

ANDAL AND SANKARADEVA: A STUDY IN ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract- *Andal, a celebrated poetess of Alwar tradition, in her Thiruppavai, while describing the beauty of nature exudes confidence about Lord Krishna's valour in destroying those who refuse to live with Nature. Her verses show neither arrogance nor a detached view towards nature, rather exhibit a selfless concern for all beings, both of natural and non-natural world, and exhort all human beings to show concern and love for nature. Sankaradeva, another great poet of Bhakti tradition, too echoes the same concern for nature and going deep sees how the nature creates such ambience for god realization. In his Bhagabat and Gunamala he while describing the grandeur of nature calls upon people to enjoy beauty in nature which may keep one's mind concentrated upon God realization. This paper aims at making a comparative study of Andal and Sankaradeva in their approach to Nature.*

Keywords: Nature, pastoral, spiritual, soul.

I. Introduction

Eco-consciousness is nothing new to eastern mind, "in Japan and China the admiration of wild mountain landscapes has existed since ancient times"(Botzler and Armstrong 96). However, in the West the appreciation of natural beauty has developed very slowly because, "human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny-that is by religion," says White Jr.(204) which proves quite appropriate for Christian and Indian minds.

II. Occidental and Oriental Approach to Nature

Doctrines of Christian religion makes Nature subservient to religion; "Christianity incorporated a linear sense of time with distinct beginnings and ends. It also inherited a creation story in which humans were made in God's image and placed in a special position of dominance over the rest of nature," though saints like Francis later stressed on the " perspective of equality among all creatures, including humans."(204) Even though Heidegger, Levinas, Nietzsche, Derrida et al ground their ethics on one's responsibility to the other and try to dismantle philosophy which functions by speaking for the other and fostering meaning upon them yet western ethical thought has a deep-seated humanist bias and the philosophers speaking for the other have failed to reach the Vedic concept of the "Other". Even though Derrida's concept of God appears to be very

close to the Brahman-Atman Identity of the Vedic tradition, it is far from the Upanishadic thought, “That thou art”.

In contrast to the Christian tradition, the dominant Indian tradition accords an equal status to both the human and non-human spheres, and the Vedic thought believes that any alienation of the two could spell for both the humans and non-humans. The *Taittiriya Brahmana* says, “ the same divine milk that circulates through creatures here on earth lights the suns- all the suns of the galaxy. It condenses also into the forms of the clouds. It pours down as rain and feeds the earth, the vegetation and the animals. The individual with the awareness of this secret cannot be avaricious for any portion of the abundant food that may come to him. He will share it willingly with his companions. He will not wish to break the circuit by hoarding the substance to himself... His food avails him nothing: when he eats, eats his own death”(2.8.8). Guided by this sentiment Hindus in India feed ants, crows and other animals and see the same divine power flowing in all creatures of the creation. Aruni’s words *Tat tvam asi* which enjoins to be aware of the identity of one’s core essence with the hidden substance of all and everything, and not to get alienated from the nonhuman world sum up the entire Vedic conception of reality including the non-human sphere.

III. Andal and Sankaradeva

This Vedic concept of the nature-culture interface is celebrated frequently by Indian poets, both ancient and medieval; prominent among them are Andal, a Tamil poet of Alwar tradition and Srimanta Sankaradeva, the saint poet of Assam. This paper aims to trace such symbiotic relationship between nature and human life found in the poetry of these two poets; one singing Nature’s sustenance giving power to human beings and the other through celebration of the physical beauty of Nature asks the mortals to indulge in altruistic and spiritual activities by concentrating on the feet of their personal god. However, both the poets’ avowed aim is to sing the praise of Lord Krishna, their personal god whom they take as the Paramatma and they themselves as atmas, the latter eternally longing to mingle with the former.

IV. Nature-Culture Interface in Andal’s Thiruppavai

Andal’s verses, thirty in number, tucked together in a collection titled *Thiruppavai*, written in the Parai poetic form, meant to be sung in the Tamil month of Margazhi that corresponds to December 15 to January 15, are fine examples of Nature-Culture interface. The verses catalogue the flora which includes lotus, lily, basil plants and speak about how the fragrance of the latter occupies an honoured place since the leaves of this plant are offered to Vishnu, the other form of SriKrishna. At dawn, as the night changes into day, these plants radiate a freshening look that catches Andal’s keenly observant eye prompting the poetess to record this magical moment where she exhorts her companions to rise and inhale the fresh air and enjoy the beauty of nature.

The poetess not being satisfied with cataloguing the natural objects and describing natural scenery around in the dawn goes to record the songs of various birds resonated through the surrounding producing a soothing effect. Andal wakes up her maiden-friends to the approaching dawn exhorting them to enjoy the songs of the morning birds: “Did you not hear the alternate twittering of birds making loud noises?” She asks her friends to enjoy the chirping of black birds, cooing of cuckoo birds and cawing of hens, and requests them to listen to the alternate twittering of various birds that have made the earth worth living, thus foreshadowing the strains of deep ecology that has stressed on the need to listen to the nonhuman world too. Andal’s four verses record different notes of various birds reinforcing the Indian idea that human and non human world cannot be separated and bird’s song helps in “knowing the secrets of nature”, untangling the boredom of man’s monotonous life,

Not satisfied with cataloguing sounds of various birds, Andal records the sounds of different animals and insects, reminding one of a harmonious coexistence of various living beings on this earth. Mooing of cattle and the incessant buzz of the honey bees when go hand in hand with the chanting of Hari naam accompanied by the blowing of the conch, tinkling of pendants and the jingle of the bangles of cowherd woman while churning the milk create an atmosphere that reminds one “the negotiation between the human and the nonhuman world” (Sumathy 38).

In *Thiruppavai* Lord Krishna’s valour, his beauty and his benevolence is celebrated by following the pastoral tradition, “the tradition that idealises rural life that obscures the realities of labour and hardship” (Garrad 33), associated with the worshipful being. Andal imagines herself and her companions as cowherds and Sri Krishna as their guide. Andal while describing the generosity of cows who flatten their udders to make milk plenty not only for their calves but also for the whole earth reminds one nonhuman world’s kindness to the human world : And the cows with big udders/ Would fill milk pots to the brim,/ And healthy cows and never diminishing wealth, Would fill the country. (Verse-3). The pastoral imagery which runs as an undercurrent in *Thiruppavai*, “not only presents a picture of an ideal, fertile land but also prays for one”. (Sumathy 38) Thus *Thiruppavai* underscores a homogenous world where man can live in coexistence with the natural world, where everything is interconnected and interrelated, where each and every living being lives in perfect harmony with nonliving thing.

Andal’s verses sing of peaceful coexistence of beings in God’s creation, both living and nonliving, no one in privileged or in disadvantaged position, each having empathy for the other, the dichotomy between self and other getting obliterated. The whole purpose of Andal, apart from making man conscious of nature’s benign spirit and benevolent role, is to depict righteous and exact role of divine beings in the scheme of creation so as to arouse in man’s mind the sense of devotion toward SriKrisna in his divine role to establish order and righteousness on the earth. Another Krishna devotee Srimanta Sankaradeva, pioneer of bhakti movement in Assam, has described nature in its luxuriant and tantalizing beauty to fill the human mind with spiritual feeling, thereby to arouse devotional feeling for personal god SriKrisna. Andal’s nature-culture

interface in her *Thiruppavai* and Sankaradeva's description of nature in his tenth canto of the *Bhagabata*, *Gunamala* and other verses have a common purpose, to depict SriKrisna's benevolent role in redeeming human kind and God's concern to keep His creation in perfect harmony.

V. Nature description in Sankaradeva's Poetry

In literature description of nature is done in three ways: first, the external aspects of nature in its tooth and claw is presented so as to arouse awe and wonder In man's mind and vis-à-vis toward its creator, secondly, nature as a background to human activities and thirdly, influence of nature on human life, to say harmonious and congenial relation existing between man and nature. In the literary works of Sankaradeva nature is painted to serve as the background to the love-sports of Sri Krishna. The description of Autumn season corresponding to the months of September and October in which the month of Kartika falls, the most auspicious month in the eastern part of India, in the tenth canto and *Gunamala*, aims to serve two purposes; one to show the season in all its grandeur and loveliness and the second, how the season serves as a background to arouse devotional feeling toward Sri Krishna and the latter's role in saving the mankind from worldly tangles. The season, calm and quiet, atmosphere maintaining equilibrium, devoid of incessant heavy showers and roaring thunders experienced during the rainy season, and its activities leaving a soothing effect on man's mind without arousing any feeling of sensuality as experienced in Spring; clear, cloudless and azure sky serving as a canopy, earth adorned with beautiful landscapes washed with bashful moonlight and the breeze, cool and composed blowing across, lilies and lotus pregnant with blood red pollens blooming in plenty serves as a perfect background to depict the love dallies of *gopis* and their lover Sri Krishna. Sankaradeva has catalogued indigenous trees and plants not to paint the nature in its exteriority but through this to create an ambience to arouse devotional feeling towards SriKrsna".(Saikia Bora 1730

The philosophical idea behind the *ras* sports is deep and mind blowing; here *gopis* stand for *jivatmas* and Sri Krishna for *Paramatma*, the former longing eternally to mingle with the latter, a concept we find in Andal's *Thiruppavai* and Jayadeva's immortal work *Gitgovinda*. In the love sports of Sri Krishna and *gopis* there is no trace of sensuality, mind remains clean and clear, pure and serene; it is all metaphysical, above body and mind, spiritual and divine. It is transcendental love, fulfillment of each other, the beings getting divine pleasure in their association with the creator and the creator getting full satisfaction in the perfect harmony among his creation.

Sankraradeva endows Autumn with such elements as clear sky, crystal clear water channel, cool breeze etc. that instill in one's consciousness a spiritual feeling. After rainy season, with the advent of Autumn, nature takes a composed, unadulterated form as an ascetic after losing mental equilibrium regains it by yogic practice. During autumn four functions are mainly performed: first, all the clouds are dispelled from the sky and the sky becomes clear; second, victims of rain and flood get relief and move comfortably; third, paths on earth once muddy and

stinking regain their vitality and fourth, the season removes all the dirt from water and makes it clear and pure. The poet in his imaginative power associates the functions of autumn with the impact of Krishna devotion. In the tenth canto of the *Bhagabata* he writes: Krishnara bhakati yene cari dukha harai cari asamar. (Devotion to Krishna dispels sorrows suffered during four stages of life). By using metaphysical metaphors Gurujana has extended a new dimension to the description of Autumn.

Sankaradeva intertwines the physical beauty of autumn with the spiritual and metaphysical beauty of human life. To attain aesthetic pleasure he has created a divine flower garden where trees and plants of various species adorned with colourful flowers abound in providing a proper ambience for Lord Krsna and *gopis* to make love. But behind these physical activities there lies an eternal truth, souls' eternal search for a greater soul.

VI. Comparison and Conclusion

Both the saint poets- Andal and Srimanta Sankaradeva- have a single aim-to arouse a devotional feeling in ordinary human beings for their personal god and show them the ways how to free themselves from the coils of worldly life. When Andal achieves her objective by describing nature-culture interface, Sankaradeva does it by his description of nature in its fullest bloom serving it as a background to Krsna remembrance and worship. Andal's singing of Krsna's grace is subdued and subtle but Sankaradeva's is loud and obvious. It is because the tradition of Krsna worship was there in the South by the time Andal composed her verses and before her a number of graceful numbers in Tamil language had already appeared singing the praise of god but in Assam Sankaradeva was the pioneer in popularizing the divinity of Krsna and making him the worshipful god of his neo-Vaisnavism religion.

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Note: Author of the article depended on U. Sumathy's *Ecocriticism*.to have idea on Andal.