

MADHUSUDANA'S CONCEPT OF BHAKTI

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The conception of Bhakti plays vital role in the philosophy of Madhusūdanasaraswati. He was a great teacher of Advaita Vēdānta and as such he could hardly go beyond the typical views of the monistic school of Vedānta philosophy. He pledged his allegiance to this system by confirming over and over again that knowledge i.e. Vrttijnāna of Brahman leads to salvation. And salvation is absolute identity between Jiva and Brahman. Yet Madhusudana could not keep himself away from the influence of Vaisnavism of his time. But the two apparently conflicting stream of thought did not remain unassimilated. As one of the greatest intellectuals of medieval India, he tried to forge a reconciliation between the Advaita View and the Vaisnavic View".

In his exposition of Bhakti Madhusudana faithfully adopts the definition of Bhakti in the Bhagavata, mentioned above for Madhusūdana also, bhakti is a mental mode corresponding to the uninterrupted flow of the Bhagavata and arises in a mind which has obtained liquification. Through the Bhagavata does not expressly refer to this state of the mind at the time of bhakti, Yet Madhusūdana takes this clue from the analogy of mind with the water of the Gangas, mentioned in the Bhagavata. Madhusudana maintains that bhakti springs in the mind melted by Bhagavaddharma, which Madhusūdana equates with madgunasruti of the Bhagavata. Finally, such bhakti is directed to Sarveśa - a term corresponding to Sarvagunasaya of the Bhagavata. Madhusūdana therefore, may be said to have adopted the definition of bhakti in the Bhagavata in all its details, though he improves upon the concept of bhakti by imposing variegated ideas, metaphysical, literary and Otherwise. The gist of Madhusudana's bhakti may therefore, be summed up as follows: By the practice of listening to the merits of Bhagavat the mind melts. Such melted mind develops an uninterrupted flow towards the Supreme Lord.

Melting of the mind as a precondition to the mental mode called bhakti, distinguishes such mental mode from akhandākāracittavṛtti which does not require any melting of the mind and which embraces the soul free from all differentiation. Madhusūdana brings in an interesting analogy to explain the process of the melting of the mind, which serves as the condition for the rise of bhaktivṛtti He compares the mind with lac. Lac is solid by nature but it becomes liquid when it comes liquid when it comes in contact with fire. Similarly mind is indifferent and unresponsive by nature, but it is stirred into melting by some internal stimuli like love, anger, fear, affection and so on. In the adoption of these stimuli Madhusūdana has once again resorted to the Bhagavata. Kindled by any of these, the mind melts. But such melting is distinguished from mere Slackening brought about by extraneous conditions, which are not adequate for bhakti. But he leaves the analogy of lac at this stage and exposes the unique character of the mind as follows: The melted mind receives the form of Bhagavat which clings to the mind for all times to come. In fact such form imprinting itself on the melted mind becomes a permanent acquisition there of. So that though the mind becomes hard afterwards or may entertain excussion in to other objects, the said form persists. Such permanent acquisition, Madhusūdana designates as Samkara, Vāsana, bhāva and bhāvana.

In allegiance to the literary theory of rasa Madhusūdhana has tried to establish a link between ordinary 'rati', developing into 'Sringara' and Bhagavat-rati". In the case of ordinary knowledge about the beloved, what knowledge in fact embraces is not the illusory object like the beloved, but the caitanya as conditioned by the illusory object. Rati inhering in the lover is, in the way stated above, the form of beloved in the mind of the lover. Closer scrutiny discloses that such form is the reflection of object consciousness. Ordinary rati therefore differs from Bhagavatrati in so far as the former is a reflection of object-consciousness, while the latter is a reflection of pure consciousness viz Bhagavat Himself. But both are rati being the reflection of consciousness on the mind which has already melted.

The question arises whether Bhakti rasa which is all bliss can be recognised to a special type of knowledge as well. In his point the concept of Bhagavat as enunciated by Madhusūdana, seems to throw some light. Madhusūdana conceives Bhagavat to be 'bōdha sukhātmaka'. If we add to this the further fact that the supreme reality is self revealed then Bhagavat as all bliss must be taken to be self revealed. If none can conceive of happiness remaining unknown it is far more so with regard to bliss being self-revealed. So bhakti it is a knowledge.

In Madhusūdana, therefore we come across a grand climax of the concept Shakti. In the Bhakti-sūtrās bhakti was mentioned as 'anurakti' but its precise connotation was left largely unexplored. In the Bhagavata, bhakti was taken to be mangati mental mode and thus the Bhagavata may be said to have tried to give about a clearer perspective of Bhakti. In the Bengal school of Vaisnavism, Bhakti was taken to be a rapturous knowledge. It was even recognised as an expression of spiritual power. But Madhusūdana upon the mind of the aspirant votary.

Madhusūdana thus recognises in the context of bhakti 'Manogati' of the Bhagavata. He further accepts, like the Bengal school of Vaisnavism this mental mode to be a type of knowledge. But he goes further. He takes bhakti to mean the reflection of consciousness on the mental mode. It is apparent that of the two Advaita Vedantic theories of knowledge mental mode as Jñāna, Madhusūdana adopts the latter in his conception of bhakti.

Such concept of bhakti as reflection of consciousness. On the mental mode runs parallel to the akhandakaracittavrtti of the Advaita Vedānta. But while the latter embraces Brahman, the pure existence of Brahman as reflected on the mental mode, bhakti of Madhusūdana receives the reflection of Bhagavat, the all-bliss reality. An ordinary mental mode is incapable of receiving the reflection of Bhagavat. It is conceivable that even akhandākārācittavrtti the highest type of mental mode of the Advaita School, fails to be a receptacle of the reflection of Bhagavat vrtti which arises in melted mind receives according to Madhusūdana, reflection of Bhagavat with the reflected i.e. Bhagavat. The result is that for Madhusūdana bhakti is Bhagavat Himself and not merely a divine power as upheld by the Bengal school Vaiṣṇavism.

Madhusūdana explains the genesis of Bhagavatakarata i.e. the reflection of Bhagavat on the mental mode in the following way. The erroneous knowledge this is a snake, and the true knowledge it is a rope, establish the fact that both the knowledge reveal the rope. But while the false knowledge reveal the rope. But while the false knowledge embraces rope merely as 'this'

the true knowledge grasps it as rope. Knowledge of rope as 'this' is therefore, not opposed to the superimposition of snake on the rope, while the knowledge of rope as rope is. Madhusūdāna carries this fact to explain the genesis of reflection of Bhagavat. The ordinary cognitive mental mode like 'the pitcher exists' is a false knowledge, in so far as it comprehends the pitcher, which is the false reality. Madhusūdānās bhakti; on the other hand, involves another kind of cognitive mental mode which grasps Bhagavat. According to Madhusūdāna this second kind of mental mode is the valid knowledge. But in both the kinds of knowledge the pitcher exists Caitanya is revealed, as existence, in bhakti the same caitanya is revealed as all-bliss Bhagavat. According to Madhusūdāna Brahman is the state of absolute existence where knowledge and bliss remain undifferentiated", When the all-bliss nature of caitanya is fully manifested, on the other hand, Madhusūdāna calls it Bhagavat. According to Madhusūdāna therefore, both Brahman and Bhagavat are basically caitanya with difference in manifestation. But while revelation of caitanya as mere existence is not opposed to the superimposition of objects on it, the revelation of caitanya as Bhagavat is. Thus according to Madhusūdāna the revelation of Bhagavat in Bhakti corresponds to the revelation of rope as rope and discards, as the knowledge of adhistilana in all its details, the superimposition of external objects on consciousness. That is how bhakti embraces, exclusively Bhagavat, unblemished by external objects. On the basis of the experience of susupti which grasps bliss and no external objects, Madhusūdāna proceeds to maintain that even in the state of svapna and jāgrat, the mind by nature concerns itself only with Bhagavat, while the impression of other objects are forged by external causes. He argues that it is not a nature of mind to receive the form of any pragmatic objects with the sense-organ causes the form of that objects in the mind. But uninterrupted by these two types of causes the mind as the Upanisads says received bliss, i.e Bhagavat in susupti. It follows that left by itself, the mind has the knack of receiving the form of Bhagavat. While, on the other hand, it is disturbed by a stimulus whether external or internal, it receives the form of an object either pragmatic or illusory. To receive the form of Bhagavat therefore, is natural to the mind.

Though the form of Bhagavat comes naturally to the mind, yet as existence it is not opposed to the form of ordinary objects, appearing simultaneously in the mind. By the practice of spiritual method the form of external objects gradually disappears from the mind, so that eventually the form of Bhagavat being reflected on a pure mind eradicates completely the forms of external objects.

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And in this way the flow of mental mode taking the form of Bhagavat becomes perpetual. At the beginning of sādhanadyāsa the form of Bhagavat of mind remains indirect or rather suppressed. But gradually through the intensity of sadhanadijāsa, it comes up to the conscious mind and finally becomes manifested. While. manifested, the form of Bhagavat completely destroys from the mind forms of other objects.

Madhusūdāna has explored a new path in which the doctrines of monism is reconciled to the theory of devotionalism. He recognises bhakti as a means of removal of avidhyā, which leads to ultimate self-realisation. Bhakti for Madhusūdāna is as effective as the 'sravana manana etc' of the Advaitins. As bhakti leads to salvation through self realization, knowledge serves both in the theory of devotion and in monistic view, as the direct cause of salvation. But according to devotionalism salvation is no the summum bonum of human life. After the Bhagavata, Madhusūdāna propounds divine love above salvation, when divine love at its climax places the devotee in the state of perpetual bliss. The devotee enjoys at that stage the ecstasy of supreme love for Bhagavata. Such ecstasy, as stated, before, is 'rasa' and is Bhagavat Himself. Ecstasy is regarded by the followers of Bhagavata as the highest goal of Jiva and Madhusūdāna accepts this view the endeavour of the Advaitas ends in Brahmakaivalya which Madhusūdāna call as paramukti or supreme salvation'.

In this context Madhusūdāna reinterprets theviṣṇava terms sākōkya etc' to fit in with the monistic thought. He equates sayūjya with lack of distinction between jiva and Brahman and in relation to sayūjya he calls salōkya etc. as limited salvation. Monistic kaivalya is vidēha kaivalya when even avidyālesa which causes the continuance of the gross physical body of the Jivanmukta is exhausted. In the description of different stages of spiritual evolution of the devotee in his pursuit for bliss, jīvanmukta is described as the sixth stage but Vedeha Kaivalya is avoided. In order to enjoy the bliss of divine love. In order to justify the exposition of the theory of bhakti Madhusūdāna points out apparent difference between Bhakti and Brahmavidya, the subject matter of the Advaita school. The differences are as follows :

(1) Brahmavidhya is undifferentiated mental mode comprehending the non-dual reality. Bhakti on the other hand is differentiated mental mode having Bhagavat as its content.

(2) While the great sentences 'tat tvamasi etc produce Brahmavidya nine-fold-devotions je Sravana, Kirtana etc. is stated to bring about bhakti

(3) Brahmavidhya results in the eradication of primordialavidyā, root of all evils. But bhakti reaches its climax in supreme love for Bhagavat.

(4) Brahmavidya is the special privilege of rare personages, who have achieved Sadhana Catuṣṭaya, but bhakti is open to all. The melting of the mind is the only prerequisite for the dawning of bhakti.

Though Madhusūdāna has thus drawn the line of differences between Brahmavidya and bhakti, yet his synthetic mind has eventually assimilated Brahmavidya in the texture of bhakti and has integrated it in the hierarchical evolution of bhakti in its different stages. Madhusūdāna's mind has been moved in the direction in his commentary on Bhagavatgita, where he says that jivanmuktas, being purified by knowledge develop a love for Bhagavat. In this Madhusūdāna confirms the Bhagavata idea as well.

THE ELEVEN STAGES OF BHAKTI

But this synthetic attitude has assumed a full fledged form in Bhaktirasayana. Where he has expressed his view by assigning place to Brahmavidyā as a stage in the evolution of bhakti. In order to bring this out in a clearer perspective and also to appreciate the workings of

the synthetic mind of Madhusudana, we now propose to deal with the stages of bhakti which culminates in the highest flight of divine love (prema psakarsa).

Madhusūdana enumerates the stage as follows:

Prathamam mahatanh sēvā
Taddaya-Patratha tatah
Śraddhatha tesam dharmēsu
Tato hariguna śrutih
Tato ratyamkurotpattih
Svarūpādhigatistatah
Prēma vrddhi paramanande
Tasyatha sfuranam tatah
Bhagavadharmanisthatah
Svasmimstatguṇa sākā
Premnotha parama kasthētygudita
Bhakti bhumika

Madhusūdana exposes these stages as follows:

Stage: (1) Service of the great. By the great Madhusūdana means primarily Bhagavat Himself and secondarily the devotee of God.

Stage: (2) To acquire the grace of the such grace of the great may require endeavour or it may be spontaneously achieved.

Stage: (3) A favoured votary develops a taste for the practice of spiritual methods consisting in nine-fold devotion.

Stage: (4) Actual practice of the nine fold devotion according to one's capacity. These four stages are exclusively means: while the following stages are achievements though they allow still higher stages.

Stage: (5) Reception of the reflection of Bhagavat by a mode of melted mind. This stage is bhakti in its narrower sense which Madhusūdana has presented in the definition of Bhakti, while the other stages it follow it represent hierarchical maturity of this very stage.

Stage: (6) This stage practically the same as Brahavidya of the Advaita school and allows three hierarchical sub stages:- (a) realisation of the true nature of Jiva and distinguished from the gross and the subtle bodies. (b) Realisation of identity between the true nature of jiva and Brahman, the all pervading self (c) Realisation of such identity strengthens detachment to reach its climax.

Stage: (7) With the drawing of paravairagya the votary becomes overwhelmed with divine love in its ever increasing intensity.

The stages that follows now are ends as distinguished from above group of stages who are more or less means.

Stage: (8) the direct revelation of Bhagavat, the all-bliss reality.

Stage: (9) Total absorption of the votary in Bhagavat when his an his senses are completely dedicated to the service of Bhagavat.

Stage (10) Manifestation of the majesty of Bhagavat in votary.

Stage (11) The climax of divine love indicated by extreme intolerance of separation and finally resulting in surrender of life.

It is evident that bhakti as defined by Madhusudana at the beginning of Bhakti-rasayana is taken in the enumeration of, the stages of bhakti as the fifth stage which he describes as 'ratyāmkurotpatti', consequently, one might say that Madhusudana has taken the first four stages preceding the ratyāmkurotpatti as the means for the attainment of bhakti the fifth stage.

In some cases however Madhusūdana admits the variation of this rule. Though divine grace he votary develops a taste for the practice of spiritual methods consisting in nine fold devotion. Madhusudana at other place of his Bhaktirasayana has observed in the context of the exposition of a verse of the Bhagavat, that the practice of 'Karmayoga' consisting of the performance of Nitya and Naimithika Karmāns, may also bring about the above mentioned taste. He further states that Karmayoga can lead to both the paths of knowledge and the path of devotion

Bhakti the fifth stage which Madhusūdana adopted at the beginning if Bhaktirasayana for the purpose of defining it, finds interesting elaboration in his enumeration of next three stages: rathamkurōtpatti gains increasing intensity of Love for Bhagavat, resulting in His direct revelation in the mind of the votary. Between the stages of the first dawning of rati and the development of intensity of Love, Madhusudana inserts the realisation of the self of Advaita Vedanta. That means according to Madhusūdana rati is intensified by the realisation of the self. This realisation is not the manifestation of Bhagavat, the all bliss reality, but is the knowledge of reality as pure existence, for, Bhagavat becomes manifested only after the love for Bhagavat has gained intensity. The process of mind receiving the form of Bhagavat falls into four hierarchical phases:

- (1) The generation of rathyāmkura
- (2) The realisation of the self
- (3) The intensification of love for Bhagavat and finally
- (4) The manifestation of Bhagavat as all-bliss

When the all-bliss reality becomes manifested to the devotee, he naturally becomes overwhelmed by such achievement. He no longer remains conscious of the external universe and all his activities are absorbed in Bhagavat. As a result of such complete concentration on Bhagavat the majesty of Bhagavat becomes manifested in the devotee. In this way the Sarstimukti of Vaisnavās finds its recognition in the stage of bhakti described by Madhusūdan. Thus Bhagavarati resulting in the manifestation of Bhagavat, is further crystallised by the spontaneous performance of Bhagavaddharmās and culminates in perfection of divine love. The climax of divine love is Bhakti rasa and according to Madhusudana, it is the manifestation of all-bliss nature of Bhagavat in all His splendour.

It may be said that while the realisation of identity, associated with the development of 'rati' was identity of the devotee with reality manifested as pure existence, the same identity is reiterated in the realisation of 'rasa' with the difference that the latter case the devotee finds himself In perfect union reality manifested as all -bliss. A confirmed monist like Madhusūdana could not have conceived otherwise. One might take this identity with Bhagavat as a higher type of sāyujya mukti than the sayūjya achieved previously when the devotee realised himself

identified with reality as pure existence That identity is the substance of such realisation of the climax of divine love, is borne out by another fact. Madhusūdāna describes the climax of Prema as marked by the most poignant intolerance of separation from the beloved.

In other words Madhusūdāna takes this intolerance as the last heightening of love sentiment desolving into what may be described as the perfect union between the devotee and Bhagavat. In fact Madhusūdāna takes intolerance to be the basic feature of love ranging from rati to rasā. On the ground of all these Madhusūdāna conception of bhakti as rasa presupposed perfect identity between the the devotee and Bhagavat. It may be noted here that intolerance at its climax, disclosed at the final stage of Bhakti, is also recognised as such by Jiva Gōsvāmin. In his prīti Sandarbha, he called this state as mahābhāva ie the climax of 'bhava' a word which has its parallel in the word rati of madhusūdāna.

In his conception of hierarchy in the stages of bhakti Madhusūdāna mainly depends upon the authority of the Bhagavata It appears that the structure of his bhakti bhūmikās is based on one verse of the Bhagavata viz.

*"Satam prasamyat mama viryasamvidō
Bhavanti hrīkarnarasayanaḥ kathah
Tajjōsānadasvapavarga vartmani
Śraddhārbhaktiranukramisyati".*

Here the Bhagavata clearly states that in the company of the great one can hear the praise of Bhagavat. These praises being heard leads to the unfoldment of sraddha, rati and bhakti in progressive order. Thus here we find the hierarchical order of (1) sat prasmya which is equivalent to mahatām seva of Madhusūdāna sraddha (2) rati and (3) bhakti, which Madhusūdāna calls prēmnaḥ parakatsha Else-where the Bhagavata maintains that divine grace is the Prerequisite of devotion. Again, the Bhagavata states that the performance of Paramadhama is the direct cause of bhakti i.e. rati The dharma consist in the nine fold devotion as described in the Bhagavat Madhusūdāna further holds on the basis of the Bhagavata that divine grace is achieved by restoring to the great, who are compassionate by nature. The compassionate great, out of pity, showers grace on the devotee which enables the devotee to obtain divine grace. We therefore, come upon the following hierarchical stages that results in the advent of rati: - (1) The service of the great, which enables the devotee both to hear the praise of Bhagavat and to obtain divine grace. (2) The divine grace (3) Sraddha in Bhagavaddharma and (4) actual performance of such dharma. In this way all preliminary sadhana stages including rati are found illustrated in the Bhagavata. Madhusūdāna collects them and with his synthetic genius, knits them into the stages of bhakti where the hierarchy among stages is brought logically clear perspective. The stage that comes after rati stage is described by Bhagavata in the verse, 'Nyastakrtidanakoalo jadavat tamnanastaya'etc. Madhusūdāna takes this as the stage of premadadhya where ever increasing intensity of love finds expression in external exuberance. And in between the stages of rati and premadadhya he places the stages of self realisation which is described in the Bhagavata as coming after the dawning of bhakti in Bhagavat. Here also Madhusūdāna shows his originality by arranging position of stages coming after 'rati'.

That the realisation of all pervading self as identical with the devotee leads to the heightening of love in the manifestation of Bhagavat is also stated by the Bhagavata.

While describing the 'rasalila'. But the illustration of the intense love of the gopics for Bhagavat mentioned in this context is utilised by Madhusūdana to illustrate the climax of love, the final stage of the devotee.

After the manifestation of Bhagavat the votary becomes completely absorbed in Bhagavata. This condition is stated by the Bhagavata while describing the condition of Ambarisa". As a result of such total absorption in Bhagavat the majesty of Bhagavat becomes manifested in the votary. This state is also illustrated by the Bhagavata in several contexts such as state is held by the Bhagavata as more or less a by-product of the stage of total absorption such as absorption culminates in the climax of divine love i.e. the goal of the votary's. Though Madhusūdana depends on the Bhagavata for the condition of the votary in the last three stages. Yet their progressive order is conceived by Madhusūdana.

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