

The Philosophy of Sankara and Sankaradeva: A Brief Study

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Sankara (eighth century AD) and Sankaradeva (15th-16th century AD) are two great philosophical geniuses of two different ages of Indian history. Sankara, being the predecessor, it is probable that he could have exerted some influence on the latter with his strong ground of non-dualism. In actuality Sankaradeva was a staunch follower of the teachings of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and, hence, he believed in the Bhakti faith which is based on the philosophy of qualified Brahman while Sankara's teaching is that of non-qualified Brahman. Thus the two Sankaras seem widely to differ from each other. Since Sankaradeva's is a Bhakti movement, it seems at the first sight that his philosophy is akin to Rāmānuja's. It is generally seen that Bhakti has as its basis the duality of God and devotee, and hence Sankaradeva also should have been taken to be a dualist. So it is usually seen that most of the scholars try to establish him as such, regard him as a follower of Rāmānuja and deny the influence of Sankara on him. Some others even go to declare that Sankaradeva was not a Hindu at all, and hence his religion and philosophy are independent of Hindu religious philosophy.

Sankaradeva's opinion on God, *atman* and world, therefore, is to be investigated on the basis of his literary works in general and the *Kīrtan-ghoṣā* in particular, it being his most honoured contribution. His views can be compared with those of the great *acharyas* of the Advaita Vedānta. Their views on *māyā*, the inexplicable power of *Brahman*, are also to be examined in order to have a clear idea of their similarity and dissimilarity. In this paper an attempt will be made in this direction, and it will be shown that as regards the nature of the world and *Māyā* Sankaradeva's view is in consonance with his predecessor while in case of God and soul he has his own views.

Contradiction in the Śrutis

Indian philosophy is mostly based on the *Vedas* in general, and more particularly, the *Upaniṣhads*. It is found that

the *śrutis*, i.e. *Upaniṣhads* sometimes speak of duality of Reality while at times of its Unity. Sometimes they speak of Creation as in the sentences 'whence these beings have been produced, by whom they exist or live, and in whom they enter and merge is the Brahman'¹ etc. while at other times non-Reality of the World is declared as in the sentences "all this is Brahman, Brahman in the front, Brahman at the back, it is on the right and on the left"², "Brahman is the only one without a second"³ so that the idea of creation becomes meaningless.

Reconciliation of Sankara

Then the problem arises as to which one of the above sorts of statements in the *śrutis* is correct, unity or duality. As *śruti* is infallible, neither of them can be rejected. Both might have their ground to stand upon. To reconcile these opposite views, Sankara (eighth century AD) interpreted the two types of views on the basis of '*māyā*' mentioned in various texts as in "Indra undergoes many forms through the *māyās*"⁴, "Know *māyā* as *prakṛti* (the primal cause) and Maheśwara (God) as owning that *māyā*"⁵. *Māyā* is, thus, the keynote of explaining the contradictory views of the holy *Vedas* and attaining at the Root Cause of the world. In this attempt to reconcile, Sankara attained at the idea of Unity of Reality as the final Truth of the *śrutis* and of duality as apparent.

Brahman: One Reality without a Second

Basing on some of the statements of the *śrutis*⁶ the *sūtras* like *janmādyasya yataḥ*⁷ etc. are composed where it is said that that from, in and to which these objects are born, preserved and merge is Brahman⁸ which means that Brahman is the origin, support and end of the world, 'the efficient and material cause of the universe'⁹ He creates without implements, without any external material. This type of saying agrees with the creation of the world and it means that Brahman is the cause and the world is its

effect. But somewhere they speak of Brahman as both material and instrumental cause of the world¹⁰ and in that case no difference can be there between the two, as between gold and gold ornaments. According to the B.S. the power of creation belongs to the pure, stainless Brahman, even as heat belongs to fire¹¹ Brahman for its own sport¹² develops¹³ into the world without undergoing the least change¹⁴ and without ceasing itself to be. But how the cause develops into the effect is not clear in the B.S. Sankara takes this problem up and deals with it on the basis of *māyā*, taking it as the intermediary.

According to *Bh. māyā* is the cause of the world, not Brahman. Brahman is immobile, free of impurity, very minute, One and without any effect. Therefore, Brahman can not be the cause of the world. It has no duality. Gods like Brahmā &c also can not understand the real nature of this Brahman.

The Two Aspects of Brahman

Sankara recognizes two aspects of Brahman. These two aspects of the same Brahman are recognized by the *Upaniṣhads*. One is having the differences of name and form, and the other is just opposite to this, having no differences.¹⁵ Former one is for worshippers and the other is only for knowledge. The former one is termed as *saḡuṇa* Brahman, qualified Brahman, and the other is *nirḡuṇa*, non-qualified. The former is the object of worship for the devotees, who don't hanker after knowledge. And that is the path followed by Sankaradeva.

Based on such statements, Sankara says that Brahman alone is True, the world is not true, and *jīva*, the self, is Brahman itself and nothing else¹⁶. That the Brahman alone is the Reality is hinted by Sankaradeva also in the *Udeṣāvāraṇa* of his *K*¹⁷ as:

"O Lord, of the nature of Consciousness, pervading, One and without effect; who can say you as duality? The aspect that is without any movement, without any impurity, and minute is not known even to the gods, how can we know It. But you have the other aspect which has four arms, is adorned with the yellow garments, and is holding the conch, the wheel, the mace etc. you put on a jewelled mukuṭa and a necklace, you have the sign of Srivatsa on your chest and a flower-garland on your neck. This very form is adored by the gods and is worshipped by the devotees as well."

Of these two aspects, the former is the Unqualified and latter is the Qualified. The former is not the cause of the world, while the latter is. Thus it may be surmised that Sankaradeva's God is both qualified and unqualified. In the former aspect he is not the cause of the world, while in the latter aspect he is. As this diversity in the world is said to be due to *māyā*, there is no possibility of the world being real.

How could the One, Unqualified be the Qualified and thus become the cause of the world? In its reply one may see the Vedastuti section of the *K* where he says that the Lord is the Real One, He is Brahman, in Him the world manifests itself. The Lord, on the other hand, reveals Himself in the world being the immanent Lord. "*You are real, you are Brahman. But in spite of being unreal this world manifests itself in you. In the world also you manifest yourself being inherent.*"¹⁸ Here the term *antaryāmi* is significant. The second line of the above verse is dubious. When God is said to manifest in the world then He has two alternatives 1. He transforms Himself into the world, 2. He appears as the world. In case of transformation the world's reality has to be accepted. But as its reality has already been rejected in the first half of the verse its evolution can not be accepted. Here in this statement there is the possibility of interpreting the world as real as Brahman; but the doubt has been discarded at the very beginning with the statement that the world is *axanta*, unreal. This word is repeated in many places of his works. Thus, one can easily come to the conclusion that Sankaradeva does not accept the Reality of the world, but according to him Brahman alone is the sole Reality. And, since he speaks of the world as unreal it cannot be regarded as the *pariṇāma* (evolution) of Brahman. In that case the world would have to be accepted as real, like curd of milk, where both curd and milk are real; and then the unity of Brahman would be hindered. Sankaradeva does not say so. That the world is unreal is evident from another clear statement of Sankaradeva: '*This unreal world has been produced in you. It appears as if it were real.*'¹⁹

This problem is solved also by Sankara in his commentary on the Chandogya (6.3.2) where he puts forward the doubt of the opponent and asks:

"Is it justified on the part of the unworldly and omniscient god to willingly enter the bodies, which are the embodiment of innumerable pains, to feel the pains, in spite of His being independent? It would not have been, if he would have wished to enter with his own nature unchanged, and suffer the pains. But it is not so. He said this only that I would enter with the nature of this *jīva*. Individual self (*jīva*) is just the apparent form of the God. He manifests Himself in the form of *jīva*, individual self, which is appearance of the conscious Self only, just like the image that appears in a mirror, or like the suns and the like in waters²⁰.

Here it is said that Brahman apparently manifests himself as the individual self. He does not actually enter in his real form. So the individual self is also not really independent of the Brahman.

The Brahman or the Absolute Reality is explained in two different aspects viz. *sopādhika* Brahman (qualified God) and *nirupādhika* Brahman (unqualified God). The former is endowed with *avidyā* or ignorance or *māyā* while

the latter has no relation to *māyā*. This Supreme Self with *māyā* is Īśvara (God). This world of various innumerable characteristics and having names and forms is the projection of *Māyā*. Thus, the Relative Brahman alone creates the world²¹. This God is regarded as Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient²².

Thus it is seen that Sankaradeva is of the same opinion with Sankara in this regard, as far as the question of *antaryāmin* is concerned.

What is *Māyā*?

Maya, according to Sankara, is an endless ignorance without a beginning, and is based on previous ignorance. It can not be said as real or unreal, or both or none of these at all. So he terms it as inexplicable²³. It is *mithyā*. It envelops and thus hides the true nature of things and at the same time imposes something else in its place as a snake on a piece of rope. The aspect of hiding the real is termed in Sanskrit as *āvaraṇa* and the one that imposes the unreal is called *vikṣepa*. A man sees a snake in the twilight on his way and jumps back in fear; after a moment he looks back with a calm mind and discovers that it was a rope lying on his way; ignorance disappears, true knowledge appears and his fear also disappears simultaneously. Thus it is ignorance that imposes the unreal on the real. The Real remains for all times: past, present and future. It may virtually disappear for a time (as in the case of the rope cited above), but not in reality. And because the imposed object disappears as soon as ignorance is dispelled, the object imposed can not be termed as unreal; it can not be termed real too as it has no permanent existence. It was the illusion that made a mixture of the true and untrue²⁴. So the world is also inexplicable like its causes ignorance, illusion, *māyā*. Same is the case with Brahman, which the *Upaniṣads* term as the sole Reality, the only Truth without a second²⁵ is enveloped by its indispensable power *māyā*. The One without a second appears as many just like the single Moon appears as innumerable moons in waters of the ponds, seas and oceans, etc. One can not term the many moons as unreal because they appear to the eyes. They can not be real because they don't exist for all times. Another illustration of this type of superimposition is that of a single face of one who looks his face in a curved mirror with innumerable surfaces, where the single man becomes many for the seer, but as soon as the mirror breaks down the faces disappear; there remains the single face of the seer alone. So also the waters in many pots in the sea become the one sea-water as soon as the pots break down; the skies in many containers become one sky as soon as the containers disappear.

Māyā cannot be differentiated from Brahman as the

power of burning from fire, or like the power of magic from a magician. In case of magic it is the magician who with his power of magic imposes some other thing over the real object. In that case the projector is the power of magic, not the magician himself that projects. So also in case of the world it is *māyā*, the power of qualified Brahman that is responsible for the imposition of the apparent world on Real Brahman. Because superimposition is the function of *māyā*, *adhyāsa* is another term to mean this type of imposition. *Adhyāsa* is defined as of the nature of memory of some other thing that had been apparently seen in former times.²⁶ Other equivalents of *māyā* in Sanskrit are *mithyājñāna*, *mithyāpratyaaya*, *mithyābuddhi*, *avyakta*, *mahāsusupti*, *ākāśa*, *akṣara*, and *avidyā*. Thus ignorance, false knowledge, false feeling, etc. are the causes of the appearance. Sankara uses the word *māyā* in some places.²⁷

Māyā in Sankaradeva

Sankaradeva in his *Kīrtan-ghoṣā* uses the term *māyā* in many places, sometimes to mean the inexplicable power of the Lord, sometimes the power of individual ignorance and sometimes to mean magic. That *māyā* has the two functions of enveloping and projecting is stated by Sankaradeva by the words that he projects the unreal by covering the real is his *Māyā*.²⁸ This is a clear declaration of Sankaradeva's recognizing *māyā* as the cause of false knowledge. That *māyā* is the root of the apparent world is stated by Sankaradeva in the Vedastuti section of the *Kīrtan-ghoṣā* that this unreal world has come out of God, and it appears as real always.²⁹ But in another place this appearance of the world in place of God, the only Reality, is stated to be due to *māyā*. The Reality is God Himself, He has no difference in itself, but difference is seen in Him only due to the power of *māyā*.³⁰ It means that like Sankara, Sankaradeva also does not recognize the differences *sajātīyabheda* and *vijātīyabheda*. The Lord is one, self-illuminant, eternal and without any effect. Thus, the Lord has no effect, which means that He is not the cause of the world. He appears as many only due to *māyā*.³¹

God in Sankaradeva

As in the *Bhāgavata purāṇa*, Sankaradeva says that the Infinite One, with its power of *māyā*, creates, preserves and destructs the world at the end.³² The *Bhāgavata* says that God, Time, Force, the Self being the resources of energy and essence, that Absolute One, the Lord of the three *guṇas* with his power creates, preserves and destroys. Here, the word power means *māyā*. Sankaradeva, in the *Vaikuṇṭha-prayāṇa* section also, has a similar type of statement.³³

“You create the creatures in your self taking resort to māyā of the nature of the three guṇas; you yourself take care of and destroy them, but no evil or good can affect you.”

In another place Sankaradeva speaks of this world as the work of māyā, which means that actually Brahman or God does not create the world; it is the result of the three guṇas of Māyā alone.³⁴

Māyā, on the other hand, affects the intellect of man and all other creatures in the world by covering the real Self from their knowledge.³⁵ And Absolute Self and the individual self are not two different entities, they are one and the same³⁶. This view of Sankara is reflected in the statement of Sankaradeva too when he says that one should not regard oneself as distinct from God.³⁷ That man is affected by māyā is illustrated by Yaśodā's bewilderment at the sight of her son's Universal Form in the Śīśulīlā section of K, where she declares that she thinks of herself as the doer and of the sons and husband as belonging to her.³⁸ This is in line with the statement of Sankara in the B.S., where he says that it is due to *adhyāsa* that men behave as 'this is I' and 'this is mine' and so on.³⁹ Here it is seen that as long as māyā is, there is the sense of 'I' and 'mine' in the individual self. Māyā dissolves as soon as the false knowledge disappears and true knowledge appears.

Liberation in Sankaradeva

In respect of attainment of freedom from Māyā, of course, Sankaradeva differs from Sankara. While Sankara speaks of true knowledge of the self and non-self as the way to attaining freedom from māyā, Sankaradeva does not lay stress on knowledge. Sankara says that after hearing the words of the śrutis and brooding over and practice of the same the individual self realizes his own Self and thus he becomes free from his body, attains release from the body and the related pains⁴⁰ Sankaradeva, on the other hand, depends on the grace of the Almighty in getting release from the bondage of māyā. He says that this whole world is full of Māyā, or the effect of māyā and is like a dream⁴¹. God alone can do away with the hold of māyā. When man takes resort to the feet of God, then He dispels the bond of māyā of all jīvas of the world.⁴² While Sankara lays stress on knowledge, Sankaradeva denies the necessity of knowledge; according to him refuge in the feet of God is enough for every success. One should know God as his own self and take resort to devotion in Him; then he does not feel any need of the worldly pleasures like that of son, wife and other worldly wealth⁴³. That is why Sankaradeva asks the Lord to take away His Māyā.⁴⁴ To appease God devotion is regarded as the sole way of worship unlike Sankara, who lays stress on knowledge of the Self alone.

Conclusion

Thus it is seen that as regards the Unity of Reality, unreality of the world and the process of creation etc. there are similarities between Sankara and Sankaradeva; while regarding the process of attaining release from bondage they don't agree with each other. Sankaradeva does not take knowledge as a means to emancipation. Of course, he does not deny knowledge at all; according to him, knowledge comes forth as a result of devotion, *bhakti*, which burns up māyā, and as a final result the devotee becomes one with God.⁴⁵ It is in similarity with the Vedantic view that the self is the Self itself (That art thou, *tat tvam asi*; and I am Brahman, *ahaṃ brahmāsmi*).

Abbreviations

Bh. = Bhāgavata
 B.S. = Brahmasūtra
 B.S.S.B.= Brahmasūtra Śāṅkarabhāṣya
 K.= Kīrtan-ghoṣā
 S.B.= Sāṅkarabhāṣya

Notes

1. (*yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante yena jātāni jīvaṅti yat prayantyabhisamvīśanti tadbrahma tadvijijñāsasva'*. *Taittirīyopaniṣat*, 3.1)
2. *sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ brahma, purastādbrahma paścāddakṣiṇataścottareṇa*
3. *sadeva somyedamagra āsīekamevādvīṣyam*, *Chandogyopaniṣat*,
4. RV.6.47.18
5. *Māyāntu prakṛtiṃ vidyānmāyīnantu maheśvaram*
6. *yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyant'* *Taittirīyopaniṣad*, 3.1 and the like
7. B.S. 1.1.2
8. B.S. 1.1.2
9. Radhakrishnan, 40, 2008.
10. B.S.1.23-27
11. B.S. 1.3.1
12. B.S. 2.1.33
13. B.S.1.26
14. (B.S. 2.1.27
15. *dvirūpaṃ hi brahmāvogamyate nāmarūpavikāra-bhedopādhihīṣṭm tadviparīṅca sarvopādhihīvarjitam*, *BSSB*,1.1.12
16. *brahma satyaṃ jagannithyā jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ*
17. *māyāteḍe dekhīya bibidha paricheḍa. svarupata tohmāra nāhike eko bheda. caitanyamwarupa byāpi eka nirañjana tomñka bulibe dvaita koona agyājana. nicchala nirmala xukhmarupa jito swami. deve najānanta tāka kene jāno āmi. Aparā tohmāra rupa jāta bhuja cāri pitabastre xobhoi xankha chakra gadādhāri*

- pindhi āchā ratnara mokuṭa t̄ara hāra
hiyāta śribatsa gale banamālā jāra.
Xehixe murtika ārādhanta devagane
Lākexe bhakatajane cinte xarbakhyane. (K. Udeṣā, 83-85)
18. Tumi satya brahma tomāta prakāxe jagata iṭo axanta
Jagatato xadā tumiya prakāxā antarjāmī bhagavanta. (K.
Vedastuti, 14.)
19. Axanta jagatakhāni tomāta udbhava bhaila xanta hena prakāxe
xadāya. (Vedastuti, 21)
20. Jīvo hi nāma devatāyā ābhāsamātram. buddhyādibhūtamātrāsam
sargajanitaḥ ādarśa iṭo praviṣṭaḥ puruṣapratibimbo jalādiṣṭvōva
sūryādīnām. Chandogyā. S.B. 6.3.2
21. sopekṣo hiśvaro viṣamām sṛṣṭim nirmimite, BSSB, 2.1.34
- 22.
23. anirvācanīya
24. satyānṛte mithunikṛtyāhamidammamedamiti naisargikoyaṃ
lokavyavahāraḥ B.S.S.B.; Bh.1.
25. Ekamevādvitīyam, Chandogyā, 6.2.1; ātmā vā
idamekamevāgra āsīt, Aitareya, 2.1.1.1; ayamātmā brahma
sarvānubhūh, brhad, 2.1.11.
26. smytirūpaḥ paratra pūrvadṛṣṭāvabhāsaḥ, B.S. S. B. 1.1.3.
27. māyāmātram hyetatparamātmanovasthātrayātmanāvabhā-
sanaṃ rajjōvā iṭo sarpādibhāveneti, B.S.B.B. 2.1.9; eka eva
parameśvaraḥ kūṭasthanityo vijñādhāturavidyayā māyayā
māyādivadanekadhā vibhāvoyate, B.S.S.B. 1.3.19
28. Abastuka dekhāwaya bastuka āvari. Ehixe mohora māyā jānā
niṣṭha kari
29. Axanta jagatakhāna tomāta udbhava bhaila xanta hena prakāxe
xadāya (K. Vedastuti, 21)
30. Māyāte dekhīya bibidha pariccheda. swarūpata tomāra nāhika
kichu bheda. K. Udeṣā, 83
31. Nitya nirañjana swaprakāxa īxa eka. Māyā upādhira bale dekhīya
aneka. Kurukṣetra, 512
32. āpuni māyāra bale anante. Srijanta pālanta xaṃhari ante.
Prahād carit. 176);
sa īśvaraḥ kāla urukramo'sāvojaḥ sahaḥ sattvabalendriyaātmā
sa eva viśvaṃ paramaḥ swaśaktibhiḥ sṛjatyavatyatti
guṇatrayeśaḥ (bh.)
33. triguṇā māyāka kari āsraya ātmāta srajā jata jīvacaya
pralaya pālana karā āpune napāwe lāga eko doxe guṇe;
toammāyayā triguṇayātmani durvibhāvyaṃyaktam sṛjasyavasi
lumpasi tadguṇasthaḥ.
- Naitairbhavānājita karmabhirajyate vai yal sve mgkhe'vyavahita'
bhirato'navadyaḥ. (Bh.)
34. Māyāra racanā iṭo jagatake jāni Pāche moka pāibā tumi kailo
niṣṭha bānī. (Vaikuṇṭha. 112) lvantu maddharmamāsthāya
jñānaniṣṭha upekṣakaḥ manmāyāracanāmetam vijñāyopasamaṃ
vraja. Bh. 11.31.49
35. brahmā ādi kari jata devatā paṇḍita, jāhāra panthata honta
māyāye mohita. K. Prahādā. 119
Bicāri cāhile doxa nāhike āmāra. Jāra māyāpāxe bandī xamasta
xaṃxāra, K. Haramohana, 78
36. Jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ
37. Aponāka nedekhība īśwarata bhinna. Bh. (Assamese),
Niminavasiddha--, 201
38. Mai yaśodā mora putra swāmī, brajara xabe adhkārī āmi.
Hena ahamama xadāye karo. Jāhāra māyāta upajo maro. K.
śisūlilā, 35.36
39. ...mithyājñānanimittaḥ satyānṛte mithunikṛtyāhamidam-
mamedamiti naisargikoyaṃ lokavyavahāraḥ. BSSB,
pramāṇabhāṣya, 2
40. ...jīvasya śrutikṛtam vivekavijñānaṃ śarīrasamutthānam.
vivekavijñānaphalaṃ swarūpeṇābhiniṣpattiḥ kevalātma-
swarūpāvogatiḥ. tasmādvivekavijñānābhādanāvīrbūtaswar
ūpaḥ san vivekavijñādvīrbūtaswarūpa ityucyale. BSSB, 1.3.19
41. Māyāmaya iṭo putra bhārjyā kalevara, K. Prahādā, 143;
Jateka xaṃxāra naya xabe swapna māyāmaya antake kexata
āche dhari. K. Balichalana, 18
Tomārexe māyākarme bandī huyā xaṃxāre upajo maro. K.
Vedastuti, 17
Jata dekhā jata xunā jateka manata guṇā xabe māyāmaya
swapnaxama. K. Vaikuṇṭha. 32
42. Jaya jaya hoka hari ānanda prakāx. Xamasta jīvara karā māyāka
bināxa. K. Vedastuti, 2
43. Tumi mahāguru tomāra caraṇe mane jadi laila bāxa. Tomāra
kṛpāta xabe xiddhi haiba nalāge jñāna- abhyāxa.
Tumi ātmā hena jāniyā tomāka cite bhajai jīto jana. Tucca putra
dārā bixaya xambhoge nāhi āra prayojana. K. Vedastuti, 18-19
44. Tomāra katākṣadṛṣṭi pāyā nṛtya karai māyā bhari tuli mardai
mora mātha. Param a ātura huyā tomāta xaraṇa lailo māyāka
nivārā jagannātha. K. Vedastuti, 22.
45. Upajāibe āti baiṣṇava jñāna. Māyāka karibe dahi nirjāna,
Caitanyamūrti pūrṇānanda hari. Thaibanta tente ere eka kari. K.
Nāmāparādha, 31-33