

Srimanta Sankaradeva and his Eka-Sarana Hari-Nāma Dharma

Sonaram Chutiya

The purpose of his (Sankaradeva's) writings is summed up in the Assamese version of his Bhakti Ratnakara thus:

Prathamate kahu grantha karibāra hetu
Bāndhilā Sankaradeve mahādharma-setu
Krishnese parama deva nāma-dharma sāra
Ihāka karibe mātra lokata pracāra

The cause of so much writing by Sankaradeva is the construction of the Bridge of the Great Religion. The aim was to propagare (the message) "Krishna is the Supreme Deity and Nāma Dharma, the essence of all religions."

The name of the religion he had propagated is Eka-Sarana Hari-Nāma Dharma, the Religion of Taking Refuge with the One God only. This Eka-Sarana had been accepted from the Srimad-Bhagavad Gita. Let us discuss here the four slokas from the Gita (18/63-66):

Iti te jnanamakhyatam guhyad guhyataram maya
Vimrisyaitadasesena yathecchasi tathakuru

"Thus have I expounded to thee the most mysterious of all knowledge; ponder over it fully, then act as thou wilt."

According to Dr. Radhakrishnan, 'yathecchasi tathakuru' (act as thou wilt) is the speciality of Hinduism. The individual has been given to act according to his will. Even the Buddha had told his followers not to follow the precepts (just) because they were uttered by the Buddha; they should examine them to their satisfaction: 'Parikshya vikshavo grahyam na tu madvacana gauravat.'

Next, Shri Krishna says:

Sarva guhyatamam bhuyah srinu me paramam bacah
Istosi me dridhvamiti tato bakshyami te hitam.

"Hear again My Supreme Word, the most mysterious of all; dearly beloved thou art of Me, hence I desire to declare thy welfare."

As Arjuna was beloved to Krishna, so Krishna had to declare the means for Arjuna's welfare. What are these means? Shri Krishna declared:

Manmana bhava madbhakto madyaji mam namaskuru
Mamebaisyosi styam te pratijane priyasi me.

“On Me fix thy mind, to Me bring thy devotion, to Me offer thy sacrifice, to Me make thy obeisance; to Me indeed shalt thou come-solemn is My promise to thee, thou art dear to Me.”

This sloka had been translated to Assamese by Shri Madhavadeva in his famous Nāma-Ghoshā:

Mota mātra sadā diyā mana
Mora bhakta hovā sarvakshana
Moke pujā mātra moka karā namaskāra
Kahilo tomāta satyavāni
Pāibā sukhe moka mahāmāni
Tumi priyatam suhrida sakhi āmāra.

Lastly comes the Eka-Sarana sloka:

**Sarva dharman parityajya mamekam saranam braja
Aham tvam sarva papebhyo mokshayisyami ma sucah.**

“Abandon all duties and come to Me-the only refuge. I will release thee from all sins; grieve not.”

The next question arises: *Why should I take refuge in Krishna? Who am I and what is the relation between God and me?*

In the Mahabharata, we find:

Guhyam brahma tadidam vo bravimi
Na manusat sresthataram hi kincit.

“I tell you this, the secret of the Brahman; there is nothing higher than man.”

What is ‘man’? The different philosophers give different definitions of man. According to Aristotle, man is a rational animal, he is a political animal. According to another definition, man is a moral or ethical animal; again, he is a self-conscious animal. Again, from the spiritual point of view, man is the image of God; man is the image or reflection of the Brahman.

But according to Mahāpurusism, the religion established by Mahapurusa Srimanta Sankaradeva, **the individual soul is a part and parcel of God**-“Jiva amse tumi prabeshilā gāwe gāwe.”, “Hāmu jiva yata siva teri amsa”, etc. the nara-tanu- the human body-is hankered after even by Brahma. The gods, in spite of their earnest request, do not get it.-“Brahmāra bāncani nara-tanu”, “deve nāhi pāi mānavi huibār.”

To know one's self is one of the most important teachings of Srimanta Sankaradeva. It is the true result of the advice 'know thyself' of Socrates uttered more than two thousand years ago in Greece and 'Atmanam biddhi' of the Upanishadic age.

That man is not an ordinary animal, that he is a part of God, had been declared by the Svetaswataropanishad:

Srinvantu visve Amritasya putrah
Aye dhamani divyani tasthus
Vedahametam purusam mahantam
Aditya varnam tamsah parastat
Tameba viditvati mrityumeti
Nanyah panthah vidyate ayanaya.

“Sons of Amrita, inhabiting the numberless universes, I have known the Mahān, the great Purusha as the sun in darkness. Knowing Him only the people can be immortal; there is no other (alternative) path for this.”

Who is this Mahān Purusha? The Gita and the Bhagavata had narrated elaborately regarding this Purusha. He is the root cause of everything existing in the universes, nay, “He is the proprietor of the innumerable crores of universes”:

Ananta koti brahmāndar Hari adhikāri
[Madhavadeva, Nāma-Ghoshā]

Thus, thousands of years ago, our ancestors had declared that everything-sentient and insentient-arises from the Brahman as the sparks from the fire.

Up to the 16th century, this great truth had been hidden in the Sanskrit literatures and the common man was not allowed to have a scent about it. But, throughout India, even in Europe, a religious upheaval occurred and in different parts of the country, religious reformers were anxious to simplify the faith, discourage caste-distinctions and promote brotherhood for the benefit of the common people.

The vitality of India lies in religion and through religion only, India had come into contact with other countries. So long as the Indian people do not forget the great inheritance of their forefathers, no power on earth can destroy India. Mahapurusa Srimanta Sankaradeva had introduced Assam to India and India to Assam. He had not mentioned even for once the name of Assam as a country but mentions ‘Bhārata Varisa’ hundreds of times in his vast literature.

There are three potent qualities in every human being – to think, to do and to feel. These are the three aspects, however small they may be, of sat, cit, and ananda, the swarupa lakshanas of the Parabrahma. From these lakshanas or the fundamental qualities are derived Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. Srimanta Sankaradeva has written:

Jnānara pathata nāhike sahāya karmara pathata bhaya
Bhaktira pathata Iswara rakshaka jānibā rājā niscaya

“There is no help in the Jnana path; Karma path (too) is full of difficulties and hindrances, but God (Himself) helps in the path of Bhakti.” Even the great gods such as Brahma and Shiva are baffled by the effulgent innumerable bibhuti of Shri Krishna of the Gita and the Bhagavata.

Karma-marga or the path of Karma is not fit, especially for this Kali (Iron) age. So, the Bhakti-marga is the easiest path, not only for human beings but even for the birds and beasts. Srimanta Sankaradeva says:

Nalāge bhaktita deva dvija rsi huibe
Nalāge sambhrita sāstra vistara jānibe
Yaksa rāksha stri sudra yata brajabāsi
Pakshi mrigo Visnu bhailā Krishnaka upāsi

“In Bhakti marga it is not necessary that one must be a Brahmin or a deva (god); nor is it necessary to know all the sastras. (Look how) By worshipping or having unflinching faith in Krishna, the Yakshas, the Rakshasas, the women, the Sudras, all the inhabitants of Vraja (Vrindavana) and even the birds and the beasts became Visnu.”

In the Mahapurusiya religion (Mahapurisism), the knowledge through Bhakti is the real knowledge. It is why Srimanta Sankaradeva has described the animals of Vrindavana-Gokula as possessing more wisdom than the human beings due to their deep faith in Krishna as their only savior in all their sufferings:

Gokulara pasura dekhio kene jnāna,
Jānoi rakshākarta Krishna vine nāhi āna;
Hāmbārao kari yuthe yuthe dhenugane,
Pasila sarana save Krishnara carane.

“See the wisdom of the animals of Gokula. They knew that there is no other savior than Krishna. They all took refuge in the feet of Krishna.”

We all know that there are nine different aspects of Bhakti – sravana, kirttana, smarana, arcana, pada-sevana, dasya, sakhitva, vandana and atma-nivedana. Srimanta Sankaradeva had propagated the Dasya aspect of Bhakti through the help of Sravana and Kirttana.

Thus, Mahapurusiya Dharma (Mahapurisism) embraces not only all human beings but also *all* the creatures:

jagata jivana Rām, jagata jivana Rām,
jagatar sumangal tuvā guna nām.

“Rama is the life of the whole universe, O Rama! chanting your Nāma and Guna is beneficial to the whole world.”

[A recipient of the prestigious Srimanta Sankaradeva Award, Vaisnava Pandit Sonaram Chutiya is a leading scholar of Assam Vaisnavism . He was also the padādhikār of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, the largest socio-religious organization in Assam.]