

Bhakti In Sree Narayana Guru's Darśana Māla

Dr. S. Omana

Former H.O.D. of Philosophy, University College,
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India

Abstract

God-realization is the ultimate goal of man. *Bhakti* is the best of all tools for God-realization. This essay deals with *bhakti* in the Bhakti Darsanam of Narayana Guru's *Darśana Māla*. Bhakti Darsanam consists of ten verses. In the first three verses *bhakti* is defined as meditative search for *Ātman*, *Brahman* and *ānanda* respectively. The fourth verse defined meditative adoration of *Ātman*, the first verse revealed the oneness of *ānanda*, *Brahman* and *ātman* and the next verse stated the essentiality of the integral experience of a real bhakta, and that kind of *bhakti* is considered as the best in verse eight. In verses 9 & 10 it is stated clearly that the one referring to the Supreme-Self is the highest *bhakti*.

Keywords: *Bhakti*, *Ātman*, *Brahman*, *Ānanda*, *God-realization*.

1. Introduction

Sree Narayana Guru is a contemplative man of wisdom - a rishi of the modern age. He has brought scientific view point to India's treasury of wisdom. He expressed his philosophy lyrically in his writings. According to the Indian tradition the ultimate Reality is *sat-cit-ānanda* or *Saccidananda*. The ultimate goal of man is to realize oneself as *sat-cit-ānanda* or *saccidananda*. *Bhakti* or devotion is considered to be the best of all tools for realization.

This essay is concerned with Narayana Guru's concept of *Bhakti*, in his *Darśana Māla*; his most important Sanskrit work - his magnum opus, and to show how it will take the spiritual aspirant to the goal of realization of God or Absolute.

Before going into the details of Guru's concept of *Bhakti* it is essential to have a brief account of *Darśana Māla* (Garland of Visions)

Darśana Māla is an exceedingly compact and lucid expression of Narayana Guru's unitive vision. In this work, the Guru presents *Vedānta* as the Science of Sciences and makes clear once more the essence of the Upanishadic wisdom. In it Guru gives his views of the Absolute Reality – Brahman is visualized from ten different perspectives, each vision constituting one chapter. Each chapter depicts how the one reality looks when viewed from the particular point of view it chooses. All are equally important, as are the beads in a garland. The ten chapters are:

1. Adhyāropa Darśanam.
2. Apavāda Darśanam.
3. Asatya Darśanam.
4. Māya Darśanam.
5. Bhāna Darśanam.
6. Karma Darśanam.
7. Jnāna Darśanam.
8. Bhakti Darśanam.
9. Yoga Darśanam.
10. Nirvāna Darśanam.

Bhakti Darśanam deals with the emotional coming together of the individual being with the total being, the realm of *bhakti*. Though the term is translated as devotion, it is here to be understood as having the under one of a contemplative mood.¹

Bhakti is a word given various connotations by various systems, traditions and cults. In the religious context it means a sort of emotional rapport a supplicant develops towards God or the deity he worships.

Prapatti, is also a form of *bhakti*, if one's attitude of surrendering oneself and everything is to God's will. One offshoot of this form of emotional *bhakti* is the common religious expression of singing exhilarating songs called *bhajan*s. Temples and

¹ Guru Muni Narayana Prasad, *Garland of Visions*, D.K.Printworld, 237, (2007).

other places of worship developed as an extended version of this *bhakti*.

The Guru deals with it in the *Bhakti Darśanam*, giving more weight to the philosophical insight of non-duality than to the emotional aspects. *Bhakti* according to him, is one of the facets of experientially perceiving one's oneness with *Brahman* or the Absolute.

The Guru's overall perception of *bhakti* is based on the notion that *Atman*, the Self or oneself, in essence is *ānanda*. Oneself being *ānanda* has necessarily to be turned towards one's own being. On the firm basis of this, in this chapter the Guru gives six definitions of *bhakti*, each complementary to the other.

Bhakti is a word derived from the verb root *bhaj*, meaning, to do service by sitting nearby (*bhaj sevayam*). This sitting nearby and doing service need not necessarily be a physical act. The more virtual rather than actual it is, it becomes more sublime. The root also denotes to be seated nearby, to Partake of something to meditate, to attain, to accept, to worship, none of which needs be excluded from the sense of *bhakti* understood here.

Bhakti and love always go together. Something becomes lovable to you, not because you like that particular object, but because you love happiness or *ānanda* it gives. This *ānanda* in its turn really is the essential content of your own being or *Ātma*. The object you love also is yet another form in which the same *Ātman* becomes manifest. This is one of the secret aspects of wisdom taught by the saint Yajnavalkya to his disciple and wife Maitreyi, in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. (IV. 5.6)².

2. Bhakthi Darsanam

Translated by Nataraja Guru³

Verse 1

Meditation on the Self is bhakti.
That by which the Self is blissful, with that,
the knower of the Self always meditates upon the Self by the Self.

In this First verse, the Guru defined *bhakti* as meditation on the Self. *The Bhagavad Gita* (111-17) underlines the truth that a man who is interested in the Self and satisfied in it has nothing else to do. Sankara in the *Vivekachudamani* (The Crest Jewel

of Wisdom) verse 32, also says that *bhakti* is the meditation on the true form of one's Self. The reason why such great importance is given to contemplation on the Self is stated in this verse by the fact that the very nature of the Self consists of Bliss.

In Narada's *Bhakti Sutra*, *bhakti* is even defined as absolute love, which can also mean love for the Absolute.⁴

All living beings are naturally disposed to such meditation. Therefore, the quality of representing this high value is what makes the Self fit to be meditated upon. In the world all people who have attempted to Self-realization are in truth those who contemplates the Self.

Verse 2

Brahma is meditated upon
because *Brahma* is blissful.
Constant meditation on *Brahma*
is known as *bhakti*.

The second verse defined *bhakti* as meditative search for *Brahman* or the Absolute.

The *Bhakti Darśanam* is visualized in this chapter with this conception of *Brahman* - *brahmātmaikya* its core.

The absolute Reality, individuated, is understood as *ātman*, and universally as *Brahman*, both being *ānanda* is essence. Both definitions convey to be one inner sense only. Therefore, of the absolute such a constant and unbroken medication is known as contemplation.

Verse 3

Ānanda alone is meditated,
not misery by anyone any time.
That meditation which is blissful
is bhakti, it is instructed.

Every one meditates on *ānanda* (happiness) alone, No one meditates on suffering.

Meditation aimed at *ānanda* is taught of as *bhakti*. Not merely humans, but all living beings as well, every moment in every way, strive to ensure happiness in life. This is a basic law that governs life.

Every being contemplates on *bhakti* always thus is the means of achieving happiness. No being desires to be unhappy. Therefore, there is no activity in life that aimed at one's own suffering. This

² Guru Muni Narayana Prasad, *Garland of Visions*, D.K.Printworld, 238, (2007).

³ Nataraja Guru, *An Anthology of the poem of Narayana Guru*, Narayana Gurukula, 17 (1997).

⁴ Nataraja Guru, *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*, Vol. III, Narayana Gurukula, 30, (1977).

happiness or *ānanda*, the one goal of all beings, is nothing but the essence of their own being, the essential content of *Atman* or *Brahman*. Suffering and happiness are contrasted by the guru here.⁵

Verse 4

Ātma alone is *Brahma*.
The knower of the Self contemplates
the *ātma*, not any other.
This thus meditating the Self
is named as *bhakti*.

The fourth verse defined *bhakti* as meditative adoration of *Atman* one's (that is *Brahman*). *Ātman* or oneself being *Brahman* in essence, meditating on *Brahman*. Whether seen as *Brahman* or *Ātman* its real content is *ānanda*. The real *bhakta* or devotee therefore is the one who meditatively adores the Self – Reality by being immersed in the experience of the oneness of *Brahman* and *Atman*. This inner feeling of self – absorption is to be counted as philosophically sound *bhakti*. The man who meditates on the Self is a real contemplative.

Verse 5

Ānanda, *ātmā* and *Brahma* —
such are the names of this alone, so it
is said.
In whom there is such certitude of
awareness, he as a contemplative is
well known.

Narayana Guru's concept of *bhakti* is based on the Vedantic doctrine that *ātma* essentially is *ānanda* in content and that *atma* is nothing but *Brahman*.

It is the same ultimate reality, which has the attributes of existence – subsistence – value which is also reformed to the Self, the Absolute or Bliss. Such a certitude is called *bhakti*. The man possessing this certitude is the real *bhakta*.

In this verse the truth of the great *mahavakya ayam ātma brahma* (The Self is the Absolute) is indicated.

Verse 6

I am *ānanda*, I am *Brahma*, I am
ātmā;
in such forms, for whom
there is always identification,
as a contemplative he is well known.

In the sixth verse it is stated clearly who is a genuine *bhakta* and what is real *bhakti*. A contemplative having conceptually and intellectually understood the truth of the great dicta like "I am Bliss", "I am the Absolute", "I am the Self", as referred to the same reality when he realizes himself to be the Absolute through his own inner experience (perceptually) this state is said to be the most superior kind of contemplation. The man attaining to this kind of contemplation is the best of all.⁶

It is not merely in the spiritual pursuit that the *ānanda* - centered *bhakti* becomes meaningful. Where ever there is quest for *ānanda*, *bhakti* is also there; only that we remain oblivious of being *bhaktas*. This *bhakti* has its place even in the context of our pursuit of worldly pleasures. One of the best examples of such a *bhakti* is in the conjugal relationship between husband and wife. The mutual adoration relevant in such contexts is also counted as a form of *bhakti*.

Verse 7

The wife does not merely worship the
husband,
nor the husband, the wife.
By all, their *ānanda* alone is
worshiped, which resides in the sense
interests.

In this verse it is explained clearly how ordinary people think that when a husband takes care of his wife who ministers to him, it is not merely in the interest of husband or wife that they do so. The truth is that whatever pleasure they derive from sense objects is really felt as pleasure by the Self alone. The ignorant man considers the source of pleasure as existing in things and attracted to them. But the wise man finds the source of pleasure in himself, and sees the universality of such a pleasure. The well known instance of the dialogue between Yajnavalkya and his disciple and wife Maitreyi found in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (IV.5) supports this point.

Verse 8

Thus the wise man sees everywhere
nothing but the joy of the Self—
not even a little of anything else.
His *bhakti* indeed is the highest.

We have seen that the ultimate – Reality is *sat-cit-Ananda*. It is the *saccidananda*), ultimate reality that manifests itself as everything in the

⁵ Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, *The Psychology of Darśana Māla*, Narayana Gurukula, 391 (1987).

⁶ Nataraja Guru, *An Integrated Science of the Absolute*, Vol.III, Narayana Gurukula, 33, (1977).

world. Hence, everything is *saccidanandam*. (*Sarvam hi saccidanandam* is now a firm spring board for us). When limiting this notion to the context of *ānanda* alone, we could very well say, *sarvam hi ānandamayam* (everything indeed is *ānanda* in essence). People still, even when they are experiencing directly the *ānanda* content of *Ātma*, because of their ignorance, remain completely unaware of doing so, and think of life as full of sufferings. The best way to free them from suffering is removing their ignorance. Once having become enlightened, they see both in painful and pleasurable experiences, one *ānanda* content of *Atman* alone as manifesting fleetingly in worldly activities as everyone else, but in their own view all such activities either as everyone else, painful or pleasurable, are merely ever changing new facets of directly realizing one's being *ānanda* in essence. The wise man understands this verity. Because he is capable of seeing all bliss as pertaining to the Absolute, his contemplation is called the most exalted.

Verse 9 & 10

Towards the Father of the world,
to one's spiritual teacher, father,
mother,
towards the founders of truth,
towards those who walk in the same
path,
towards those who put down evil,
(and) to those who do good to all,
what sympathy there is, that is
bhakti,
what here belonging to the supreme
Self is the ultimate.

Adoration to a God is essential for all humans for the sake of securing their happiness here as well as hereafter. Who desire liberation also need the same for the sake of the purification of the self. It is also important that all persons should respect their Guru with the same respect given to God, because of their help in removing ignorance and bestowing the light of wisdom. Parents are considered dear for begetting us and nurturing us with all concern for our well-being.

In short, whatever be that we love, the basic urge behind that feeling is our love for ourselves the

love for *ātma* ceaseless urge in all beings. This self, instead of turning towards something external could directly turn towards *Ātma* itself, towards the most lovable content of our own being, towards paramātma, and that is considered as the best kind of bhakti called para-bhakti.

3. Conclusion

In Bhakti Darshanam the most important feature is the persistent attempt by Narayana Guru to underscore the essential unity between *ānanda*, *ātma* and *Brahman*. The most self-evident truth on which the whole of this chapter depends for its certitude is found in verse three which states that all beings wish only happiness and not anything else.

Happiness is the ultimate aim of every creature, here is the attribute of the Self.

Bliss (*ānanda*), the Self (*ātma*) and the Absolute (*Brahman*) are three basic attributes found in this chapter. They give meaning and content to the pure Absolute. The first six verses bring the nature of this into light. In the last four verses, we have been obliged to use such terms as adoration, devotion, loyalty etc.

Narayana Guru used the terms Absolute, *Arivu*, consciousness and God synonymously to represent the ultimate Reality. So Guru's concept of *bhakti* is acceptable all religions and all systems of philosophy both Eastern and Western.

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