



## Teachings of Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva & Its Relevance in Twenty First Century

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**Abstract-**Aniruddhadeva was one of the great apostles of the post- Sankardeva era, who had contributed a lot not only towards the expansion of Neo-Vaishnavite movement but also towards the development of literature and culture of Assam. He was one of the shining stars among the Vaishnava *pandits* having scholarly talents, literary pursuits and wonderful organizing capacities, for which he can be called a *Mahapurusa* or great soul. Like Sankardeva and Madhabdeva, Aniruddhadeva was also mainly a social reformer. He was therefore more concerned with the social aspect of the Bhakti Movement than with its metaphysical principles. His teachings were in full conformity with the four fundamental principles (*Cari Vastu*) of Assam Vaishnavism - Deva, Guru, Nama and Bhakat. *Deva* which literally means deity stands for God. Aniruddhadeva taught that God, who is called Vishnu, Krishna Vasudeva, Hari, or Narayana is omnipotent and omniscient. He is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe and its only Lord. He is the image of love, and is the pure bliss. Everything emanates from Him and gets merged in Him. On the other hand *Guru* tradition received strong impetus in the hands of Gopaldeva, whose devotion to his *guru* Madhavdeva is well known. Following Gopaldeva, Aniruddhadeva placed the Guru in an exalted position and made him indispensable for getting salvation. *Nam-Kirttana* and *Bhakti dharma* also go together. They are two sides of the same coin. For this reason, the *bhakti* faith in Assam is also called *Nam-dharma*. *Nam-Kirttana* can be performed by anybody at any place. Its door is open to all. *Bhakta* or *Bhakat* means a true devotee who dedicates his life for the service of God. God is inseparable from *bhakta* and He is under the control of the community of *bhaktas*. Aniruddhadeva compares God with a cow and a *bhakta* with her calf. As the cow rushes to any one who is about to cause harm to her calf, so also God comes to rescue the *bhakta* when he is about to be molested by the wicked.

**Key words:** Teachings of Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva, *Cari Vastu* of Assam's Vaishnavism, Deva, Guru, Nama and Bhakat.

### Introduction

Aniruddhadeva was one of the great apostles of the post- Sankardeva era, who had contributed a lot not only towards the expansion of Neo-Vaishnavite movement but also towards the development of literature and culture of Assam. He was one of the shining stars among the Vaishnava *pandits* having scholarly talents, literary pursuits and wonderful organizing capacities, for which he can be called a *Mahapurusa* or great soul. Like Sankardeva and Madhabdeva, Aniruddhadeva was also mainly a social reformer. He was therefore more concerned with the social aspect of the Bhakti Movement than with its metaphysical principles. His teachings were in full conformity with the four fundamental principles (*Cari Vastu*) of Assam's

Vaishnavism. They are - Deva, Guru, Nama and Bhakat. In below we discuss about the *Cari Vastu* of Assam's Vaishnavism.

### **Deva**

*Deva* which literally means deity stands for God. Aniruddhadeva taught that God, who is called Vishnu, Krishna Vasudeva, Hari, or Narayana is omnipotent and omniscient. He is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe and its only Lord. He is the image of love, and is the pure bliss. Everything emanates from Him and gets merged in Him. As the pots and vessels made of clay when broken, get fused with the soil and as the footprints of all animals get merged in that of the elephant, which is the largest land animal of the world, so also every living being gets mingled in Hari. He descends to the world from time to time in various forms or incarnations to redeem the mankind. Of his twenty four incarnations, that of Lord Krishna, son of the Daivaki is the best. Man must therefore worship only Lord Krishna, the perfect image of Vishnu, who has thousand other names like Madhava, Kesava, Mukunda, Govinda etc. symbolising His various qualities. In the *Bhakti Mangal Ghosa* (v 569) Aniruddhadeva emphatically states

*'krsna byetireka an karta nahi jana bhagavata sastra kahe ehise byakhyana.'*

### **Translation:**

(Know, it fully well that there is no Lord except Krishna, this is explained in the Bhagavata.)

### **Guru or preceptor**

*Guru* or preceptor occupies a distinguished place in *bhakti* philosophy. Kabir declared that without a *Guru* no one can attain salvation whether he is a Hindu, Muslim, Christian or Jain. Sankardeva in his *Nimi-Nava Siddha Samvad* states that the devotees should pay their full obeisance to the *guru*, who is the soul of God on the earth. Sankardeva, of course did not receive initiation from any *guru* and therefore he did not lay much importance on the *guru* tradition. But in the eyes of Madhavdeva, Sankardeva was like a god, whom he described as 'Kalpataru' to his devotees. This *guru* tradition received strong impetus in the hands of Gopaldeva, whose devotion to his *guru* Madhavdeva is well known. Following Gopaldeva, Aniruddhadeva placed the *Guru* in an exalted position and made him indispensable for getting salvation. In the 5th *skandha* of the *Bhagavata* (v. 582) he explains that unless one listens to the exposition of the religious texts from the mouth of a *guru*, he would not be able to cultivate *bhakti* and make distinction between right and wrong. In the *Bhakti Mangal Ghosa* (BMG) (v. 127), he states that the *guru* is the image of god (*Gururupi Isva*) and it is only he who can remove all confusion regarding *bhakti* from the mind of a devotee and explain to him all matters relating to God.

### **Nam**

*Nam-Kirttana* and *Bhakti dharma* go together. They are but two sides of the same coin. For this reason, the *bhakti* faith in Assam is also called *Nam-dharma*. *Nam-Kirttana* can be performed by anybody at any place. Its door is open to all. Regarding its catholicity Aniruddhadeva speaks thus

*jati kulacar niyama samyam  
kichuka bat a nacai  
mahima janile matrake taray*

*nahike ata samsay*

**Translation:**

(It makes no distinction of caste or creed and knows no rituals or discipline, there is no doubt about the fact that if one realises the greatness of *nam*, he gets salvation).

*Nam-Kirttana* is so powerful as a redeemer that there is no sin in the world that cannot be wiped away by it. Persons committing deadly crimes like patricide, matricide, adultery etc. get liberation by chanting the name of Hari. The lowest of the lowly whose very presence is considered as inauspicious and one who takes unclean food, immediately becomes pure by singing *Nam-kirttana* and can even be raised to the status of a god if he cultivates *nirguna bhakti*. Aniruddha therefore calls *nam* the saviour of the sinners.

**Bhakta or Bhakat**

*Bhakta* or *Bhakat* means a true devotee who dedicates his life for the service of God. God is inseparable from *bhakta* and He is under the control of the community of *bhaktas*. Aniruddhadeva compares God with a cow and a *bhakta* with her calf. As the cow rushes to any one who is about to cause harm to her calf, so also God comes to rescue the *bhakta* when he is about to be molested by the wicked. As there are different types of *bhakt*, so also there are different classes of *bhaktas*, and the best is the *nirguna bhakta*.

The community of the *nirguna bhaktas* is called *sat-sanga*. Aniruddhadeva taught his devotees to seek the company of such the holy *bhaktas* who can purify their hearts and souls and lead them to the path of light. In the *Bhakti Mangal Ghosa (BMG)* (v. 696) Aniruddhadeva states that the happiness one gets in the *sat-sanga* is superior to the bliss of heaven or the pleasure of liberation. It is through God's grace that one gets the company of the real *bhaktas*, and they only with their wisdom can remove the evils from the mind of the ignorant. One may do all the fasts, perform all *yajnas*, visit all the sacred places and practice all *yogas* but till he comes to the company of the *bhaktas*, he cannot win the heart or love of Hari. Regarding the merit of *sat-sang*, he concludes by saying :

*eteke satsanga sarva upakari  
nahike patra niyam  
labhile matrake kitaertha hovay  
pavay gati param*

**Translation:**

(*Sat-Sanga*, therefore, is Beneficial to all. It Purifies the heart of everybody, without making any distinction and one who gets it, he is the blessed one.)

**Relevance of His Teaching In Twenty First Century Assam**

Now about three hundred and Ninety years have elapsed after the demise of Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva but his successors and disciples are maintaining the continuous flow of propagating the *Eka-Saran Nam-Dharma* and thousands and thousands of people belonging to different communities are accepting this religion. But at present, the scene of social, political and religious conditions of Assam is quite deplorable. The healthy society of Assam formed through the ages with high moral and human values is suffering deterioration and disintegration. On the other hand, inhuman and

barbarous activities like murder, plunder, rape etc. have become the normal order of the day. Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva taught not to look for happiness in material comfort and luxuries and strive for high spiritual values. But presently the Assamese society has become very much materialistic.

In this unstable and unhealthy state of affairs, the teachings of the ancient sages and saints like Aniruddhadeva can guide the society to peace and harmony. If one can feel the presence of God in his creations, he cannot be cruel to any living thing even to the plant kingdom. If he can consider his fellowmen as part of God, there will be universal brotherhood. By remembering and practising his teachings as well as those of his predecessors Srimanta Sankardeva, Sri Sri Madhadeva and Sri Sri Gopaldeva, the people of Assam can re-establish human values and make their lives happy and meaningful. Thereby they can work for the good of the entire human community and prepare themselves to meet the challenges not only of the twenty-first century but of all ages to come.

### Conclusion

Thus in tune with his illustrious predecessors and the teachings of the *Bhagavata Purana*, which is the main source of the philosophy of the *bhakti dharma*, Aniruddhadeva very beautifully expressed the truth of worshiping only one god in the form of Vishnu or Lord Krishna with all devotion through the simple way of *nam-kirttana*. Like Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, he had also instilled into the hearts of his disciples a sense of Indianness, by placing in their mental horizon the picture of the vast and sacred country called Bharatavarsha which is so beautiful and holy that even the gods desire to have their births in it. At the same time, he glorified the *Kaliyuga* because it is in this period of human civilization that salvation becomes so easily accessible to all people through the performance of *Kirttana*. In his practical life Aniruddhadeva greatly emphasised on the equality of the disciples by which he could foster among them a strong community feeling and win the hearts of the common people and thus greatly contribute towards social formation in upper Assam in particular.

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