CHAPTER-III
CHAPTER III

PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE AND DEVOTION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND SANKARADEVA'S PHILOSOPHY

Devotion is a very common phenomenon in most of the religious traditions. It is often meditative, emotionally disciplined and subdued and consists primarily of the wilful directing of one's attention to the object of devotion. In the 'Bhāgavad Gītā' Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna to centre himself mentally in God in all his actions in order to make his entire life an act of devotion. There is a similar emphasis in most theistic traditions in which the devotee is taught to be attentive to God.

Devotion may find its expression in emotional frenzy and passion. The devotee of a Deity often expresses total dependence upon his God by feelings, attitude, gestures or acts of submission. So, Bhakti or devotion as we see, is a discipline that teaches us how to have direct communion with the Divine. It is pointed out by some spiritual teachers that the easiest form of Bhakti or devotion is Nāmajapa i.e. repetition of the name of God with devotion, sincerity and concentration.

Bhakti is defined in various ways by its different exponents. The derivation of the word Bhakti has its root in the verbal 'Bhaj' which means 'to serve'. Service is a special form of bhakti. This method of service distinguishes bhakti from other cultures. It implies true partnership and mutual relationship between God and devotee. The root 'Bhaj' from which 'bhakti' is derived is found employed in the Vedic texts in various forms the meanings of which are: to distribute; allot or apportion; to furnish; supply or bestow; to share with; to partake of or enjoy to set about; to resort to; but never in the sense of 'to love or adore.' In the Rig Veda (1:175.5) the words 'bhakta' and 'abhakta' occur, and Agni is said to have
discriminated between the two categories in meteing out favours; but Śāyana takes the words as referring to sevamāṇa or asevamāṇa worshipping and non-worshipping yajamāṇas. The word bhakti in Vedic literature meant distribution, partition, separation or a share, and in the Nirukta, in the Rig Veda prātiṣakhya, it gives the sense of succession, order or series or an attribute. The words bhakti, bhakta and Bhāgavat are all cognate terms obtained from the root 'Bhaj'.

The most ancient document of the Hindu religion uses the root 'Bhaj' where Viṣṇu's name has been said to be worshipped. In the time of the Saṁhita the word 'Upāsana' was also used as a synonym of bhakti. The Devī Bhāgavata explains Bhakti as devotion towards the worthy. In other words loyalty is devotion out of respect. The 'Garuḍa purāṇa' refers to Bhakti as a service and an effective means of attaining the Lord.

From the etymological and semantic analyses of the term bhakti, it appears that the root 'Bhaj' means to participate and to share. When it is used in respect to people it implies a certain communion of mind and heart, and in this sense bhakti denotes a personal relationship. The semantics of bhakti and bhaj are Bhakto, loyal or devoted. In classical Sanskrit, it came to mean increasingly to participate in something by some one through affection.

Though the Bhakti culture flourished even in the vedic times, its distinct mark is felt in Mantra, Brahman, Upaniṣad etc. The vedic hymns are replete with sentiments of devotion and faith. In Chandogya Upanisad, the term Śrādha has been defined thus "when a man has Śrādha, he thinks deeply, without Śrādha none contemplates one having Śrādha alone meditates."
In explaining this mantra, Sankaracharya takes Srādha to mean theistic belief (āstika buddhi). Srādha, thus, means faith in God. Accordingly, to come to bhakti one must first have theistic belief or faith in God, and then his mind must be full of love in order to be inclined towards Him. Only then he can have loving devotion towards God. Theistic devotion involves a personal relationship in which the Deity is imagined and approached as a person. In Islam, for example the term 'manajat' meaning intimate 'converse' is supposed to characterise a person's devotion to God. The attitude a devotee adopts in his personal relationship varies and is often dependent upon how the Deity is perceived.

As Prof. M. Hiriyanna puts it, Bhakti connotes turning to God for protection and completely surrendering oneself to His will. Dr. Radhakrishnan on the other hand, suggests that bhakti is a direct development of the Upāsana of the Upaniṣad.63

The evolution of Bhakti culture in Northern India is evident from the Besnagar (Gwalior) inscription of the second century B.C. where Heliodorus, the Greek ambassador is described as Bhāgavata. Even in Assam, the Bada Ganga Rock Inscription in the District of Nowgong of date 244 (563-64 AD) mentions Bhuti Barman, the renowned king of Kamarupa as a Parama Bhāgavata. The Ālvārs (Tamil saints) preached in South India this doctrine of Bhakti and produced a vast religious literature in Tamil.64

There is inscriptive evidence of the spread of Bhāgavatism in Northern India before the Christian era; its entry into Deccan and further South took place about the first century B.C. Entering the Tamil country in the early centuries of the Christian era, it influenced the devotional songs of the Ālvārs. The revival of Bhakti movement in the Tamil country is found essentially in the work of Ālvārs in the Vaishnava tradition. The Bhakti movement is developed in the Saivite tradition in the Tamil country by the Nāyanmārs.
Álvar is one who has gone deep into the knowledge of God, one who is immersed in the contemplation of Him. When devotion is expressed in terms of a love relationship, the Deity is usually cast in a very approachable role and is described as reciprocating the devotee's love with passionate love. Through out the theistic devotion, the deities assume the roles of loving parents, intimate friends, lovers in response to the devotees own devotional role. The New Testament describes God as a loving Father.

Phenomenologically speaking, love is a non-dualistic experience. This is why love is so reluctant to enter into any Husserlian Noema. Love is neither sameness nor alternating, neither one nor two. Love requires differentiation without separation. It is a 'going out' towards the other.

Broadly conceived, love has been a motivational force in the shaping of culture within both the ideological and behavioural dimensions of life. Love may even be identified as the invisible power behind the "force that through the Green fuse derives the flower (Dylon Thomas), the vital impulse (Henri Bergson), or within of things...(the), internal propensity to unite that (Teilhard), undergirds and nourishes the entire biosphere." Viewed within a universal context, the plethora of concept of love might be reduced to three broad categories namely— the emotional, moral, spiritual qualities of experience

1. Carnal love arises out of the erotic desire to enjoy or (possess or otherwise) possess an object of beauty or virtue for one's own pleasure or gratification.
2. Friendly love or affection.
3. Divine love manifested as self giving grace and represented as ágape.

The 'New Testament' uses the term ágape for divine love. It uses this same term for man's love for man and man's love for God. Ágape unites the lover and the beloved because
of the image of fulfilment which God has for both. Agape is the Nirguna bhakti or unqualified devotion preached by Sankaradeva, the Vaiṣṇava saint of Assam. Sankaradeva describes bhakti as a 'rasa' which can be realised only by spiritualising the actual domestic and social relations. The concept of dāśya bhakti is discerned in the section of people whose occupation is mostly agriculture.

Everyone is capable of realising communion and oneness with God. What Jesus, Mahammad and the Buddha realised can be attained by anyone who follows these yogic paths. The Hindu's aspiration for mukti or deliverance which grants immortality can be seen as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. 'Yoga' means union and every chapter of the Gītā is called yoga. Christ can be seen as yogeswara, who has brought reconciliation and union between God and man, man and man, and man and nature.

The risen and living Christ answers the need of the Hindus for the reality of God. Hindus, Muslims and Christians can realise the truth and show the means by which they achieved it. Uniformity is the rigorous law of nature.

Paul's acceptance of Christ as the new principle of life only strengthens his commitment to work for him. The jñāna of Christ naturally leads to bhakti towards Christ, to an unconditional commitment to Christ and to an absolute devotion for the person of Christ. The office of Christ is nothing other than a mediation between God and humanity for which He was sent to the world by the Father. The meditorial office of Christ is distributed into three functions which are its individual parts; the prophetic, the priestly and the kingly. The prophetic light dispenses with darkness of error, the merit of the priest removes guilt and the power of the king takes away the bondages of sin and death. The prophet shows divinity to us, the priest leads us to God, and the king Conjoins us together with God.
prophet illuminates the mind with the spirit of enlightenment. God commands us that those
who obey Him, whether they are wise or simple, to them, He will reveal Himself. In the
early church, Christ gains a cosmic victory over sin, death, and Satan, through his death and
resurrection. This theme has found new importance in the twentieth century, largely through
the writings of Gustaf Auten. Jesus' death on the cross focuses upon the love of God for
humanity to which end He comes down and assumes human nature. For this He willingly
endures the sufferings of humanity. He gives Himself as ransom. He has left us a New
Testament

The Christian revelation is viewed as occurring primarily in the life, death and
resurrection of Jesus, under the illumination of the Holy spirit. The New Testament has
traditionally viewed God's revelation as being complete in Jesus Christ or at least in the life
time of the apostles. Christ is a male symbol and God is conceptualised using male
metaphors. A male symbol appears in our culture to represent maleness. Dr. Radhakrishnan
urges us to never forget the symbolic character of religion.

Personality of God is also a symbol. A Symbol represents a personal God. Though
God is more than a person yet we know Him personally. We are personally related to Him,
obey Him. When God reveals Himself in Christ, He is in one sense coming down to our
level and speaking to us person to person without reducing His transcendent nature.
Rabindra Nath Tagore also says that the personal 'I' must have a relationship with 'Infinity.'

Jesus Christ is the central point of the 'New Testament.' In the 'Old Testament' God
reveals Himself as just and terrifying, but in the New Testament as good and loving. Paul
says that it is this God who has shone in our hearts and has light of knowledge and the glory
of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
Jesus Christ can do nothing by himself; He is appointed to do his Father's work, and to be His spokesman. One who loves deeply has an insight of the true nature of God as Father. According to the Christians, a God humbles Himself as a sufferer in order to redeem human beings from misery. A supreme manifestation of holy love in action is demanded alike by the needs of man and the nature of love. Love and mercifulness of God are neither opposed to, nor do they eclipse God's righteousness. When Christianity says that Jesus is the son of God, it simply means that God is fully manifested in the person of Jesus in a way that shares His whole reality and existence. And that by this self-gift of love, God as Father makes Jesus His son, in every sense of the word. Therefore, Paul says that God in and through Christ is reconciling the world unto Himself.

Jesus Christ as the Son and Holy spirit is the power which dwells in our heart. This problem clearly explains the Son's distinction from the Father without destroying the unity of God. No doubt, Hegel conceives the Trinitarian notion in relation to the revelation which is actualised in Jesus Christ. For Hegel, "The reconciliation in Christ which is believed does not make sense without God being the Truine God. That He is, but also as the other is, as the self discriminating one .......This return of love is spirit. This understanding means that faith is not a relationship towards something subordinate, but towards God Himself." In Hegel's approach there is a tendency to think God not as the Trinity but in a binitarian way. Hegel thinks about the relationship of Father and Son as being one in the other. The spirit is the union of both in love, but it does not actually constitute the third person of the Trinity; it is only the relationship of Father and Son.

Moreover, after his resurrection, the disciples of Jesus experienced that God's love, is a divinising power which they called Holy Spirit and it flowed from the person of the
risen Jesus into their own lives. Father, Son and Holy Spirit is called cosmotheandric experience. When we look at the work of Christ and try to understand its meaning, we must always remember that it is God who revealed Himself in Christ. God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself (2 cor. 5.19). 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John, 3:16).'

And then Jesus is made to continue, speaking in the third person, 'For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.'

Paul says that Christian love also rests on three facts:

1. God has sent His only Son, the Son of love.
2. God has bestowed His Divine love upon individuals.
3. With the gift of Holy Spirit, God's love is shed abroad in our hearts as the truth of the Spirit, such a kind of divine love is not ignored in the Upanishads.

The spiritual thought of Sankaradeva's 'Kirtana Ghosa', represents the love of man for God and love of God for man. The Bhakti is the way of love and devotion. It teaches that the final aim of all religions can be reached through love. Love is the creative force. The devotee's love for Kṛṣṇa represents the finite individual's eternal love for the Supreme Divine being. Christianity and Vaiṣṇavism are intensely humanistic. The divinity of man is stressed by Jesus and by Vaiṣṇava saints. According to Ritchell, the Fatherhood of God and His love manifested in Christ is determinative of his nature and of all His attributes. Every doctrine of Christ implies a corresponding doctrine of God. A growing tendency has been discernible to adopt a humanitarian doctrine of Christ with its co-relative unitarian doctrine of God.

The Christians are absolutely sure that God raised Jesus from death and made Him alive, made Him Lord. God freely offers His love and goodness to all men. The love of God as revealed in Christ who was crucified for us, we find that God has done everything in
order to forgive us. God gives us His love freely and no matter how much we have sinned. He is longing for us to return. As we look at the cross of Christ, we see the perfectly revealed love of God which endured such gainsaying of sinners against themselves. As the cross is the fullest revelation of God's love, showing how nothing can defeat it, it is also the fullest revelation of sin. In the cross, sin and love met in their supreme conflict, and sin is defeated. The resurrection is not a historical fact. It is a spiritual and moral necessity. The cross and the resurrection must not be thought of separately; they are a unity. Our oneness with God occurs through His love in Christ; becoming man, enduring the cross, and rising to life. In Christ, we find our perfect reconciliation to God and to life. The death of Jesus is an absolutely crucial part of Christianity because of the belief that his death on the cross is the key sacrifice against sin. Martin Luther and Swede Gustav Aulen remark that the crucifixion is some sort of encounter between Christ and devil. The death of Jesus on the cross is the supreme example of the love of God, which triggered or stimulated a human response of repentance and love.

The most simple and yet the most powerful symbol of the 'New Testament' is the cross. On this sign of torture and shame, Jesus the Son of God gave his life in the fullness of love for God and for man. This cross retains the belief of all Christians that salvation comes to all men, and this is precisely what Christians celebrate in their Sunday worship. "Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross.... He is now seated at the right hand side of God's throne". "Because the Lord corrects everyone. He loves, and punishes everyone, He accepts as a Son."
In Jesus Christ, the love of God is first manifested in its fullest capacity. Goodness and love are generally treated as two attributes of God. In the 'New Testament', God's goodness, love and grace are all virtually synonymous. Love is an ontological concept. Its emotional element is a consequence of its ontological nature. Hence, it is one-sided to define love by its emotional aspect. Love is absent where there is no individualization and love can be fully realized only where there is full individualization in man. In order to understand what the 'New Testament' means by the love of God, it is necessary to first distinguish the two kinds of love signified by two Greek words 'Eros' and 'Agape'. Eros is desiring love, that which is evoked by the desirable qualities of the beloved. This love is evoked by and depends upon the lovableness of the objects when the 'New Testament' speaks of God's love for mankind, it employs a different term 'Agape'. Unlike Eros, Agape is unconditional and universal in its range. It is given to someone not because she or he has special characteristics but simply because that person is there as a person. The nature of Agape is to value a person in such a way as to actively seek his or her welfare and fulfillment. All love except Agape consist of dependent or contingent, characteristics which change and are partial. But Agape unites the lover and the beloved because of the image of fulfillment which God contains of both.

The concept of love in the Gospels and the letters of Paul shows an unmistakable imprint of both the Hebraic notion of love in the Torah (Hesed) and the Greek terms eros and philia and especially those that appear in the dialogues of Plato. In the 'New Testament', writers preferred to use the term Agape to articulate their understanding of the message of Jesus and of the early Church. Christians also feel that Agape is closer to the meaning of hesed, convenantal love of the 'Torah.'
In its widest sense, the term ἀγαπē denotes not only the mode of divine action in the world, but also the essential nature of God Himself. ἀγαπē designates the self-emptying love of God manifested singularly in His gracious act of sending His only Son Jesus Christ into the world. Rāmakrishna, the saint of modern India, practised and preached selfless devotion to God and ultimate absorption into His grace.

The widest theological scope for understanding this selfless form of love is provided in 1 John, 4, where the love of human beings for one another is based on God's prior love for man. For love is God. God manifests His love in a supremely altruistic fashion by sending His only Son to the world.

According to Nygren to understand Christian love we should concentrate not as Plato does, on a man's love for a supreme god, but on the love which the Supreme good has for man. Christians love is easily approachable. Since Schopenhauer and Neitzsche made the distinction between Christian love and Platonic love, made several new English and American translations of the 'New Testament' now represent ἀγαπē no longer as charity but as love. This is but the latest symptom of an old confusion, that of between Christian love and romantic love.

According to authentic Christian understanding, faith and devotional practice go hand in hand. In short, worship or devotional practice in Christianity is to be considered as the mirror or which authentic faith gets reflected.

We should love one another because love is God. Since God is loving, He sends His loving Son as a redeemer for human beings. Bhakti of Vaisnavism agrees with Christian faith in carrying a sense of whole hearted devotion or commitment to the other. A feeling of otherness of God is another characteristic of Hindu bhakti as it is of Christianity. Hindu
bhakti also rises above all legalism and sacerdotalism like Christian faith in Jesus Christ. In Vaisnavism, bhakti is one of the three alternative methods of attaining salvation.

The major trend of Jesu's teaching is directed to the path of love. In the love of Jesus can be seen his love for the disciples and for mankind. Love is the connecting link between them. He gives His message of love even though He knows that it will take time for people to accept it. As in the case of life and spirit, one speaks symbolically of God as love. Love as libidio is the movement of the needy towards that which fulfils the need. Love as philia, is the movement of the equal towards union with the equal. Love as error, is the movement of that which is lower in power and meaning to that which is higher. Āgape is used to express man's love for God and also reflection of and response to His love in and by us.

The 'Old Testament' expresses the meaning of āgape as chesed. It is used in a variety of ways to mean mercy, loving kindness and goodness. This word is used also in the sense of man's relation with each other as well as of his relation with God. Taking together chesed and āgape, represent a vivid picture of the spontaneous love of God demonstrated in the acts of mercy and blessings. The essence of Christianity is that nobody can love God who does not love his fellowmen. So the service of man is always in conformity with the Christian religious ideals. Jesus declares that we should love our neighbours. Likewise, Buddha also says that man can overcome anger by love, and also overcome evil by love. Jesus said 'But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them, that curse you', do good to them, we are called upon to return good for evil. Buddha's words – 'Not by hate is hate destroyed, by love alone is hate destroyed.'

The same views can be traced in Gandhi, who had a strong devotional bent. Once on asked why he does not withdraw from the world in search of God, he replied that if he
would know for one moment that God might be found in Himalayan cave, he would go there at once. But he was convinced that God could only be found among human beings and in their services.

The ethical precepts of Jesus like 'Love Your enemies' are also taught by the Upanishads, Buddha and Sankaradeva. The four Noble Truths of Buddha inherently include love and compassion towards fellow human beings. "To love your neighbour as yourself" is inherent in the vedic formula of unity with the Absolute Self. As K. Bahner says, the love of neighbour is the primary act of love of God. The Upanisads declare that man is 'potentially divine.' So we can worship God by serving our neighbour.

Sankaradeva considers devotion to be the best way to reach the spiritual goal. It is the best, because it is the easiest. It can be practiced by any one; by the monk as well as by the peasant. Human beings have an inner longing to love God. In the light of love, Jesus realised his unity with the supreme. It is possible to establish a connection between Vaiṣṇavism of Sankaradeva and Christianity so far as the concept of love is concerned. Love is promoted both by Jesus Christ and Sankaradeva. In such love, desire, ambition, love of power and thought of 'I' are transcended.

Every Christian recognises that the Christ's task in this world is to establish a kingdom of righteousness. Theistic philosophy teaches us that we all living creatures should love God because He is good. But the peculiar feature of the 'New Testament' is that God loves us even though we are not good and that we should love our neighbours even though they are not good.

The bhakti doctrine of Sankaradeva is also characterised by a profound sense of self abasement. The devotee is aware of his sinfulness and implores God's forgiveness and
mercy. The devotee regrets for not responding more generously to the tremendous love of God. Union with God is what is called liberation, in which the devotee places himself as an eternal servant to his deity of love.

Sankaradeva was careful to develop Bhakti doctrine in a social and puritan way and taking up the dāsya bhakti which was free from tantric influences. He was extra careful in his bhakti theology which attempted to attract the masses to a path of niskāma bhakti to the Supreme Deity. He did away with the worship of images, the elaborate rituals and sacrifices and the esoteric rites practised by the Sāktās. He introduced simple ceremonies consisting of Nāma or recitation of hymns and prayers. His notion of devotion was based on an implicit faith which combined two elements – Guru or teacher and Hari or Viṣṇu.

In the period of Feudalism and priesthood, Sankaradeva kept open the door of bhakti religion to all. He tried to attract people who were victims of the various evils and sufferings of the society, so that those down-trodden people could get some kind of relief or mental peace. At that time it was a difficult task. Sankaradeva had to face many hardship, but he was not defeated. His Bhāgavati Vaiṣṇava movement was a kind of revolution against the injustices and malpractices of certain classes of people. He was a revolutionary prophet, but his silent revolution was based on logic. So we can term his Bhakti movement as a social reformation too. Sankaradeva, through his Bhakti-Dharma, hearing and chanting of God's name in end by the congregation of devotees, has given solace to the tormented hearts of the people.

The religion of love and devotion preached by Sankaradeva was not new religion. It was embeded in the 'Bhāgavata Purāṇā', the 'Gītā' and some other Vaiṣṇavite works like 'Nārada Bhakti Śūtra' and 'Sāndilya Bhakti Śūtra.'
Bhakti in the 'Bhakti Sūtra' of Nārada and Sāndilya and also in the 'Bhāgavati Purāṇa', which also characterise the bhakti mysticism of the south is emotional and passionate. For Sāndilya, the characteristics of Bhakti are traceable to the emotive power of heart (rakti) which follows upon the Lord's greatness. Bhakti is affection towards the personal God and is a rasa or a passionate emotion. Nārada defines higher bhakti as the most intense love for God. The 'Bhāgavata Purāṇa' pays high tribute to the Tamil mystics. The 'Bhāgavata Mahātmya' mentions that bhakti originated in the Dravida countries. The passionate devotion to God requires total surrender and a feeling of clinging to God. This warmth and passion in bhakti is the special mark of the bhakti of the 'Bhāgavata Purāṇa', and of the 'Bhakti Sūtra' whereas bhakti in the 'Gītā' is loyalistic and puritanical. The 'Bhāgavat Gītā' and the 'Bhāgavata Purāṇa' are the authoritative texts for the Eka Sarana Dharma of Sankaradeva. Following the Purāṇa, passion in bhakti is given due recognition by Sankaradeva. It is acknowledged as supreme bhakti. But Śrī Kṛṣṇa is pictured as an ideal hero not for being an ideal match for an ideal heroine, but as the Supreme Deity. The gopies, the divine lovers want to continue in their separate existence even after being Jīvan Muktas so as to serve God forever and to enjoy the eternal bliss of love.

Sankaradeva following Sukadeva, justifies the gopies passionate love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa as an instance for 'svakia' love. The bhakti doctrine of Sankaradeva is also characterised by a profound sense of self-abasement. The devotee is aware of his sinfulness and implores God's forgiveness and mercy. Union with God is what be calls liberation, in which the devotee presents himself as a servant to his Deity of love. In the 'Bhāgavad Gītā' love or devotion finds its proper and compelling recipient in the intensely personal nature of Kṛṣṇa. In contrast to the discipline of asceticism, meditation and Self-mortification, the
pathway of devotion is offered to all average devotees as the more easier route to salvation. By the cultivation of an unqualified and passionate love for God, a person comes to know God truly, to enter his nature and become one with Him. It is by means of this kind of unstinting devotion that Arjuna, the hero of the 'Gītā' persuades Kṛṣṇa to reveal Himself in His universal and eternal form. As Kṛṣṇa Himself says: "Whatever you do, or eat, or offer or give or mortify, make it an offering to me and I shall undo the bonds of action, both good and evil fruits."

Sankaradeva derives inspiration from the 'Bhāgavata Purāṇa' for his Eka Śaraṇa Nāma Dharma; and he also creatively assimilates the ekānta bhakti culture of Pañcarātra Bhāgavata tradition with the monotheism of the Gītā.

Vaiṣṇavism which was preached by Sankaradeva is known as the Eka Śaraṇa Nāma Dharma or the Mahapurusiya Dharma. As the name implies, the Eka Śaraṇa Nāma Dharma is a religion of supreme surrender to one Supreme Deity Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa who is also known as Hari and Vāsudeva. Sankaradeva was against the blood sacrifices of the Tāntrics. Not to injure any one by thought, word or deed is regarded by him as the basic law of ethical life. The path of non-violence is said to give more religious merit than performance of sacrifice, ascetic practices etc. He rebelled against such practices and was determined to protect and restore Hinduism. Christians also claim that without love and devotion, religion would be like 'Hamlet' without the prince of Denmark. One of the most crucial things which Christ added to Judaism is love and devotion for God and also God's love and kindness for us. Sankaradeva initiated the great progressive and democratic movement which laid emphasis on the unity of Godhead. He stood against excessive ritualism, preached faith based on a liberal doctrine of bhakti. As he fought against class
prejudices and stressed on the equality and brotherhood of man within a very short period of
time, his religion of love and devotion, ethics and humanism, spread like a fire and vibrated
throughout whole of North-East India.

Sankaradeva was an erudite scholar and a versatile genius who combined in himself
many wonderful qualities rare to be found in a single individual. He whole heartedly
propagated a kind of worship called Nāma-Kirtana.

The emergence of bhakti or love is found to be personal, intense and sublime and
directed (to a personal Deity) as a form of worship. Scholars say that the concept of bhakti is
borrowed from Non-Āryan religious thought. Dr. S.K. Chatterjee in his analysis of early
Indian faith says that — "one might say that the Āryans laid greater stress on the intellect, and
the non-Āryans (Dravida, visāda and Kirata) on the emotions. Reasons and emotions
however, are both given equality of status in the achievements of man's spiritual realization.
Jñāna and bhakti are the two pivots in man's spiritual life."

The concept of love as traced in the bhakti tradition of Hinduism, especially in the
vaishnava or Kṛṣṇite branches, holds that the path of love and passion has proved to be the
easiest way to know God. Bhakti is the principal method preached and practised by
Sankaradeva. Bhakti leads to mukti or liberation. Bhakti is not simply utterance of the
names and glories of the Lord. Hari or Kṛṣṇa, but is a complex and gradual process of
removing ignorance or avidyā.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa says "Do not seek after the caste whether the man is Brahmin or candala
and treat the donor and the thief, the virtuous and the vicious equally because I am present
in everybody."
Among all the three paths prescribed for the attainment of God, namely Jñāna (knowledge), Karma (service) and bhakti (devotion), highest importance has been attached to bhakti in the 'Bhāgavata Purāṇa'. Sankaradeva holds that though all the three paths are mutually interlinked, yet only bhakti can free people from worldly attachment. Without being assisted by bhakti, Jñāna and Karma cannot lead to attainment of salvation. In Kali age, there is no better mode of serving God than by bhakti, and God is easily pleased by devotion alone. Sāṅkaradeva's concept of bhakti is illustrated in the following lines:

"Bhakti is mother, father, brother, Kith and Kin and the highest treasurer of life. It is the movement (gati), the principle (mati) and the guiding force of life. It is the highest desire of life and wealth (vitta), and possesses germs of liberation. It is the solace of life, the vital breath of the body (prāṇa) as it were. There is no other way of life save and except bhakti in this world and the next."\(^{75}\) Knowledge without bhakti is futile, the process of seeking God according to the path of knowledge (Jñāna mārga) is compared to husking of seedless paddy.\(^{76}\)

Necessity of the knowledge of God is not altogether ruled out. It comes automatically after a certain stage of attainment in the devotional process. The highest aim of a true devotee, according to Sankaradeva, is not the attainment in the of the state of absorption in the attributeless Brahman, but an eternal contiguity with God which affords unique advantages for serving the Lord.

The attitude of Sankaradeva and his followers towards Karmanitya, naimittika and Kamya become vivid when Sankaradeva speaks vehemently against the last type where selfish motive predominates. The other two types are tolerated, but they must be conducive
to the development of bhakti. Of the two types of bhakti, Sakāma and miśkāma, the latter has been highly extolled and discussed in detail in all the devotional works of Sankaradeva.

Bhakti-yoga is the union of the finite soul with the Supreme soul through devotion. Bhakti is the most intense attachment or supreme love for God. Love for God is ineffable. It is indescribable like the taste of a dumb person. Devotion is expressed in self surrender (prapatti) to God and taking shelter in Him (Sarana gati). Those who take refuge in God can cross the impassable ocean of māyā composed of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, realise their trans-empirical spiritual nature and attain moksa through grace.

The germ of this love is already found in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa where Prahlāda seeks as a boon that bhakti which is an attachment for God no less strong than attraction to sense object felt by ordinary person. Vallava defines bhakti as a great, firm feeling of love. It places the bhakti or the devotee in a subordinate position to God and promotes the feeling of self humility.

According to Spinoza, the intellectual love of God asks for no recompense. It is unreceiprocated. It is enough for the worshipper to know that he loves God; it matters little to him whether God loves him or not. It is like the love of the moth for the flame. This love is not selfish nor unselfish but selfless. According to Aristotle, love of God does not exist. It is absurd to speak of such a thing. God is unknown and unknowable. He is even beyond the rule of logical argument. For Kierkagaard, God is unable to the intellectually understood. Intellect deals with the temporal where as God is Eternal. So it is easy to attain Him (God) through whole hearted devotion, love, faith, worship, prayer and humility rather than through one's intellect.
A very pronounced and strong feature of Vaisnavism is the tendency to needs devotion (bhakti), which is generally considered to be at the heart of worship.

The true religious attitude towards a Personal God and the very foundation of the realization of man's relationship with Him is the very essence of bhakti. Bhakti is the disinterested performance of all deeds and complete surrender to God. The widespread bhakti movement is a corollary of the Vaisnava ideal of a loving, personal God which is the highest goal of salvation. Complete self-surrender (prapatti) came to be distinguished from bhakti as a superior means of spiritual realization. One of the chief purposes of the 'Bhāgavata purāṇa is the glorification of an intensely personal and passionate bhakti that gradually develops into a decidedly erotic mysticism, independent of all alternative means of salvation. According to this text, there are nine types of bhakti which have been endorsed by Sankaradeva. In the Kīrtana Ghoṣā, Prahlāda explains bhakti as Śravaṇa (listening), Kīrtana (chanting) Smāraṇa, Archana, Pada-sevan, Dāsya (servant of God), Sākhya, Bandana and Deha arpana. These nine kinds of bhakti are to be performed and this is the best teaching or uttama patha. 'Śravaṇa' is listening to the glories of God; 'Kīrtana' is the uttering of the names and glories of God; 'Smāraṇa' means remembering the glories of Gods; to worship or adore God or his idols is called 'Padasevana', to offer water and flower etc. to God is 'Arcana', 'Bandana' is praising in veneration to God, 'Dāsya' is to feel oneself as the servant of the Lord; to trust God as friend in 'Sākhya' and to dedicate the body in the name of God is 'Deha-arpana' or 'Atma-nivedana'.

Of all these, Śravaṇa and Kīrtana are given more importance and Sankaradeva at times says that these two are the keynotes of bhakti.
In his Assamese Vaiṣṇava scriptures, Sankaradeva, without denying the nirguna or the indeterminate aspect of God, has laid more stress on the Saguna aspect. For the purpose of devotion, the personal aspect of God has been specially extolled. In short, attributeless God has become attributive in Sankaradeva’s hands. Sankaradeva, in his celebrated work 'Kīrtana Ghosā' describes the two fold aspects of God. He says that since an indeterminate God is not comprehensible, so devotees worship His beatific form in the person of Nārāyana. In 'Nimī Nava Siddha Samvāda', Sankaradeva says that the original, unmanifested, and undifferentiated Reality is Brahman and when Brahman for the purpose of worship is manifested, He is known as Nārāyana or Vāsudeva.78

An impersonal God can never evoke our religious sentiments. At the bottom of all religious sentiments there lies the great feeling of oneness and solidarity with Him: We are His and He is ours. We know none but Him. We must cling to Him and Him alone. He is to lead us to happiness and glory.

Sankaradeva says that such a Supreme Personal God can only fulfil our spiritual communion with a personal God. Bhakti is the only means of realizing the Supreme God and the Vaiṣṇava saint has attached great importance to it.

Kṛṣṇa is the only eternal reality known as Brahmarūpi, Sanātana and all others are but manifestations of Him. Bhakti is free from any desire and is of the nature of inhibition of all desires. Sankaradeva proclaims that the power of devotion is the highest in the spiritual realization of the Supreme. Devotion does not neglect knowledge of God and the performance of certain rituals are the helping factors in the spiritual realization through bhakti. In the first stage, devotion results in an integral experience where knowledge,
devotion and actions all attain fulfilment. Bhakti or true devotion, according to the 'Gītā' is to believe in God, to love Him, to be devoted to Him. It is its own reward.

Devotion should not be mechanical. It should be accompanied by love. Love means attraction for the Deity. Love, according to Sankaradeva, signifies absence of shame, fear and desire. One has to love Kṛṣṇa by giving up shame, fear and desire from one's mind. Love generates joy. Success of devotion consists in giving rise to joy. Love is divine and all-embracing. It works as the force of attraction, projection, growth and development in the order of evolution in nature. It works as the force of aspiration in spirit. Finally, it expresses Divine beauty, power and majesty. There is a gradation in the growth of love. Ardour is born in the cultivation of bhakti. When ardour becomes intense, it is called love or 'prema', when prema appears, it first becomes sneha, then praṇaya then anurāga, then bhāva and ultimately monobhāva. Love assumes different forms in different types of devotion, namely Śāntya, Dāśya, Śākhya, Vātsalya and Madhura. Nārada says that without love, association would be like that of illicit lovers. In illicit love, there can never be happiness. In the Supreme love or devotion, there is a sense of self forgetfulness.

In the dāśya rasa, there is a feeling of personal attachment. Here the relationship between God and the devotee is that of a master and servant. Hence, the respectful distance between the two is always present in the mind of the individual in this relation with God. One of the most common metaphors used in theistic devotion is that of love relationship; that of the devotee or that of a servant for his master. Śāṅkaradeva and his followers looked upon God with the attitude of a faithful and loving servant. Taking into account the relation between Jīva and Īśvara as that between creator and the created and the limitations under which the Jīva operates under the invisible control of the Lord, Śāṅkaradeva was of the
opinion that dāsya bhāva is the proper attitude of the devotee towards his Master. It is also
the proper method with which God should be approached. He has expressed his relation by
describing himself as the servant of Kṛṣṇa. In one of his verses, he says, "I have become a
slave, of thy slave, Oh Lord, Oh Madhava do not forsake thy slave." 79

Unlike the Vaiṣṇava teacher of Bengal, Chaitanya, both Rāmānuja and Śaṅkaradeva
advocate dāsya type of bhakti; that is man's attitude towards God as that of a faithful
servant. In plain language, servanthood of devotee is the essential feature of Śaṅkaradeva's
work. Even Madhavadeva's mysticism consists in complete self-surrender to the Lord, who
is a compassionate Master (dāsyaśila) and a bosom friend (Prāṇa bandhu). The relationship
between Kṛṣṇa and the devotee is not of the lover and the beloved, but of the kind between
the Master and His selfless servant. His final attainment consists not in complete self-
annihilation but in a complete state of security and bliss under the sheltering shadow of his
Master's feet.

The religious teaching of Śaṅkaradeva recalls to our minds the preaching of
Rāmānuja. It may be noted that love as devotion to God has been and is undoubtedly a great
moral force in human history. Rāmānuja declared bhakti to be the most suitable means to
achieve purity and selflessness in life. Hence the same bhakti according to him is the truest
and most unfailing means for the attainment of salvation. The emotion of bhakti is said to be
a feeling akin to love. It is indeed deep devotion and love. Both Śaṅkaradeva and Rāmānuja
have developed their respective schools of bhakti almost in a similar way by assigning a
prominent place to 'Saraṇāgati' or Eka Saraṇa.

Śaṅkaradeva propounded dāsya bhakti while emphasising the puritan bhakti and the
importance of atmasuddhi (self-purification). Dāsya bhakti can become mechanical if there
is no personal relationship between the Master and the servant. The devotee realizes that he and his Isvara are one in essence, and he participating in the Divine nature, simply goes to God. The apara or higher bhakti manifests the spontaneous love between the Father and the Son, and bhakti or love becomes rasamai in nature.

According to Bengal Vaisnavism, Isvara is the ground of both Brahman and Paramatman. Sri Krsna is the eternal subject and Radha is the eternal object through which Sri Krsna realises His consciousness. The bhakti doctrine of Bengal Vaisnavism is developed in a new way called 'Raganuga bhakti'. Chaitanyadeva, like other Vaisnava preachers, accepts the authority of the Bhagavata Purana. The fundamental doctrine of Bengal-Vaisnavism is loving devotion (prema bhakti) to Radha and Krsna. This is the prakrti and purusa as taught by Sankhya system of Philosophy. Chaitanyadeva links Radha inseparably with Krsna, the idea apparently being that the world of souls are emanations from Purusa just as the various kinds of creatures are from prakrti. There can be no Krsna without Radha. It is, therefore, a mixture of Sankhya and Vedanta doctrine. The Radha culture is of recent origin. Radha's name is not mentioned in the Vedic literature including the Upanisads, nor in the 'Mahabharata' or in its supplement to Harivamsa. Radha has no important place in Sankaradeva's philosophy. Only in three plays (Natastas) viz. 'Keli Gopala', 'Rasa Jhumura' and 'Bhusana harana' is her name mentioned. She is inferior to and insignificant in comparison to the other cowherdesses who are related to Lord Krsna. The Gopala Krsna element and the worship of Radha, which are ignored in the bhakti of the south, came to have its prominence in the teaching of Nimbaraka. Nimbarakas's Krsna and Radha have taken the place of Ramana's Narayana and Lakshmi. Bhakti becomes passionate in the Vaisnavism of Chaitanya. The Damodoriya form of Vaisnavism is very
similar to the Chaitanya form of the later period as both acknowledge the influence of Saktism and Tantrism.

Sankaradeva propounded the Vaisnava culture in the form of Eka Šarana Nāma Dharma. His basic teachings centre round the four basic Realities- the carivastu, Deva, Guru, Nāma and Bhakti. The process of initiation (Saran loa) is the commitment on the bhakta's part to enter into the bhakti path, to interpret life as a theist. One needs spiritual illumination which a Guru provides and the means to reach the goal is nama (chanting the name) sublime bhakti is also the ultimate goal. It will be helpful to understand how Sankaradeva reinterpreted some of the basic concepts of the Bhagavata purana to safeguard the superiority of the path of bhakti.

The spirit of Eka Šarana Nāma Dharma of Sankaradeva reminds us of Christianity's emphasis on service to man and service to God.

Sanakaradeva in his 'Bhakti Ratnašara' (chapter on Vairāgya) deals with four kinds of Vairāgya - Viz., (1) indifference to wealth or property (2) Indifference to palatable food and drink (3) Indifference towards all the objects of pleasure and enjoyment. (4) Indifference to all these both mentally and physically. This Vairāgya or indifference is said to be the result of bhakti.

In his 'Nimi, Nava Siddha Saṁvāda', Sankaradeva gives an account of the different kinds of devotees or bhaktas which throw further light on the nature of bhakti. He also makes a distinction between Saguna and Nirguna Bhakti. Saguna bhakti is of three kinds, namely - (1) Sāttvika (2) Rājasika and (3) Tāmasika. Each again is divided into prakṛta, madhyama and uttama. However, this should not be confused with the nine characteristics of bhakti. He who does not pay respect to living beings and does not adore the bhaktas or
the devoted souls, but worship the Lord through idol or image (Eka pratimata matra aradhe Harika) is known as prakṛta bhakta. He who reveres the bhaktās or devotees, is kind to the innocent and also worship God with love and devotion, is a madhyama bhakti.\textsuperscript{81} The uttama bhakta or Mahābhāgavata is he who sees all living beings in God and god in all beings and treats this universe as a manifestation of the Lord.\textsuperscript{82}

Besides, the uttama bhakta or Mahābhāgavata possesses many other qualities. He does not have any malice or prejudices and thinks of nothing else but the Lord. He also considers this world as the product of māyā and treats birth and death, hunger and desire etc, as the products of mind. In the 'Nimi Nava Siddha Saṁvāda' Sankaradeva says that for the purpose of liberation, the karmayoga is the basic ground of bhakti as well as jñāna or knowledge. A distinction is made between sakāma karma and niskāma karma, and the latter is said to be the key to bhakti. Physical purity and mental preparation (mānasika pavitrata) are the preliminary requisites of bhakti. Yogic practices like Breath control or prāṇāyāma and āsana or postures should also be observed.

Sankaradeva also says that one who sees Brahman everywhere becomes liberated in life. Such a liberated soul may again be caught in māyā if he goes astray from the path of bhakti. The saint, it seems, is not indifferent to Jñāna or knowledge and on the contrary holds that Jñāna or knowledge is the outcome of bhakti. It is the inevitable consequence of bhakti or devotion. Sankaradeva does not denounce Jñāna and Karma. He only gives importance to bhakti because without bhakti, Jñāna and Karma become meaningless.\textsuperscript{83} Liberation is the highest end of an individual. According to one classification, liberation is of two kinds –

(1) Liberation that is attainment in this life.

(2) Absolute liberation from birth and death.
One who is liberated in this life (Jivan mukta) will have to continue his life because of his past deeds of which the present body is the consequence. But such a Jivan mukta after his death will never come back to this samisāra or world. The 'Bhāgavat Gīta' stands for the synthesis of all these paths which are, according to it, complementary to one another. Knowledge without devotion is not sufficient for salvation and there can be no perfect knowledge without devotion. At the highest stage, Jñāna and devotion (knowledge and bhakti) become identical and remain two words or names for the same experience.

Sankaradeva's Eka Sarana Dharma in Assam centred all its attention to this central concept and so a distinction was made between the two aspects of magic and religion and the attention of the people was drawn to a pure and disinterested love, a suddha bhakti for the Supreme Deity.

Sankaradeva says, "To those bhaktas, who have no longing even for mukti or salvation and whose sole aim is the love of God, I bow down my head with all reverence. I beg of God to grant me rasamayi bhakti and nothing else. I devote my whole existence to Him who is attached to His bhakta". A devotee becomes selfless in his service. "Knowing that all pleasures of the world are hollow, the devotee gives up all of them." This was an effort to give due recognition to the supreme creator Deity who is all powerful.

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