



NĀRADA BHAKTI SŪTRA: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The Nārada Bhakti Sūtra is a popular work on Bhakti ascribed to Nārada. The work composed in simple sūtra style in simple language and it contains eighty four sūtras. The major content of this work is devotion and it defines as - 'Sū twasmin parama prema rūpā' 'Amṛtaswarūpā cha' i.e. That (devotion), verily, is of the nature of supreme love of God And it is of the nature of Nectar. Nārada prefers the devotion is supreme and it should be perform alone. However Nārada state two kinds of devotion- primary devotion and secondary devotion; where unmotivated alone devotion is called primary devotion. By practicing renunciation, praises of God and avoid evil company etc , man can develop Bhakti and after attaining the supreme love devotee becomes overjoyed; peaceful and doesn't desire anything else. Narada holds that the path of devotion is supreme than Karma yoga and Jñāna yoga.

INTRODUCTION

Nārada Bhakti Sūtra is a popular treatise of *bhakti mārga* ascribed to *Nārada*. In the ancient scriptures the name *nārada* is closely associated with devotion. With his *vīṇā* always sang the glory of *Hari* or *nārāyaṇa* and it is his primary function. We have found that the *Nārada* devotion occupies a very high place. As a great teacher of devotion *Nārada* inspired so many persons like *vālmīki*, *vyāsa*, *śukadeva*, *prahlāda*, *druva* etc to practice devotion. Moreover *Nārada* can be considered as the friend, philosopher, guide and consoler of all—goods, demons and men.¹ In the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Nārada* is included in the incarnations of *Viṣṇu*, who was the founder of *pāñcharātra* tradition of *bhakti*. However the name *Nārada* is also found in *Chāndogya Upaniṣada* where he went to *sanatakumāra* for attaining wisdom. The story of *Nārada* in a detailed form is given in *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. We have found six treatises as the work of *nārada*. These are *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*, *Nārada smṛti*, *Narādīya śikṣā*, *Nārādīya purāṇa* and *Nārada pancarātra*. However, there is no clear evidence

that the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* was written by *Nārada* but *Swami Sivananda* in his edition point out that the *Nārada* discourse on devotion to *Vedavyāsa* to wrote *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* where *Nārada* said “I shall explain *bhakti* in the form of sūtras” (vide *Sribhāgavatapurāṇa* Canto- I. 4 & 5).² Whatever be the dispute, the truth is that the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* is a best work on *Bhakti mārga*, where *Nārada* propounds the doctrine of love to god for the ordinary man.

Structure and contents of Nārada Bhakti Sūtra

The *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* was composed in a simple sūtra style. It is very lucid and practical in its exposition of *Bhakti* in simple language. The treatise consists of total eighty four sūtras or aphorisms. While Indian philosophical schools were developed in the form of Sūtras, without a commentary it is too difficult to understand these sūtras, the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* has an expressible charm and beauty to understand its meaning easily.

The main content of this work is devotion. The first twenty four sūtras deal with the nature of *Bhakti*. Next sūtras from 25 to 33 explain the greatness of



Bhakti. From sūtras 34 to 50 explain the methods to practiced *Bhakti*. Description of the external marks in a true devotee has described from sūtras 51 to 66 and the last eighteenth sutras 67 to 84 glorify the great devotee. In some edition all 84 aphorisms are divided into five sections.

Concept of *Bhakti* in *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*

The word *Bhakti* originated from the Sanskrit root ‘*Bhaj*’ which means ‘to be attached to god’. *Bhakti* is love for love’s sake The devotees always want God alone, no other selfish expectation there. By following the introductory formula to announce the title of Sūtra works in Sanskrit, *Nārada* begins his work as follows – ‘*Athāto bhaktim Vyākhyāsyāmah*’³ i.e. now, therefore we shall expound *Bhakti*. The word ‘*Atha*’ means ‘now’ indicates that after having already expounded the disciplines of *Karma* and *Jīāna* etc. ‘*Athah*’ means ‘therefore’ indicates that therefore this work is undertaken to provide a practical guide to approach God through *Bhakti*. After that *Nārada* defines *Bhakti* as follows –

‘*Sā twasmin parama prema rūpā*’ ‘*Amṛtaswarūpā cha*’⁴

[That (devotion), verily, is of the nature of supreme love of God And it is of the nature of Nectar]

While *Sāṅḍilya* defines *Bhakti* as ‘absolute attachment of God’⁵, *Nārada* defines ‘supreme love of God. Supreme love doesn’t seek any aspects even liberalization, only single mindedness and satisfaction are there. But it is also a significant point that blind faith is no considered as supreme love. *Nārada* uses the word ‘*Asmin*’ instead of specifying God by any of the usual terms. Therefore he indicates all concepts of God i. e. with form or without form. By using the word ‘*Amṛta*’, *Nārada* indicates the meaning nectar and immortal both. Devotion is real nectar and it gives immortality. However *Nārada* quotes different definitions of *Bhakti* defined by different thinkers from sutra 15-18, but his own opinion is that the essential characteristics of *Bhakti* are the consecrations of all observances and activities through complete self surrender to the Lord and extreme anguish in the event of forgetting Him. And that is the supreme devotion. As an example for true devotion *Nārada* count only the infinite, unquestioning heartfelt love of the Gopīs of Vraja – ‘*Yathā vrajagopikānām*’⁶ i.e. Just as the love of the Gopīs of Vraja. *Nārada* describes the nature of that love in the sūtras from 51 to 54. According to him the nature of love towards God is inexpressible in words, just as the taste of a dumb man but that love manifests itself in a fit receptacle in a qualified person only at some place or time. This pure love is without attributes, without the poison of desires, every moment

increasing, unbroken, and subtlest and of the nature of inner experience. Though love is one but it expressed in eleven different modes-

1. Attachment to the glorification of the blessed qualities of God
2. Attachment to His beautiful form
3. Attachment to His worship
4. Attachment to His remembrance
5. Attachment to His service
6. Attachment to His friendship
7. Attachment to Him as a son
8. Attachment to Him as that of a wife for her husband
9. Attachment to self surrender
10. Attachment to being filled with him
11. Attachment to Him as expressed in the pang of separation from Him⁷

And in this love or devotion no favorable conditions are needed because it is proof of itself and it is of nature of peace and supreme bliss. By attaining this love, the devotee sees nothing but love, hears only about love, and speaks only of love and thinks of love alone. It is called *Ekānta Bhakti* or primary devotion and considered as best devotion. That is also called *Ahaitukī* or unmotivated devotion.

Secondary devotion or *Gauṇa Bhakti*:

In the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*, *Nārada* holds that the devotion is two kinds – primary devotion or *Mukhyabhakti* and Secondary devotion or *Gauṇa bhakti*. Unmotivated alone devotion is called primary devotion. It is true that one cannot be enter the stage of highest devotion immediately, to enter that stage we must need to prepare ourselves and this stages are called secondary devotion or *Gauṇa bhakti*. *Nārada* classified secondary devotion in three kinds⁸- according to the qualities i.e. *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* or according to the distinction of the worshippers as the affected the seeker after knowledge, self interested motives that impel the devotee i.e. *ārta*, *jijñāsu*, *arthārthī*.

The first classification is according to the predominance of different guṇas and it is based on the qualities of mind. ‘*Worship done without selfishness in Sāttvikā devotion. Worship done for getting power and wealth is Rājasikā devotion. Worship done to injure others in Tāmasikā devotion.*’⁹

The second classification is according to the predominance of volition, emotion or cognition. *Srimadbhagavadgītā* mentioned its four varieties¹⁰ but *Nārada* mentioned only three types because the fourth denotes *Mukhyabhakti* and other three stages are *Gauṇabhakti*. That three types are – *ārta*, *jijñāsu*, *arthārthī*. *Ārta* i.e. the affected devotee like *Draupadī* &



Gajendra; *jijñāsu* i.e. the seeker after knowledge like *Uddhava*; *arthārthī* i.e. the self interested like *Dhruva*.

We can designate the lower level of *Bhakti* or secondary devotion as *aparabhakti* and the supreme level of *Bhakti* or primary devotion as *parabhakti*. In that case first is the path and second is the realized goal. *Gauṇabhakti* may leads to *Mukhyabhakti*.

How a person develop *Bhakti* :

Bhakti is its own means therefore the means described by *Nārada* are only accessory. In the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*, states the following means or *Sādhana* to cultivating devotion –

1. **Renunciation:** Devotion itself a form of renunciation. *Bhakti* never practiced for any selfish purpose. By abandoning all sensual pleasures and all types of attachment to sensual objects man can attain the all activities are given up. Social customs and practices may be followed in like manner, to extent only as scriptural injunctions. Eating, drinking dressing should be continued as long as one wears in this body. On the attainment of *Bhakti*, life in society should not be given up and all righteous must be done but their fruits to be surrendered to Lord.
2. **Singing and listening the glory or praises of God:** By listening and singing of the attributes and glories of God, even while engaged in the ordinary activities of life in the world, *Bhakti* may be developed.
3. **By the company of the great soul:** Whereas , the love or devotion is alone, other things are of no value but to develops it company of great souls or gurus , mahatmas are needed. However that the company of great souls are difficult because there is no difference between the Lord and his devotees. Therefore *Nārada* advice that the devotion be practiced alone.
4. **Avoid the civil company:** To attain devotion, evil company should be certainly given up by all means. It is the cause of lust, anger, delusion, loss of memory, loss of intellect and total ruin. Description of women, wealth, atheists or enemy should not listen and egoism, hypocrisy and other vices should be given up.
5. **Moral life:** Non violence, truthfulness, purity, compassion, piety and other essentials of good life to be maintained and the teachings of different treatise on devotion should be meditated upon and actions that rouse

devotion should be performed by a seeker of devotion.

Fruits of *Bhakti* : According to *Nārada*, *Bhakti* is both the end and the means – ‘*Svayam phalarūpateti brahmakumārah*’.¹¹ Those who desire liberation may adopt this path alone. For that purpose *Nārada* described the fruits of *Bhakti* in the sūtras 4, 5, 6 respectively –

- a) On attaining this supreme love or devotion man becomes perfect, immortal and absolutely satisfied.
- b) Who attained this supreme love, he doesn't desire anything else neither grieves nor hates anything, he doesn't indulge in sensual pleasures nor he never feel any urge.
- c) After attaining the supreme love devotee becomes overjoyed, peaceful and completely immersed in the enjoyment of the bliss of Atman.

CONCLUSION

In the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*, *Nārada* described the *Bhakti Mārga* i.e. the path of devotion as a practical method of approaching to God, where Love of God is supreme and devotion alone is preferable. Like *Srimadbhagavadgita*, *Nārada* also holds that the devotee should dedicate his all actions to God. This path is higher than *Karma yoga* and *Jñāna yoga*.

REFERENCE NOTES

1. Swami Sivananda ‘*Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*’ ; Introduction p.13
2. *Ibid*, p.3
3. *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*.1
4. *Ibid*, sūtra 2 & 3
5. ‘*Sā parānuraktirīśvare*’ – *Sandilya Bhakti Sūtra*.2
6. *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*.21
7. *Ibid*, sūtra 82
8. ‘*gauṇī tridhā, guṇabhedād ārtādibhedād vā*’ Sūtra 56
9. Swami Sivananda’s explanation on Sūtra 56
10. *Srimadbhagavadgīta* 7.16
11. *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 30

REFERENCE BOOKS

1. *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* by Swami Bhuteshananda, Advaita Ashram Kalkata, May 2009
2. *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* by Swami Chinmayananda, Central Chinmayananda Trust, 1982
3. *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* by Sri Swami Sivananda, The Yoga Vedanta Forest University Rishikesh, 1957
4. *Nārada’s Aphorisms of Bhakti* edited by Y.Subrahmanya Sarma, The Adhyatma Prakasha Karyalaya, Mysore 1938