

Śaṅkaradeva's Concept of God: A Study

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Abstract

People believe that God is above all. This God is worshipped in different forms in different religions. Only God exists, God is dependent on everything else . According to Śaṅkaradeva , God is not only for the sake of God but also for Gods actions . Just as there is no difference between gold and earrings , there is no difference between Godly cause and Godly action .

Brahman and God are identical in Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy. Brahman is the form of nirguṇa , nirākāra irrespective and Brahman sākāra , the form of saguṇa is God . This God is known by different names as Brahman, Paramatma , Puruṣottama, Parameswara , Param Puruṣa , Nārāyaṇa , Kṛṣṇa , Rāma , Hari , Mādhava, Jagatpati in Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy . All these names are revealed by a God. Śaṅkaradeva was the originator of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism . Vaiṣṇavism arose before the creation of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism . Vaiṣṇavism was created with the focus of Parameswara Viṣṇu . By worshipping Viṣṇu with one heart , God has attained the root of Vaiṣṇavism by sacrificing his mind and soul in devotion . Neo- Vaiṣṇavism was monotheistic. Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa a deity is the only deity in the monotheism of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism . This monotheism is the faith in a one God .

Keywords:

Śaṅkaradeva , Brahman , God , Kṛṣṇa , Viṣṇu.

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Introduction

Śaṅkaradeva was a great social reformer, religious preacher , a saint , scholar, poet , writer, musician , dramatist , artist , trans-creator . This multi -talented personality was a great saint of the period of 15th and 16th century A.D. He was born at Alipukhuri of Bordowa of Nagaon district of Assam in 1449. At the very early age of Śaṅkaradeva , he lost his mother Satyasandhya and father Kusumbar Bhuyan and after that he was brought up by his grandmother Khersuti . Śaṅkaradeva was a great soul, Mahāpuruṣa .

As a great man he was able to create a renaissance in the fields of religion and literature nay in every field . Śaṅkaradeva has authored many devotional books viz – “*Kīrttana-Ghoṣā*”, “*Bhāgavata-purāna*” , “*Anādi-Pātan*”, “*Nimi Nabasiddha Sambāda*” and so on and so forth . These books explain in detail about God Brahman , the soul and the world . Śaṅkaradeva was the founder of *Neo-Vaiṣṇavism* in Assam . *Neo-Vaiṣṇavism* is monotheistic . *Viṣṇu* or *Nārāyaṇa* is the only deity in the monotheism of *Neo-Vaiṣṇavism*. Monotheism means faith in one God . His religion is known as *Eka-Śaraṇa-Nāma-Dharma* . Theistic *vedantins* who have discussed about God from their perspectives.

Śaṅkaradeva believes that “All is Brahman” . He regards that the determinate God (*īśvara*) is real and essentially identical with Brahman . The ultimate reality in Śaṅkaradeva’s faith is Lord *Kṛṣṇa* has been described both as determinate and indeterminate, as immanent and transcendent . Just as there is no difference between gold and earrings made of gold , similarly , there is no difference between God as cause and God as effect . God is both the cause and effect of this world . Brahman and God are identical in Śaṅkaradeva’s philosophy .

Methodology

The method which will be used here is descriptive and analytical in nature and data will be collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data will be collected from religious text of the said philosophers. And the secondary data will be collected from journals, newspapers, reports and records about the topic .

Objectives

- To discuss the Supreme Reality in Śaṅkaradeva’s Philosophy .
- To explore the concept of God of some of the Vaiṣṇava Thinkers.

The Supreme Reality in Śaṅkaradeva’s Philosophy

Religious man believe that God is the highest being . God is worshipped in different forms in different religions . God is regarded as the supreme being , creator and principle object of worship . Śaṅkaradeva the *Neo-Vaiṣṇava* thinker who preaches *Eka-Śaraṇa-Nāma-Dharma* has given an elaborate description of God . He maintains that God is both the cause and the effect of the world . Śaṅkaradeva , also has given his view of *Dāsyā-Bhakti* where the chanting of the name of *Kṛṣṇa* or *Hari* is the ultimate.

*tumi paramātmā jagatara īśa eka
eko bastu nāhike tohmāta byatireka
tumi kārya kāraṇa samasta caracara
suvarṇa kuṇḍale yena nāhike antara*

(Kīrtana-Ghoṣā , Harmohana Upākhyāna -519,520)

Thou art *Paramātmā* (the highest self) , the sole *īśa* (Lord) of the world . There is nothing different from thee . Thou art the cause , thou the effect , this sensate and insensate world , even as the earrings is nothing apart from gold .

According to Śaṅkaradeva , Brahman is the ultimate reality and that Brahman is nothing but *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* alone . Srimanta Śaṅkaradeva believes in *avatāriśm* (Incarnation) . According to Śaṅkaradeva , *Kṛṣṇa* is the best *avatāra* . According to Śaṅkaradeva , *Kṛṣṇa* is the *Parama Puruṣa* , *Parama Brahman* , *Jagatpati* , *Nārāyaṇa* and *Vāsudeva* . According to him , God is the cause of all incarnations .

prathame pranāmo brahmarupī sanātana

Sarva avatāra kārana nārāyana

So one thing is clear that in Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy , Brahman , God and *avatāri Kṛṣṇa* are one . It is assumed that other God and Goddesses are part of God . According to Śaṅkaradeva , if different Gods and Goddesses are worshipped except God *Kṛṣṇa* , then that devotion is adultery .

anya devī deva nakaribā seva

nakhāibā prasāda tāra

mūrttikō nacāibā gr̥ho napaśibā

bhakti haiba vyabhicāra

It is assumed that Śaṅkaradeva was a monotheist . *Kṛṣṇa* is the only deity in his monotheism. This God *Kṛṣṇa* is worshipped in the way of devotion like *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* . This *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* are the best of the nine kinds of devotions . These are reflected in his writings , such as *Kīrtana-Ghoṣā*. Śaṅkaradeva puts utmost importance to the *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* forms of devotion . In the *Bhāgavata* , Śaṅkaradeva says –

yadyapi bhakti navabidha mādhavara

śravaṇa kīrtana tāto mahā sresthātara

Although there are nine kinds of devotion of Madhava *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* are the best among them . According to Śaṅkaradeva , listening to *Kṛṣṇa's līla* is the best vision of devotion and is the path of liberation .

The concept of God is an attractive idea . Which cannot be finished by studying . The more you study , the more you can't end up studying . Śaṅkaradeva was an *Advaitist* (non-dualism). Śaṅkaradeva maintains that the worship of one God , *Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa* , the faith of supreme surrender to the one , *Viṣṇu* , and for that matter *Kṛṣṇa* the principle

deity of worship in the system , and constant recitation of His *Nāma* of the one God , *Kṛṣṇa*. Śāṅkaradeva said that *Viṣṇu* or *Kṛṣṇa* is the ultimate reality . Who is one without a second . In other words , *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* is the Supreme Reality or Parama Brahman .

The Concept of God of Some of the Vaiṣṇava Thinkers

It is seen that the many *āstika* schools of Indian philosophy also accept to the existence of God . Advaitist Śāṅkarācārya says that Brahman is *nirguṇa*. He says that Brahman is the only truth , the world and individual self are false . Similarly Rāmānujācārya is talking about saguṇa Brahman in his *Viśiṣṭadvaitavāda* . Here Rāmānujācārya says that Brahman has innumerable good qualities like omniscient , omnipotent , almighty .

Rāmānuja also known as Rāmānujācārya ,(1017-1137 A.D) was a theologian , and a social reformer . His view is known as *Viśiṣṭadvaita* or qualified monism . Rāmānuja also holds that “ All is Brahman” . But it is not indeterminate. Brahman and *Īśvara* are the same and real . God is not a distinction -less reality . It has internal distinction , though does not have external one . God has two parts- *cit* (finite soul) and the *acit* (the matter) . The parts that are the *cit* and *acit* are real.

In the view of Rāmānuja , God is not indeterminate , but is possessed of infinite number of infinitely good qualities . God really creates the world , sustains it and withdraws it . In the state of desolution , God remains with pure matter and bodiless souls in an unmanifested form . This may be called the causal state Brahman (*Kāraṇa-Brahman*) . After desolution , God becomes manifest in the world and the embodied souls . This is called the effect state (*Kārya-Brahman*).

Achārya Vallabhā , also is known as Vallabhācārya (1479-1531) . His view is known as *Śudhādvaita* or pure Non-Dualism , and declares that the whole world is real and is subtly Brahman . The individual souls and the inanimate world are in essence one with Brahman . Vallabha holds that Brahman is the independent reality and is identified with *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* . His essence is existence (*sat*), knowledge (*chit*) and bliss (*ānanda*). God is personified as *Kṛṣṇa* , when he is endowed with the qualities of wisdom (*jñāna*) and action (*kriya*) . He is the creator of the world , and we need not suppose that he should possess a physical body as worldly agents do , since what is applied to us need not be applied to the transcendent God . Vallabha looks upon God as the whole and the individual as part; but , the individual is of identical essence with God .

Śāṅkarācārya was a famous philosopher of south India. He flourished in the eighth century A.D. Śāṅkaradeva’s idea of God matches Śāṅkarācārya’s Advaita Vedanta .

Brahman is the main concern of Advaita Vedanta . The main teaching of Śaṅkara's Advaita are expressed as Brahman is ultimately real , the world is a false appearance on Brahman and the *Jīva* is essentially identical with Brahman . Śaṅkarācārya has accepted *Nirguṇa Brahman* as the Ultimate Reality . This Ultimate Reality is *Nirvikāra* (immutable) , partless , eternal, indestructible , indefinite and all pervading and permeating . The *Nirguṇa Brahman* is obviously higher than the *Saguṇa* one and it cannot change for it is *ajā*, unborn . Śaṅkarācārya believes that the *Upaniṣadic* observation “*tat tvam asi*” is literally true and that the soul is identical with the higher reality. But he finds both the *Bhāgavadgīta* and the *sūtras* of Bādarayana speaking of the *Jīva* as an ‘*aṃsa*’ of the Highest Reality .

Madhvācārya was born in A.D.1197 and lived for seventy - nine years . Madhvā advocates the reality of five - fold differences between soul and God , between soul and soul , between soul and matter , between God and matter and between matter and matter . Hence , Madhvā does not regard the universe of matter and souls as the body of God . Matter and souls are different from each other and from God . They do not qualify God because they have substantive existence themselves. Though God is the immanent ruler of the souls and though the souls as well as matter depend on God , yet they are absolutely different from God and cannot from His body.

Conclusion

So from the discussion, it was seen that the idea of God is an highest idea in Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy . All the Gods and Goddesses are satisfied if they worship this one God . He talks about worshipping this God through devotion and calls *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrttana* the best of the new devotions . So this is explained by Śaṅkaradeva through his idea of God . However , other *Vaiṣṇava* thinkers have offered their own opinions about God . One of the ideas related to God offered by Śaṅkaradeva, according to him , through devotion we can attain God and we can also attain liberation through devotion . So the only way to attain God is to listen to *Hari Katha Śravaṇa-Kīrttana*. He describes *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrttana* as the best of the nine kinds of devotion and discusses how to adore this God by devotion. He asserts that commitment is the path to both achieving God and emancipation.

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