cause of the universe. Sankaradeva begins his master piece, the holy Kitranghosa -

"Prathame pranamo brahmarupi sanatan
Sarva awtararar karana Narayana." (Chaturvimsati Avatara Varnan)

(First of all I bow to the Eternal Narayana who is the nature of Brahman is the cause of all incarnations.)

In the chapter 'Haramohan' Hara thus prays to Vishnu:

"tumi paramatma jagatar isa eka
Eko vastu nahike tomata vyatireka.
Tumi karya karana samaste sarachar
Suvama kundale jena nhika antar.
Tumi pasu paski surasura tarutrina
Ajnanate murhajane dekhe binnabinna."
(Haramohan)

(There is nothing else than Thee. Thou art the effect, the cause the whole universe, as there is no difference between gold and gold earnings. Thou art all beasts and birds, gods and demons trees and creepers. It is for sheer ignorance that dullards see them different.)

Sankaradeva's creed is based on the worship of Krishna who is suddha (pure), satya (true). Brahman, Vishnu and Krishna are fundamentally one. Krishna is God Himself. Sankaradeva's Krishna is Supreme Reality or Param Brahman and not merely an avatara of Vishnu:

"Parama purusa tumi sanatana hari
Yadukula avatari acha chadma kari."

(You act the Supreme Purusa. O Eternal Hari! You hast incarnated in the Yadu dynasty in guise.)

In the episode 'Prahlada Carita' -

"Savata bara prabhu cakrapani
Achoka tumi ami kona jana.
Brahma hare seva yara carana
Srejante palante samhare ante."

(The lord Cakrapani is the greatest of all. Who are we? Even Brahma and Hara worship at his feet. With His eternal power maya He creates preserves and at least destroys.)

Sankaradeva expressed that there have no things apart from Brahman:-

"ise kebale satya mica sabe ana" (Vedastuti)

(Apart from You all are false. You alone is truth)

Like Upanishads, Sankaradeva said that the non-duality of Brahman is absolute pleasure:

"Tomar advaita rupa parama ananda pada
Tate mora magna hauka citta." (Vedastuti)

(Let my mind be absorbed in the super blissful non-dualistic aspect of Thee.)

Basically, Sankaradeva believes in the Nirguna Brahman but while dealing upon the acts of his Lord Krishna, he appears as a devotee of the Saguna Brahman. He realized the significance of the Saguna Brahman as the means of worship. But in the final analysis his Ultimate God is Anadi, Ananta and Purna Brahma -

Nahi adi anta purbapara
Purna brahma jagata iswar. (Sishulila)

(God is Supreme father of all creatures of this world.)

Reason or intellect can't help a devotee in the ultimate realization of that Brahman:-

Yito Brahman nohe tarka gochara
Napave bacane mane ochara. (Sishulila)

(Argumentations are impervious. Brahman is not known by reasoning. Neither speech nor mind can approach Him.)

2.2 The world is false or unreal: Advaita Vedanta believes that the world is ultimately false. From the standpoint of the world it seems to be real not Brahman. Sankaradeva admits the Vedantic theory of Satkaryaveda which state that the effect is non-different from the cause. Due to this fact it is possible that the effect is reabsorbed into the cause, as gold ornaments can be transformed back to gold. Sankaradeva remarked:

Mukut kundala jena subarnere vinna nuhi
Michamatra namarupa jata.
Ahangkara panchamatra tomata prthaka nuhi
parabhu paramarthabharata. (Vedastuti)

(Like the golden crown and the golden earning which are non-different from the gold but which are only false names and appearances.)

The unreal world appears as real because of its origin from the Brahman: Tumi satya brahman tomate prakase
Jagata itu asanta Jagatate sada tumio prakasa Antarjyami
bhagavanta. (Vedastuti)

(Thou art Brahman the truth, in Thee manifested this false world. Thou art also always manifested in the world as the inner controller O, Bhagavanta!)

Asanta jagatakhana tomata udvaba vela Santa hena prakase sadaya. (Vedastuti)

(The unreal universe appeared from Thee and it manifests always as real.)

In the *Bhagavata*, Sankardeva admits *vivartavada* i.e. apparent modification. He illustrates this evolution with the example of the illusory snake evolving from the real rope.¹ He expressed in the chapter 'Sishulila' that the world is in *Brahman*:-

Yosoda sundari dekhanta pase
Samasta jagata garbhate ache.

(Yosoda saw all the oceans, island, mountains, rivers etc. in the mouth of Krishna)

2.3 Jiva and Brahman are not different: *Advaita Vedanta* did not accept the difference between *Jiva* and *Brahman*. The individual self is a part of God. The individual self for the embodied soul is called *jivatma* and *Brahman* is called Supreme self or *Paramatma*. Sankardeva holds that *jiva* is a part of the Supreme self. As he says in the *Kirtan*:-

"tomarese amsa ami jata jiva jaka" (Vedastuti)

(We are all individual self is a part of You)

In the section '*Krishnar Vaikuntha Prayan*' Krishna advised to *Uddhava*:-

'Samasta bhutate byapi acho moi hari
Sabako maniba tumi Visnu bhuddhi kari.'

(I Lord Hari am pervading through all creatures respect them all in the way you respect Lord Hari.)

Sankardeva finds the presence of the *Brahman* even in animal's life. He says:-

*"Kukura srigala gaddarvaro atma ram
Janiya sabako pari kariba pranama."* (Krishnar
Vaikuntha Prayan)

(Even the souls of dogs, foxes and asses are verily God with the idea that they shall be respected.)

Asanta iswara hari samasta bhutata
Henajani pranika kariva satkara.

(Lord Hari is omnipresent in all creatures; hence have due regard for all of them.)

Sankardeva believed that God is the creator of all individual bodies and He is present in every individuals or *jiva*:-

Jiva amse tumi pravesila gawegawe
Ave ami tumaka bhajoho sarvabave. (Vedastuti)

(You entered in all individual bodies. Therefore we worship you in all forms)

Pt.Sonaram Chutia remarked – "By declaring that the creation of His expression and 'jiva amse tumi pravesila gave gave' they (Sankardeva and Madhavadeva) have introduced the *jivas* as being the parts of Krishna. All things considered, the final verdict is: Brahman (Param), Vishnu and Krishna are *eka tattva* (one truth), one and the same. All *jivas* or in other words, every one of us, are His *amsa*."^[2]

2.4 Concept of Maya: *Maya* or *Avidya* is the chief characteristic of *Advaita system*. The world is a creation of *Maya*. The individuals' selves on account of their inherent *Avidya* imagine themselves as different from *Brahman* and mistake *Brahman* as this world of plurality even as we mistake a rope as a snake. *Maya* represents the false world as the real and conceals the *Brahman* which is the source of the Universe. By means of it the Supreme Lord creates the world. What is *Maya*? Sankardeva wrote in the *Bhagavata*:-

Abastuka dekhabya bastuka abori
Ehise mohura maya Jana nistha kari^[3]

(Concealment of the truth and misrepresenting it- this is my *Maya*. You must know it.)

He expressed that the appearance of *Brahman* as the world is due the influence of *Maya*:-

Tomarese mayaye mohit sarvaskhane
Tumi atma tomak najane ekojane.

(Always influenced by Your *Maya* anyone could not know that You are Supreme Soul)

Mayatase dekhaya vivida pariceda
Sawarupata tumar nahike kisu veda. (Uresa Varnan)

(You appeared in different forms for *Maya*, basically You are not different.)

Jata dekha dhana jana sabe vishnumaya
Akasata sanchare meghara jena Chaya. (Gajandrapakhyan)

(All riches son and other members of the family are but illusion of *Visnu* they appear like shadow of cloud in the sky) In the *Kirtanaghosa*, Sankardeva holds the concept of *Maya* same as *Advaita Vedanta*.

2.5 Moksa or Liberation: Like *Buddha*, the *Samkhya*, the *Jaina* and other Indian thinkers, *Advaita Vedanta* believes in *Jivanmukti* (the liberation of one while one is alive). It is the state of perfection attained here. The permanent realization of the truth- '*I am Brahman*' is the perfect wisdom or liberation from bondage. Such a liberated person is in the world, but not of the world. The soul then being free from the illusory ideas that divided it from God, is free from all misery. As God is Bliss, so also is the liberated soul. Sankardeva expressed the same view on *Jivanmukti*:-

Vishnumoya dekhoi jitu samasta jata
Jibanta mukuta houoi achira kalata.
Sakala pranik dekhibeke atma sama
Upaya madhyat ito ati mukhyatama. (Krishnar
Vaikunta Prayan)

(One who sees Vishnu in all the world secures ones deliverance at once in this very life. To see every being as equivalent to one's own soul is the supreme means of attaining deliverance)

After all Sankardeva declares:-
Nalage lina mukutika tatha
Nahi Hari pada pankaga yatha.

(I refuse the salvation in which; being merged in Thee, I miss Thy lotus feet)

But it is more remarkable that in his *Eka-Sarana-Hari-Nam-Dharma*, Moksa is not considered desirable in preference to Bhakti [4].

3. Conclusion

The *neo-vaishnava* bhakti culture of Assam believes in the non-dualistic concept of God. We know that the *Sankardeva* advocate *Ek Sarana* (self surrender to the One and to the One alone). '*Ek Dew, Ek Sew Ek bine nai kew*' (One God, One shelter, non else but one) are the watchwords of his faith [5] It is monotheism uncompromising. As a matter of fact, different non-dualistic aspects have found in the different places of *Kirtanghosa*. In many places of *Kirtanghosa* lays stress on *Advaita*. *Sankardeva* suggest the views of abstract monism here. There is no doubt that *Sankardeva* was greatly influenced by *Advaita Vedanta*.

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Jarita upaji jena ace sarpajana. (*Bhagavata. XII*)
(All things are false beyond Brahma like the appearance of the rope as snake)
2. 'Mahapurusiya Dharmar Darsanik Tattva' by Sonaram Chutia
3. Bhagavata.III
4. Muktitā nispṛha jito sehi bhakatak namo
Rasamayi magoho bhakati. (Namghosa)
(I crave for the satiating devotion and bow down to the devotee who is free from desire even for release)
5. Anya devi deva nakariba seva
Prasado nakhaiba tar
Murtiko nacaiba grho napasiba
Bhakti haiba byabhicara. (Bhagavata)
(Bow not to other Gods and Goddesses. Enter not the house where it is worshipped. Cast not a glance at the images. Partake not of their offerings, less they devotion to the One should be polluted.)
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