CHAPTER XIX

EKANATHA: A TRUE FOLLOWER OF RELIGION
Ekanatha: a true follower of religion

The meaning of truth of realism in truth:

Religion, like every distinctively human activity has two parallel objectives, one is cognitive and other is conative, the theoretical and the practical. The fundamental of religious life is to manifest the truthful motivation of life based on the philosophical aspects of theology. The word 'Religion' itself used in the narrower sense but it must have the philosophical essence with a pragmatic use in the socio-religious field. 1

'The God who is known must be independent of the act whereby He is known, this is known as the essence of the truth of realism in theological knowledge' 2.

Ekanatha was one brightest star of the Indian religious culture. He was the follower of Janardana (knower of the inner heart), the Krishna (the Lord Almighty who attracts in the monistic meaning) in an anthropomorphic form. He was an ardent devotee of Krishna Janardana, but

1. Religion in philosophical and Cultural perspective
   - J. Clayton Feaver & William Horoz
   N.Y., 1971 p 85

2. Ibid p 89
manifested in his pragmatic thought in monistic way of thinking by interpreting the eleventh part of the sacred scriptures of Vaisnavas, the Sri Bhagavatam in the line of his preceptor Jnaneswara in the Maharastrian language, which existed before three hundred years ago.

His early life

Ekanatha was born in between 1518 and 1521 Saka era. Historians differ in their opinions regarding his birth year, but it is presumed that he was born in the holy place at Paithan on the bank of the river Godavari in 1533 A.D. Pt. Ganparkar ascertained the exact year of his passing away in 1521 Saka (1599 A.D.) by defying the arguments of Pt. Sahasra Buddh. However, he lived a creditable life for sixty-six springs. His father was Suryanarayana and his mother was Rukminibai. His birth day tithi (according to the solar system of Indian Calendar) still ceremonially observes in the land of Maharashtra.

Ekanatha clarified the Vedas by interpreting the Bhagavata in lucid style;

Ekanatha used the language of the common people.
of the then Maharastra for interpreting the Bhagavata. His inspiring interpreting of the Bhagavata led the people to realise the true essence of the vedas. Saint Tukarama treated his treatise as the vedas of the Varakari Sampradaya (a religious sect based on self-surrendering to the Almighty).

He was a man of high spiritual standard. He showed much of his humiliation as a follower of vaisnavite cult. He said:

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Grantha daksuna sajnan /
Mahati jnata eka janardana //
Jerali jehalia darsan /
Mukha sampurna maniti //
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Janardana (the Lord) himself has depicted his mystical power in these composition of Abnangas (Couplet) and His is only realiser. Reading the scripture one may mind 'I am a learned man' but 'I am nothing but a fool, if any one looks at me from nearer distance'.

He also gave much stress on discouraging the ego-centric ideas before the realising the truth of the
Bhagavata and proclaim a relating matter with such utterance. His utterance was that one should treat all the creation of the universe as the manifestation of universal power, without burying the difference from high and low or good and bad one can realise the essence of Truth. Thus he sang:

Ekadasa kshetra na jwa jan /
Ma Citsamudra paripurna //
ye theng jo jaisa hoi Nimagna /
To misaci apna ratne lave //

'The canto (of the Bhagavata) is ocean of eternal embodiment of joy. If any one absorbs in it, he may get the gem(ecstatic condition). One yet the idea according his power of absorption'.

Influence of Caitanyaadeva on Ekanatha :

Advent of Ekanatha occurred just after a century of Srikrishna Chaitanya's demise, who travelled widely southern part of India and visited the holy place Pandharpura also during his sojourn. There is slight touch of philosophical influence of Srikrishna Caitanya on Ekanatha. 3

3. Ekanathi Bhagavata - Prankishore Goswami  
Cal., 1375 B.E. (B) Preface viii
Srikrisna Chaitanya opened the avenue of powering thought from the Sufi saint. He introduced the dancing mood of the Darves (Sufi saint) in the time of praising the Almighty by singing the glories of Him with the musical instruments. Eknatha adopted some sorts of arrangements done by Srikrisna Chaitanya in his sect by knowingly or unknowingly.

His first word regarding the concept of god was thus:

Jane Janardana aka jane to Sutala misa / Hengci nemOlian gungfe anek nigatmaehrenen / [Ramchandra Krishna Kamat Chandragarkar's ed. no. 3rd. 1880 Saka]

which means:

'One may attend the supreme truth who treats the Lord of all beings (Janardana) and the common mass (Janagana) in the same outlook'. Here the concept of Sri Chaitanya's idea worked in him much more than that of Sankara's monistic thought:
Other valuable works of Ekanatha:

The following are the works done by Ekanatha including his main work on commentary of the Bhagavata:


He also composed separate poems and ordained them with the following titles:


His ethical teachings to the mass:

But his popularity among the masses did not depend on his scholarship but it rested mainly on his lyrical poems (Abhangas) in which he showed his proficiency in leading the simple minded common men in the devotion to God and made sense of highly values of morality in individual life. He attracted the people above their
personal gain in the worldly life and composed a lyric against the self-centred ideas of the age. Thus he said:

'We should live in the world as more pilgrims who come to a resort in the evening and depart the next morning. As children build houses in sport and throw them away, so should we deal with this life. He was born in a pious Brahmin family but never encouraged the discrimination between man and man on caste consideration. In one of his devotional songs he sung his mystical spiritual experiences and proclaimed: 'In the dawn of spiritual experiences I saw the whole world clothed in radiance. No doubt the song impressed the common intellectual level of the mass and it bore on social value. In another popular song he sang ........' Inside and outside, in sleep and in working, in whichever direction he looked, he sees only Ram.'

His religious tolerance:

Ekanatha had a spirit of bearing ideas of non-violence patiently even after the provocation. His

5. Meditation and spiritual life - Swami Yatiswarananda
Bangalore, 1979, p 622
6. Ibid
7. Ibid.
contemporary religious opponents irritating him in many ways in blasphemous speeches of his preceptor. Nanadeva particularly but he could not utter any word of protest against their commission of vices and said in an lyrical poem:

Mae jeth jharâ dewan gayen /
Tain boânen Janardanôi Hoye ..... //

'I could not protest them, an inner urge came from the Lord Almighty (Janarda - the Lord of the mankind) and He used to speak in favour of me, where I lapsed to argue with them. He devoured all my ego-centric ideas.'

Other instances of his tolerances were connected with stories in his personal life and in every case he shows his spirit of Ahimsa (non violence) and patience. Here is an historical fact related with life.

Once when he was coming out of the river after a bath, an irreligious Mohammedan spat on his body. 'Ekanatha calmly went back and took his bath again. The Mohammedan again spat on his body, and again Ekanatha without a word of anger went and had his bath. The spiritting and bathing went on 108 times the repentant scoundrel fell at the saints feet and begged his pardon'.

7devotional literature in India in Bengal Cal., 1964, p 361
9. Meditation and spiritual life - Swami Yatiswarananda
Bangalore, 1979, p 621
teaching of Vedanta, i.e. oneness of God through his composition of lyrical impressive poems and made it popular among the masses of Maharashtra.

His contribution to the literature of Maharashtra:

His contribution to the literary field of Marathi language in the sixteenth century, still remains unparalleled in the twentieth century. His interpretation of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita on the comments of Sri Jñanesvar is an unique work in the field of Indian Philosophy. His commentary and composition based on the Bhagavata, Cants XII is an excellent treatise both of religion and philosophy for all ages. He was in the personal bondage of love with contemporary mystic saints Jñanesvar and Namadeva, and their path was followed by many saints and Tukarama elevated their thoughts in highest position in the field of religion as well as philosophy.

He concluded his definition of emancipation on saying from Yoga Vasishtha:

'Na moksha navaspristhe na patale na bhutale' 'The emancipation is not available in the sky or in the underworld, or in this existing world', but it is available:

'Moksha hi Ceto bimalam samyagnamabibodhitam' on the concept of exclusively pure knowledge of truthfulness'. Tukaram had such knowledge to define the truth. He did not rise above the earth with his body. So much as he rose above his body while on this earth.
Life of Suradasa:

There is dearth of documentary evidence of Suradasa's hagiographical data. There are three sources of acquiring information on his pre-monistic life through the sectarian religious literature life 'Chauresi Vaishnava Ki varta' (The narrative about eighty-four Vaishnavas) edited by Bhav Prakash in the year 1698 A.D. 3. But it is partly mixed with sectarian motivation. Other literary works of mediaeval Hindi literature depicted Suradasa as a miraculous person and a Soothsayer. 4 Another noted religious literature of Vaishnavite school written in Hindi by Nabhadasa, the Bhaktamal which supplies the unbiased information on the hagiography of Suradasa expressed the views that Suradasa was a blind poet and a great musician but never bothered for his personal biography. 'In the Persian sources, and one which has also created some confusion about Surdasa is Ain-e-Akbari a historical work by Abul Fazl. Written in 1597 A.D., it contains the names of the musicians and the Singers in Akbar's Court. 5

4. Ibid p 2
5. Ibid p 7
'Another Persian source that caused confusion is Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh by Abdulqadir Badayuni. In a letter, sent to someone named Suradasa who lived in Varanasi, a suggestion was made to present himself before emperor Akbar when he visited Allahabad. It was to ask Akbar to redress some grievances that the Surdas had against someone. Akbar visited Allahabad in 1001 A.D. and Surdas, the singer of Sur's ocean, was long dead by this time. Suradasa never intended to place some facts of his personal life in his works 'Sursagar' or 'Sursaravali' according to the old traditional system of India that one should expose himself for his own cause. The name and fame can destroy a sane spiritual life. The name is the impediment in the ways of simultaneously for spiritual and mundane life. There are many legends surrounding Surdas, most of them are centering on his blindness. It is true he was a blind with his eyes, but he had deep insight outlook. He felt his parental house before touching his teens and used to live in a cottage built by the village landlord up to eighteen and finally he shifted his place of residence for spiritual practice and composing the songs of the Lord to praise Him. He permanently

6. Ibid, p 8
7. Ibid, p 8
settled near the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna at Allhabad, the place where he used to live was called 'Gauhat,' a slopy land which was generally used as a drinking place for cattle population.

At the age of thirty-one he had an occasion to meet Sri Vallabhacarya, a great Vaisnavite saint, an exponent of new school of thought. 'Suddhadvaita' (i.e. pure dual process on thinking God). He blessed him and gave initiation in Krsna as personified God and asked him to compose songs for praising the Almighty in dual form. He taught specially in the teaching of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita and the 10th canto of Srimad Bhagavad. 'Bhav pravash' a Hindi literary work on the religious aspect depicted very finally the interesting light on the association of Suradasa with his Guru (i.e. the preceptor) Sri Vallabhacarya as usha Nilsson mentions in her work 'Surdas':

'Just as a warrior never turns his back on the battlefield, and goes forward, ahead of everyone, in the same manner, Surdas' devotion became higher and higher. That is why Acarya (Vallabha) called him Sur. And Sri Gosain (Vittal Nath) called him Surdas' .

8. Ibid. p 5
The more devoted he became, the more his humility increased. He created a rich composition in colloquial language of the locality. His vast works of composition of Suradasa are equally valued with the works of 'Namadeva, Kabirdasa and Dadu'. He constantly emphasised the forsaking of all worldly attachments and involvements, in order to seek union with God. Humility and supplication were the major notes of this poetry. 9.

Characteristics of Suradasa in the Bhakti literature:

Suradasa had no attachment with the worldly materials alike other great personalities of creative world in Indian Literature in mediaeval age, but his stand of creative world was to praise the Lord of universe in anthromorphic form without further approach towards monistic outlook of Godhood. 10.

He is called Saguna Kavi, a poet, who attributed Godhood in qualities of humanly behaviour in Hindi literature. Where other contemporary poets of Bhakti era sang for the universal monism, there he spoke frankly:

'My mind runs in circles
bewithered.
Finding nothing to grasp,
in Faceless, who is
Faceless, attributeless
No lines, no characteristics,
considering it, in everyway
in accessible
Sur decides to sing of
incarnate God Hari
and his various lilas'.

As it is quoted by
Usha Nilsson

It is also to be noted that he had no direct sensual perception though the ophthalmic power, only oracular conception of him, made him a natural poet and singer. Thus he created for himself a permanent position among psychic sphere of the listeners, that people were impressed much by his created works. The story of child Krishna,
his birth and physical ability, his naughtiness in his childhood days, which he depicted in his creative art showed the child psychology which advent much after several centuries from the west. In his own language he penned a funny thing through his composition though he had eyesight:

'Mother Jasoda is teaching him,
how to walk
Stumbling in a panic, he extends
his hands
Wavering, he puts his foot
on the floor
She holds him tightly
looking at his beautiful face

........ etc

It is rightly observed by friend of India, C.F. Andrews:

"In English Literature child poetry is comparatively modern growth. This is different from Indian poetry where through the stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa the child has been from the first the object of poets devotion and love." 11

11. Andrews paper : Centenary Celebration Committee, Cal., nd.
His psychological approach in writing poems made him a unique popular poet. His influence on the poorer community all over north India is still immense. His main contribution to the mediaeval society was high because of his induction of parental love in his creative works, which insisted other to love their children to make them perfect men.

His contribution to the development of Hindi Literature:

Though sixteen works are attributed to Suradase only three are of major literary importance.

1. Sursagar
2. Sursaravali
3. Sahitya Lahari '12

His minor works are:

1. Govardhana Lila
2. The commentary on the Tenth Canto (of Bhagavat)
3. Nagalila
4. Pran Pujari.

12. Ibid. p 21
Surdasa's fame rests on the collection of poems in volume called **Sursagar**. According to a legend, **Sursagar** contained 1,25,000 songs, but not more than 6,000 have been found, out of which approximately 5,000 have been authenticated. His manuscripts were preserved at the temple of Srinathji. In a **pada** he said:

"Vyasa narrated it to Sukdeva in twelve Chapter
Surdas sings the same in Bhasa-pada" 14.

He admitted himself about his pattern of composition was totally based on **Bhagavat Purans**.

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His countrymen still remember him by attributing his name on the whole blind community those who always deserve sympathy from their countrymen. 15.

15. Surdas - Collected essays by Sur Smarak Mandal by Dr. S.N. Srivastava.