

BHAKTI ACCORDING TO SANDILYA

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BHAKTI or devotion to God is one of the most ancient paths to perfection. There are quite a good number of verses in the Ṛgveda wherein the doctrine of bhakti is transparent. Take for instance this ṛk, where the Lord has been praised and there is also a reference to the recitation of His names : 'You praise that Ancient Cause the origin of ṛta (the Divine Law), according to your knowledge. You will be freed from birth. If you cannot praise Him, recite His name. However, we, O Lord Viṣṇu, devote ourselves to your light and attributeless form!' (R.V. 1.156.3). And again, this ṛk, where there is a clear allusion to the hearing and reciting of His names as also surrender to Him : 'He who offers (his all) to Lord Viṣṇu, the husband of Śrī (or Lakṣmī), the Ancient Cause, the Creator, the Ever-new, he who recites the glorious birth and works of this glorious Being, that giver, that reciter, obtains fame (or material enjoyments) and reaches the Highest Abode' (R.V. 1.156.2). Another ṛk considers Indra the great God as father and mother : 'O Vasu ! O Śatakṛatu ! You have become our father ! You are mother ! So now, we bow down to you !' (R.V. 8.98.11).

Coming to the Upaniṣads we see that though they are mainly devoted to knowledge, the doctrine of grace, which is an important aspect of the philosophy of devotion, is also mentioned, as for instance in the statement of the Kaṭha Upaniṣad : 'Whom the Ātman chooses, by him is He obtained ; to him He reveals Himself' (2.23). So also in another : 'When he who is devoid of desire-motivated actions, through the grace of God the supporter, sees the Paramatman's glory,

then does he become freed from sorrow' (*ibid.*, 2.20). The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad actually uses the word bhakti and clearly stresses prapatti (self-surrender) also : 'He who has supreme devotion (bhakti) towards God, and as towards God, so towards the teacher, to him verily, the great soul, all these things declared (thus far) will reveal themselves' (6.23) : 'To Him who at the beginning created Brahmā, and who gave the Vedas to him, — to Him the God who reveals the Knowledge of Himself, desirous of liberation, do I fly for refuge' (6.18).

Gradually the doctrine of bhakti was systematised into a regular philosophy and religion. It came to be known as the Bhāgavata religion and has also been variously designated as the Nārāyaṇīya, Sātvata, Ekāntika, or Pācarātra religion. Its main sources are the Nārāyaṇīya, section of the Mahābhārata, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, the Bhagavad Gītā, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the Pāñcarātra Āgamas and the Bhakti Sūtras of Śāṅḍilya and Nārada.

Not being satisfied with the impersonal Brahman of the Upaniṣad, the Bhāgavata religion has converted Brahman into the Personal God. Īśvara, Nārāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva are the names most commonly used with respect to Him. He cannot be apprehended by the senses nor by logic and arguments. Śrutis or the scriptures at best point towards Him. His grace is the supreme factor in realising Him. Single-minded devotion (ekāntikā bhakti) is the only means by which His grace can be obtained and He can be captured. Actually He is not independent as others make Him out to be, because, He is subject to the will of his devotees (bhakta-

parādhīna). He is always fond of those devoted to Him and reveals Himself to them. Complete resignation (prapatti or śaraṇāgati) is another means of attaining Him. These are its chief tenets in brief.

In Sanskrit literature it is commonly seen that the propounder of any doctrine or philosophy, or for that matter, any branch of knowledge, puts it down in the form of sūtras or aphoristic statements which are supposed to be brief but pregnant with deep meaning. Either his disciples or those coming in that tradition generally compose more detailed explanations of those sūtras called variously as bhāṣya, vṛtti, vārttika or ṭīkā, depending upon their length, form etc. It is impossible to understand these sūtras accurately without the help of such traditional commentaries. Since this sūtra literature along with the respective commentaries forms the basic work in any branch of knowledge, it is usual for the students of that branch to make a deep study of them. Looking from this standpoint, it is imperative that serious students of the doctrine of devotion must make a careful study of both the Nārada Bhakti Sūtras and the Śāṇḍilya Bhakti Sūtras. Before we delve deeper into the latter which is the subject of this essay, it is worthwhile making a brief comparative study of these two.

Though both the works are associated with the names of two great sages who adorned the spiritual horizon of our country, though there are no doctrinal differences between them, and though they deal with the subject in a more or less systematic way, their modes of approach to the subject are so different that we are compelled to say that each is complementary to the other and that our study of devotion will not be complete without studying *both* of them. Śāṇḍilya's approach is more intellectual while Nārada's is more emotional and practical. Hence we can safely say that Śāṇḍilya has evolved a philosophy of devotion whereas Nārada has made it a practical religion of devotion. Śāṇḍilya is very particular in mentioning the pramāṇas (the means of knowledge) as also the nature and mutual

relationship among the various constituents of the prameya (what is to be known) like Īśvara, jīva and prakṛti. He discusses about the reality of creation, controverts the theory that knowledge alone can give liberation, propounds and defends devotion as the sole means of liberation and also delineates the various forms of devotion. Nārada however does not seem to be interested a whit in all these intellectual gymnastics but goes straight to the practical aspects. Apart from defining devotion and describing its various forms, he gives several invaluable practical hints, warns against the pitfalls, eulogises the importance of devotion, gives its special characteristics to enable the aspirants to cultivate them and finally paints a vivid picture of the ideal devotees.

When we look at the sūtras of Jaimini, Patañjali or Bādarāyaṇa, we would perhaps be more right in putting the sūtras of Śāṇḍilya in that class. May be for the same reason, several commentators have chosen to comment upon these sūtras and leave Nārada's untouched. Neither do the latter need any commentary since they are so simple and direct!

It would however be extremely interesting, and even fascinating, if an attempt could be made to intelligently synthesise the two into a single treatise on devotion.

Several Śāṇḍilyas are to be met with in our religious literature. For instance : King Dilīpa's spiritual guide, king Nanda's priest, priest of Śātānīka (son of Janamejaya)—all these were Śāṇḍilyas. One Śāṇḍilya is mentioned in the Mahābhārata as having conversed with Bhīṣma, sitting on his bed of arrows. Another Śāṇḍilya has been mentioned as the father of Śaṅkha and Likhita, the well-known smṛtikāras. Three Śāṇḍilyas are mentioned in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad alone. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad mentions Śāṇḍilyavidyā. We do not know which of these Śāṇḍilyas was the author of the Bhakti Sūtras. Nor can it be definitely said when this Śāṇḍilya lived.

The Śāṇḍilya Bhakti Sūtras have two well-known commentaries : the bhāṣya of Svapneś-

vara and the Bakticandrikā of Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha. There is a third one attributed to Bhavadeva.

Let us now turn to the philosophy of Śāṅḍilya as depicted in his sūtras, depending mainly on the bhāṣya of Śvapneśvara. For the sake of convenience in understanding the philosophy of the sūtras, the same can be discussed under four main headings : (a) The Pramāṇas or means of knowledge ; (b) The Prameyas or the objects to be known through these means ; (c) The Sādhanās or the practical means to be adopted to gain liberation ; and (d) Mukti or absolute liberation from mundane existence :

(a) *The pramāṇas :*

Though the philosophy of the sūtras seems to have a close affinity with the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara, only three means of knowledge like the three eyes of Rudra are accepted, as against the six of the Śaṅkara school. They are pratyakṣa or sense-perception, anumāna or inference and śabda or verbal testimony of the scriptures, the last one being the chief. In sense-perception an important point to be noted is that knowledge through it comes in two stages. When the senses come into contact with their objects, the ignorance covering them is first destroyed, and then only, knowledge will arise in the mind due to its being illumined by the soul.

(b) *The Prameyas :*

Īśvara or God, jīva or the individual soul and jagat or the created world are the three prameyas we come across in the work as in other theistic treatises. Īśvara, para, cit and bhajanīya are the words used in the sūtras to denote God. Devotion to Him gives liberation and *not* knowledge of Him. His śakti or power is called māyā or prakṛti. He creates the world through this māyāśakti, putting it up as a screen as it were. Hence it is this prakṛti that undergoes modifications and not He Himself. Since He and His power are identical, this creation also is identical with him. His power is unobstructed. He is ever the Lord and ever free.

He is of the nature of consciousness. He, out of pity for the created beings, takes on a divine body through His power and is born in the world out of His own free will in order to destroy the demons or propagate the Vedas. In fact, after creating the world consisting of the high and the low, he also like a father, creates the Vedas. There are several well-known incarnations of His, devotion to whom also will give liberation. Though there are several modes of devotion, even one is enough to please Him if practised intensely. When devotees give up their bodies in this world before attaining supreme devotion to Him, they are reborn in His world where they will continue their practice and ultimately attain Him. He is the dispenser of the fruits of our actions, of our merit and demerit.

The individual soul or Jīva is of the nature of consciousness and is essentially identical with God, also called Brahman by the commentator. His individuality, his separation from God, has been caused by his association with buddhi or antaḥkaraṇa (intellect or internal organ) which consists of the three guṇas and is an upādhi (a limiting adjunct). Again, this association and the consequent bondage of saṁsāra have been caused by lack of devotion to God and *not* by lack of knowledge of Him. Being an evolute of the prakṛti of God, which is real, this upādhi is also real and not an illusion caused by ignorance. Hence it cannot be removed by knowledge. When a red china rose is kept near a crystal and the crystal appears red, it cannot be got rid of however intently or cleverly one may gaze at it! It can be removed only by the removal of either of the two things or the contact between them. Similarly here also, since the soul is eternal and all pervading, the only other alternative left is to dissolve this upādhi viz., the buddhi back into its original cause, the prakṛti of God. This can be done only by supreme devotion to God. Once this is done, liberation is attained. Though the individual soul is actually identical with God, because of the multiplicity of the buddhis, it also appears

as many. It is like the sun appearing as many, being reflected in several mirrors. When the mirrors are removed, the several reflections merge back in the sun. It is for this very reason, that when one soul is liberated, others are not, like the reflections continuing in other mirrors even though one is removed.

Apart from the conscious entity which exists in a two-fold form (God and individual soul), the only other reality that exists is the insentient prakṛti. There is no third reality apart from these two.

This prakṛti is actually the power (śakti) of God and is also called māyā and pradhāna. It functions also as the material cause for creation. Being the power of God, it is real and not unreal as some others think. Hence this world, the whole creation, which is its product or effect, is also real. Arguing backwards, prakṛti is the generality or totality of insentient creation. Hence it pervades every one of its products. But being insentient, it cannot by itself evolve into this wonderful universe. Neither can the intellect of an ordinary being do it. It is possible only for God. The order in which creation takes place from God is practically the same as in the Sāṅkhya and Vedānta. Dissolution takes place in the reverse order.

The sūtras uphold the sat-kārya-vāda or the doctrine of the pre-existence of the effect in the cause and the consequent pervasion of the former by the latter. Hence creation (sṛṣṭi) and destruction (pralaya) are actually manifestation (avirbhāva) and disappearance (tirobhāva). The doctrine of production (utpatti) which says that the effect is a new product, produced by the combination of the causes, is criticised and disapproved.

(c) *The Sādhanas :*

Bhakti or devotion is the sole means to liberation. It is defined as supreme attachment to and love for God.

All, down to despised souls, are entitled to tread the path of devotion.

This devotion is not of the nature of knowledge (jñāna) for these reasons : (i) It is lacking in the knowledge of one who hates. One who hates another may have knowledge

about him, but he cannot be said to be devoted to him ! (ii) Knowledge gradually gets eclipsed as devotion arises ; (iii) It is the opposite of hatred. Hatred being an emotion, devotion also must be likewise. It is well-known that the opposite of hatred is love and not knowledge ; (iv) Devotion is spoken of as a rasa which is the same as rāga or attachment, and as anurāga which clearly means attachment to God ; (v) Lastly, there is the famous example of the milkmaids of Vṛndāvana who attained liberation through devotion even though they had no knowledge.

Though devotion is of the nature of rāga (attachment), it cannot for that reason be condemned, because the object of that attachment is God and not human beings or the things of the world. It is only in the latter case that it becomes condemnable.

Neither can it be identified with work (kriyā), will or wish (icchā), nor even with faith (śraddhā).

Then, what is the place of knowledge in the scheme of liberation ? It is a secondary sādhana which helps to destroy the impurities of mind and thus pave the way for the rise of devotion.

It is interesting to note that Śāṅḍilya calls the prasthānatraya (the Upaniṣads, the *Gītā* and the Vedāntasūtras) as Brahmakāṇḍa and not as jñānakāṇḍa as it is usually termed. He argues that jñāna or knowledge is common to both the pūrvamīmāṃsā (called Karmakāṇḍa) and the Uttaramīmāṃsā. In both cases the object is to give us the knowledge about things which are previously unknown: of karma (ceremonial rites) in the former case and of Brahman in the latter case. After giving this knowledge, the former urges us to perform these rites and the latter, to attain liberation through devotion to Brahman, termed as samsthā.

The path of yoga as taught by Patañjalī is also useful as a secondary discipline since it helps in the purification and concentration of mind. However the samādhi (perfect concentration) spoken of there, can also be attained by secondary devotional practices. Precisely for these reasons a devotee of God is

superior to those who tread the path of concentration, ceremonial rites or knowledge.

Sāṅḍilya has graded devotion into parā or supreme and gauṇī or secondary. Actually it is the former alone that deserves to be named as bhakti. Since the latter leads to the rise of the former, it is also called bhakti, but in a secondary (gauṇī) sense.

In Sū. 44, Sāṅḍilya gives a long list of the signs by which the maturity of devotion can be inferred. They are : Sammāna (respect), bahumāna (high esteem), Prīti (delight,) viraha (forlornness), itara-vicikitsā (doubting other objects), mahimākhyāti (praising His greatness), tadartha-prāṇasthāna (holding the life for His sake), tadīyatā (considering everything as His), sarvatabhāva (regarding Him as existing in all beings) and aprātikūlya (not resisting His will).

Though these are the signs by which supreme devotion expresses itself, they are also the means to attain supreme devotion when they are consciously practised. In the latter case they become gauṇī bhakti.

Other types of secondary devotion are those mentioned in the Gītā (9th chapter) such as Kīrtana (praising Him), namaskāra (obeisance), ananyacintana (thinking of none else but Him), yajña (worshipping Him), patrādi-dāna (offering of leaves, flowers etc.), arpaṇa (offering everything one does or enjoys) etc.

All these purify the heart and facilitate the rise of supreme devotion. There is no rule that they should be practised all together or only some of them or in any particular order. Any one of them, when practised sincerely and intensely, can please God and thus give rise to supreme devotion.

Most of these forms of secondary devotion are of the nature of action ; for instance, worshipping Him with all the accessories, singing His glories, repeating His names and so on. Among all forms of action these are the best, since they are actually the result of the meritorious acts of previous births and will now lead directly to supreme devotion. Another beauty of these is that they can produce either supreme

devotion or fulfil any other desire of the aspirant depending upon his attitude and motive.

The scriptures contain elaborate and difficult expiations for various kinds of sins. They consume a lot of time and money as also cause a lot of physical pain. The doctrine of bhakti assures that remembrance of God, glorifying Him, hearing about His life and deeds etc., are also equally capable of destroying even great sins and can take the place of those difficult expiations. However a sincere repentance is a precondition and these practices must be continued till death. And for a sinner, the real practice of devotion will begin only after the destruction of his sins through remembrance etc.

Supreme devotion (parā bhakti or parānura-kti) which rises in the final stages as a result of the practice of secondary devotion leads to infinite beatitude. A very important characteristic of this devotion is ekāntabhāva or absolute one-pointedness. This devotion can be directed not only towards God but also towards any of His manifestations like Varāha, Nṛsiṃha, Vāmana, Rāma or Śiva.

Since all, irrespective of their birth or capacity, are entitled to the practice of devotion, it is likely that many of them will not have attained supreme devotion before they die. Such devotees are reborn in the world of God like the Śvetadvīpa where they will continue their devotional practices and finally attain it, and through it, liberation.

(d) Mukti :

It is the lack of this supreme devotion that is the real cause of bondage, of suffering and transmigration, and not lack of knowledge as some argue. The commentator does not subscribe to the Advaitic view of anirvacanīya khyāti (logical indefinability of a particular type of knowledge) with the help of which the illusoriness of the world is sought to be proved. When a snake is seen in a rope it is a simple case of mistake technically called anyathā-khyāti (mistaking one for another). Hence it is lack of devotion alone, and *not* knowledge that is the cause of bondage. Consequently devotion destroys this bondage and gives libe-

ration. That this liberation is of the nature of immortality and is obtained through devotion to God is confirmed by the śrutis also (vide Ch. U. 2.23.2).

Supreme devotion destroys the upādhi of the individual soul viz., the buddhi (understanding) or antaḥkaraṇa (the internal organ), thereby liberating it. The liberated soul lives as a jīvanmukta as long as the body lasts due to the momentum of his past karmas which have fructified giving him this body. Once the body falls, he is merged in God.

It has already been pointed out that this is like the merging of the reflected image of the sun in the real sun once the mirror is removed, and other non-liberated souls will continue to

exist separately due to the upādhis being infinite in number.

Liberation can also take place in a gradual way. Those who are purified by the practice of lower forms of devotion but die before getting supreme devotion, will go by the arcī-rādi-mārga (the path of light leading to the world of conditioned Brahman) and reach final beatitude from there, later on. Thus, lower devotion gives gradual liberation whereas supreme devotion gives it immediately. However, it should not be forgotten that even lower devotion leads to liberation only through the production of supreme devotion whether in this world or in the higher regions.

BHAKTI AS EXEMPLIFIED BY SRI CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU

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A PROPHET of *prema bhakti*, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1533) spread the sweet scent of *prema* all around and charged the atmosphere with his sublime sankīrtan. Though he was a Vaidik brahmin pandit, he purveyed out of sheer compassion the ambrosia of Hari's name not only to the sinners and outcastes but also to Muslims, just as the broad-hearted Ramanujacharya had broadcast the mantra to the masses for their salvation. It is no small achievement of Chaitanya that he brought into the fold of Hinduism or, to be precise, Vaishnavism, Muslims as well as Hindus who had been converted to Islam, and checked the spread of the alien religion among the people. What is more, he is still a living force, as is evident from the fact that the movement he set into motion is drawing people to the path of bhakti, the trail blazed by him, not only in the land of his birth but also abroad. His boundless love knew no barriers of caste, creed, or colour. Little wonder, then, that west-

erners too should find delight in drinking the nectar of the name of Krishna and in reordering their lives in tune with the message of the Mahaprabhu. This universal love of Chaitanya is but a manifestation of his mature bhakti. There is more to it. His holy life is a luminous illustration of the potency of pure bhakti in elevating and perfecting man. It is a loving call of infinite hope to men feeling low in spirit despite the mounting amenities of modern times. As his life serves to illustrate his bhakti, we shall touch upon some of the events of his life.

The child is father to the man. While yet a baby, the cries of Nimai¹ would not stop until the women clapped their hands and chanted

¹ Chaitanya was then known as Nimai on account of the neem tree near which he was born, or as Vishwambhar (the supporter of the universe), or as Gauranga because of his golden complexion, Sri Krishna Chaitanya (he who awakens Sri Krishna in the hearts of all) being the name he was to get later at the time of sannyasa in his twenty-fourth year.