

Chapter – 5

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Conclusion:

Owing to India's ever-increasing international importance the ethical values of classical Hinduism and Indian Buddhism largely affect the world. There is an obvious difficulty in trying to assess values in a rapidly changing society, such as India's, where the present is little more than a short corridor from a long civilized past to an indeterminable future. Economic structure, social order, political organisation are involved in the changes taking place there.

Some of the major social problems confronting India to-day are poverty, unemployment, crime, war and conflict – social, political and economic, etc.. Besides, industrialisation has changed the economic system, which has led to capitalism, exploitation and class-conflicts as well as unemployment, crime, immorality, family disorganisation and its evils. It is worthwhile, therefore, in this changed situation to consider the views regarding liberation of some contemporary Indian philosophers. Keeping this in mind the present writer tries to consider the views of some contemporary Indian thinkers, viz., Sri Aurobindo, Rabindra Nath, Radhakrishnan, B. N. Seal and particularly of Śrīmanṭa Śankaradeva. The reason for selecting these contemporary Indian thinkers is, the

present writer humbly points out, that they have tried to rethink the notion of liberation (*mokṣa*) from a standpoint different from that of the classical Indian thinkers. Perhaps the present changing society has compelled them to think in that way.

Sri Aurobindo :

Sri Aurobindo considered religion for the spiritual transformation of life, for according to him, religion can purify life. But at the same time he warns us against the control of religion over the activities of life when it identified itself with a creed, a cult, a Church, a system of ceremonial forms and becomes a retarding force. Giving the example of the role which religion played in the ancient human societies, Sri Aurobindo said, it could not regenerate mankind because of its false socialisation. Religion consisted of priesthood, a mass of ceremonies, dogmas whose acceptance was forced through the fear of hell. It imprisoned man's freethinking. Religion neglected the gospel of the purity and perfection of mankind. For these reasons religions failed in transforming the life of man.

According to Sri Aurobindo, "Religion has to be lived not learned as a creed. No religious teaching is of any value unless it is lived, and the use

of various kinds of *sādhana*, spiritual self-training and exercise is the only effective preparation for religious living”.¹

Aurobindo defended ancient Indian religion and culture because it held that man could become conscious of the eternal, he could spiritualise and divinise himself by self-knowledge. It fulfilled the purpose of true religion. Speaking in favour of such religious approach Sri Aurobindo said, “To make all life religious and to govern all activities by the religious idea would seem to be the right way to the development of the ideal individual and ideal society and lifting of the whole life of man into the divine”.²

Unlike individualistic approach of the traditional Indian spiritualism Sri Aurobindo put forward the idea of mass or collective liberation. He was not satisfied with the ideal of individual liberation and sought liberation of the entire humanity - even complete transformation of the material consciousness itself into a divine line upon the earth. He emphatically said that the integral *yoga* was not directed towards individual liberation, but for humanity as a whole. An individual ascent was only one aspect of the whole spiritual adventure. But ultimately it was to equip the *yogī* to help the human race in its spiritual progress. The conception of mass liberation is a significant viewpoint of Sri Aurobindo and a proof of his humanistic approach in the whole of his integral philosophy. It is the

sacred duty of all the perfected individuals to work for the liberation of the human race suffering under the strains and stresses of modern civilization. Aurobindo said, "Only the full emergence of the soul, the full descent of the native light and power of the spirit and the consequent replacement or transformation and uplifting of our insufficient mental and vital nature that can effect this evolutionary miracle".³

Sri Aurobindo was very realistic in his theory of spiritual evolution. He conceded that there was not the least probability or possibility of the whole human race rising en-bloc to the supramental level. But he was confident of the capacity in the human mentality to press towards a higher plane of consciousness once it reached a certain point of stress of evolutionary impetus. He also knew that transformation would be a slow and painful process. In the beginning only a few more developed souls would emerge as pathfinders and path makers. These souls would have to struggle against odds, but ultimately they would help in changing the whole of humanity into a new life. The ideal of a perfected human world cannot be created by men who are imperfect. The spiritual fulfilment of the urge of individual is, therefore, the first essential condition for the perfected life on earth.

Rabindra Nath Tagore :

There are many modern (contemporary) Indian philosophers who subscribe to this view, and Rabindra Nath Tagore is one of them though unlike Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan etc. he did not deal with the notion of liberation or '*mokṣa*' in his literature in an explicit manner. But human love and relationship have occupied a predominant place in his entire literature.

Tagore's philosophy of man is largely based on perception : "In the vessel of man's affection I taste his divine nectar".⁴ He voiced the ancient wisdom of India. Tagore carried India's message of love and universal brotherhood to all parts of the world and thus tried to bring East and West together on the pure and lofty platform of human relationship. The great compassion which the founder of Buddhism entertained for his fellow beings, his resolve to renounce the world of luxury for relieving mankind from suffering roused Tagore's admiration for Buddhist philosophy.

It has been emphasised by Tagore that as man is manifestation of the infinite there should be no point in our mutual discords and rivalries. Thus Tagore made it clear that ancient Indian philosophy and ideals of love, mutual respect on the basis of oneness of all could provide a real foundation for the idea of one world.

He considered the same reality to be man. He was fond of quoting from the *Upaniṣads* - '*puruṣānnaparānkiñchit*' - i.e., there is nothing greater than man. Man was considered by Tagore as a finite - infinite being. Objective '*Brahman*' and subjective '*ātman*' are both considered as the same thing, are infinite. He read the conception of human unity in the unity and identity of the *Upaniṣadic* '*Brahman*' and *ātman*.

Tagore accepted the western definition of humanism that man was the dominant and ultimate reality. If there is God, he must be interpreted in human terms. Rejecting the mere traditionalism and orthodoxy of *Hinduism*, Tagore, for the first time, adapted to the spirituality of western humanism. He wanted a compromise between western science and Indian spiritualism in order to guide the human race, in order to evolve a common culture and uniform ethical standard.

Tagore might be considered as a remarkable link between the ancient wisdom of India and the contemporary civilization characterised by scientific spirit and advancement in technology. He particularly emphasised two points of ancient Indian philosophy and culture viz. human solidarity and supremacy of spiritual values.

His philosophy is centred round the eternal question - what is the relation between the infinite and the finite? It might be pointed out here that according to the *Upaniṣads* reality is infinite – ‘*Brahman*’. According to S. Radhakrishnan, “In the spirit of *Upaniṣads*, Rabindra Nath makes out that the supreme dwells in each man”.⁵ And once this basic truth is understood by all men they would become liberated souls and would work for the improvement of this world. Tagore did not want that type of liberation, which can be achieved by practising renunciation. He desired to taste with pleasure liberation within innumerable bondage.⁶

Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan :

Radhakrishnan can be described as the comparative philosopher of modern age. He always felt the need for reinterpretation of Indian philosophy in the light of Western philosophy and our present conditions. It is because in a relevant and adequate philosophy we must start from the human end and link it with absolute.

According to him, man is more than a physical being. His nature is not constituted merely of instincts, mind or consciousness. He cannot be understood as merely an object of psychology, physiology or sociology. The real nature of man finds expression in the spiritual nature whereby all divisions and distinctions become irrelevant and life is experienced in its

totality. Radhakrishnan believed in the concept of rebirth regulated by the law of *karma*. So long as man is a slave of his desires he is subject to the law of *karma*. *Karmas* or actions determine the pace of human progress towards the ultimate goal, that is, infinite self-perfection. Radhakrishnan has outlined two conditions for the realisation of his ideal. The first is, inward perfection attained by intuition of soul and secondly, outer perfection which is possible by liberation of all. Like Lord Buddha, one should strive to get liberated for the good and liberation of all others. For this, man has to strive through religious discipline and gradual moral perfection. The final goal of soul is *ānanda*. Matter, life, mind are different stages through which man has to advance till he knows himself as the spirit. This is self-realisation.

Like Mahatma Gandhi, this philosopher president ever remained concerned about the welfare of the poor and downtrodden. Radhakrishnan, fully aware of the shortcomings of our age, said, "Modern civilization seemed to me to suffer from the same defect of being soulless. Politics and economics do not take their direction from ethics and religion. If the lost soul is to be restored to human life, a new vital religion which does not require us to surrender to the rights of regions must be developed".⁷

Radhakrishnan emphasised that philosophy should aim at conveying the vision of the meaning and purpose of life to others. The task of philosophy is also to serve practical ends of human society. He called for 'mobilisation to the wisdom of the world' for the sake of a new approach and view of future society.

Radhakrishnan adheres to the *mahāyānistic* concept of collective liberation and subscribes to the notion of *sarvamukti* or universal redemption (S. Radhakrishnan, the Hindu view of life, p. 65). The dialectics of temporal manifestations with all their dynamism, contrary affirmations and contradictions come to an end when the whole world is liberated from evil and illusion. The full manifestation of the being of God is tantamount to the termination of the historical process (Contemporary Indian Philosophy, p. 501). When the cosmic cycle attains its consummation through universal redemption, it is possible that the supreme spirit may will to express itself in another manifestation. Thus even after '*sarvamukti*' the boundless creativism of the supreme being gives rise to a possible cycle of eternal recurrence. The roots of the doctrine of cosmic liberation are to be found in the Hindu *purāṇas*. It conclusively points out the traditionalistic and revivalistic elements of Radhakrishnan's philosophy. This doctrine, beyond the categories of reason and science, is the reassertion of the notion of millennialistic

chiliasm and eschatological destiny, which are a part of the tradition of ancient Indian thought.

Like Rabindra Nath Tagore, Radhakrishnan believes in the moral saving power for civilization. Formidable challenges are damaging the very fabric of modern civilization and spiritual humanistic ethics can alone prevent its doom. He writes, "The world has seen a number of civilizations on which the dust of ages has settled. We assumed that whatever may be the changes and developments, the solid structure of Western civilization was itself enduring and permanent, but now see how appallingly insecure it is It is not safe to be immoral. Evil systems inevitably, destroy themselves by their own greed and egoism. Against the rock of moral law, earth's conquerors and exploiters hurl themselves eventually to their own destruction. While yet there is time, there is not much left we must take steps to prevent the helpless rush of man to his doom." ⁸ The twilight of religion and the jeopardization of moral values make it imperative that modern civilization be re-imbued with a spiritual purpose and an ethical code.

According to Radhakrishnan, liberation is the state of complete spirituality, the state of divinity itself. One cannot aspire for such a state unless he himself is spiritual. If we compare the physical nature of the primitive with that of the modern, we do not find much difference. The

difference lies in their approaches to life. The history of evolution is the history of gradual unfolding of spiritual capacities latent in man. That is why, with the growth of evolution the pattern of life and behaviour begin to differ. Moreover, with the advent of man we notice a distinct and radical change in the course of evolution. Prior to that, evolution had proceeded more or less on mechanical lines, but when man appeared on the scene his efforts and behaviour started having a hand in the course of evolutionary growth. That shows that man has within himself divine capacities.

Let us try to follow Radhakrishnan's description of human destiny in a more detailed and clearer manner. The destiny of man lies in his ultimate liberation. But, in what does liberation consist? According to Radhakrishnan, although the finite aspects of man are real, the distinctness or the uniqueness of man consists in his spirituality. Therefore liberation would mean the realisation of complete spirituality. This amounts to the realisation of divinity. Therefore Radhakrishnan says, "The destiny of the human soul is to realise its oneness with the supreme".⁹ The goal of life is the union with God, the realisation of the complete monistic character of reality. This can be described as self-realisation also, because it is the fullest expression of the higher nature of the soul. The infinite aspect of the soul bears the mark of the creator and

reminds the soul perpetually of his real nature. Radhakrishnan tried to describe certain salient features of this stage.

The attainment of this state opens before the soul the possibility of a new kind of experience viz., the experience of the universal - of the one, which expresses itself everywhere. Faint glimpses of such an experience can be had in artistic or aesthetic or ethical sensibility. One of its clearest examples is the mystical experience of gifted seers. Artistic experience, for example, in a very faint way, gives us an idea of the nature of the experience of the state of liberation in the rare moments of aesthetic contemplation. Such moments are moments of peace and pure joy. What is a momentary experience in this state becomes an aspect of the life of the liberated soul.

Radhakrishnan seems to be impressed by the ancient Indian concept of “*jivanmukta*”, but describes it in his own peculiar manner. The liberated individual is the *jivanmukta*, and as such is not affected by the world. He does not have any passion or attachment left for the worldly objects, and as such he acts in a selfless and disinterested manner and works simply for the good of others. This description is similar to the description of the *jivanmukta*, and yet there is a difference. The ancient Indian thinker believes that the *jivanmukta* becomes ‘*videhamukta*’ as soon as he is free from the fetters of the body, which, as a result of the momentum

generated by the forces of the *karma*, has continued to exist even after attainment of '*mukti*' by the soul. But once this momentum is exhausted the soul does not come back to assume any bodily form, he is now fully free from the forces of birth and rebirth. According to Radhakrishnan, this is not necessary. He feels that even when an individual is able to attain liberation, his task is not complete for he has then to play a part in the liberation of others. Individual liberation is not the ultimate destiny of the individual souls. Therefore, it is not necessary for the liberated individual to be fully free from rebirth. He may live and move in the world for the redemption of others and if for that purpose it becomes essential for him to assume different bodily forms, he may do it. The only thing is that he would become absolutely free from the bondage of love, passion for life and fear of death. He is now completely free from egoism and selfishness. All his actions are now guided by his realisation of the oneness of everything.

In a sense, it can be said that in the state of realisation individuality is more asserted than denied. He admits this when he says, "There is no question in my scheme of the individual being included in and absorbed by the divine."¹⁰ Realisation is the realisation of one's true nature, and in that sense it cannot be a denial of individuality. Moreover, as we have seen, even after attaining liberation an individual has to stay as an

individual in the world and has to work for the redemption of others. That also shows that the individuality of the individual is not obliterated. Using the *Upaniṣadic* analogy of the river and the sea Radhakrishnan says that although the river appears to be lost in the sea, the sea and the river do not become identical with each other. That is to say the individuality of the individual is retained even in liberation. This can be proved on the ground that although the individual after redemption realises divinity, the Supreme does not become the individual – the identity of the two is not established in an objective manner.

But that is only one aspect of Radhakrishnan's solution of the problem. That is not the final solution because individual redemption is not the ultimate human destiny. Even when an individual is liberated, he does not become free from the cosmic process till all others are saved. The world-process will reach its final goal when every individual will realise divinity. Therefore the ultimate human destiny is not individual redemption but universal redemption, "*sarvamukti*," as Radhakrishnan calls it.

Will the individual retain its individuality even then? Radhakrishnan says that this question is irrelevant. The problem of man and his destiny is relevant in relation to the fact of creation which is nothing but an actualisation of one of the infinite possibilities of the absolute; and

therefore with *sarvamukti* the purpose of this creation will be realised. Then the end of the cosmic process will be reached. When all of us will be liberated, time-process will be transcended. The ultimate destiny, therefore, is the 'end of time'. As Radhakrishnan says, "We need not assume that the cosmic process is an end – in – itself. When its end is reached when its drama is played, the curtain is drawn and possibly some other plot may commence".¹¹

The present-day world is heading towards destruction, and if we do not become alive to the needs for the hour, it would become a task too difficult for us to build out of the ruins. The present-day man, according to Radhakrishnan, is in the need of a radical change in the ways of his life. Burdened and tired to death by his loneliness in the midst of everything, man is in frantic search of some means for release from the anguish of existence. Therefore, at least to expedite liberation he has to do something.

Radhakrishnan says, "Religion is not a creed or a code but an insight into reality".¹² This insight will reveal that man is always confronted with something greater than himself which is somehow immanent in the human soul. This is the eternal or the absolute reality, which being present in the soul of man as its secret ground and thus forming a bridge between the finite and infinite insight into this truth may be called the

essence of religion. Therefore, Radhakrishnan says that religion is that discipline or the way of life which enables man to “make a change in his own nature to let the divine in him manifest himself”.¹³ Religion implies a faith in the ultimacy of absolute spiritual values and a way of life to realise them. This faith involves an awareness of the beyond, and therefore, a conviction that such an awareness is possible. That is why great religions have often been prophetic, or have been based on truths intuited or seen by gifted seers. That is why religion is the affirmation of the ultimacy of religious experience. Thus, the fact that such experiences enable men to forget the ills and worries of life at least temporarily is an evidence of the fact that only through such experiences can liberation be attained.

Acharya Brajendra Nath Seal :

Acharya Brajendra Nath Seal’s work ‘The Quest Eternal’ also reminds the present writer of Hegel’s “The Phenomenology of Mind”, to the extent that the spiritual excursion is conceived of in terms of temporal succession marked by three-fold quest – regarding the ancient age, the medieval age and the modern age.

In the first stage, that is, the ancient world, the human spirit was submerged by the overwhelming mystery of nature. In the second stage,

there is a quest for a transcendent monotheism. But the modern quest is more immanentistic in its character. It accepts the futility of individual conquest of physical death through belief in a mighty liberation. This may be an indirect attack by Acharya Seal on the negativistic elements of the theistic religious system. The final gospel is that of the conquest of human passions and moral and spiritual purification. In this stage, Buddhistic gospel of compassion and the chastening of the emotions are considered to be the only way to human enlightenment. But contrasted to *theravāda* (*hīnayāna*), Buddhism, Acharya Seal has far more emphatically adhered to the concept of universal divinity. This symbolised as a deathless march in search of the spirit.

According to Acharya Seal, the modern ideal is the quest for life and the conquest of the blind raging fury of the demonic power of death. The destiny of the modern man is to obtain mastery over the evil power of death. The human spirit looks for universal liberation and immortal love or psyche. Eventually, it appears, that final emancipation can come only through the purgation of all the passions and the illumination of the human soul. It is only the efflorescence of "world-passion of creative deity"¹⁴ and the realisation of the heavenly bliss and cosmic compassion can lead to the awakening of the world soul.

Śrīmanta Śankardeva :

During fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and much prior to the emergence of *Chaitanya Deva* of *Nadiā*, there arose in Assam a school of neo-*vaiṣṇavite* thought. It bore no resemblance either in the details of its tenets or in their actual application to the main school of thought that was creating a spiritual ferment all over Southern and Western India. The point which it had only in common with them is that it extolled the cult of '*bhakti*' to *Śrīkrṣṇa*.

Assam *vaiṣṇavism* was styled by its greatest exponent *Śankardeva*, the '*eka-śaraṇa-nām-dharma*', the religion of supreme devotional surrender to one (Sir R. G. Bhandarkar's *Encyclopaedia of Indo-Aryan Research*, Vol. 3, part 6). This discussion would remain incomplete if we do not discuss the view of *Śankardeva*. Though *Śankardeva's* philosophy is different from that of the contemporary Indian philosophers mentioned so far, yet we can not ignore the standpoint from which he tried to preach his view for the present writer strongly feels that social out look of *Śankardeva* which is evident from his '*eka-śaraṇa-nām-dharma*' can help to reduce a lot the socio-psychological crisis of present day. In other words, it has a direct impact on society.

evils are the creation of illusion and the wisdom is the only way to remove those evils. He says:

“*Bhakti Karante Āpuni Upaje Jñāna*”¹⁶

It means, devotion creates wisdom automatically.

According to him, there are nine modes of *Bhakti*, viz., (1) *Śravaṇa* (listening), (2) *Kīrtana* (chanting), (3) *Smarana* (recollection), (4) *Archana* (worship in God’s image with offerings), (5) *Vandana* (obeisance), (6) *Padasevana* (personal services), (7) *Dāsyā* (servant’s activities), (8) *Sakhittva* (friend-like behaviour) and (9) *Ātmanivedana* (unconditional surrendering of one’s own self to the God). And among these nine modes only (1) and (2) i.e., *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* played dominant part in the faith of *Śankardeva*. ‘*Bhakti* disinterested and continuous love for the lord’. *Śankardeva*, in his ‘*Bhakti Ratnākar*’ classified *bhakti* as follows : *bhāgawatī* or *uttamā* (higher devotion), *antaranga* (intimate or all-loving devotion), *saprema* (loving devotion and *nirguṇa* (absolute). The highest type is the *bhāgawatī* or *uttamā*, which the devotee with pure heart and mind, bestows upon lord *Viṣṇu*, and this self-surrendering is absolutely motiveless. It is superior to the state of final release. In such a state, the *bhakta* acquires the capacity of dissolving the *linga-deha* (subtle body).

In his rendering of the twelfth book of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavat*, Śankardeva explained the four kinds of dissolution: *nitya* (daily) dissolution, which accounts for the constant changes in the body of all creatures; *naimittika* (occasional) dissolution, which happened at the end of a day of *Brahmā*, consisting of four thousand human *Yugas* (years) when *Nārāyaṇa*, with the universe resting within himself, goes to sleep on the serpent, *Ananta-Śayyā*, in the water of dissolution; *Brahmā* also sleeps with him; *prākṛta* (material) dissolution, which happens at the end of a century of *Brahmā*'s years. when even *Brahmā* is destroyed by *Īsvara*, as all of *prakṛti*'s creation withdraw into *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* remains in an undistributed equilibrium (*vṛtti-śūnya*); and *ātyantika pralaya* (final dissolution) which is the same as *mokṣa*, final release or 'mukti' Then the individual soul, a part of *Brahman* cut through ignorance (*ajñāna*) which creates the idea of many entities in one *Brahman*, being released from *ahaṁkāra* and the bondage of *karma*, by dint of *jñāna*, forgets the outer body. realises bliss and an undivided soul within its own heart, and itself becomes *Brahman* (*brahmamaya*). This view is certainly *Advaitic* where the individual soul dissolves into *Brahman*. The philosophy of Śankardeva as found in "Śankar and his times : Early history of the *Vaiṣṇava* faith and movement in Assam" written by Maheswar Neog is as follows:

“Thou art the soul of the world : when one worshippeth thee, one uniteth with thee, even as one seeth the beauty of one’s own face in its image reflected on a looking-glass.

In the *Kali* age one can secure release through the singing of God’s glory and cutting through bondage (of *māyā*) can become *Hari* himself.

Meditating on me through day and through night, thou shall get release from the bondage of *karma* and shall enter me at the time of thy death.

The last of the seven effects of the utterance or remembrance of God’s glory is to unite the individual self with *Hari*, who is the very image of consciousness and the abode of absolute bliss. One, who meditates on God *Mādhava*, enters *Viṣṇu* just as butter melts into fire.

One can attain salvation in the mundane body even if one’s account of past virtues and vices (*prārabdha karma*) is not closed, when one become detached from all the objects that the mind or subtle (*linga śarīra*) runs after and absolute knowledge (*paramārtha-jñāna, nirguṇa jñāna*) dawns on one’s heart. This state is called *jivan-mukti*, “released in life”. *Arjuna* is stated to have attained it after *Kṛṣṇa* had passed away”.¹⁷

Although *Śrīmad-Bhāgavat* admits complete merging of individual soul in *Brahman*, the devotee prefers distinct existence in a form whatsoever in which he can worship God to achieve total union. The highest desire

that a *bhakta* can have is the attainment of a place *Vaikunṭa*, in the celestial abode of the lord. And for this reason when a *bhakta* dies it is said that he has attained the *vaikunṭaloka*.

We find in Śankardeva a rigid non-dualistic view, with an admixture of *māyāvāda*. The philosophical aspects of Śankardeva's poetry and religion have remarkable similarity with the *Advaitic* views of the great *Ācārya Śankara*.

Śankardeva admits *nirguṇa Brahman* to be the ultimate reality and *jīva* to be one with Brahman. To him *Brahman* is indeterminate (*nirviśeṣa*), changeless (*avikārī*) and eternal (*nitya*). Śankardeva seeks to combine this monistic view with the theistic idea of a determinate personal God, which is the pivot of his creed. *Bhakti* or sole devotion to this personal and transcendent God invokes his grace, which can lead man to a knowledge of the soul (*ātma-jñāna*) resulting in '*mukti*'. From the philosophical standpoint, identity between the *jīva* and the world is asserted, and from the religious angle of vision difference between the two is spoken of. But to him the *jīva* is not the ultimate real like *Brahman*; it merges unreservedly into the latter at the time of '*mukti*'. The world also is not true, but it possesses a semblance of reality because of the immanent truth that underlines it.

According to Śankardeva, God as *Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa-Rāma* represents eternal *Brahman* and demands the worship and devotion of the human being. The *Jīva* is different from God only in as far as it is the creation of God and therefore a *jīva* should worship God with the love from the very core of his heart and external rites. Absorption in *Brahman* comes as a natural consequence of release from the bondage of *māyā* and cycle of rebirth. But the devotee may well look forward for a place in the *Vaikunṭa*, and becomes identified with God. This is because in *Vaikunṭa* the life of devotion may continue forever. As a matter of fact, the devotee would not look down upon the life in the body of any animal or in any sphere, provided he is allowed the privilege of servitude to the lord.

Prof. Sarat Chandra Goswami observed that, “Though from some passages of Śankardeva’s writing he can be interpreted as preaching the doctrine of *līnamukti* or liberation as consisting in being completely merged in the absolute or God, yet he seems to be more inclined to the doctrine of liberation in which the self can retain its distinct individuality in the liberated state and can enjoy loving communion with God and consequent bliss and tranquillity of mind. The liberated self becomes similar in nature to God, lives in the same region with God enjoys perfect freedom of bliss and participates in God’s glory and powers or in powers similar to those of God”.¹⁸

Mokṣa, i.e., liberation which *nyāya* considers being *parama puruṣārtha* or highest value or valuing par excellence is according to *nyāya*, a state of complete freedom from all kinds of pleasure as well as pain. According to *nyāya*, there is no pleasure, which does not entail pain in some form or other. Therefore one desires absolute escape from ills of life must give up all hankering after pleasure. *Nyāya parama puruṣārtha* is thus one that transcends both pleasure and pain.

According to *nyāya* and *sāṃkhya* *mokṣa* is a state as transcendent both of pleasure and pain is *puruṣārtha*. We find *mīmāṃsā mokṣa* as the manifestation of the innate eternal joy in the soul and according to the *advaita* view, *mokṣa* is *Niratisaya ānanda svarūpatva* or the realisation of the unexcelled bliss, which is the self. All these answer to the above definition of *puruṣārtha*. Even Buddhist *nirvāṇa* as escape from or extinguishing of this life which is nothing but pain can be regarded as *puruṣārtha*.

The *Cārvāka* view of *puruṣārtha* as consisting of either *kāma*, (sense satisfaction) or *artha*, (economic prosperity).

As regards *mukti* or liberation, however, *Vaiṣṇavas of Mahāpuruṣīya Sampradāya* of Assam, go beyond the *Vedas* and speak of a *Pañcama Puruṣārtha* or fifth and highest end of life, namely, *bhakti* which,

according to them, is superior even to *mukti* or liberation considered as *parama puruṣārtha* by *nyāya*, *mīmāṃsā* and the *advaita* schools.

“*Muktito nispr̥ha jīto sehi bhaktak namo
rasamayī māgoho bhakti,
Samasta mastaka manī nija bhaktar baiśya
Bhajo jeno deva Jadupati*”¹⁹

A *bhakta* when deeply engrossed in Lord’s Love, does not aspire anything from Lord – nor even liberation i.e., the ‘*mukti*’. *Madhavdeva*, the chief apostle of *Śankardeva*, expressed his devotion to God so blissfully that he could rather prefer to remain mortal and be a devotee than attain ‘*mukti*’ and be deprived of devotion. According to *Madhavdeva*, *rasamayī bhakti* is an intense love and devotion towards God. Here a devotee gets full and spontaneous control over his senses and becomes immaculate and pure and sees the effulgence of the Lord within and hears the Divine Melody of God.

Again if we see the following verse from *Kīrtan Ghoṣā* by *Sankardeva* :

“*Nālāge līn mukutiko tathā
nāhi Hari pada pankaj jathā*”²⁰

Now why, one may ask, is *bhakti* be regarded as the highest end of life, superior even to *mukti* ? The reasons advanced by the *vaiṣṇavas* who are the followers of Śankaradeva are :

Firstly, *svarūpānanda* or intrinsic delight is one's own perfection does not bear comparison with the selfless delight one feels in being source of delight in another. In this respect *prema-bhakti* as the selfless delight in the love and service of the lord *Hari* for his own sake is a higher joy than the selfcentred joy which is *Brahmānanda*.

Secondly, in *Advaita* *mukti* as advocated by Śankarāchārya the *jīva* merges itself into the calm, unruffled joy which is *Brahman*. But in *prema-vaicitra* or difference of type involved in the service of god in diverse social relations there is a qualitative variety and richness which no monolithic homogeneity of form can achieve.

Thirdly, *mukti*, in whatever form we take it, is nothing but a disguised form of self-love, though negatively conceived and as such it bears no comparison with *prema-bhakti* or disinterested joy in the service of lord *Kṛṣṇa* for his own sake as *ātmanivedana* or pure self dedication to god out of pure love which flows spontaneously from the heart.

The name of *Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu* is considered as very separate and intimate to the heart of devotees. If a votary recites^t, meditates and chants His names and Glories once whole-heartedly, all his sins that had been committed in

the past life, go away and thereby, the mind becomes pure. Through constant chanting of the name of *Kṛṣṇa*, a devotee can overcome the cycle of re-birth. In the path of *Śaṅkaradeva*, chanting the name in congregation occupies an important place besides individual meditation.

Śaṅkaradeva's bhakti movement redeemed the people of the oppressed society. His religious movement unified the people of different castes and communities into one common band. His faith was so catholic that people irrespective of caste and community were allowed to sit (seat) together in their religious pursuit and in other social spheres as well. The catholicity germinated by *Śaṅkaradeva*, had developed among various sections of people. There is no caste-bar among the adherents of these obscure rites. Tolerance and sense of brotherhood tended to grow even among people of various faiths and cults. People belonging to other faiths like Islam to their fraternity and, thereby, the out look of the votaries are proved to be very broad. That paved the way for religious tolerance and co-existence. For the spread of the faith, he composed verses in the local languages. The illiterates who could not read, were also able to understand and recite these verses easily. *Śaṅkaradeva* founded the *Satras (Vaiṣṇava mat)* and *nāmghars* (prayer house) in various places in North-Eastern Region of India so that people could assemble there, for taking part in the chanting of the name of the Lord *Kṛṣṇa*.

It might be mentioned further that he advised to install a *nāmghar* i.e. chapel in every village and to establish *Satras*, i.e., temples in various places to discuss the high morals of religion with a view to bring unity and discipline with good character in the society through these *nāmghars* and *Satras*. This is the peculiarity of the view of Śāṅkaradeva which cannot be found elsewhere in India. If his philosophy is followed sincerely the present-day social and religious unrest may be solved to a large extent. According to Dr. Brinchi Kumar Baruah “No need to retrospect the contribution of *nāmghar* comprising its social, religious and cultural aspects. It is the museum of Assamese national culture. *Nāmghar* is considered as National Theatre”.²¹ Poor and rich, high and low have equal part and position in the premise of *nāmghar*. Through it the democratic thought occupies a reasonable place. The selection of *sutradhar*, *gāyan*, *bāyan*, *rashikar*, *dhuliya* are done with a democratic process. The performance skill pertaining to song, dance, drama and other artistic zeal, reflects through the *nāmghar*. Moreover, amicable settlement related to any social disputes are decided through this institution. Thus *nāmghar* as a social, cultural and religious institution has noticeable position among the Assamese people.

Ankiya Bhāonā is a fusion of music, dance and drama of the ethnic tribes of Assam introduced by the Fifteenth Century icon. Śankardeva believed that through the proper use of physic, soul may be freed from the illusion. This very Indian philosophy is beautifully defined by Sri. Aurobindo in his “The Indian Culture”. The interesting thing is that this philosophy is found reflected in William Blake’s philosophy of life too. Śankardeva had used *Ankiya Bhāonā* not only to propagate his religious philosophy, *eka-śaraṇ- nāmdharma*, but also to make Assamese society a composite one. The cult of Śankardeva, was as relevant now as it was hundred years ago. Bhaba Goswami, General Secretary of Śankardeva Mahāsabha said, “Our *Guru* taught us to open our heart to each and everyone ... the festival will be the first step towards rebuilding this lost bridge”.²²

The theatre festival organised during this time has been aptly titled *Setubandha* (building bridge). Bhadrā Krishna Goswami of the *Mahāsabhā* said, “*Setubandha*, in which diverse social groups which participate with promote love, understanding, peace and harmony in strife – torn Assam”.²³

Bhaba Goswami said that over the centuries, *Ankiya Bhāonā* has retained its ‘spiritual value and social esteem’ and the religious theatre festival was expected to achieve its objective of ‘aligning social ethnic groups’.

Śankardeva, however, never claims himself as the messenger nor he called himself as the manifestation of God. Rather, he calls himself a slave to Lord *Kṛṣṇa*. It is, in fact, '*Dāsya Bhakti*' that pervades his literature. The soul aim of '*Dāsya Bhakti*' is emancipation of the weaker sections of the human society with full of humanitarian values, such as baptism of low-caste *hindus*, the tribesmen, *muslims* and the women who were generally deprived of their fundamental rights for entrance into temples and also for community progress.

The autocracy and dictatorship of the *Ahom* monarchism and frequent wars had disturbed and dispersed the indigenous tribal unity. In the circumstances the old thought and beliefs were weakened. They were in search of a new way. In such a juncture, the new *Vaiṣṇavism* and *Satriya* culture of *Śankardeva* had fulfilled the need of those people. The '*bhakti*' movement of *Sant Kabir*, the '*Vaiṣṇavic*' movement of *Tulsidas*, *Sri Chaitanya* and *Śankardeva* were against the castism and communalism. Despite a total devotion to Lord *Viṣṇu*, *Śankardeva* was basically a lover of mankind. This can be understood from the verses of the – '*Kirtan Ghoṣā* :

“*Kukkur Chandāla Gardhaba Ātmā Rām
Jāniya Sabāko Karibā Pranām*”²⁴

It means – Lord Rām is everywhere even in the soul of the dogs, donkeys or in foxes, therefore do have best regards for all the creations of the world. In this way, Śankardeva was a philosopher, social reformer, eminent scholar and ultimately he was a symbol of unity. The Śankari beliefs (thinking) is not a mere account of holy and evils, but is a philosophical thought for the benefit of the entire human society. He respected all the sects of population. And literature marked with enthusiasm for human welfare everywhere in the world has been regarded by him as a part and parcel of this world with mutual interdependence. ‘*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*’ which indicates the mutual relationship with the Creator is found in each and every part of his literature.

It might be emphasised here that he was a pioneer of social justice, economic equality, universal brotherhood and women’s liberation. Long before the dramatist Henry Ibsen, Śrimanta Śankardeva pronounced the necessity and importance of women’s liberation. In Assamese sociological approach, they discover verily the fact that womenfolk take equal part in singing *kīrtana* hearing *śravana* in almost all the *kīrtanghar* and *nāmghar* which resemble the free Christian Churches. His religious thought was irrespective of race, colour, nationality, caste and such other things. His democratic outlook is reflected in his famous gospels like “*Kukkur Śṛgāla Gardhaba Ātmā Rām*” and so on. His clarion call is for

the liberation of all the people in the world. To him religion was not based upon caste, but on universal brotherhood.

For him, human beings are human beings and division among them is a sin and an unwanted action. If our treatments towards them become equal indiscriminating, the society would be harmonised and only a harmonised society can progress towards positivity.

Insurgency, violence, unemployment, illegal immigration, corruption etc. become the events of the present days. Accumulated frustration and anger of common people sometimes outburst as communal riot and politically motivated actions mislead mass conscience to a wrong way. The young generation urges for rapid easy money; culture becomes more of a spicy entertaining media creating the misunderstanding between original ethnic groups and demand for separate identity becomes alarmingly aggravated. In this complex scenario, the teaching and ideal of the great social reformer of medieval Assam '*Śrī Śankardeva*' has immense value. He has tried to unite different tribes of the state, emancipates women folk, rejuvenates ancient culture mixing with the faith in our Supreme Power, starting democratic religious doctrine, promulgating of simple living and thus creating a peaceful unbiased society. Present generation must analyse and try to incorporate this principle to counter the evil forces of the society.

The present age has led our present generation in a state of turmoil. We are now traversing through a period of transition where the generation of old tradition, culture and life-style are being gradually substituted by a more technosavy, easygoing life-style. The situation aggravated by various socio-economic factors, leads the people to a confused state and social unrest becomes the call of the day. To combat this menace we should have a multipronged strategy where spirituality may have an active part. The matter of concern is that there has been no programme to distribute knowledge about spiritualism. The vital aspect of individual and social life has been missing as observed. The present writer believes that spirituality is the vital force which alone can give *mukti* or liberation from all the evils, which are creating problems in every sphere of individual and social life.

Thus we always look spirituality in the domain of religion, but not it crosses the border and gradually enters into every day's life as an undercurrent. Apart from static God it includes the physical body, mind, society and understanding of environment, nature and knowledge of the universe. The changes which cannot be attained by strict rules can be brought by culturing spirituality. Science, religion and spirituality, when join hand in hand, can change the present chaotic society into a peaceful holy society.

Conclusion :

The discussion made in the previous chapters is an attempt to understand the concept of liberation (*mokṣa*) propagated by the different Indian philosophers. Now the question is : has this discussion any relevancy for the modern, better say, post modern civilization? The world is now sick and is showing symptoms of delirium. This is now an age of despondency as the present generation, unconcerned about the welfare of themselves and others plunging into despair and the worst of all are that there are no doctors skilled in this kinds of social disease. “This civilization in which we are living is tumbling down, and, I think, tumbling down very fast”.²⁵

A correct understanding of the concept of liberation, advocated by the Indian philosophers may suggest a solution to this “present - day crisis”. It can remove the fear and worries of world and may bring hope to the despondent and cheer to disappointed. Present world has plunged into intellectual confusion, spiritual chaos, emotional frustration and moral bankruptcy. There is so much strain in modern life that even the advancement of technology is not able to solve all the problems of this day. There is a growing proneness to commit suicide, violence, crime in our children and we can do nothing but helplessly staring at them. Is there no way out? The present dissertation however tries to show solution and way which perhaps may lead us from this darkness to light.

It is seen in the discussion made so far in the previous chapters that in Indian philosophy by summum bonum of life is meant the absolute cessation of sorrow, i.e., liberation. The realisation of ultimate reality leads to the development of some sort of total detachment in a person. Due to this detachment he becomes able to dissociate gradually the 'I' from the 'not I'. And when the process of this dissociation becomes complete then this worldly sorrow can not touch the 'I' and in this way the 'I' achieves liberation or *mukti* from sorrow.

The question which confronts us is : How does this notion of liberation help us to solve the socio-psychological problems which we are suffering in the 21st century? In the present society extreme greed, pride and selfishness have turned a man into a totally self-centred creature in such a way that in most of the cases he does not even care to think twice before committing any misbehaviour. In other words, stress, tension, unrest and diseases related with them have become part of our life. These all are nothing but symptoms of psychic disbalance.

It is to be emphasised here that under this circumstances a discussion of the ancient concept of *mukti* or liberation is highly relevant for getting rid of those evils responsible for destroying the balance of the society. In order to be relieved from the present unrest, mental and social it is

necessary to develop some sort of detachment in us. The present socio-psychological problem is rooted in some sort of inordinate longing for all the possible commodities we can have. All of us demand everything in this world and in doing so we forget our limits, physical and intellectual. Each one of us want to strive for the material gains to the maximum extent and to achieve the goal we do not hesitate to acquire money by any means. We teach our children to be richer. We insist them only to run after money. We never try to find peace and be happy. As a result of that people become happy. Money is the only target for our life. Our social status at present depends on our material prosperity. We have forgotten the old dictum viz. mental satisfaction is the ultimate pleasure (*Santoṣam paramam sukham*). We are thus steadily marching towards gradual destruction and there is no doubt that the development of a social attitude like this is mainly responsible for the present socio-psychological crisis.

To get rid of these difficulties it is high time for us to look back to the solution suggested by philosophers of India. The only remedy is to culture mental detachment. That is to say, we ourselves have to realise that material gains cannot give us permanent satisfaction and it is necessary to make our children to realise the same. The detachment sought for will be felt after this realisation. Once this detached attitude is developed our lost mental peace will come back.

A regular practicing of meditation would help us to regain this mental peace which is another name of perpetual mental satisfaction. And no trace of sorrow can be in that mind where perpetual satisfaction rules.

It is to be pointed out here that the recent evidence of Harvard Medical School suggested that meditation (even for short period) increases the Alpha Wave – the relaxed Brain Wave and decreases anxiety and depression. By MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) study shows that the meditation activate the section of brain which controls the autonomic nervous system of person. These are the functions in our bodies that we cannot control such as indigestion, blood pressure etc. There are also the functions that are often compromised by stress. So, all the health experts now agree the positive effect of *yoga* and meditation to combat a variety of health problems and for holistic development. Our everyday life becomes full of stress and counselling in personal, family and social life become necessary for a harmonised life. The counselling based on spiritual values has more impact on man to cope up with such situations. The primary purpose of spiritual practice, viz., meditation, etc. is to provide effective instruction in non-violent thought, the stimulation and motivation of the people towards *ahimsā*.

Spirituality, morality and ethics have no clear bearing in the present day society. For, society itself has no clear bearing on heritable, traditional and social values. Even well-qualified graduates and post-graduates in the field of science, engineering, technology and management are not readily accepted as serious social citizens, as the present day education system offers no provisions to gain experience in social virtues while studying.

Interfacing science and education with ethics will be able to advise people on their various problems in a holistic manner as have been adopted by *Śankardeva* of Assam and also transform and elevate the society to greater heights, resting on moral and ethical plan. The development of a sense of moral and ethical values consistent with a career as professional and finally the development of a philosophy will ensure a personal satisfaction in the pursuits of a productive life leading to perpetual peace.

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