

## A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO THE CONCEPTS OF ANANYA AND NISKAMA BHAKTI

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### **Abstract**

*The concept of bhakti is not merely a religious concept. It has been treated as philosophically important for the reason that it is also considered as the means of liberation. Although different types of bhaktis are found to be suggested by different bhakti vadins, in this paper only two types of bhakti have been taken into consideration. The type of bhakti described in the Bhagavad Gita (XI-22&54, XVIII-51 to 55) can be considered as ananya bhakti and the type of bhakti described in the Bhajanamala (I/78 &II/73) of Santha poet Bhima Bhoi is an example of niskama bhakti. The paper aims at the exposition of both the types of bhaktis developed in these two important sources. The paper attached emphasis on finding the answering the question: Is ananya or niskama bhakti individualistic or having some social relevance?*

### **Keywords**

*sakama bhakti, niskama bhakti, nirguna bhakti and ananya bhakti*

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### The Concept of *Bhakti* and the types

*Bhakti* as a concept has been derived from the root *bhaj*. It stands for love, adoration, surrendering, reverence, etc. The primary stage of *bhakti* is *aasakti* or *anurakti*. The *aasakti* becomes *bhakti* in a mature state. Mohanty writes: "Love for the 'finite' is *aasakti* and love for the 'Infinite' is devotion (*bhakti*). *Bhakti* is a spontaneous human response to the perennial call of the 'divine'."<sup>1</sup> Trilochana Misra considers "*bhakti* is a universal human sentiment arising in a certain context and directed to a certain object. Circumscribed by an age-long process of abstract meditation, the common man in the post-Vedic period yearned to convey his devotional sentiment to a personal God. The ethos of that age necessitated worship of a single personal God in lieu of the abstract One."<sup>2</sup> A definite type of act having a definite aim leads to *bhakti* where 'longing for something' happens to be the primary factor.

Considering the celebrated views on *bhakti*, Narada has considered it to be the deep attachment to God and Shandilya has considered it to be a constant longing for God. While Ramanuja considers *bhakti* to be constant devotion to God by remembering Him every now and then and Sri Chaitanya considers it to be the exclusive love for God.

In general *bhakti* has been conceived of three types as *sâmânya bhakti*, *gauna bhakti* and *mukhya bhakti*.<sup>3</sup> In the case of *Sâmânya bhakti* an individual is spontaneously dragged towards that thing which is highly appreciated by him. It is the attachment towards something that deserves to be loved, remembered and also followed. In this kind of *bhakti* there must be some physical object of devotion not necessarily the God. The cases of *gauna bhakti* mostly involve aesthetic attractions or the attractions pertaining to the nature (*guna*) shared by the individual. There are three different *gunas* shared by man, namely, *tâmasika*, *râjasika* and *sâttvika*. Accordingly, the *bhakti* can be *tâmasika bhakti* (static devotion) or *râjasika bhakti* (mutative devotion) or *sâttvika bhakti* (sentient devotion). In the first case there is the longing for gratifying his own selfish ends; in the second case the *bhakta* concentrates on the welfare of the mass rather than his own; in the case of the last one the *bhakta* is a seeker of salvation to get rid of from the shackles of the birth-rebirth cycle by obtaining the grace of the Divine. He considers Divine grace is only way to achieve salvation so he concentrates on the divine exclusively. In this manner in the Gita there has been mention of these three types of *bhaktis*. In the case of *gauna bhakti* God is the object of devotion. In the first two types God is considered as a means whereas in the third case divine grace is emphasized for salvation. Along with the admittance of these three types of *gunâ bhakti* in the *Bhagabata* there has been the treatment of a fourth category<sup>4</sup> which has been treated as the highest category

of *bhakti* and hence it is considered as *mukhya bhakti*. Here the devotion is treated as the devotion par excellence because the devotee pays causeless and selfless devotion to God. The *mukhya bhakti* is otherwise considered as *nirgunâ bhakti* or as the *gunâtîta bhakti* or as *Kevala bhakti* where one sees the Divine in every form. Here the *bhakti* is immensely charged with the love of God. Normally it proceeds in two stages, namely, *raganuraga* and *ragatmika*. In the Bhakti tradition Madhva has considered his *bhakti* to be *paramâ bhakti*, Nimbarka has conceived *bhakti* to be either *aisvarya* or *mâdhurya*, for Vallabha *bhakti* is either *maryâdâ* or *prusti* and Chaitanya's *bhakti* has several names like, *suddha bhakti* or *râganurâga bhakti*, etc.

It may be made clear that it is not the only classification possible for the different types of *bhaktis* found in the bhakti literatures but it can be treated as a model classification. Whenever there is a need for a classification the classification is done with a purpose. Now considering from moral perspectives the bhakti should be divided into two types only, namely *sakama* (having desires) and *niskâma* (desireless). So far as the Bhagavad Gîta is concerned, out of the *trigunâtmikâ bhakti*, the former two are found as *sakama bhakti* and the last one (*sâttvika bhakti*) is not *sakâma* by nature. If we try to find out the term of the Gîta to be applied for its best category of bhakti then it would be *ananya bhakti*<sup>5</sup> which is non-different from the *sâttvika bhakti*. The type of *bhakti* emphasized by Bhima Bhoi in his writings is *niskama bhakti*. His conception of *niskama bhakti* seems to resemble very much with the *ananya bhakti* emphasized in the Gîta. The paper aims at making a comparison between the *ananya bhakti* and *niskama bhakti*.

### **The Gîta's Concept of *Bhakti***

The Gîta's concept of bhakti cannot be categorized as one type. Many scholars consider Gîta's conception of bhakti to be *jnanamisraa bhakti*. It indicates that there can be two types of bhaktis. One is through pure emotion and the other is emotion grounded in knowledge. And it has been hinted earlier on different occasions that different types of bhaktis are mentioned in the Gîta. So far as the *sakama vs niskama bhakti* of the Gîta is concerned it has been mentioned earlier that referring to the three possible gunas there are three types of bhaktis, namely, be *tâmasika bhakti* or *râjasika bhakti* or *sâttvika bhakti*. Out of these three the first two should be treated as *sakama bhaktis* as the bhakti is has some desired goal. And the last one is found to be free from desires. In that spirit it can be treated as *niskama bhakti*, though the terminology, '*niskama*', fit to the temper of the Gîta but has not been mentioned in the Gîta. Rather than taking the key expression used in the Gîta in the context of bhakti the '*ananya bhakti*' would be more suitable to be applied to the Gîta's concept of bhakti.

In the context of bhakti, the four types of *bhaktas* as mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* can also be taken into account which would also include different types of *bhaktis*. The four types of *bhaktas* are namely, calling God in distress (*ârto*), seekers of knowledge (*jijnâsu*), seekers of wealth or material objects (*arthâthee*) and the man of wisdom (*jnânee*).<sup>6</sup>

#### ***Sakama bhakti* verses *Ananya bhakti* in the Gita**

Shri Krisna suggests that Arjuna to remain attached to Him considering Him to be the end.<sup>7</sup> In the language of Gandhiji “Forget yourself in me, says Shri Krishna, mediate constantly on Me, let your atman be ceaseless communion with Me, and live with your heart ever united with me; if you live thus, I shall draw you towards me.”<sup>8</sup> Here the bhakti suggested to Arjuna is in support of the *sakama* bhakti.

In the Gita Shri Krisna indicates that he can be available to him who throughout the life constantly and exclusively concentrates on Him (without thinking about any other)<sup>9</sup> and he repeats it by saying that the *ananyaa* bhakti is the means to be with Him. One who knows about this method of (*bhakti*) for getting Him he will concentrate Him. So, the knowledge is also involved in cultivating the proper bhakti. Only the wise follow such practice because they know about this.<sup>10</sup> In this context Gandhiji writes that “knowledge comes spontaneously to a *bhakta*. He does not have to wade through big volumes. But he who believes that he will acquire knowledge first and cultivate bhakti afterwards will fail measurably in his aim. No one acquires knowledge in that way. Such knowledge breeds, if anything, pride. But he who lovingly cultivates devotion for the Lord and constantly thinks on Him gets knowledge without any special effort to that end.” It is the reason many scholars have considered Gita’s bhakti to be *jnana-Mishraa bhakti*.

If we think of a term for the type of bhakti prescribed in the text it should be termed as ‘*ananya bhakti*’. In fact, referring to Gandhiji pandit Nilakantha has mentioned<sup>11</sup> in his commentary of the 22<sup>nd</sup> verse of the ninth chapter that there are three marks to identify the eligible yogi (*yoga ksama*) and those are equality (*samatva*), capability for choosing right action (*karmare kaushala*) and exclusive devotion (*ananya bhakti*). The understanding is that there should be the exclusive concentration on Shri Krisna without thinking of any other, which would be *ananya bhakti*. In the Gita the qualifying mark and the reward for such *ananya bhakti* have been developed in the 51 to 55 verses of the chapter XVIII.

What has been understood about this *ananya bhakti* of the Gita is that in extending exclusive bhakti there is no other aspiration of the being other than concentrating on the Lord. The expectation of the result is not there. In this manner

by nature, it amounts to *niskama bhakti*. Gita not only advocates in support of *niskama karma* but also *niskama bhakti*.

The type of bhakti expressed by Odia poet philosopher Bhima Bhoi is termed by him as '*niskama bhakti*'. In his conception of bhakti emotion and devotion are found inseparable manner. The emphasis on knowledge is there indirectly in the sense that one should know that the supreme alone can help to save the jiva and rescue the jiva from his deplorable situations. His conception of bhakti is dominated by pure emotion along with total surrender and *niskama* surrender by performing the duty for the world. Bhima Bhoi has emphasized on the *niskama* surrender in the context of bhakti. Authors like Patnaik and Panigrahi have explained the *niskama bhakti* of Bhima Bhoi in the following manner.

*“bhakata bhâve honti basa he sakâmare nahin  
niskâmare thai satyabachana parakâûa he.”*<sup>12</sup>

Referring to the couplet of Bhima Bhoi Panigrahi has written “Bhima Bhoi, however glorifies *niskâma bhakti*. In *Stutichintamani* he says that the only way to get out of the suffering is to follow to the spiritual path, i.e., to have uninterrupted devotion to the Lord. One cannot attain the absolute by constant utterance of the name of the Lord, going on pilgrimage etc. The only path is to develop *niskâma bhakti*.”<sup>13</sup> Thus Panigrahi has pointed out that Bhima Bhoi has attached the importance to the *niskâma bhakti*. But going one step ahead Patnaik has mentioned that the desireless self-surrender before the Lord is the most important aspect of Bhima Bhoi's *niskama bhakti*. She has written that “Mahimâ Dharma offers a unique interpretation of *niskâma-bhakti* that not only signifies desireless self-surrender to the Highest Principle but also moral perfection.” “The identifying mark of a *bhakta* is that he is not limited by any *guna (nirguna)*. He considers the mankind as his own brethren and a part of his soul.”<sup>14</sup>

Bhima Bhoi has given the reason in support of his acceptance of *niskama bhakti* that he had the conviction that God would be available to them those who will have desireless devotion for him that is why he has said that he is prepared to leave *niskama bhakti* and the practitioner of *niskama bhakti*.<sup>15</sup>

Praharaj and Pati have mentioned that the proper nature of *niskama bhakti* should be of the following type. “*Niskâma Bhakti* would be that where *bhakti* needs to be treated as the end-in-itself. In other words, it is the *bhakti* for the sake of *bhakti*. There is no aspiration to get anything or any type of attainment through *bhakti*. Even here the desire for the attainment of *mukti* is also not there. It only involves self-realization which is the end in itself.”<sup>16</sup> If such an understanding given here regarding *niskama bhakti*, which appears to be quite reasonable, then neither

*ananya bhakti* of the Gita nor the *niskama bhakti* of the *Bhajanamala* or *Stutichintamani* are fully in tune with this type. But that there is emphasis on the self-surrender and it is free from material aspirations cannot be denied. Thus, even though a full-fledged *niskama bhakti* may appear to be a utopian ideal but in both the cases their emphasis on the 'desireless' aspect cannot be overlooked. Both the types resemble each other at least in this respect.

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