Chapter-6

SYNTHESIS OF THE TWO PHILOSOPHIES

From the above study, it appears that Śaṅkara and Śrī Caitanya are diametrically opposed to each other. This can be supported from the fact that in Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta, Śrī Caitanya is said to have criticized Śaṅkara’s views in extremely strong words. Śrī Caitanya has described Śaṅkara as a nāstika propagating a wrong theory to lead men to a wrong direction so that none can attain liberation and that the process of the world of bondage goes unhampered. He has said more than once that the Śaṅkara’s path of jñāna cannot bring liberation and that it makes man roam in the cycle of birth and death.

A closer study of these two philosophies, however, reveals that there is little difference between between these two philosophies. The difference between these two philosophies is only apparent, while at bottom they propound more or less the same ideal.
To speak in brief, we may refer to the following points:

1. Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Puruṣottama lying in essence beyond the world process is not much different from the nirguṇa Brahman of Śaṅkara. Śrī Caitanya’s Paramātman, the world governor, more or less corresponds to Śaṅkara’s Isvara endowed with māyā. In the view of Vaiṣṇavism, the Absolute in its manifestation as Paramātman concerned with the governance of the material world and the jīvas or the selves is called Saguṇa or qualified. According to Advaita Vedāntins also, Isvara endowed with the cosmic activities i.e. creation, sustenance and dissolution of the world is Saguṇa or qualified. Śaṅkara does not deny Brahman having form and quality. He says that Brahman assumes forms with the help of upādhis or limiting adjuncts, which can be seen by the spiritual aspirants in meditation. Śaṅkara also says that Brahman is endowed with the quality of purity, pervasiveness etc. which, however, are said to be non-different from the essence of Brahman.

In the view of Vaiṣṇavism, the Absolute as Bhagavat is endowed with the Svarūpa-śaktis or essential powers of sandhinī, samvit and hladinī which correspond roughly to sat, cit and ānanda; yet Bhagavat is called nirguṇa or qualityless because of the fact that these qualities are divine or transcendental, as distinct from the empirical qualities. On the other hand, the Advaita Vedāntins consider these essential qualities as identical with the
essence of the Absolute, since, they maintain that the Absolute is of the nature of sat or existence, cit or consciousness and ānanda or bliss. The Upaniṣads, have clearly declared again and again that Brahman is devoid of colour, form, quality etc. Again, though Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in the Gītā that Puruṣottama or the Lord having form, quality etc. is the highest reality, he does not deny the concept of qualities and formless Brahman, since, he says that Brahman without quality and form is sustained by Puruṣottama. The Bhāgavata-Purāṇa also declares that Brahman is an aspect of Ultimate Reality. A passage of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa quoted more than once in the Caitanya-Caritāmṛta declares that the same Ultimate Reality, is denoted by the terms “Bhagavat”, “Paramātman” and “Brahman.” The Caitanya-Caritāmṛta has declared again and again that the formless Brahman is simply the bodily lustre or an aspect of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the lord. Thus, it cannot be held that Śrī Caitanya does not accept the existence of the nirguṇa Brahman. Hence, difference between these two schools is mere a matter of outlook.

Further, though Śrī Caitanya advocates the philosophy of Puruṣottama, the Personal Absolute, he accepts the existence of the Impersonal Brahman also. In a like manner, though Sankara is vocal about the Impersonal Brahman, he accepts the reality of Puruṣottama, the Personal Absolute also.
Hence, both the aspects of Brahman, i.e. Brahman without quality and form as also Brahman with quality and form are found in the Upaniṣads and Brahma-sūtra. And both Śaṅkara and Śrī Caitanya have accepted these two aspects of Brahman. The difference between these two thinkers is simply this that Śaṅkara following the path of knowledge gives emphasis on the formless and qualityless Brahman, while Śrī Caitanya following the path of devotion gives greater emphasis on Brahman with quality and form i.e. Puruṣottama, the emotional Absolute.

2. On the essential nature of the self and the relation between the Absolute and the self, both Śaṅkara and Śrī Caitanya do not differ from each other. For just as the Brahman, the self is also of the nature of existence, knowledge and bliss. The difference between these two thinkers lies only in the fact that according to Sankara, the self is totally identical with Brahman while Śrī Caitanya regards the self as an atomic part of Brahman. On this issue, we want to say that a part cannot be thought to be different from the whole, as the part cannot be separated from the whole. Moreover, it is again and again said in the Upaniṣads that when the river water merges into the seawater, the first cannot be separated from the second; and that when the
juices of different flowers form honey we cannot differentiate which part of honey comes from which flower. In the same way, when the self merges into Brahman; the former cannot be differentiated from the latter. We mean to say that, at the highest level of realization the question of part and whole cannot stand, as the part is not at all distinct from the whole. Moreover, Śrī Caitanya holds that the individual selves in their transcendental nature are the gopīs of Vṛndāvana, which are like the leaves, creepers, and flowers of the tree of Śrī Rādhā and this Rādhā is one with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Hence, it is implicitly accepted that the selves are also identical or one with Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

3. In the view of Śaṅkara, Brahman is the vivarta or unchanging material cause of the world, Śrī Caitanya, on the other hand, says that Brahman is a pariṇāmi or transforming cause. Now, whether the world is a vivarta i.e. false appearance or pariṇāma or real transformation is a matter of emphasis. Śrī Caitanya regards the world as a pariṇāma of Brahman or Bhagavat, the Absolute. He, however, adds that even in this pariṇāma or transformation, the essence of the Bhagavat does not undergo any change, and that what undergoes change is His śakti or power. The essence of the Bhagavat remains the same like a cintamani or wish fulfilling stone which itself remains the same producing gold-ornaments. In a like manner, Śaṅkara
also holds that Brahman associated with the power of maya creates the world out of itself, though the essence of Brahman does not undergo any change. Accordingly, Śaṅkara regards the world as a vivarta.

Hence, the position stands thus that in the view of Śaṅkara, Brahman is the unchanging material cause of the world, while maya is the changing material cause of the world. It is, however, held that maya does not share the nature of Brahman, as this māyā has no ultimate reality. In the view of Śrī Caitanya also, Bhagavat is the unchanging material cause of the world, while maya is the changing material cause of the world. Here, Śrī Caitanya considers māyā as a real power of Brahman and also accepts an unthinkable relation between these two. Both Śaṅkara and Śrī Caitanya have accepted that the world as revealed to men of ignorance is not ultimately real. Śaṅkara holds that in essence the world is nothing but Brahman, for it is Brahman that exists everywhere. According to Śrī Caitanya also, the world is pervaded by the Lord. The vivarta-vāda and pariṇāma-vāda are nothing but ways of explaining this position. Thus, for both the thinkers the Absolute in its essence is without any change.

4. For Śaṅkara, realization of Brahman is liberation from the cycle of birth
and death, and it is the final goal of human life. For Śrī Caitanya, the attainment of the service of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā in the divine land of Vṛndāvana is the final goal of human life. Śrī Caitanya does not call it liberation but actually it is not different from Śaṅkara’s concept of liberation, because when a jīva attains this state it is automatically freed from the cycle of birth and death. The point is that liberation is of five-types, namely, (i) Sāyujuya or absorption into the Absolute, (ii) Sālokya or attainment of the same divine land of the Lord, (iii) Sārūpya or attainment of a form similar to that of the Lord, (iv) Sārṣti or attainment of aśvarya or power similar to that of the Lord and (v) Sāmīpya or attainment of proximity of the Lord. Of these five, Śaṅkara puts emphasis on sāyujuya-mukti while Śrī Caitanya puts emphasis on sāmīpya and sālokya mukti. Śrī Caitanya may be said to put emphasis on sārupya and sārṣti forms of liberation also, in the sense that the self-attaining eternal Vṛndāvana is endowed with a divine form which is similar to the Lord and is also endowed with powers almost similar to that of the Lord.

5. Though Śaṅkara regards jnana as the only means for liberation, he accepts devotion also as helpful to the attainment of jñāna. Śaṅkara has
given more emphasis on bhakti in his commentary on the Gītā and in his prakaraṇa granṭhas or original works. In a like manner, though Śrī Caitanya regards bhakti or devotion as the highest means for the attainment of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and the divine land of Vṛndāvana, he gives high value to jñāna. Śrī Caitanya’s concept of bhakti as the hlādiṁ-sakti of Śrī Kṛṣṇa involves the idea of jñāna or realization of Brahman as leading the self to liberation. Thus, we find that there is little difference between Śaṅkara and Śrī Caitanya. The difference between these two thinkers lies only on their emphasis, Śaṅkara gives emphasis on the speculative aspect of the Absolute, while Śrī Caitanya gives emphasis on the emotional aspect of the same; their views are not completely opposed to each other.

References

1. jīvādi niyantṛtvena sphurat paramātmeti śabdyate-BhŚ,p.9; kevalasya paramātmanno nimittatvaṁ sakti viśiṣṭasya upādānatvam-PS,p.44.
2. syāt paramesvarasyāpi icchāvasāt māyāmayaṁ sarīruṁśādhakānugrahārtham-BSS,1.1.20; sec also ibid1.2.3;3.2.15,3.2.23 and 3.3.11
4. brahmaṁ hi pratiṣṭhāḥ naṁ amṛtasyāvyasya ca-BG,14.17
5. vadanti tat tattvavidas tattvam yaj jñānam advayam, brahmaḥ paramātmety bhagavān iti śabdyate-BP,1.1.11; brahma ātmā
bhagavān kṛṣṇer vihār-CC,1.2

6. jīvah sūkṣma-svarūpo’yam saṁkhyaūto hi cit kaṇṭha quoted in CC,2.19; jīver svarūp jaiche sphuliṅger kaṇ-CC,1.7.


8. rādhā kṛṣṇa ek ātmā dui deha dhāri. anyonye vilāse ras āsvādana kari-CC,1.4; rādhā pūrṇa śakti kṛṣṇa pūrṇa śaktimān...rādhā kṛṣṇa aiche sada ekai svarūp-ibid; ākār svabhāvī bhede vrajadevīgan.

9. mani jaiche avikṛta prasave hemabhār. jagat-rup hay śīvar tabu nirvikār-CC,2.6; tathāpi acintya śaktye hay avikāri prākṛta cintāmaṇi tāhe drśṭānta je dhāri-CC,1.7.

10. See Śaṅkara’s comt. On BS, 2.1.24,2.1.27-28 and 3.2.20

11. ātmā-vaśyam idam viśvam yat kiṇḍa jagatyām jagat-BP quoted in CC,2.25.

12. See CC,1.5.

13. Vide, bhagavato bhaktir drḍha’dhīyatam-Upadeśa-paṇcakam,2; bhaja govindaṁ mūḍhamate-Carpaṭa-pañjariṅa-stotra,2; iha samsāre bahu dustare kṛpya’pare pahimurare-ibid,8; also see Mahadevan.T.M.P, The hymns of Śaṅkara, p.37; enam ātmānam nirasta-samasta-prapaṇcām avyāktaṁ saṁrādhanaṁ kālepaśyanti yogināṁ saṁrādhanāṁ abhakti-dhyānaṁ prāṇidhānādy-anuṣṭhānam-Saṅkara’s comt. on BS,3.2.24; mokṣa-kāraṇaṁ sāmaṅgyāṁ bhaktireva gariṇayaṁ svasvarūpāṇusandhānāṁ bhaktirity ahbhidhiyate-VC,32.

14. Tin sadhane bhagavan tin svarupe bhāse...jñān mārge nirvikṛṣa brahma prakṣe-CC,2.2.4; jñāna-yoga-mārge tāre bhaje jei sab brahma ātmā rūpe tāre kare anubhāb. upāsanā bhede jāni śīvar mahimā-CC,1.2 and CC,1.5.