

# **A discerning Rhetoric of Sandilya on the nature of a Devotee**

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It can possibly be held that Bhakti or devotion to God is one of the most primeval paths to perfection and this holds a vital role in the daily life of human beings in the contemporary world. It relates material life to metaphysical life. Speculations on Bhakti can be traced to the ancient literature in India from the Vedic period itself. The great sages of India were enriched with the knowledge of this concept with its all-round specifications. The scattered ideas of Bhakti found in the Vedas and post Vedic literature attained a systematized and elaborate form from the hands of Narada and Sandilya who are well-known as the authors of Bhaktisutras. Both the works Sandilyasutra and Naradasutra are associated with the names of two great sages who adorned the spiritual horizon. They deal with the subject in a more or less systematic way and their mode of approach to the subject is so different.

It can be clearly ascertained that Between the two sages, Sandilya and Narada, the former can be considered as the first one by view of the mentioning of his name in the Naradabhaktisutra <sup>1</sup>, SatapathaBrahmana <sup>2</sup>, Brhadaranyaka <sup>3</sup> and Chandogyaupanisad <sup>4</sup> Also the name of Sandilya is placed with high esteem. References can be found with regard to Sandilyopanisad also. Coming in to the modern versions of literature, the Vedantasara characterises

Sandilyavidya as consisting of devotional meditations directed towards Brahman viewed as possessed of qualities. Any way Sandilya's approach is more intellectual and practical. Through this sutra, he expressed his thoughts about Bhakti with deep inner sight and clear intuition. These hundred aphorisms of Sandilyasutra treat in a beautiful manner the nature, culture, forms and path of devotion. He tries to point out that the elements of freedom of soul necessarily stand for the elements of Bhakti.

Sandilya begins his sutra with ""अथातो भक्तिजिज्ञासा" ५ that is after commenting upon other treatises he takes delight to exemplify the philosophy, science and ontology of Bhakti. Generally the word 'atha' is used in four sentences; afterwards, commencement of a new treatise, connection with a previous passage and benediction. Though the first meaning is more common, the second one is more appropriate in this context. The word jijnasa in this aphorism implies inquiry. Therefore he begins his sutra with an inquiry into devotion. He says that this Bhakti is an affection fixed on God.

“सा परानुरक्तिरीश्वरे” .६

He used the word Anurakti to the word attachment, which is the emotion of love. It is an entrenched attachment to the Supreme Lord and that is the only way for oneself becoming immortal, beatific, and eternally blissful. This Parabhakti or primary devotion alone leads to the attainment of realisation. It is the effect of other means, because the help given by singing the names of Lord, prostration etc are the secondary cause of devotion. It removes all obstacles which stand in the way of a devotee for attaining primary devotion.

## Conception of Devotee in Sandilyasutras

Devotees are identical with the Lord and their mind and intellect are merged in him. He exhibits the highest form of love and devotees spend their time talking about and glorifying God. They have the highest love and respect for all creatures. These devotees are true saints and having their association is the highest reward in life. Who fix their mind upon the God and meditate on Him with deep faith is the best devotee. Sandilya points that the only entrance for the appearance of devotion is the freedom from bondage. This is due to the dedication of all fruits of action to the Lord and it purifies the heart of devotee.

""अबन्धो अपर्णस्य मुखम् " 7

Sandilya says that the secondary acts of devotion originate from past virtuous actions. They are certainly superior to other deeds that are daily performed<sup>8</sup>. Even for the expiration of the gravest offences, there is absolutely no need for a devotee to observe severe penances like Chandrayanavrata, because he has taken recourse to constant chanting of divine name till the death does not befall upon him. For a devotee even a little act of devotion like remembering and praising the Lord destroys gravest sin, because Bhakti has got such an extraordinary power<sup>9</sup>. BhagavadGita also says: by abandoning all attributed duties and take refuge in Bhagavan alone. He will deliver thee from all sins.

""सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज

अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः " 10

Because dedicated devotion makes the Lord stationed at heart therefore for the expiration of sins it does not require any other

assistance as Bhakti serves the self same purpose. <sup>11</sup> Sandilya mentions that every man even down to the lowest born, has equal right to follow the path of devotion, as it is taught to the successive authorities, like all other objects which are common to all. There is equality of the rights for the highest and the lowest class of human beings. Sandilya also says in his sutras, 'even men and women of low castes have a right to devotion'.

“आनिन्ध्ययोन्यधिक्रियते पारम्पर्यात् सामान्यवत्”<sup>12</sup>

There are exclusive references which prove that the devotion does not depend upon the caste, creed or birth, high or low. Right up to the despised births like the candala etc., all are entitled to practice devotion, because the desire to escape from the miseries of mundane existence is common to all. Bhagavad-Gita states that

“यत्रोपरमते चित्तं निरुद्धं योगसेवया  
यत्र चैवात्मनात्मानं पश्यन्नात्मनि तुष्यति”<sup>13</sup>

Naradabhaktisutra says that 'birth, scholarship, external appearance, wealth and occupation etc make no difference in devotees' .

“नास्ति तेषु जाति-विद्या-रूप-कुल-धनक्रियादिभेदः”<sup>14</sup>

That means Surrender to the God does not demand the special qualifications of caste, birth, sex, qualities, work, time, place and stages of life. Thus it does not behold us to make a distinction between one devotee and another. And these devotees also do not feel any distinction between man and man. Sandilya also tries to point out that since it is province to all, therefore verily it is recollected that the performance of the means of the higher devotion is also in the world of the Lord. It is clear therefore that the province of the

higher devotion extends everywhere.<sup>15</sup> The Brahmasutra states that 'the mediation on Brahman, according to the opinion of Badarayana, must be admitted with regard to those also, who above men, in the scale of evolution; because of its possibility with regard to them also'.<sup>16</sup> Sandilya says that those who have developed supreme devotion directly reach the Lord. Those who are not endowed with perfect devotion attain emancipation by gradual process.

“क्रमैकगत्युपपत्तेस्तु”<sup>17</sup>

He tries to mention that the final stage of immediate attainment can be accounted for only if it refers to the perfected devotion. Even the worst sinners when stand destitute fervently craving the mercy from God too are bestowed with devotion and gradually attain the abode of peace.

### **Characteristics of a devotee**

Sandilyabhaktisutra describes the actual position of a devotee and the primary characteristics of devotional service. Sandilya points that the perfect purity of devotion is to be known from the external marks of a devotee<sup>18</sup>. The approaches of devotee are pure and they do things for others. Sandilya points out that a single minded devotee had certain qualities. He described the special characteristics of a sincere devotee. He states that the marks of devotion to God can be known from remembering the words and acts of great devotees such as honour, great reverence, delight, grief in separation, aversion to everything else, constant singing of the glory of the Lord, preservation of life for His sake only, the feeling that everything belongs to him alone, the idea that He is all in all, entire absence of opposition to Him and his will, and the like.

“सम्मानबहुमानप्रीतिविरहेतरविचिकित्सामहिमख्यातितदर्थप्राणस्थानतदीयतासर्वतद्भावाप्रातिकूल्यादीनि  
च स्मरणेभ्यो बाहुल्यात् ”<sup>19</sup>

**सम्मान** - According to Sandilya, sammana or honour is the first feature of a devotee. To honour someone means to respect and esteem them. To honour God means to give Him the regard, respect, admiration, adoration, awe, praise, submission and obedience which are due to Him. This means to worship Him in all our attitudes, affections and actions.

‘अथातो भक्तिजिज्ञासा’<sup>5</sup> A devotee offers respect or great reverence to others without expecting anything in return. He respects everyone as part of Krishna and treats them accordingly. True reverence can be attained only by those who may be blessed by God.

**प्रीति** - Even without depending upon sensual pleasures, the state of mind should be brought into a calm and undisturbed existence. As a consequence of this, the mind gets immersed in its natural tendency of happiness beyond all sensual fluctuations. This is the intention of Preethy.

**विरह** - The feelings of a devotee who suffers from viraha can hardly be described in words. Viraha, though it is very painful experience indeed for the devotee, intensifies his love towards the Lord. For example, viraha exhibited by the milkmaids of Vrindavana. These gopis were wonderful devotees of the God.

**इतरविचिकित्सा** - A devotee dislikes other activities and they concentrate their mind only on God. They believe that He is the Supreme and only the love of God is the eternal. In the heart and

mind of a true devotee, there is no place for anything other than God. Pure devotion is a straight and simple practice.

**.महिमख्याति** - The devotee possesses heart as pure and soft through the practice of japa. Through the japa, a devotee should not perform any illegal activities and he should always act in God's interest. This constant singing of the glory of the lord is useful to attain infinite, eternal peace, immortality and freedom from the samsara. This type of bhajan destroys the three kinds of Tapa - adhyatmic, adhibhouthic and adhidaivika.

**तदर्थप्राणस्थान** - Devotees spend their life and prana, only for the sake of Isvara. And they engage everything in a proper way in Krishna's service. For example, Hanuman preserved his life for Lord Rama only.

**तदीयता** - Bhakta feels that everything in this world belongs to God alone. Complete surrender to Krishna is the goal of every devotee because he wants to become free from material desires in order to serve God more and more. Complete surrender is the most important of all qualities to be developed. For instance Prahlada had the idea that everything belongs to Lord Narayana only.

**सर्वतद्भाव** - The term sarvathadbhava points out that all thoughts of bhakta are to be directed towards God only. They sang all about His deeds only. They were immersed in His love. They had no other thoughts. They cannot think of anything else other than God. They will not do anything for himself but for the sake of God and as an offering to Him.

**अप्रतिकूल्यादीनि** - The firm confidence on God and the belief in Him are to be developed through visualizing Him in a form devoid of errors. This attitude will create a sense of non- opposition towards Him in all respects from the part of a devotee. Sandilya also uses the term 'smaranebhyo bahulyath' which means that the above mentioned qualities will be increased by the constant memory of God within us.

In this way Sandilyabhaktisutra enumerates the forms and kinds of actions which characterize a devotee. According to Sandilya, a true devotee should accomplish these features and values. He tries to point out that the devotee who is endowed with Supreme devotion has single hearted devotion into the Lord. By performing this kind of devotion emancipation comes. The worldly desires and actions never cultivate in a true devotee's mind. He has no arrogance in anything and this worship is the easy and practicable way to attain God. He also says that there is a natural affinity of the devotee for God and this devotion is never interrupted because the devotee recognizes the presence of Bhagavan in his heart.

## NOTES

1. Naradabhaktisutra: 51.
2. Satapathabrahmana: X.6.3.
3. Brhadaranyakopanisad: 4.5.
4. Chandogya upanisad : iii. 14.
5. Sandilyabhaktisutra : 1.
6. Ibid., 2.
7. Ibid., 64.
8. Ibid., 71.



9. Ibid., 76.
10. Bhagavadgita : 18.66.
11. Sandilyasutra: 77.
12. Ibid 78.
13. Bhagavad Gita 6-20.
14. Naradabhaktisutra 72.
15. Sandilyasutra 79.
16. Vedantasutra 1.3.26.
17. Sandilyabhaktisutra 80.
18. Ibid., 43.
19. Ibid., 44.

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2. The Aphorisms Of Sandilya, Translated by E.B.Cowell, Indological Book House, Varanasi, 2002.
3. Sri Sankaracharya Srimad Bhagavad Gitabhasya, (Translation by A.G.Krishna Warriar), Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, 1953.
4. Sastri Bhagabat Kumar Goswami ,The Bhakti Cult in Ancient India, Chowkhamba Sanskrit series office, Varanasi, 2002.
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6. Krishna Sharmaw, Bhakti and Bhakti movement. A New perspective, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1987.